



AMERICAN beauty

Jeremy Evans savours the thrill of sailing one of the rarest Sparkman & Stephens Swan classics – a New York Yacht Club 48

Forty years ago, at the age of 13, Gavin Howe built a very small sailing dinghy in his grandmother's garage. After that there was only one way to go. Up in size! He raced those frisky International Moths for a few years, then bought a Laser. He also became editor of the magazine *Yacht & Boat Owner* and upsized to his first yacht at the age of 23, which was appropriately a 23ft, Finot-designed *Rève de Mer*. She was a foot too short to enter the following year's two-handed Round Britain Race, so Gavin added a sugar scoop to the transom, teamed up with Mike Owen, raced round Britain in a month and finished 10th on handicap.



Nicki

He still holds the course record for the smallest yacht to finish.

Eight years and a few career changes later, Gavin decided it was time he owned a Swan. Now most people would equate 'Swan' with 'very rich', but Gavin was not in that class at all. He found a 16-year-old Swan 37, but got warned off by a surveyor who pointed out cracks in the keel and rudder. Still determined, Gavin sought out Swan importer John Irving at the London Boat Show who 'couldn't have been more helpful' and explained why the Swan 37 was a great yacht. Gavin never regretted ignoring the survey. His

Swan 37, *By-Pass*, provided three years of excellent racing and cruising including the 1988 *Yachting Monthly* Triangle, in-between times, she earned a useful income as a charter boat.

Having been bitten by the Swan bug, Gavin decided he needed more accommodation for his wife Nicki and three growing girls: Adele, Kirsty and Emma. Feeling a bit flush, he

bought a 15-year-old Swan 41 in the summer of 1989. He sold the Swan 37 for much the same price he'd paid for it the following season, but retained the name *By-Pass*. His original Swan is still going strong – she was recently on sale for considerably more than twice the price Gavin paid two decades earlier!



Gavin

BAPTISM BY FIRE

In 2003, Gavin decided to upsize once again and began looking for a Swan 47 CB (centreboard), a somewhat rare model more commonly known as the New York Yacht Club 48. Gavin considered three different boats in the UK, Holland and the USA before deciding on the 1981 vintage *Black Tie* in Newport, Rhode Island. After a week of trials, it was a baptism by fire as Gavin and his daughter Emma sailed *Black Tie* to Bermuda with three delivery crew, the first stage of the journey back to England. Despite a reasonable forecast they were caught in appalling weather. Gavin was sick for four days and experienced the worst sea conditions he has ever known. One night they locked the wheel, closed the hatches and



huddled below as the wind blew steadily at more than 50 knots while confused Gulf Stream waves battered *Black Tie* from all sides. It reminded him of the time he was hove-to in a gale during the Round Britain Race 25 years earlier, drifting towards an invisible St Kilda on a pitch-black night!

With *Black Tie* safely home, Gavin's girls – wife Nicki, now 50, and teenage daughters – endured rather than enjoyed a dismally rainy summer holiday in the Channel islands. Nicki summed up the situation: 'I'd rather be at work. Take this boat somewhere warm... or else!'

So Gavin moved *Black Tie* to Majorca, which proved a brilliant choice. The cruising was delightful and the weather was fine. With *Black Tie* moored in Palma's inner harbour by the old city, Gavin and Nicki could fly out for long weekends on budget flights – just four hours from leaving work to nibbling tapas in *Black Tie*'s cockpit, with the added bonus of year-round use of their yacht. The three Howe girls could use *Black Tie* as a floating apartment, or go sailing with a local skipper if they wanted a break from cafés and shops. It also gave Gavin the opportunity to race with a 13-strong crew at the Swan Rolex Cup in Sardinia last September, which he rates as the ultimate must-do regatta. *Black Tie* finished fifth in a class of 60 Swans.

Owing to family illness, *Black Tie* is now back on a marina berth at Cowes. This allowed Gavin to assemble his racing crew for the Swan European Championship, but his girls are clearly determined to get their black Swan back to Majorca as soon as possible – if all goes well *Black Tie* will be back in the Med next year.



The Swan's huge rig is a bonus in light airs

ON DECK

My first impression was 'This is a big boat!' She has hefty Lewmar winches, a lot of hardware, three large hatches and a huge expanse of teak deck. It's no wonder Gavin races *Black Tie* with 13 on board, but the NYYC was also designed to be cruised by a husband and wife, which Gavin says is 'no problem at all', though it's worth noting that he's a very experienced sailor.

