

An interview with David Bicks about the 2018 Castine Classic Yacht Race



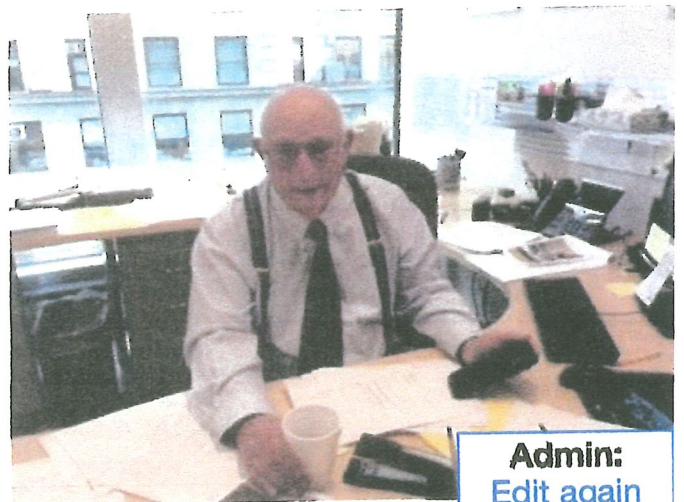
by David Schmidt 30 Jul 08:00 PDT
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Castine Classic 2016: The 65' NY 50 'Marilee' (a 1926 Herreshoff) chasing the 65' Blue Peter (a 1930 Alford Myline) © Kathy Mansfield

When it comes to racing wooden boats on picture-perfect waters, it's almost impossible to beat the Pine Tree State, as Maine's rocky coastline is generously punctuated with islands, peninsulas, sounds, bay and fjords that have served as perfect cruising and racing grounds for centuries' worth of sailors. That tradition continues to run strong today with events such as the Castine Classic Yacht Race, a two-day event (August 1-2, 2018) that includes a 19.6 nautical mile race from Castine to Camden that's celebrating its 19th anniversary this summer.

The Castine Classic, as it's commonly called,



David Bicks is the chairman of the Castine Classic Yacht Race © Image courtesy of David Bicks

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yachts on the East Coast and strategically helps deliver the fleet from Castine to Camden, Maine, ahead of Friday's Camden Classic Yacht Regatta, which carries them to Brooklin, Maine, for Saturday's start of the Eggemoggin Reach Regatta (August 4; www.erregatta.com).

In addition to offering great classic-yacht racing on some of the East Coast's prettiest waters, the Castine Classic, which is celebrating its 19th anniversary this summer, is also an opportunity for the Castine Yacht Club to celebrate some of the brightest minds within the wooden-boat community.

For example, in 2008 the event honored the incredible work of the legendary Olin J. Stephens II (1908-2008), who celebrated his 100th birthday at the regatta; in 2009 the event celebrated Maine boat builders, in 2014 it honored lobster boats, in 2015 schooners were the celebratory vessels, while other years it paid tribute to the work of legendary designers such as Nathanael Greene Herreshoff (2011) and William Fife (2012).

This year, the event will hold an exhibition on Wednesday, August 1, at the Castine Town Dock for the Maine Sailboat Builders Celebration, which will honor some of the most storied names in New England's wooden boatbuilding circles, including Brooklin Boat Yard, Rockport Marine, Lyman-Morse Boatbuilding, Gannon and Benjamin, Artisan Boatworks, and French & Webb.

Additionally, the event will host a symposium at the Maine Maritime Academy featuring a panel comprised of skippers, boatbuilders and historians including America's Cup winning tactician and noted sailing writer and journalist Gary Jobson.

I interviewed David Bicks, chairman and founder of the Castine Classic Yacht Race, via email, to learn more about this annual DownEast regatta.

How many boats do you expect to see on the starting line of this year's event? Also, do you have any idea as to the average age of the yachts that will be racing against each other?

We expect about 40 yachts, with about 32 in three Classic classes and about eight in Spirit of Tradition class. The Classic classes will include yachts built from 1902 through Concordias built in the 1960s--with the "average" represented by about five 45' S&S NY 32s built in 1936.

