

# THE YEAR OF THE SCHOONER

To many classics aficionados, the schooner is the ultimate symbol of the golden age of sail. Indeed, the Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta itself was originally conceived as a schooner race. In recent Regattas, our schooner classes have grown each year to include more and more stunning beauties. In 1995, we welcomed a full dozen proud and beautiful schooners, large and small. Among them were the following exceptional examples of the breed.

## Lelantina

Awarded the trophy for "the most photogenic yacht," this glorious 85-foot gaff schooner was born in 1937 on the drawing board of John Alden, one of the most celebrated designers of the first half of this century. She was ordered by Ralph Pevery, who specified that she be almost identical in proportions to the 1929 *Lelanta*. The choice of builders was made carefully, for only masters of steel construction would be able to produce in riveted steel such an irrevocably smooth finish. Eventually the famous shipwrights of Germany's Abecking & Rasmussen were appointed.

The hull today is still impeccable below her two original spruce masts. The interior — although not original — reflects all the elegance and finery of St. Tropez, her home port. She is finished in a refreshing combination of woods — teak, white pine, and mahogany — creating a rich, warm atmosphere.

It is said that under sail *Lelantina* is a "model of docility and balance." Certainly her graceful shape reaching across the blue waters outside English Harbour during the Regatta attracted countless admiring looks. She was a thrilling sight indeed: acres of golden teak decks scattered with crew dressed in crisp whites and, overhead, her magnificent 6,600 square feet of Egyptian cotton-coloured sail carrying her along in the fresh trades.

## Aello Beta

This stunning 120-foot gaff schooner has a fascinating story to go with her beauty. Fittingly named for the Greek god of wind, *Aello Beta* was designed by Max von Oertz, who was commissioned by a Greek magnate to create a smaller sistership to the architect's legendary design, *Meteor IV*.

Completed in 1921, *Aello* was sold only four years later to an English baronet who renamed her *Nenia* and kept her for more than a quarter of a century, eventually selling her in 1953. For the next three decades, she served as a houseboat in



Lelantina races back to the finish line.

Salcombe, in England's West Country, her beauty sadly waning. Then in 1980, Cameron Chisholm bought her and dedicated himself to restoring her following von Oertz's original plans step by step. Neither a sailor nor a shipwright, Chisholm taught himself everything as he went along, setting up his own yard in Bristol and hiring a team of professionals to work on the project with him.

One evening, while having a drink in a pub, Chisholm learned from a diver friend of plans to salvage a cargo of teak that had sunk in 1917 off the southern coast of Ireland. Then and there, Chisholm agreed to buy the entire cargo, unseen. On first sight, the three barge loads of timber towed away from the wreck appeared to be beyond use. But once the surface of the wood had been carefully planed off, beautiful teak of excellent quality was revealed. Chisholm carried his project to completion, restoring *Aello* not only to her former glory, but also to Lloyds 100 A1 standard. What's more, *Aello Beta* earned the enviable distinction of being the only composite vessel built in Burma teak in the past 50 years.

Sold again in 1990, *Aello* cruised the Mediterranean before embarking on her first transatlantic voyage, which eventually brought her to the Caribbean and the Classic Regatta. Skippered by 32-year-old Robin Todd with a crew of usually no more than four, she is a magnificent sight off the wind, with more than 6,000 square feet of sail driving her at speeds of up to 13 knots. From her varnished, clinker sailing skiff

to her distinctively high bulwarks topped with a shining caprail, her gleaming teak gives no hint that it lay at the bottom of the Irish Sea for more than 60 years.

## Mary Bryant

What could be a more apt way to learn the traditional skills of sailing than aboard the evocative little training ship *Mary Bryant*? An RYA-recognised school, this lovely gaff schooner, though just 48 feet long and less than twenty years old, recalls the magnificent training vessels of yesteryear.

She can indeed trace her heritage directly back to the early part of this century, for she was designed as *Coaster III* by Murray Peterson, whose design for the original *Coaster I* was on the drawing board back in the 1930s. Built in Cornwall, *Mary Bryant* has tidy quarters below, including a captain's cabin complete with a well-tooled workshop; on deck she is embellished with varnished spars, hatches, and pinrail.

She is owned and skippered by Anna Stratton, and for the past five years they have together inspired their students — men and women of all ages. This was their second Antigua Classic Regatta and we look forward to seeing both Anna and *Mary Bryant* back again in 1996.

