

*The Tuttle's at  
Long John —  
What version did  
they tell  
their dad of  
this one?*



# SPINNAKER TRIM

By Greg and Patti Fisher

Good boat speed with a spinnaker comes from not only excellent spinnaker trim, but also tip-top teamwork and communication between skipper and crew. As the spinnaker is adjusted for the changing conditions, the skipper should also adjust his steering style, and the crew should adjust the manner in which they fly the spinnaker. As in the total race, good speed downwind comes from the addition of all the variables that make up good speed.

**GREG:** It is important when steering the boat with the spinnaker up that every move made up or down be made slowly and with good communication with the person flying the spinnaker. If the skipper sees a puff coming and he wants to head up to get into it before his competitors, he should be sure to tell the crew that this is his plan. If he feels that the puff will be heavy enough that he will have to bear off to keep the boat up on a plane and under control, he should also communicate that to the spinnaker person.

It's obvious that the third crew in the team is important in relaying this information to both the skipper and the person flying the chute.

**PATTI:** It's very important that every movement of the helm be made gently and with good communication with the person on the spinnaker. Not only does good balance of the boat demand slow, gentle steering, but the crew on the spinnaker must have time to react with the trim of the guy and the sheet. Whenever the boat goes up, the guy should go forward and the sheet should be trimmed in slowly. Whenever the boat goes down, or a puff hits, the guy should come back and the sheet be eased.

Notice we are talking about the guy and the sheet simultaneously. Once the spinnaker is up, I feel that it's a good idea that the crew move forward enough that she can have her hand on the guy at all times, but have the ability to ease it in and out quickly with the puffs and shifts. If the boat gets hit with a rapid puff and the skipper jerks the bow down quickly, not only will he knock it off the plane but also knock it farther off balance, as I won't have time to ease the spinnaker out to match his steering arc.

**GREG:** One exception to this is if there's a boat trying to ride over us to weather, coming up quickly on our stern, and we want to try to quickly "dissuade" this fellow from trying to roll us to windward. At this stage, we'll stick the boat up sharply to try to knock him off our transom. Of course, again this should be pre-communicated with the crew so they are completely prepared and ready to trim the spinnaker in quickly. It may be a good idea to have the middle crew be the only one looking at the boat, and actually give the command as to when to head up. This may be governed by the time they are in the trough of a wave, or when none of the crew are looking at us, or the skipper is reaching down in the boat, etc. This is the time to catch that boat off guard. We are not trying to luff the boat up and foul them out, but just trying to tactically "loose them." The middle crew would also be the one to lower the board at the precise moment.

**PATTI:** When the skipper does use this tactic, it's important that the crew pull the chute in quickly, but also be prepared to ease it out quickly. It would be much better to have the chute luff and collapse one time than to push the boat over on its ear and lose control. The skipper should keep his eye on the luff of the spinnaker, and I should always be telling him whether he can go higher or whether he's too high for the trim of the chute. Once he's up so high that the spinnaker cannot be trimmed in any tighter or sailed effectively, I'll say "that's it" and he'll steer the boat to the luff of the spinnaker just as he would a jib. The crew must not be afraid to tell the skipper to bear off if she needs a hand to keep the spinnaker full.

**GREG:** We mentioned a little bit of the teamwork in handling a heavy air puff effectively, that will either put the boat up on a plane or make it plane even faster. It's a good idea for the skipper to anticipate this puff and actually "pre-bear off" to keep the boat underneath the spinnaker. The middle crew's cue is important here, as it's a good idea to actually have the boat borne off a good 2-3 seconds before the puff hits. Of course, the crew will have to ease the spinnaker out at the same time the boat is bearing off, so communication is again very important.

**PATTI:** At this stage I usually ease it out a foot at a time, and try to keep the curl in. That is, unless we get hit with a great big puff, at which time I know the skipper will continue to bear off, and I'll allow it to curl a good 2'-3'. This way I'm always ahead of the skipper, so if the puff were suddenly to get worse, it wouldn't require much time to completely dump the spinnaker.

**GREG:** In this situation, we're talking about pretty wild puffs that come through. The third crew would definitely have their hand on the vang and centerboard, and be ready to pull the board up higher or dump the vang if we get hit with a wicked puff. With the vang eased out the whole top of the main will begin to luff, and the boom rises up much higher and farther away from the water.

