

Sparkman & Stephens 75th Anniversary Celebration Events, Mystic Seaport, Connecticut

Between July 8th and July 11th, the sun was shining on Sparkman & Stephens as the company celebrated its 75th Anniversary in New York at the New York Yacht Club and in Connecticut at the Mystic Seaport. Yachts and guests alike made the trip from near and far, including Florida, California, Texas, Maine, Canada, Bermuda, Italy, Holland, Denmark, France, to name a few, to celebrate the founding of the company in 1929 by Olin Stephens and Drake Sparkman

The events began with a cocktail party hosted by Sparkman & Stephens and the S&S Association Members for S&S Association members on Thursday evening July 8, in the Model Room of the NYYC. The S&S Association President, Rob Snoeks, and the U.S. Regional Secretary for the Association, Steve Kloebler, paid tribute to Olin, the firm, and the many designs that have come from the company's drawings boards. To officially kick off the celebrations, Olin, Steve, Rob, and Patrick Matthiesen, the Association's Secretary and Treasurer, honored an Association tradition with a drink of champagne from the S&S Cup, the same cup that would later be awarded to the winner of the Cape to Castine Race.

Also noteworthy on Thursday evening was the presentation by Greg Matzat, S&S Chief Naval Architect, and Bruce Johnson, S&S Chief Designer, to the New York Yacht Club of the original design contract for the America's Cup yacht RANGER, the successful defender of the 1937 America's Cup. This contract is dated November 4, 1936 and is signed by Drake Sparkman, Starling Burgess and Harold Vanderbilt. Vice Commodore George R. Hinman Jr. and Rear Commodore Charles H. Townsend accepted this contract to commemorate the long history Sparkman & Stephens holds with the New York Yacht Club.

The celebration continued on Friday, July 9, with the arrival of seventy of Sparkman & Stephens finest designs at Mystic Seaport. That evening S&S held a Welcoming Party for the arriving yacht owners, their crews, and other friends of S&S. Originally only 100 people were expected for the cocktail party at the Mystic Seaport's Member's Garden, but when 350 people RSVP'd, the party had to be moved to the River Room and Patio at the Seamen's Inne, adjacent to the Seaport. Yachting Magazine, Mount Gay Rum, and Sparkman & Stephens sponsored the Welcoming Party.

More than 1000 owners, enthusiasts, and friends of S&S were at Mystic Seaport on Saturday, July 10, to participate in the company's anniversary and see the yachts on display. All of the yachts dressed ship and flew the signal flags "7" and "5" from their spreaders signifying S&S's 75 years of yacht design and brokerage. The docks were full with people talking to the owners and touring the yachts. Some were lucky enough to test sail Sparkman & Stephens latest design, a 36 ft Day Sailer, the M36.

Other important visitors reviewing the yachts in attendance were the judges for the Concours d'Elegance. The winners of the Concours were announced at the Gala Dinner later that evening. The winners were as follows, Best in Fleet, *BOLERO*; Best Classic/Professionally maintained, *BRILLIANT*; Best Modern/Professionally maintained, *SLEIGHRIDE*; Best Classic/Owner maintained, *WESTWIND II*; Best Modern/Owner maintained, *KESTREL*; Best Swan, *VIXEN*; Best Power, *GREY FOX*; Longest Distance Traveled, *WAR BABY*; and a special trophy awarded by the Concours judge, Yves Tuset to *GAUCHO*, a New York 32, as oldest private yacht.

Another highlight on Saturday was an Open House for S&S guests of the Rosenfeld Collection and the S&S archived plans at Mystic's Collections Research Center. Following the tour was a lecture series which included: Jere Russo from Mack Boring who gave a lecture on maintaining diesel engines, Robbie Doyle of Doyle Sails who spoke about cruising sails, R.C. Keefe who presented a slide show of great S&S yachts, James Moran & Carl Persak, two S&S naval architects who explained how hull shapes are created, and Brad Van Liew of Raymarine who spoke about his successful Around Alone Open 50 campaign. After the speakers, actual movie footage of Dorade's 1931 Transatlantic and Fastnet Races was shown.

As the Saturday evening sun was going down over the Mystic River, the Sparkman & Stephens 75th Anniversary Gala was getting underway beneath a huge tent on the North Lawn of Mystic Seaport. S&S

President Mitchell C. Gibbons-Neff welcomed all the guests and yachts. Noted author, John Rousmaniere, was the master of ceremonies for the evening. Rousmaniere asked the 500 people at the dinner to stand if they had sailed their first S&S yacht within the last 25 years and about half the crowd stood. Then Rousmaniere asked people to stand if they had sailed their first S&S yacht within the past 50 years. After everyone had seated he asked everyone to stand who sailed their first S&S yacht more than 70 years ago and only one person rose, Olin Stephens. The crowd cheered with a standing ovation.

After a lobster dinner and the presentation of the Concours d'Elegance awards, Janet Baxter, president of US Sailing, presented Olin with the US Sailing Sportsmanship Award, which Olin graciously accepted. Olin, humble, then took the opportunity to recognize broker Drake Sparkman, his brother Rod Stephens, and engineer Gil Wyland for their efforts to make S&S a successful and reputable firm for the past 75 years.

Representing the continuing success of Sparkman & Stephens today, Bruce Johnson and Greg Matzat took the opportunity to recognize the many yards from around the world that have built S&S's designs. Many of these yards were in attendance at the Gala, including Derecktor Shipyards, Lyman-Morse Shipyard, New England Boat Works, Morris Yachts, Royal Huisman Shipyard, Stellar Yachts and Walsteds. Once the speeches concluded, an 18-piece band kicked up and everyone danced under the moonlight until midnight.

When the sailors awoke Sunday morning to the music of a bagpiper walking the waterfront, they saw the morning forecast brought sunshine once again. With the forecast though, was news of technical difficulties at the Mystic Drawbridge. Fortunately, luck is always on the sailor's side when there is another rendezvous to attend. The bridge delay was brief and the yachts were able to parade out of Mystic and rendezvous with the IYRS cruise at Fishers Island.

It was an exciting weekend, but only the beginning of a series of events running through August. The week of July 12-16, was the Annual IYRS (International Yacht Restoration School) Cruise, followed by the Museum of Yachting Annual Sparkman & Stephens 12-Meter Regatta in Newport, Rhode Island over the weekend of July 17. After one weekend off, the celebrations continued at the end of July with the Cape to Castine Distance Race and finished with a Designer's Symposium and Classic Yacht Racing in Castine, Maine.