UNDER WAY

This may be an old Swan, but she definitely gives a sense of superiority as you look down on the hoi-polloi. Motoring gently downriver past the Cowes waterfront, many yachts were clearly a lot

'She gives a sense of superiority as you look down on the hoi-polloi'

more modern but I don't think any had the style of this cool black Swan. Despite the apparent size and complexity of a NYYC 48, we had reversed out of the marina berth within a few minutes of boarding,

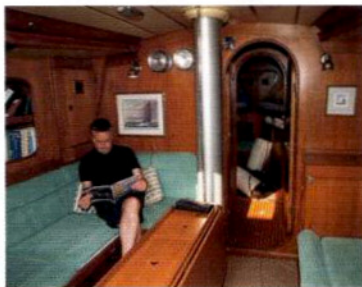
while Nicki took charge of the galley below. With a twin-blade folding prop, Gavin cautioned that *Black Tie* manoeuvres a lot better in a marina when the centreplate is right down, although you can sail with it fully retracted – just don't expect →

»» BELOW DECKS



ABOVE: The layout features a good-sized, forward-facing chart table and a secure bracing position in the galley

RIGHT: The saloon is practical and the high-quality woodwork has been restored to its original matt finish



ABOVE: Plenty of bookshelves



ABOVE: a superb nav-station

BELOW RIGHT: There's plenty of stowage and ventilation in the galley



»» ON DECK



ABOVE: A secure cockpit – but no table

BELOW: Slot for inner forestay

BELOW: Winch-grinding pit or sun-deck?



optimum windward performance. With the board fully down, she tacks through about 70°.

Black Tie can also beat upwind at over 7 knots, or speed downhill at over 11 knots under spinnaker – but not with just Gavin and Nicki on board! Despite the large size of the mainsail and genoa, we found them fairly easy to work – albeit in light winds, when there wasn't too much grinding on the primary winches. The flush deck has a wide-open feel and the helmsman's view forward is superb, although blanketed by the genoa to leeward, as Gavin discovered when he had a close call at the Swan Europeans. It's also a very comfortable helming position, with a superbly stylish set of cream cushions! Unlike your average 'stack em high' sailing caravan, *Black Tie's* crew cockpit is surprisingly compact and small. In racing mode, the crew would be spread over the deck; in cruising mode, you expect to have a smaller crew on board.

We sailed *Black Tie* downwind from Cowes to the Needles, anchored in the lee of the island, then sailed back to Cowes again. Sadly, the seabreeze never kicked in properly. The wind briefly built to around 12 knots, then died back. Enough to enjoy the splendid feeling of sailing a classic Swan and to test the centreboard – we hit the bottom close inshore off Yarmouth (fairly gently) and it just swung back with a clunk. How very convenient!

» NYYC 48

Seventy Swan 47 yachts were built between 1974-1979, including a special centerboard version known as the Swan 47 CB or NYYC 48, designed for New York Yacht Club members to cruise the Bahamas, Chesapeake Bay or America's intercoastal waterways. Writing in his classic book *The Proper Yacht*, Arthur Beiser explains that the NYYC 48 was modified with a longer, shallower keel than the Swan 47, reducing draught by about 2ft. An inch-thick, swivelling, stainless-steel centreboard is raised or lowered by a winch on deck and can be left in any position, with maximum draught of over 9ft. To make up for a higher centre of gravity, the ballast was increased by a ton. The mast was reduced by 2ft, to clear bridges on the intercoastal waterways, with the boom extended to maintain the ample sail area. A removable inner forestay allows the NYYC 48 to be sailed as a cutter as well as a sloop. The entire accommodation of the Swan 47 was shifted 2ft further aft, providing more space in the forward cabin, a longer saloon with wider pilot berths and an improved galley for comfortable cruising, plus a larger engine and bigger tanks.

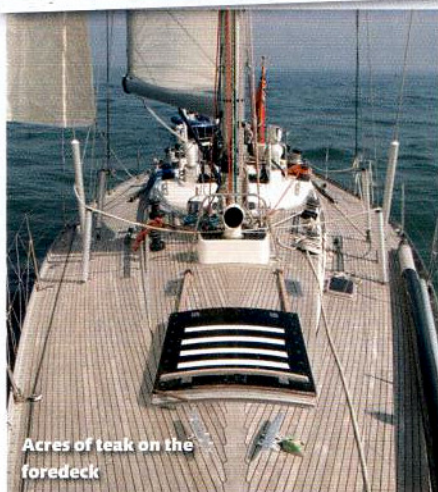
ONLINE BOAT TESTS

Choosing a boat? Whatever you have in mind, whether new or second-hand, an ocean-going cruiser or a creek-crawling weekender, YM has probably tested it. You can order boat test reports from the www.yachtingmonthly.com online library. Go to the home page, click on 'feature index' and type in the boat's make or model.