This anticipation of the puff is important, as if the puff hits and the skipper has to bear off quickly to keep the boat



under control, he will use more rudder, which creates more drag, and will slow the boat down.

PATTI: I think it's a good ideal to mention that while we're talking about the crew easing the spinnaker out as a puff hits, the skipper should always have his hand on the main and be ready to ease that out. In fact, he should play the mainsheet regularly, just like the crew is on the spinnaker.

GREG: The guide we use in trimming the main downwind is so we'll always have just a little bit of luff along the luff of the main. This will keep the angle of the leech correct and the sail less apt to stall. We always have a good 2"-3" of luff in the entry of the main at all times.

We should be sure that the cunningham and the outhaul are eased off to allow the draft of the sail to move back and up into the sail, to make the leech nice and round for the best power when sailing downwind. This is especially important in light air, when we're looking for as much "kick" from the leech and after part of the sail as possible. Light air definitely demands a different technique on the mainsheet. Instead of rapidly pulling it in and out, it should be a slow hand-over-hand trim and ease to keep that entry constant all the time.

Steering the boat downwind demands a new technique in light air. Whereas in heavy air we were always steering up and down to keep the boat under the spinnaker, in light winds we're always steering the boat up and down, "hunting" for the fastest apparent windspeed. Basically, it's not much different than sailing an ice boat in light winds, where the skipper is going to steer the boat up until he feels it begin to develop more and more speed, and then he'll slowly bear it down again as far down as he can go until the speed starts to die. When it dies he'll bring it back up until the speed builds, and then back down. It's almost a constant up and down, just like sailing upwind to keep the boat moving at top speed. You will be amazed at the difference in speed between the boat that is always "hunting" for the apparent wind, and the boat this is just sailing along on a straight course. Good judgement is required here to keep the boat from sailing too high off the desired course hunting for this new wind. If you think there's a puff coming, or you've just lost so much apparent wind that you need to go high to get back up again, that's one thing. But if you think it's a genuine lull, and you're going as fast as you can at the angle to the mark, then it's best to stick there until the next puff. Again, the third crew will always be calling out these puffs so we can anticipate and put our boat on the fastest angle in the new puff.



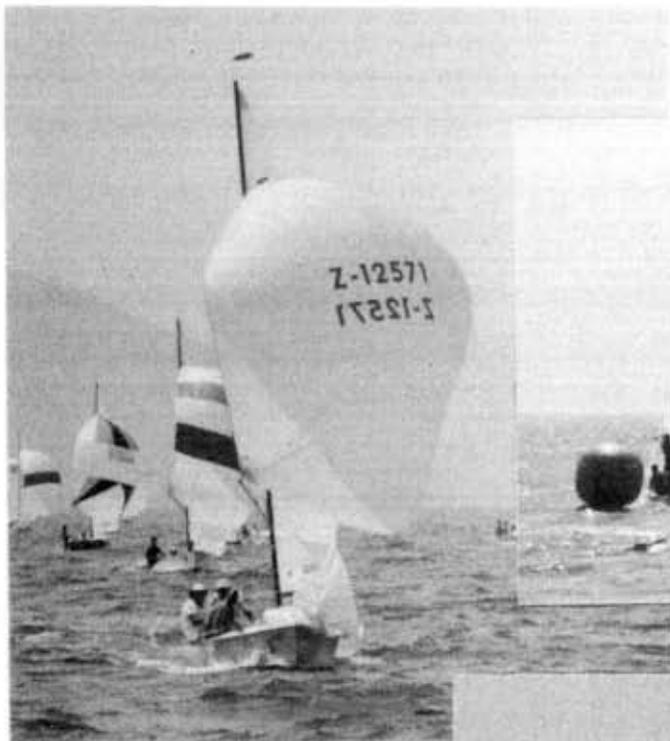
PATTI: Trimming a spinnaker in light air is definitely no easy task ... especially when the skipper is sailing all over the course to keep the boat going at top speed. You must never cleat the guy in these conditions, and always keep the spinnaker at the correct angle to the wind and the depth. If you ease the guy and the sheet out too much the spinnaker will become too full and stall too easy. If the guy and the sheet are pulled back too far, the spinnaker will be too flat and too choked. A good starting guide rule of thumb for this trim is that the skirt of the spinnaker is never any closer than 1' - 18" off the forestay.

