

Snipe Class History

A radical departure from tradition for the yacht racing world was set in motion in Sarasota, Florida, in March 1931, when RUDDER editor Bill Crosby attended a meeting of the Florida West Coast Racing Association. In answer to a request for the creation of a class of racing sailboats suitable for trailering to regattas, Crosby promised to give the proposed class a send-off by designing and publishing plans for such a boat in his magazine.

The name Snipe was chosen in accord with RUDDER's custom of naming all its designs for sea birds, and the Snipe plans appeared in the July issue of RUDDER - which quickly sold out.

By early September, reports of boats being completed from the plans were coming in, the first one from 14 year-old Jimmy Brown of Pass Christian, Mississippi, who had built the boat with the help of his father. Soon owners were asking for information on a national class, and a system of registration was put into effect, numbering the boats, so that owners living near each other could be put in touch. Number 1 was awarded to Jimmy Brown.

By May 1932, 150 boats had been registered, and racing became general as several of the large racing associations recognized the Class by giving official starts. In November 1932, the Snipe Class International Racing Association (SCIRA) was formed with Dr. Hub E. Isaacks of Dallas, Texas, as Commodore. A constitution and by-laws were drawn up and the first rulebook was published. At the end of the year there were 250 numbered boats, and Dallas was awarded the first fleet charter - which is still in force. The first fleet outside the United States was chartered in March 1933 in Dover, England.

In July 1936, the Class reached the status of world's largest racing class with fleets all over the world. Although the World Championships had been held since 1934, it was not until 1946 that this Championship actually became international. The event was held at Lake Chautauqua, New York with contestants coming from Brazil, Newfoundland, Portugal and Switzerland as well as many parts of the USA. This had an impact on the Class and it was decided that international competition should be promoted. Commodore Charles Heinzerling announced that he would design a separate trophy for the USA champion, thus releasing the Hub Isaacks Trophy for true international competition. Dr. Martin Dupan repre-



senting Switzerland, was so impressed with the Championship at Chautauqua that he became the instigator for the first World Championship to be held outside of the USA. It was held in Geneva, Switzerland in 1947, with Ted Wells of the USA winning over champions from 13 countries. In 1949, the decision was made to hold Hemisphere Championships and World Championships in alternate years.

The Board of Governors bought the Snipe plans from RUDDER in 1948 and the Class was incorporated in 1954. In 1958, the Snipe received IYRU's recognition as an international class.

The boat was designed as a 15 foot 6 inch hard chine hull, to conform to the standard 16 foot plank, and was designed for easy home building (so simple that a schoolboy could build one). The original 100 square feet of sail areas was increased to 116 feet, with the introduction of the overlapping jib which replaced the working jib in 1932. Currently the sail area is 128 square feet in mainsail and overlapping jib. Spinnakers are not permitted. The hull has remained essentially unchanged through the history of the Class with only slight changes due to tightening of tolerances. The largest single change made over the 50 years of Class history was the weight reduction from 425 pounds to 381 pounds in the early 1970s.

Early Snipes were all of wood plank construction, but through the years plywood and fiberglass have come to be accepted as building materials. Most boats are now built by professional builders and are fiberglass, but plank and plywood are still used, and amateurs can build boats from plans obtainable from the SCIRA office, or by fiberglass boats in kit form from the manufacturers, for home finishing. All boats are required to be measured and to carry current SCIRA decals in SCIRA competition.

photos: page 4: Adelaide, Snipe #1 sails in Shreveport, Louisiana, USA. This page: 30,000 owned by Jeff & Gary Beck of Lake Lanier, Georgia, USA.

