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77 Years Later, Yacht Repeats Win in Trans-Pacific Race



Honolulu Advertiser

Dorada's owner, Matt Brooks, was told that the yacht, pictured near Diamond Head in Hawaii in 1936, was a "piece of antique furniture" and that "it couldn't be done."

By CHRIS MUSELER
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It took a thousand or so miles of sailing with the long, powerful waves of the Pacific Ocean for Hannah Jenner, a rising star in ocean racing, to get comfortable in this year's Transpacific Yacht Race. Jenner, a 31-year-old from Britain, is used to racing ultralight 40-footers across oceans. But in the Transpac this month, Jenner was sailing Dorade, a 52-foot wooden sailboat from 1930 that is trimmed in varnished mahogany and adorned with polished bronze hardware.

"When I first was asked, I said: 'Really? How old is this boat? Isn't it going to break?'" Jenner said. "I'm used to boats that become more stable the faster they go. This boat rolls like crazy. It's like learning all over again."

Dorada, considered the forebear of modern ocean racing yachts, won the 2,225-nautical-mile Transpac race from Los Angeles to Honolulu in 1936. And 77 years later, the slender white hull with tall spruce masts rolled to victory again, beating the most modern carbon-fiber ocean racers to win its division and the overall King Kalakaua Trophy.

Racing classic wooden yachts is not unusual, but the sailing is often restricted to coastal day racing around buoys. Dorade's owner, Matt Brooks, has a more ambitious goal of racing his yacht in all the great ocean races the boat won in the 1930s and '40s. He said he was told that the Dorade was a "piece of antique furniture" and that "it couldn't be done," but Brooks and his crew received the overall winner's trophy for the Transpac on Thursday, which should silence skeptics.

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Brooks said, "What we found was that the boat loves the ocean," 77 years later.

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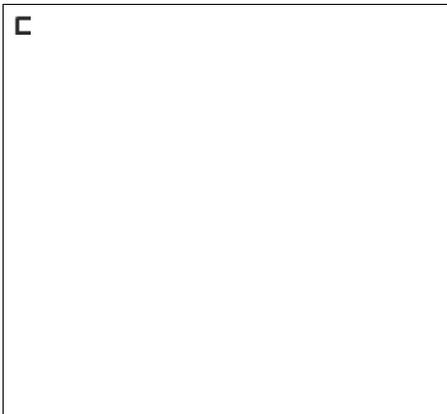
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Dorade's finishing time in the Transpac race this year was 12 days 5 hours 23 minutes 18 seconds, knocking more than a day off the boat's 1936 run.

"What we found was that the boat loves the ocean," said Brooks, who bought the boat in 2010 for \$880,000. "You can tell she's doing what she loves to do."

Dorade was designed in 1929 by Olin Stephens, one of sailing's most successful designers. The yawl was design No. 7 for the fledgling firm [Sparkman and Stephens](#) in Manhattan. Stephens, then 21, and his brother Rod were at the helm when the mahogany-planked, engineless boat made its first mark in the history books, winning the 1931 Transatlantic Race. Small and powerful, Dorade beat the traditional schooners of the time. The designer and his crew received a ticker-tape parade upon their return to New York, and the win set the stage for Stephens's [long career](#).

Dorade's finishing time in the Transpac race this year was 12 days 5 hours 23 minutes 18 seconds, knocking more than a day off the boat's 1936 run. The greatest distance covered in a day, or best 24-hour run, was 224 miles in 1936, but 203 miles this year.

Handicap rules used for offshore racing allow boats of different sizes and types to compete in the same race with time allowances and staggered starts. Figuring in those allowances, Dorade's adjusted time of 5 days 12 hours 20 minutes 55 seconds beat Roy P. Disney's modern 70-footer Pyewacket, which had an adjusted time of 5 days 14 hours 51 minutes 21 seconds. Dorade started a week earlier than Pyewacket, which finished the course in 8 days 15 hours 41 minutes 3 seconds.

"The whole idea of a boat like Dorade pulling this off has great benefits," Disney said, referring to the publicity the win has attracted.

He added that he hoped more classic boats would race in the next Transpac. Disney said he had considered racing the wooden maxi yacht Windward Passage, which broke the course record in 1971, a result often called the Transpac's greatest performance.

Brooks's schedule for Dorade is primarily an attempt to recreate history. The list of races includes the Newport Bermuda Race, the Transatlantic Race and the Fastnet Race. Dorade raced in the 2012 Newport Bermuda Race, finishing sixth in its class. Brooks has his sights set on another Newport Bermuda Race in 2014, followed by the 2015 Transatlantic and Fastnet Races.

For this year's Transpac race, Brooks and his crew spent last winter in San Francisco and Los Angeles testing different sails, navigation equipment and sailing techniques while racking up more than a thousand miles of ocean sailing. Dorade is the oldest boat to race and win the Transpac, but Brooks treated the yacht like any other top racing program in the fleet.

Brooks had new masts designed and built, in spruce, to handle the additional stresses of new laminated, aramid fiber sails. The hull, which was slightly asymmetrical as a result of its age, was faired and re-scanned. Some of the best sailors in the world were brought in to round out the seven-person crew, including an America's Cup navigator and an around-the-world race skipper.

"The boat was extremely well sailed," said Robbie Haines, an Olympic gold medalist who was a helmsman aboard Pyewacket. "Though it's disappointing to us, part of me kind of likes seeing Dorade win."

What Jenner and the rest of Dorade's crew learned on their two-week sojourn was that the genius of the boat's design and how the sailors in the 1930s skillfully sailed her never go out of style.

"It was definitely a new style of steering," Jenner said. "Everything all of us know we had to forget and go to the old school type of sailing."

The crew watched old films of Olin Stephens steering a rocking and rolling Dorade in the 1931 Transatlantic and holding the tiller steady in the center of the boat. By the end of this Transpac, Jenner said, they were all steering the same way as Stephens.

Brooks and the navigator Matt Wachowicz added to the historical realism by practicing celestial navigation all the way to Hawaii.



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“We wanted to complete the historic circle,” said Brooks, who is a member of the [St. Francis Yacht Club](#) in San Francisco, the same club that had James Flood, the boat’s 1936 owner, as a member. “We were within a mile or so of the GPS course.”

Despite the unruly motion of the narrow hull, Jenner said Dorade offered benefits over boats like Pyewackett.

“On this boat there are actually bunks with cushions as opposed to sleeping on sails,” she said. “It’s also bizarrely silent down below a wooden boat, but you can hear creaking and cracking noises, which was a little unsettling.”

Few boats have as grand a history as Dorade’s, but Brooks hopes to prove a point with the boat.

“I hope this win will make people sit up and take notice that these boats can still do what they were designed to do,” he said. “They shouldn’t be restricted to dockside museum pieces.”

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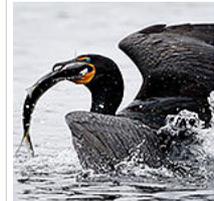
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