The pole height is also very important, and on most of the boats I sail on, the skippers have the topping lift placed at a position where the person flying the spinnaker can adjust it easily. On Greg's Thistle, he has the topping lift right beside the guy cleat. This is a perfect position, because when a puff comes, not only does the sheet have to be eased, but the pole has to be raised to keep the two clews even. If the pole remains down too low when a puff hits, the draft will be pulled too far forward in the spinnaker, and the spinnaker will choke. By the same token, if the pole stays up too high when a lull comes or when the skipper has to keep his boat down on course and can't come up to grab a new apparent wind, the chute will simply sag into itself and collapse at the top and be very difficult to get flying again. When we do have to sail dead before the wind, a trick that I've learned to keep the spinnaker flying is to ease the sheet and the guy out about as far out as I can (2'-3' off the forestay) and then tease the guy back by pulling it back in slow but sharp 6"-8" bites at a time until I get the pole far enough aft that the skipper can sail dead before it. It may be necessary to quickly lower the pole to keep the upper leech from dumping off, but this teasing the guy back helps to induce a little more breeze in the spinnaker and helps to open up the leeward leech. As soon as the leeward leech gets tight and closed, the spinnaker will surely stall.

GREG: Some boats are rigged where the topping lift comes back to the center of the centerboard trunk, or is up on the foredeck where the third person can get to it. The big problem with this is that now there are three people concentrating on the spinnaker, and no one to watch for shifts, boats, and puffs. If the third person is just waiting for the spinnaker trimmer's command to raise and lower the pole, there's too much of a lag and the spinnaker can easily collapse. We both feel very strongly that the person flying the chute should also have the ability to adjust the topping lift.

A good guide for setting the height of the pole is that the two clews are even with one another. When we get a puff, the leeward clew will suddenly raise up higher than the windward clew, so the topping lift will be raised to bring the two clews in alignment again. Of course, if we get a lull, it will work just the opposite.

PATTI: Another good trick for adjusting the topping lift if you have a spinnaker that has a vertical center seam is, since it's sometimes difficult to see the leeward clew through the body of the main, you can set the center seam parallel with the mast. This is easy to sight from the crew's position flying the spinnaker, and if the center seam were suddenly to cock up on a positive angle away from the mast, then we need to lower the pole to bring it parallel again. If the center seam cocks upward on the leeward side, away from the mast, then we need to raise the pole to bring the center seam



parallel to the mast. This works well since the person flying the spinnaker can see it all. Many times if you use the two ends even rule, only the skipper can see the leeward clew of the spinnaker through the main window.

Another good guide for adjusting the angle of the pole to the wind, or the trim of the guy, is to set the pole at just about perpendicular to the wind. Sometimes this is very difficult to eyeball, so I ask my skipper to place a tell-tale on the topping lift about 6" up from the pole. This way it's very easy to tell from my position whether I've got the guy too far back or too far forward.

GREG: Patti and I have put together an outline which talks about the teamwork involved in approaching the weather mark, putting the chute up, gybing it, and dropping it. It lists each person's job as we have done it on our boat in the past. It's interesting to notice that never at any one point are any two people doing exactly the same thing. I guess you might say that it's truly teamwork in that everybody has their own job, and there's never any overlap. This is important, as a lot more can get done and with a minimum of communication. Of course, the only way something like this can really work well is if it's practiced well before the team begins racing together. It may seem a bit corny, but when I end up sailing with a new crew on the boat, I actually give them a copy of a similar outline to go over and somewhat memorize, so that person knows what his responsibilities will be on the boat. This way there will be no confusion, and everyone knows what must be done before the regatta even starts. This is especially helpful if we don't know whether we'll have the time to practice before the races.



## OUTLINE

- I. Teamwork approaching the weathermark.  
**Forward crew** puts up the pole, puts guy into eye, undoes chute.  
**Middle crew** plays jib, hikes.  
**Skipper** plays main, steers.
- II. Hoist  
**Forward crew** pulls guy back, uncleats jib and allows it to luff, and looks for mark.  
**Middle crew** concentrates on getting chute full and flying, always making sure boat is balanced before trimming.  
**Skipper** hoists spinnaker to knot, eases main and concentrates on steering towards mark.

