

NEWS FROM THE COCKPIT



S&S Swan 36/021 Lofna

Newsletter no. 351

Our next yacht...

Unknown to my wife Gill, in early 2018 I had written a short note to myself entitled "*Our next yacht*". My note included a shortlist, and the boat at the top of that list was "*S&S Swan 36*".

In my view the S&S Swan 36 offers a near perfect combination of wonderful lines from the great Olin Stephens, sailing performance, and quality fibreglass build by the now legendary Nautors yard (supervised by Rod Stephens himself), while still retaining the looks of classic yachts of an earlier era. The smallest S&S Swan is a very practical size for both sailing and yard facilities here in Northern Ireland, but practicality aside, it also ticks the very important box marked "emotion". Just setting foot on your yacht should immediately make you feel good, even before you drop the lines, and looking at your yacht from any distance, you should be able to think "That is beautiful". S&S Swans can do this in a way that few other yachts can!"

In August 2018, a contact at our sailing club on Strangford Lough told me I should go and look at a boat that was for sale.

"What is it?" I replied

"It's a Swan..."

This had my attention. "Okay... which one, and where is it?"

"It's a *Swan 36*, and it's at East Down Yacht Club"

I was speechless. Surely this wasn't possible - a Swan 36 for sale less than 5 miles away? I stopped what I was doing and drove to the nearby town of Killyleagh, then down a tiny lane leading to a boatyard on the Lough shore at East Down YC. Sitting on an old trailer in the yard was indeed a Swan 36. It was in a terrible state of repair, with torn covers revealing a white boat stained green by years of dirt. Closer inspection revealed the white paint on the hull had blistered, and a large sign had been taped onto the hull stating "THIS BOAT IS UNINSURED" as a warning to keep away in case the rusting trailer collapsed.

The nameplate on the transom said "**Icon**", although I was told she had been renamed **Seamroige**, which is Irish for shamrock. Obviously not the lucky variety. A borrowed ladder gave access to the cockpit, which contained a dirty brown pond as the drains were blocked by leaves and moss. Soil had started to form over years on the deck and cockpit seats, and even grass had begun to grow. As the water drained from the cockpit, I walked around the teak deck, which looked in surprisingly good condition. Despite the dirt, the quality of the deck fittings - which included 6 stainless steel Andersen ST winches - was clear. Someone had invested a great deal of time and money in this yacht in the past, but things had evidently gone very wrong. She had been left sitting in the boatyard for 6 years at that point.

Down below, conditions were much worse. The filthy water inside had been drained to the level of an open through-hull. I later learned the yard man had pulled out a transducer to reduce the weight of water inside in case the trailer collapsed. Below this level, the boat was still filled with a toxic soup of rainwater, used engine oil, battery acid and dissolved flares. The Volvo Penta engine had been completely submerged and 6 litres of dirty oil had floated out, forming an oily black internal waterline almost half-way up the saloon door. Even the air inside the boat was acrid and difficult to breathe, *but despite everything, the potential of this boat was obvious* (to me anyway!)

I was prepared to take on a boat in "project" condition, and this one would need a complete refit, but the first and most important challenge was of course Gill herself! Fortunately she was also able to see past the condition, so negotiations with the owner were quickly concluded. We had found our next yacht. In September 2018, we took ownership of S&S Swan 36/021, launched in July 1968 as Lofna - a name we quickly decided to return to.

We were able to relaunch **Lofna** (S&S Swan 36/021) in October 2018 (she would surely float, given how well the hull had kept water in) and tow her to our sailing club for a pontoon berth that winter. Winter 2018/2019 was spent keeping the rain out while we cleaned and stripped the boat inside, then we hauled out on a borrowed trailer in spring 2019 to continue work in the boatyard. The first job I did was to fit (or refit?) a drainplug in the bilge, while reflecting that if Lofna had been fitted with a drainplug before she might not be ours.

By Autumn 2019 we had built a trailer, and could tackle the job of moving a 36' yacht 50 miles by road from Strangford Lough to a workshop in Larne, owned by our friend and mentor Bryan Willis (www.bryanwillismarine.com). After an anxious October journey, **Lofna** arrived in Larne for the work to continue in the luxury of an indoor heated workshop. We are planning to relaunch Lofna in spring 2022, after a 3½ year refit we have been documenting on Instagram at https://www.instagram.com/swan_36_lofna/.

With the investment in time, effort and money so far, we could of course have bought a French production boat and just gone sailing, but for us that would leave the "emotion" box sitting completely empty.

We're still not sure if we found our next yacht, or if she found us. Either way, we can't wait to set sail on Lofna, and are very much looking forward to meeting other S&S Swan owners on the water in the years ahead.

Derek Fairley

October 2021

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