

BRILLIANT – Auxiliary Cruising Schooner
Sparkman and Stephens Design No. 12

LOA 61' 7'', LWL 49', beam 14'8'', draught 8.9', placement 85,400 lbs, sail area 2082 sq.ft.

Designed for Walter Barnum 1930, built by Henry Nevins Yard, City Island, New York, 1932. The construction was overseen by Rod Stephens who was working in the yard at that time, gaining experience.

Unusually, for a construction of this size, steamed oak frames were specified rather than the more usual or more common sawn frames. These frames were the largest ever bent at Nevins and are still as solid as the day that they were first fitted. The design was heavily reinforced with usual Nevins style Everdur bronze strapping, first made popular by Herreshoff. She was designed as a blue water boat, her owner had apparently wanted a vessel that was “unbreakable” but at the same time fast, comfortable and safe. Barnum’s original letter commissioning the vessel from S&S stipulated “every piece of material ... to be literally perfect for the use intended ... that the vessel be as fast and weatherly as possible ... as handsome as possible ... and that the vessel be capable of being rolled over in a hurricane and coming up again with the hull and deck opening covers intact ... that it have a rudder and steering gear as nearly unbreakable as possible ... and that the lower mast ... be staid to stand any conceivable strain that might be placed upon short only perhaps of a complete capsizing ...”. In short the vessel had to be perfect. The quality of the materials that were to go into her construction raised her cost to double that which would have been appropriate for a normally built vessel of similar size at the time.

The design is rugged and readopts the old fashioned schooner rig made so popular by the Alden Malabar Schooners. She has a slightly hollow fine bow entrance, comparatively narrow beam, indicating speed and agility. Uffa Fox commenting on her lines stated, “the lines are of those of a fast and yet very weatherly cruiser with clean easy buttocks and powerful sections standing out from the rest. These two combined make a fast reaching vessel, the sections giving power to carry sail and the easy buttocks making for high speeds DORADE with her easy sections is at her best to windward and running; all her remarkable days runs being made with the wind well aft. These records show the effect of the difference between the two sets of lines”.

Nevertheless, the days of the schooner were over for in the 1932 Bermuda race, BRILLIANT could not keep up with the likes of DORADE and was even beaten by ALDEN MALABAR X (also a schooner). Nevertheless she had much success in schooner racing and in her 1932 crossing to England she made frequent daily runs of 200 miles a day with a best day’s record of 231 miles, an average speed of almost 10 knots, quite remarkable for a heavy displacement vessel of this type.

BRILLIANT is a true auxiliary – that is to say she has a powerful auxiliary engine which is entirely encased in a metal lined engine room, essential in a vessel of this size in those days when auxiliary power was by petrol combustion and not diesel.

BRILLIANT can be seen in pristine condition at the Mystic Seaport Museum, Connecticut and she must be the most elegant and perfectly maintained sail training vessels afloat.

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