- A.) The hoist — heavy weather alternative.  
**Forward crew** pulls guy back, uncleats jib and allows to luff, and hikes!  
**Middle crew** hoists chute, pulls board up.  
**Skipper** eases main way out and holds onto spinnaker sheet. He does not trim sheet until boat is balanced. Then gives sheet to middle crew.
  - B.) The hoist — from the weather side.  
**Forward crew** grabs the entire spinnaker in his arms and stands up (pole is not up).  
**Middle crew** pulls slack out of sheet and guy, and actually pulls the sheet around slightly so the leeward clew is almost to the headstay.  
**Skipper** sails **dead before** the wind and pulls the halyard up "smartly." Communication from the skipper to the middle crew is critical here so the spinnaker is actually thrown forward at the same time the skipper is pulling the halyard up.
- III. After the hoist  
**Forward crew** balances boat, drops jib from full luff, eases cunningham, checks vang.  
**Middle crew** flies chute only.  
**Skipper** trims main, board up to balance helm, steers for mark.
  - IV. On the reach  
**Forward crew** balances boat facing aft (unless it's blowing) so that they can see puffs and watch competition. Cleans up boat, readying for gybe.  
**Middle crew** flies chute only.  
**Skipper** trims main, steers for mark, or for defense as forward crew says. Steers waves.
  - V. Sailing into the gybe  
**Forward crew** hands old guy/new sheet to middle crew. Knocks old guy from guy hook.  
**Middle crew** grabs old guy/new sheet, takes up slack, begins to square chute as skipper bears off.  
**Skipper** overtrims main slightly, bears off slightly.
  - VI. The gybe on deck
    - A.) **Forward crew** goes up on deck, places back to the mast, facing forward, feet spread and knocks pole loose from old guy and mast.  
**Middle crew** moves to middle of boat, holding sheet and guy **always** watching spinnaker.  
**Skipper** moves to windward seat from rail, continues to slightly bear off.
    - B.) **Forward crew** continues facing forward, grabs new guy, hooks into pole, hooks pole onto mast.  
**Middle crew** sits on new windward seat or rail, concentrates on spinnaker,

- keeping it full...always ready to dump sheet, if necessary; **never** dump guy.  
**Skipper** bears off quickly, sits on windward rail.
- C.) **Forward crew** comes back off deck, grabs guy from middle crew, places in guy hook, and cleats. Hikes, if necessary.  
**Middle crew** releases new guy, concentrates on spinnaker.  
**Skipper** "re-bears off" completing "s" turn, eases mainsheet, if necessary.
- VII. The gybe from inside the cockpit (an alternative for heavy air on deck)
- A.) **Forward crew** reaches up, legs braced against foredeck, knocks pole off guy and mast. Pole hangs on topping lift.  
**Middle crew** moves in middle of boat, holding sheet and guy, always watching chute.  
**Skipper** moves to windward seat from rail, continues to slightly bear off.
- B.) **Forward crew** comes back inside boat under vang and balances boat.  
**Middle crew** sits on new windward seat or rail, concentrates on spinnaker, keeping it full. Always ready to dump sheet if necessary; **never** guy.  
**Skipper** bears off very hard, ducks as boom crashes overhead, and quickly sits on windward rail.
- C.) **Forward crew** reaches up, grabs new guy, hooks pole on new guy, and mast. Takes new guy from middle crew and hooks in guy hook and cleats. Hikes!  
**Middle crew** release new guy, concentrates on spinnaker.  
**Skipper** "re-bears off" completing "s" turn, eases mainsheet, if necessary.
- VIII. Going into the drop  
**Forward crew** pulls on cunningham, outhaul, eases vang and then hoists jib, making sure it is luffing.  
**Middle crew** concentrates on spinnaker.  
**Skipper** drops the board, cleans up mainsheet, positions boat for mark rounding.
- IX. The drop — to windward
- A.) **Forward crew** knocks pole off mast and guy, leaves pole hanging on top-pint lift, grabs chute and pulls down to windward.  
**Middle crew** lets go of sheet, grabs jib sheet and trims jib.  
**Skipper** uncleats spinnaker halyard when forward crew is ready, trims main, begins to round.
- B.) **Forward crew** continues stowing spinnaker, then grabs jib sheet.
- Middle crew** lets go of jib sheet, takes mainsheet and helps skipper finish trimming main.  
**Skipper** finishes mark rounding and trims cunningham, backstay, and traveller.
- X. The drop — to leeward (not recommended unless necessary to have the spinnaker on the correct side for the next downwind leg.)
- A.) **Forward crew** leaves pole up, goes to leeward, grabs chute in middle of spinnaker and pulls!  
**Middle crew** releases guy and sheet and lets luff, grabs jib sheet and hikes.  
**Skipper** uncleats spinnaker halyard when forward crew is ready, trims main, begins to round.
- B.) **Forward crew** quickly stuffs spinnaker and gets to windward side as soon as possible...when everything is stable, goes forward to bring pole down, takes jib sheet.  
**Middle crew** lets go of jib sheet and hikes, helping skipper trim mainsheet, if necessary.  
**Skipper** continues to round and trims cunningham, backstay, and traveller.

