Origin and Rebirth of “BABE”, an S&S 30 Daysailer
Excerpts by Danielle Abbott, S&S Naval Architect and Glenn Walters, Managing Partner, Bluenose Yachts

Before his death at age 100, the co-founder of Sparkman & Stephens chose a 1935 sloop—one of the smallest of S&S’s many ocean racer/cruiser designs—as the yacht he most wanted to update.

In 1935 Olin Stephens, the design half of a Manhattan design-and-brokerage firm started by Stephens and yacht broker Drake Sparkman six years earlier, drew up plans for a custom 30’ 6” (9.3m) ocean racer for the Miami–Nassau and St. Petersburg–Havana races. Named Babe, she was a forward-thinking boat for the time, with short overhangs and light displacement, just barely meeting the requirements of the Southern Ocean Racing Conference. Accommodations were secondary: a simple galley, portable toilet between berths, and a single pipe berth forward. Her large sail plan had a high-aspect ratio for that period, and the boomkin made an extra-long boom possible without a lengthy stern overhang. Listed by S&S as Design No. 97, Babe embodied trends that would later drive modern cruising and racing yachts. Her length overall was the minimum allowed for the ocean races in which she was to participate, making her an agile and responsive racer. To compensate for the lower stability of a small boat, the beam was made “almost one-third of her waterline length,” wrote Stephens (in his book Lines, mentioned below) “more than most larger boats” of the pre-WWII era. Her broad beam “gives her a shoaler hull form,” he added, “so that her short keel is like a separate fin, minimizing wetted area”—a shape presaging today’s wide canoe bodies with separate fin keels. When drawing the hull-to-keel transition for Babe, Stephens recalled as inspiration the wing-to-body fairing of a Douglas DC-3. Applying developments in aircraft design to sailing yachts was certainly a novel concept in 1935, but one that has enhanced sailing’s evolution.

S&S Design No. 97, Babe was drawn specifically to compete in races like the Miami–Nassau and St. Petersburg–Havana. Her 30’6” (9.3m) was the minimum size for such events.
In 2002, long after his official retirement from S&S, and a career that spanned more than 50 years, Stephens wrote “Lines”—a limited edition, large-format book in which he critiqued the original drawings of his favorite S&S designs from the period 1930 to 1980. (They amount to 49 in all; see “Sailboats From the Century Before,” Professional Boat Builder No. 82, page 18, for a review.) The book includes America’s Cup winners, ocean cruisers, fast racers, and large schooners. It was during the selection process for Lines that Stephens was asked by his good friend, and author of the preface, Knight Coolidge: “Of all these beautiful boats, which one would you redesign?” Stephens considered the question for a minute and then chose Babe, the smallest racer/cruiser in the collection. The modern features of her hull and keel, her small size, simple accommodations, and ease of handling mark Babe as a perfect candidate for a makeover. Stephens thought the first changes to the original design should be to increase the mast height by 2’ (61cm), eliminate the boomkin, deepen the draft to 6’ 4” (1.9m), and decrease the displacement to under 10,000 lbs (4,530kg). Those modifications conformed to current trends to which she already hinted, and maintained her comfortable handling qualities and seaworthiness.

Between 2002 and 2004 numerous inquiries at S&S showed there was serious interest in a redesign of an Olin Stephens favorite. But most sailors who wanted a 30’ ocean cruiser were wary of the cost of a “new” design and a one-off build. Nothing came to fruition until this particular design caught the eye of a Maine boatyard owner in 2008. Terry McClinch, of Boothbay Harbor Shipyard, became intrigued with the idea of Babe revisited, once Knight Coolidge had related his 2002 conversation with Stephens about redesigning a classic S&S yacht from the 1930s. McClinch was excited about the prospect of a new work by Olin Stephens, and decided to go forward with the project. Stephens would work with S&S to complete the re-design, which was to be built plank-on-frame, with bronze hardware, painted nonskid deck, teak hatches, and fitted with a fin keel, bulb, spade rudder, and carbon rig and contemporary sails—thus combining the appeal of traditional boatbuilding with modern developments for which Babe was so well suited initially.