The fleet will range in LOA from 28' to 65' and will include the iconic S&S 52' yawl *Dorade*, which launched Olin Stephens' career in 1930 and has continued to this day as a premier racer around the world. In 2008 Olin Stephens celebrated his 100th birthday on the water with us in Castine and witnessed *Dorade* win the race. "The greatest birthday present ever", Olin proclaimed.

Are Spirit of Tradition boats allowed to race, or is the regatta only open to actual classics? And if it's the latter, how do you and the other organizers define the term "classic"?

We run a Spirit of Tradition class, which is not eligible for the Ames Cup, our top trophy for the overall winner--awarded in memory of three members of the Ames family of Castine who were lost off Newfoundland in the Newport to Bergen race in 1935.

We have no "classic" definition. For my part, I follow the Supreme Court's guidance on pornography: "I know it when I see it."

Am I correct that the regatta consists of a single race, which will take place on August 2? Also, can you give us an overview description of the course and the challenges that crews will face?



2016 Castine Classic: The famed S&S 52' 'Dorade' was built in 1929 and will return to compete in this summer's Castine Classic Yacht Race - photo © Kathy Mansfield

The Castine Classic Race on August 2 from Castine to Camden is a stand-alone race, but it kicks off three days of racing on Penobscot Bay. On August 3 Camden Yacht Club runs a race from Camden to Brooklin, followed on August 4 by the Eggemoggin Reach Regatta (ERR).

We are grateful for the longtime support of the Castine event from Steve White of Brooklin Boatyard and Taylor Allen of Rockport Marine, who together run the ERR.

The 19.6 nautical mile Castine Classic course starts at the Castine harbor bell around noon and runs southwest down Penobscot Bay, rounding Robinson Rock bell south of Islesboro, and then north to finish at Curtis Island bell off Camden.

The challenge is to play the often-fickle southwest wind on the long beat down East Penobscot Bay.

Is the Castine Classic Yacht Race more of an event for hard-core wooden-boat racers, or is this more geared towards family-style fun? Can you explain?

For many years the Castine Yacht Club and Camden Yacht Club ran a major Gulf of Maine Ocean Racing Circuit (GMORC) race, second only to the Monhegan Race out of Portland. It became dominated by young, "hot shot", very competitive racers, and disorderly conduct ashore.

Not what I was looking for. Castine ceased sponsorship. Instead, nineteen years ago we started the Castine Classic race, which is characterized by low-key competition, warm camaraderie and high-



The Castine Classic Yacht Race attracts a wide variety of vessels, including the 69' 'Isobel', the 48' 'Pleione' and a classic Nielsen sloop - photo © Kathy Mansfield

level of sportsmanship. We often see three-generation family crews.

How long have you been involved with the regatta? Also, can you describe the kinds of changes and evolutions that you have seen take place during your time at the event's helm?

I have chaired the Castine Classic event since the beginning. It is both a race and a classic yacht celebration honoring various yachts, designers and builders.

This year, on August 1, we will be honoring some of our local world-class yacht builders, with an exhibition at the Castine Town Dock of some recent, notable builds and a symposium at the Maine Maritime Academy [that will be] chaired by famed skipper and commentator, Gary Jobson.

Castine could not have staged these events without the unstinting efforts over they years of many others. I think of the stalwart service of the Castine Race Committee, including Kevin Coady, Bob Scott, Bill and Shannon Light, Jim Raber, Cynthia Boyer, George Murnaghan, Wallace Alston, Dottie Sherling and Marcia Mason. And the editors of WoodenBoat magazine (Matt Murphy, Maynard Bray and Tom Jackson; www.woodenboat.com) who have given key guidance. Finally, Kathy Mansfield, the noted UK yachting photo journalist, who has provided a magnificent photographic history. My appreciation to all.

For details and history of the Castine Classic Yacht Race and celebration, please see www.castineclassic.com