Best of luck with your skipper/crew teamwork with the spinnaker. If you have any questions, or any ideas you'd like to add, please feel free to call either of us.





# BUILDING THE FIRST LIGHTNING

By Susan Kenney

Skaneateles. To the Onondaga Indians who named it centuries ago it meant Long Lake, and it was their prime hunting and fishing grounds. To those who came later it has been best known as a summer resort, and the easternmost of New York State's Finger Lakes—long, narrow bodies of water cut deep into the upland by glaciers millions of years ago. For still others it's the home of a famous restaurant. But boating and sailing enthusiasts may recognize the name for another reason; some of the luckier ones may even find it on a small bronze plaque somewhere on their wooden Comet, International 14, Rhodes Bantam, even a vintage rowboat or canoe. For over 50 years, from 1902 until the mid-1950s, the Skaneateles Boat and Canoe Company turned out wooden boats of fine design, craftsmanship, and durability. And of all the boats conceived, crafted, and built in this small boatworks, none has been more enduring or popular than the 19' sailboat that made its first appearance on Skaneateles Lake in July, 1938 — the Lightning.

John and George Barnes, owners of the boat company from 1932 until 1946, who along with two of his fellow workers actually put the pieces together to create Lightning Number One. The whole process, from conception to completion, took four years, the actual building two years. Now in his late 70s, lean, wiry, and still active, Bert Perkins lives in Skaneateles, where his family has resided for generations, just up and over the hill from the lake where the first Lightning was launched. Recently he recalled the building of Lightning Number One.

"Around 1934, a couple of years after the Barnes brothers took over the business, we were building mostly Comets and Internationals. We'd gone out of the rowboat and canoe business, and were doing just sailboats. John was big on Internationals; used to sail them on Lake Ontario when he was a boy. But the smaller boats weren't selling—partly the Depression, I guess—and we had most of the Comets spending their time as collateral at the bank so we could meet the payroll. People just weren't buying, at least not around here. There were probably a dozen Comets on the lake and about as many Internationals, and that about did it. Though, come to think of it, we did ship a couple of Comets out to Cuba in 1935. Not that they weren't a good boat, fast, but the cockpit was so small. You could only fit two or three into it, all sitting on the floorboards and climbing all over each other every time the boom swung across. Wasn't too comfortable. The International wasn't much better from that standpoint, and you were likelier to get wet. They were really racing boats, not for family sailing.

"So one time—it was the fall of 1934, I think—John and George got their heads together with a couple of their old sailing cronies, Sedge Smith and Weck Barber. They'd grown up on the lake and sailed all their lives, since 1890 or so, anyway, in just about anything they could get their hands on—St. Lawrence skiffs, sailing canoes, catboats. Mowers, knockabouts, you name it. Sailing's always been big around here—nice, deep lake with good, predictable winds and no

shoals—and between the four of them they knew what there was for boats. Anyway, they decided what the world needed was a sailboat big enough to hold six people on a day sail, with seats up off the floor for comfort, stiff enough so you could get up and move around without pitching everybody into the drink, but still fast and ticklish enough to hold its own as a racer. Hit both markets, in other words. Art Emerick was the plant engineer then, and he thought we ought to have something with as few curves as possible—like the Comet, so it would be easy to mass produce." This was an important consideration for a small boat company with fewer than 30 workers. The simple lines would also make it possible for home boatbuilders to construct their own boats.

Everyone agreed it was a pretty tall order, but John Barnes took the idea to the New York firm of Sparkman and Stephens, and by late 1935 Olin Stephens II had come up with plans and drawings for the new boat. "Then all we had to do was figure out what to do with 'em," Bert remembers. "Darn thing took the better part of two years just to lay up."