Danielle Abbot joined S&S in April 2008, just as work was set to begin. Bruce Johnson, the firm’s chief designer and executive vice-president, assigned her to the project—a perfect opportunity to take a design from concept to completion. They started with Olin Stephens’s freehand sketch on a plain piece of paper, showing a rough outline of how he envisioned the new Babe. Danielle began by drafting a boat that fit his parameters and had the look of the sketched profile, and sent him a set of plans for review. Olin sat down with Coolidge, who took notes. Olin provided comments on and revisions to her drawings. During the next few months, she would send revised plans to Olin and he would reply with design notes; we went back and forth like that about five times, each step further developing and refining the design. The original sketch showed a boat with very low freeboard, deep fin keel, and a sheerline that added graceful charm to her simplicity. Olin wanted to keep accommodations and outfitting down to the bare essentials. By now the boat’s purpose had changed: no longer a rugged small ocean racer, she was to be a simple, handsome daysailer with enough room down below for an overnight or weekend outing. That shift allowed S&S to maximize sailing performance and good looks, at the expense of comfortable headroom below—a trade-off deemed worthwhile for the sailors the new design would target. Our re-design was to have a new name as well: Nymph.

*Nymph*, S&S Design No. 0097-c1, was a fine collaboration between a design firm and its founding father, and a fitting symbol of the company’s work for the sailing community. Olin Stephens died on September 13, 2008.
Fast forward to August 2012, Nymph was not produced and the project lay dormant for a few years with additional efforts made by Brendan Abbott, also with S&S, to revise Nymph into a more modern day version of BABE without compromising the basic design parameters and adhering to Olin’s suggestions and feelings. After hours of fine tuning and deliberation the final result of Design No. 0097-C2 was completed in 2012 and the challenge became how and with whom to build.

There was considerable discussion with project manager Jeff Gray about finding a boat builder who could meet budgets, deliver quality and might be interested in moving the project from the drawing boards to the fabrication phase. Several builders indicated interest, but no one was prepared to make the commitment to build the plugs, molds and hull number one in a recessionary market. A local Newport, RI craftsman, John O’Connor, expressed possible interest in building the first three hulls in conjunction with Jeff Gray’s assistance and S&S oversight. The additional challenge remained of who would fund the project and who would market and sell the final result. One of John O’Connor’s business partners, Glenn Walters of Bluenose Yacht Sales, was then introduced to the project and asked about his ideas on how to tackle the final challenges. Formerly with Morris Yachts and their M36 project, Glenn, decided this was a S&S design that deserved to be brought to the market and in the worst case basis this was a beautiful boat to build and own. After several more weeks of discussion with the S&S management team, Bluenose Yacht Sales, agreed to exclusive world-wide marketing and sales rights in exchange for building hull number one. S&S and BYS spent several months obtaining quotes, inspecting boat yards and a final decision was made to produce the new BABE II here in Bristol, RI using a local high quality builder, CC Fiberglass, well known for building J boats and Hunt Yachts.

The project team was created and was composed of Brendan Abbott, chief designer with S&S, Jeff Gray, project manager with S&S, John O’Connor, project manager with Bluenose Yacht Sales (BYS), Glenn Walters, design engineer, sales and marketing for BYS and the CC Fiberglass team of Joseph DeLaponte, Cesar DeLaponte and Joe Pimenta. This small team met and spoke every week on countless details and
drove the project in a fast pace on the basis of having hull number one in the water, test sailed and presented to the public for display at the September 2012 Newport Boat show.

CC Fiberglass, Quantum Sails, Selden Masts, and Mars Metals just to name a few of the third party participants were tremendous in their inputs and meeting deadlines such that BABE II was launched on schedule in early September, test sailed, professionally photographed, formally christened and made her debut at the 2012 Newport Boat show.

Christened by Glenn Walters mother, Judy, and named the “GORDON E” after the recent passing of his father, BABE II was splashed and has been exceeding all expectations of performance, ease of handling, elegance, fun and is wowing crowds and on lookers alike at boat shows and harbors from Newport to Annapolis.
With a final weight of around 6,000 pounds, a tall rig, non-overlapping headsail jib, furling asymmetrical spinnaker, and a very comfortable cockpit, BABE II is just about everything Olin had wanted to achieve including a price point of less than $200,000 with a sail away base boat price of only $159,000.

With a simple and elegant interior to sleep four, a full marine head, vanity sink, and options for other cruising amenities, the S&S 30, BABE II has more interior volume that competing daysailing boats that are 36’ in overall length, but with a waterline that makes her fast and amazingly well balanced.

The Yanmar 14 hp saildrive will easily move her under power at over 7 kts and at 2200 rpm she will cruise for hours at 6 kts.

And every client is amazed how dry she is and balanced even in 20kts of true wind.
The rebirth of one of Olin’s favorite designs, BABE II, is another testimony to not only Olin’s genius but also a reflection of a dedicated team of S&S designers, project managers and a vision by Bluenose Yacht Sales to bring back a 1935 winning legend such that discriminating owners will appreciate the pedigree, quality and value in such a beautiful, easy to sail, fun boat.

Thank you to Olin Stephens.

Submitted and written by: Glenn Walters, Managing Partner, Bluenose Yacht Sales