

The Involvement of S&S with Nautor

an interview with Rod Stephens

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Rod Stephens (at the helm) and Mc-Kinney Møller Mærsk, the owner (far right), onboard S&S Swan 57/021 *Klem V*, during trial, Gulf of Bothnia, October 1979

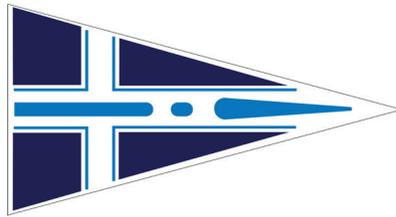
him. “Mr Koskenkylä said that was fine with him, and, by golly, right at six o’clock he was there.” This was Rod Stephens speaking, of the venerable New York City yacht design firm Sparkman & Stephens, who have probably designed more sailboats than any other group of naval architects in the world, including 13¹ of Nautor Swans. Rod Stephens sits erect and square-shouldered at his desk, hands clasped, head forward, squinting as he peers back into his marvelous memory to squeeze out a name, a date, a fact, a mood. He had been asked to discuss the relationship between Sparkman & Stephens and Nautor, and to talk about some of the outstanding Swan yachts that were designed by S&S and built by Nautor.

Rod Stephens visitor that day in 1966 in Finland was Pekka Koskenkylä, who had started Nautor, who knew of Sparkman & Stephens by reputation, and who had already decided he wanted S&S to design a boat for him. “He was looking for a competitive racing design like the Danish-owned *Diana III*², which had won the One Ton Cup.

1 Actually S&S designed 15 Swans for Nautor and not 13 as in the original text of this article

2 Winner of the first One Ton Cup, in Le Havre, 1965

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“*Diana* had gotten a lot of press,” said Rod Stephens, “for winning the One-Ton Championship Regatta, and that’s probably what caught his eye. In any event, I was very impressed by Koskenkylä’s sincerity and his determination, and by the fact that he’d gotten up early enough to meet me at 0600, so we struck a deal and I sent him the plans for his new boat.”

Rod Stephens was further impressed on his first visit to Koskenkylä’s factory in Pietarsaari. This was to approve the plug for the deck mould of what would be the first Swan 36³.

“I have never seen a more beautifully prepared plug, all painted and polished and ready to use to make the mould for the first fiberglass deck,” said Rod.

“Pekka was most insistent that, if I was to propose any modifications, now was the time. It looked so beautiful, but there were several small details which could be modified to benefit the final deck. I made several suggestions, which were to be dealt with while we had lunch. “The willingness to slightly modify a beautiful



Pekka Koskenkylä (standing, grey suit), speaking to Nautor’s craftmanships, onboard the wooden plug of S&S Swan 40, Pietarsaari, 1970

plug showed that Pekka was serious in his desire to make everything as good as possible. Thanks to the skill of the carpenters, the corrections were made forthwith and when I completed my inspection a few hours later, I had a very positive feeling toward this project.”

“So that boat, our design No. 1710⁴ with a modified rudder, turned out to be a very nice boat to sail, and at the same time she was a pretty competitive one-tonner.

“A year or so later, we designed the Swan 37⁵, a boat more angled toward the International Offshore Rule, rated one-ton, and a much faster, more competitive boat. Then two years later came the final design in that range, the 38⁶, which was really the best of the bunch. For by that time, Nautor had learned a lot about building and finishing boats, the fittings were improved, and so forth.”

Stephens went on to discuss the Swan 65⁷, which Nautor selected because of *Dora*⁸, an S&S design for Lynn Williams