Why so long? "We went slow," Bert replies. "Had other work to do, and there were just the three of us working on it, Art, me, and Wampus Hardage. We decided not to bother with a half model, just go ahead and make one full size boat, and that would be the model. Far as we were concerned, it was just another boat. We were awful careful in building her, just the same."

Although marine plywood had been developed by this time, the Lightning was not designed to make use of this relatively new material. Recently Olin Stephens II took a look at the original Lightning construction plan, still in his firm's possession. "It is my recollection that the boats were made with lines that would produce an easily built hull, but not with the idea of using plywood, although the character of the hull would seem to make it very easy to build the topsides of that material. The arc bottom might not go so easily, though." So the first Lightning was of conventional plank-on-frame construction, using some cedar and cypress ordered for the boat by John Barnes.

Before actual construction of the prototype could begin, engineer Emerick had to loft the boat and make full-sized patterns from the drawings and specifications. Bert continues: "Then we made the molds. That took a while, considering how few curves there were but it was a pretty big boat for us, the biggest yet, over 19' long and almost 8' of beam.

"Then we started to cut the pieces from the patterns, starting with the frames. I remember spending a lot of time beveling them to get a good fit at the chine. Threw away some of that expensive foreign wood." Bert shakes his head. "Seemed like a lot of trouble at the time, just for one boat. Fuss, fuss, fuss. But I guess it was worth it."

Gradually Bert and Wampus assembled the pieces of the first hull from the bottom up, Philippine mahogany for the frames and bulkheads, transom, and centerboard trunk, cedar and cypress for the bottom and sides, single planks laid edge to edge. When the hull was finished, Bert laid on

the pine deck and built in the slattered seats, floorboards, and trim, also of mahogany, along with the rudder and tiller. The big centerboard was made of steel; the winch was oak, hand-turned by Bert himself. "It took a while," Bert says, "but a lot of it was figuring, not building. There was no steaming or anything like that, that was what was so amazing. Everything could be cut right out, curves and all."

Finally, the prototype Lightning was finished and ready to rig. George Barnes designed special brass fittings, which were produced by nearby Port Byron by the Calwell Company. The rest of the rigging and hardware was provided out of boat company stock. The canvas sails, over 175 sq. ft. of them with the now familiar zig-zag and big number 1, were made by the Joy Company, and the wooden mast by a company named Pidgeon Hollow Span Company. The hull was painted white, and the deck canvas which had been

stretched over the deck was painted green. By the summer of 1938, Lightning Number One was fitting out and ready to sail. Olin's brother, Rod Stephens, who had already inspected the boat during her building, came up from New York for trials that summer, and John and George Barnes did most of the crewing. "It was a tall order," Bert recalls, "but when we were done they knew they had something, all right."

The first Lightning was officially launched in October, 1938 from the ramp at the Skaneateles country Club, a mile and a half from the boatworks. In a review in *Yachting* magazine that year, the boat was praised for its perfect balance, its ease of sailing in light air, its responsiveness and stability in stiff breezes. It was recognized immediately as an exceptional racer, but the slatted mahogany seats and wide, roomy cockpit could hold six adults comfortably, and small

*There IS a mark in there someplace?*



children could crawl up under the foredeck and curl up on the almost flat bottom for a long day's sail. The Lightning looked like a hard combination to beat as a racer-day-sailer.

All in all, everyone agreed it was an impressive debut. The boat was an instant hit at the local sailing club, and Number One was bought on the spot for \$495 by Gordon Cronk, an avid local sailor and friend of John Barnes. Sparkman and Stephens turned the plans over to John Barnes, who in turn gave them to the newly formed Lightning Association so they would be available at low cost to both amateur and professional boatbuilders. Orders began to come in thick and fast, and over the winter the boat company went into full-time production on the new Lightning class. "We turned 'em out one a day and still couldn't keep up," Bert remembers. Lightning Fleet number one was chartered the next summer at Skaneateles Country Club, and word spread fast about the hot new racer-daysailer. The Association assigned numbers and plans to eight professional builders in addition to Skaneateles Boat Company.

