

Latitude 38 November 1990

WESTSAIL TALES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

I waxed nostalgic reading your article about Westsails. In 1973 I hired on as a carpenter for the first Westsail 42. The company was quite a rogue's gallery then: Lynn and Snyder Vick, business idealists in the best post-sixties tradition, sailors, wannabee sailors, a hundred or so illegal aliens, a couple of Aussies on the lam — even a few boatbuilders. However odd the mix, it definitely was a fun place to work. For me, it was like getting paid to go play every day.

After giving the Kendall 32 a flush deck and calling it a Westsail 32, one of the company's best public relations moves was to document John Carson's trip through the South Pacific on *Pegasus* with his girlfriend. Her name escapes me, but she'd been Miss Milk of 1969 (Britt McPherson) and was built for the job. Whenever she came into the plant to check a boat under production, all work would invariably come to a halt. She and John toured the country giving seminars and selling the 'ultimate' (is anybody else tired of that word yet?) cruiser. The two were very good at fueling dreams and motivating people to just get going and DO IT! I think John is still selling boats in the Seattle area.

My favorite Westsail design was the Westsail 43, an aft cockpit version of the center cockpit 42. After we added seven more feet to the mast, she even sailed pretty well. Best of all, no matter what the weather on deliveries or shakedown cruises, I never ever felt insecure or worried about the boat's ability to take a beating. Bill Lee is right, 'Fast is fun'; but when you're sliding down the face of a wave and watching *Merlin* twist and torque about, we're talking adrenalin and pre-ulcerous secretions, not laid-back Mom & Pop or singlehanded cruising. That's the beauty of sailing, there's room for the whole spectrum (which coincidentally happens to be the name of my favorite Westsail 43, hull #6...).

I happened to be foreman of the Westsail 42/43 line when we built a custom 42 for the 'Dean of American Broadcast News', Walter Cronkite. He used to walk around the plant with an entourage chronicling his every move with cameras and notebooks. I don't think the poor guy could even go to the bathroom alone. He was the same person in real life as he projected on television; warm, friendly, concerned and very classy. A beautiful painting was made of his boat under sail; I'd love to get a print if anyone knows how.

We built another 42 for [*name withheld to protect Latitude from being sued*] a fellow closely associated with the ZZ Top rock 'n roll band. Every week at production meetings Hans, the plant manager, would get on my case because #67 was so over budget and behind schedule. A little detective work revealed that every time the future owner, or one of his rock 'n roll cohorts, showed up to check on the progress, which was once a week or so, a new supply of drugs was delivered to the production crew. Times being what they were, everyone wanted to work on that boat!

When the boat was finally finished, way over budget, the guys showed me all the trick secret stashes custom-built into the furniture. I never did explain to Hans why that boat took so long and cost the company so much money. I guess my sympathies were always with the guys building the boats rather than those managing the money.

Want more? When we built John Carson's Westsail 43, he was unhappy with the 6'3" headroom he's a big and tall guy. So after bolting the deck on, we put a hydraulic jack in the main cabin and boosted the headroom by two more inches. Unfortunately, we split the laminate of the cabin top in the process, right down to the plywood core. By this point in construction John was on such bad terms with the foreman that we just filled the crack with chopped strands and resin, then gel-coated the whole thing. I always worried a little bit

about that particular boat.

In 1977 things started going down the tubes for Westsail. I did a delivery to Hawaii and quit when upon my return I was told to start tooling up for a golf cart(!) line. We were talking desperation by this time. Receivership and Chapter 11 loomed throughout the plant like stale cigar smoke. The fun had gone out of it, the bubble had popped and some shady things were happening on the production line.

A few of the guys who jumped ship started a fledgling company, Cruising Consultants, and built one boat, the Crealock 37. After several incarnations it became Pacific Seacraft, which to my understanding became a Fortune 500 company under the expert tutelage of Henry and Mike. To bring things full circle, it's also my understanding that the company was sold this year to, you guessed it, the Japanese. As Linda Ellerbee would say, "And so it goes."

P.S. Westsail owners needing bronze parts to upgrade or replace (custom or stock) should call Lee at Elk Brass in Compton. He's about the last of the O.E.M. suppliers — and he owns a beautiful Westsail 32.

Chris Carley
Teresa J, Crealock 37
Santa Cruz

Chris— Great letter. Pacific Seacraft, which was purchased two years ago by Singapore's Singmarine Industry, certainly wasn't a Fortune 500 company. We doubt if all the sailboat manufacturers put together could make the Fortune 500. Pacific Seacraft, by the way, recently picked up all the Ericson molds and moved them back to California from Mexico. They have plans to market that line in the United States, Japan and perhaps Europe. Want a sense of how times have

changed? The CEO at the Southern California boatbuilder is a gentleman by the name of Wong Kok-Seng. And so, it's gone.