## Robert Gordon

Originally designed as a sail-training vessel for cadets of the Robert Gordon Institute in Aberdeen, Scotland, the 66-foot Illingworth schooner *Robert Gordon* has sailed proudly through a checkered career

by Lucy Tulloch

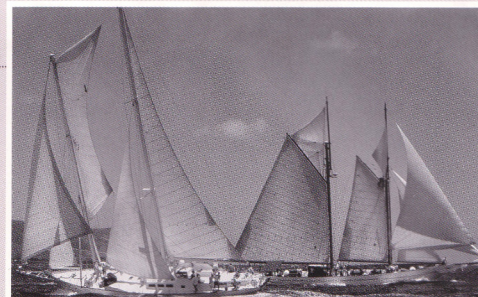
that a lesser vessel might not have survived.

Built in Holland in 1967, she started out respectfully enough, serving the school for many years as a classroom at sea. Then one day she was bought by a wealthy gentleman who attempted to smuggle a large consignment of drugs aboard her from Lebanon to England. There she was seized and the villains were thrown into jail. By the time the drug squad had finished their search for hidden contraband, *Robert Gordon* appeared in a very sorry state indeed on the front pages of the dailies and "News at Ten."

A couple of years later poor old *Robert Gordon* was auctioned off and bought by Brian Leary QC of Kent for a meager sum. For some years, he tried to get a yard to rebuild her, but each time he was thwarted by what appeared obvious and inevitable: she was simply too far gone.

Finally, after much persuasion, Simon Johnson agreed to take her on in 1992. The fact that the vessel had been dismissed by the surveyor as mere scrap did not deter Simon from setting four ambitious objectives: 1, to bring her up to a high-quality finish; 2, to complete the project within a year; 3, to ensure that it cost less than her value; and 4, to get her back into earning her own keep. He met them all. Simon found countless pepper-mill holes on the hull, and replaced much of the plate. He recaulked the decks, painted the vessel throughout, stripped the interior, and built a beautiful new one with the help and expertise of friends and family.

When all was ship shape once more, Simon and *Robert Gordon* set off on her maiden voyage across the Atlantic, arriving in Antigua to charter for twelve weeks and sign up with Nicholson Yacht Charters in English Harbour. In last year's Classic



New Freedom and Aello Beta.

Regatta, her second, she won herself a second place, impressing us all. Congratulations to Simon and his crew, including cook/mate Paul Colwell, who together keep an immaculate boat and sail with enthusiasm second to none.

## New Freedom

With her huge fisherman heeling her over in the gusts, and an enthusiastic crew of at least 25, *New Freedom* was a fine sight in last year's Regatta, her first since she scooped up three trophies back in 1990.

For more than four years, this 84-foot ferro-cement schooner designed, built, owned, and skippered by Tony Fincham, has lain at anchor as if waiting patiently for her next Classic Regatta. She has undergone extensive work above and below decks here in English Harbour, with practically everything being replaced except the sails. And what a lot of sail area she has! Her gollywobbler alone measures around 2,000 square feet; but with the fresh trades we had in 1995, she didn't fly it, opting instead for the fisherman stays' rig.

Tony and *New Freedom* have been together since 1972, when he originally began building and designing her finer points on Canvey Island, Essex, and launched her in 1974. Her lines were drawn by Chris Petrie and she was conceived originally as a contender for the first Whitbread Round-the-World Race. She aroused more interest and publicity than any other entry that year, but, unfortunately, she did not manage to get the necessary financial backing.



The topsail schooner Memory.

With December's snow lying on her decks, and without undergoing extensive sea trials, Tony set sail from chilly England, bound for Antigua. There, her ample accommodation made her a good charter boat and she quickly became one of the first members of the Nicholson's charter fleet — an assignment she continued to fill for twenty years.

Today, Tony runs Dockyard Divers and has been preparing *New Freedom* for more chartering, specialising in diving.

## Memory

Designed by Tom Colvin, the 60-foot topsail schooner *Memory* is a larger version of his famous 40-foot junk-rigged *Gazelle*. Her corten steel hull, painted beautifully in dark green, graced the Regatta with the elegance of a sailing dinghy. Her lovely lines are set off by an impressive 15-foot bowsprit and slender white tender hanging in davits astern.

*Memory* was built in 1979 in Deltaville, Virginia, by the Mooney Brothers for Gordon and Kathy Baxter, who are today putting the finishing touches on a brand-new — but traditional-looking — 100-foot three-master in Maine. Named the *Kathryn B.*, she will spend summers on the East Coast and winters in the Caribbean. Perhaps we will see her at a future Classic Regatta.

*Memory* was conceived as a cargo-carrying vessel, and has cruised up and down the U.S. East Coast with her current owner Jim Mog at the helm. He has spent the past two years in the Caribbean, making Trinidad and Venezuela his primary ports of call. With one additional person, this lovely schooner is easy to handle and very comfortable, he says. Jim plans to return to the Chesapeake Bay in June 1996 and then winter in Florida. We hope to see him back here again soon.