According to Bert, the Skaneateles Boat Company built most of the first 300 Lightnings. Other early builders were the Lippincott Boat Company of Riverton, New Jersey, and Emmons Boat Works of Central Square, New York. A number of amateur boatbuilders acquired plans, including several in Skaneateles, and George Barnes himself built Lightning Number 15. Planks were the preferred construction, but by the late 1940s plywood was being used extensively, particularly in home-built models. These early low-number Lightnings are considered collectors' items now, but the combined efforts of perhaps a dozen boat companies over the next several years resulted in the production of close to 2,000 boats by the time the International Lightning Regatta was held in Skaneateles in 1946. It was in

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*I was greatly impressed by the light steering at the time of the very first trials, and I seem to remember that I sailed the boat back and forth in the vicinity of the yacht club, having unshipped the tiller just to show how the balance could be controlled by positioning the centerboard and the trim of the sails. I felt there were not many boats that could be so easily handled and this probably would contribute to a successful class. I guess my estimate was rather conservative."*

—Rod Stephens

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spite of the fact that all these companies, including Skaneateles, were doing war work nearly full-time between 1941 and 1945: Skaneateles Boat Company turned out experimental boats and pontoons for PT boats, using a process invented by the Barnes brothers called Hydrolite, which Bert Perkins describes as "saturating the wood with glue and water, sticking it in a mold, and cooking it in an oven just like a great big pie crust." After the war the Lightning shared the boatworks with the once-again-popular Comets, Internationals, and the new 13½' Rhodes Bantam, also commissioned by the Skaneateles Boat Company.

By the late 1950s the Lightning was the largest one-design class over 16' in length, with over 8,000 boats registered worldwide, and after the advent of fiberglass Lightnings the number nearly doubled, until today Olin Stephens estimates that there are 15,000 of them all over the world, a fact he modestly attributes not so much to the design itself as the excellent class organization. Ironically, neither Sparkman and Stephens nor John and George Barnes made a penny in royalties from their brainchild, and in fact the Skaneateles Boat Company went broke and closed during the '50s heyday of the Lightning. But both John and George Barnes were enthusiastic owners and racers of Lightnings, winning the Nationals three times between them, and the regionals countless others. Bert Perkins and his brother Dutch both owned Lightnings for a while, as did many other families in Skaneateles.

What happened to the Lightning as a class is part of recorded history, but what happened to Lightning Number One and the man who built her? Bert Perkins left the Boat Company in 1946. "Thought I'd try something else for a while. Had enough of boats, I thought. I did carpentry, then built myself a motel to keep busy." He and his wife and three children ran a successful motel business for many years, but "somehow people kept showing up in the yard with boats to fix, and I couldn't very well turn 'em down. A mast broke here, a hole was stove in there..." Finally in the mid-'50s Bert opened a boat repair and storage shop adjacent to the motel, where he repaired many of the wooden boats he had helped build. At one time or another, he figures, he must have worked on almost every boat in town.

Bert and Lightning Number One crossed paths again some 20 years after he had built it, when its second owner Lew Ayres, also a Skaneateles resident, brought it to Bert for repairs. For many years the boat with the green deck and white hull and the big number one on its mainsail could be seen sailing with the other Lightnings on Skaneateles Lake any summer weekend. After Lew Ayres died in the late 1960s, his daughter took the boat to nearby Cazenovia Lake, where it was bought by a man named Ryan from Utica who later moved to Ohio.

But the boat came back. Bert Perkins saw Lightning Number One again at the 40th Anniversary Lightning Regatta held in July, 1978 at the Skaneateles Country Club. "I went up when they were launching the boats for the race. There was one whole lot of Lightnings, wood ones, plywood ones, fiberglass ones," Bert nods thoughtfully. "The old girl looked pretty good. Better'n ever, as a matter of fact. She'd been completely restored. Beautiful boat, Beautiful," he says, smiling, remembering perhaps the two years he and Art and Wampus spent putting pieces together like a jigsaw puzzle. "Not bad for a 40-year-old boat," Bert says. "Not bad. But then, she was built to last." And last she had indeed, thanks to Bert Perkins, who built it not better than he knew, then at least as well as he knew how.

Reprinted through courtesy of Susan Kenney and *Wooden Boat Magazine*. Ms. Kenney grew up in Skaneateles. Bert Perkins, who built Lightning #1, is her stepfather. She teaches English and creative writing at Colby College in Maine.