'You'll spend ten percent of her value on annual running costs'



With her distinctive sheer, tall rig and fine ends, there's no mistaking a S&S Swan

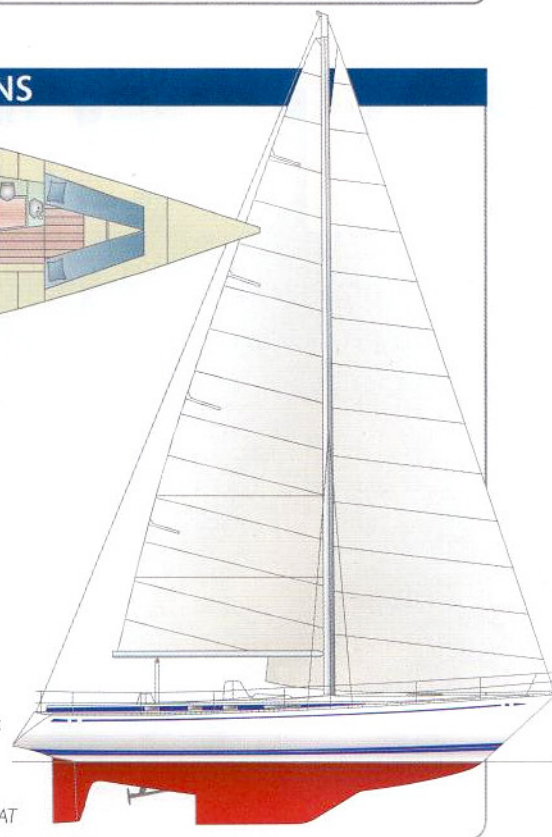


Acres of teak on the foredeck

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Price guide	£100,00-200,000
LOA	14.57m (47ft 10in)
LWL	11.05m (36ft 3in)
Beam	4.19m (13ft 9in)
Draught (board up)	1.82m (6ft)
(board down)	2.93m (9ft 6in)
Displacement	14,700kg (32,400lb)
Ballast	7,000kg (15,500lb)
Sail area	127m ² (1,366sq ft)
Spinnaker	205m ² (2,210sq ft)
Engine	85hp Nanni diesel
Fuel	400 litres (55.5 gallons)
Water	500 litres (133 gallons)
Berths	6-7
Design	Sparkman & Stephens, New York
Builder	Nautor, Finland
Website:	www.classicswan.org

* All prices quoted in YM boat tests are inclusive of VAT



EXTRA POWER

A previous owner replaced *Black Tie's* original Volvo Penta MD 21A with a more powerful 85 hp Nanni (based on a digger engine!) which gives a cruising speed of 8.3 knots – perfect for covering long, windless distances with 400 litres in the fuel tank.

DOWN BELOW

The accommodation is clearly designed for sailing practicality, rather than acting as some enormous hotel. The main saloon is large and comfortable, with a good-sized pilot berth to starboard and TV to port. There are two more berths in the large forecabin, which doubles as a sail locker in racing mode. Next door is the heads, equipped with push-button toilet and taps. Moving aft, there's the navigation area to starboard and a large galley to port, leading to an owner's cabin in the stern, with double and single berths, standing headroom and direct access to the helmsman, via the rear hatch.

Above all, the accommodation of the NYYC 48 appears serious and restrained. It has been designed with a view to giving the best possible service when the yacht is underway, rather than maximising the accommodation for nights in marinas. And it's clearly Swan quality. Before *Black Tie* left the USA, Gavin had the interior refurbished. Floorboards were stripped and bleached and shiny varnish removed from the woodwork, restoring the original matt finish.

THE COST OF OWNERSHIP

Swans are generally reckoned to be the preserve of the super-rich, but Gavin says you don't need to be minted to enjoy owning a classic. His original Swan 37 was recently on sale at £66,000 and he reckons the going rate

for a NYYC 48 is from £100,000-£200,000, depending on condition and specification. We found just one 1977 model currently on sale, at £164,000, described as 'Easily handled by a couple, excellent condition, fully fitted for world cruising and ready to go.' As with all large yachts, replacing sails, electronics or the engine can be very expensive. Fortunately, *Black Tie* was extensively refurbished eight years ago, with all-new teak decking and toerails, following a collision. Gavin warns that too much scrubbing and chemical cleaning can ruin a teak deck in as little as three years – go gently if you don't want a very large bill. At much the same time, *Black Tie* was transformed from a white Swan to a very smart black Swan with a complete epoxy treatment to the hull. Having got your Swan up to scratch, Gavin says you'll

'You don't need to be minted to enjoy owning a classic'

need to spend about 10 per cent of her value on annual running costs – but you'll enjoy the fruits of owning a classic, which will depreciate far less than most modern yachts. Gavin lightened the burden of owing his first two Swans with extensive charter work, but as a senior executive

with publishing conglomerate Reed Elsevier, he is now in a position to share *Black Tie* exclusively with family and racing crew, making his NYYC 48 a true dual-purpose sailing machine.

BRAND LOYALTY

Finally, I asked Gavin why he was so loyal to Sparkman & Stephens and their Swans, to which he gave a simple reply. 'S&S Swans are all very carefully thought out for good sea keeping and exude a timeless air of quality. Their performance is pretty timeless as well!' ▲



Black Tie in racing mode off Egypt Point, Cowes