3 S&S design no. 1710.51

4 For the *Gaia* class, built by Italian Cantiere Benello, with a full keel

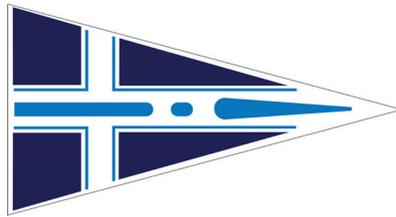
5 S&S design no. 2035

6 S&S design no. 2167, 116 hulls built, the largest number of boats Nautor ever built in 53 years

7 S&S design no. 2110

8 S&S design no. 2089; under the name *Tenacious* she won the 1979 tragic Fastnet race

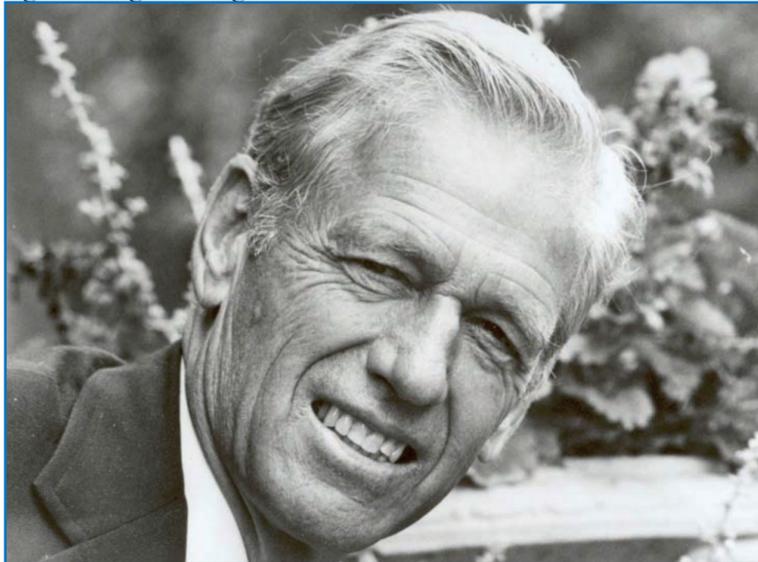
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that had been built by Palmer Johnson in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. “The only reason she didn’t win the first Bermuda Race she entered was a screw-up in the rod rigging which prevented her from tacking for the finish line when she should have. *Dora* finished first in most of the races she entered, which caught the eye of Koskenkylä, and he decided to go ahead and build the boat out of fiberglass, even though she’d been designed for aluminium.”

Shortly thereafter, a Swan 65, *Sayula II*, won the first Whitbread Race; there were three of them in the second Whitbread and they all finished in the top five; in fact, in that particular race, S&S designs, including the three Swan 65⁹, finished first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth. “Pretty good,” says Stephens with a grin.

“The Swan 44¹⁰ was what I’d call a “general development”, says Stephens. “One of the early models we did for Nautor was a Swan 43¹¹ which was a pretty good boat; one came over from Finland and won the New York Yacht Club Spring Regatta. So the boat caught on and we sold maybe 15 of them in the U.S. and sometime later we updated it to try and make it an even better boat. Unfortunately, just about that time the smart designers began to figure out how to beat the IOR with flat-bottomed boats that had the same measured displacement,



Rod Stephens (1909 - 1995)

but actually weighed a whole lot less. So the 44 wasn’t the Admiral’s Cup success we thought it would be, although it was still a very successful design and over the years it has won a lot of races.” Sparkman & Stephens produced 13¹² designs for Nautor during the course of their 14-year relationship, almost one new boat per year and ranging in overall length from 36 to 76 feet (11 - 23 m). During the course of that relationship, the company was sold to Oy Wilh. Schauman AB. Pekka Koskenkylä left the firm and sailed his own Swan 65¹³ to France where he became the Nautor representative.

Jens Rudback was brought in to run Nautor.

Though not a sailor, he put a high priority on

race results from Swan designs and began to work with designers other than Sparkman & Stephens, notably Ron Holland.

9 65/020 *King’s Legend* (sloop rigged), 65/006 *Disque d’Or* (original name *Kertios*) and 65/009 *ADC Accutrac* (original name *Pulsar*)

10 S&S design no. 2112

11 S&S design no. 1973

12 See note no. 1

13 This boat, named “Swan”, was built as Pekka’s personal yacht outside the series production, behind the woodworking shop in Kronoby. She is now sailing in South America under the name “Swan Ready to Rock”

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