

THE INCREDIBLE LASER STORY

1971 1981

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"The Performance Family"



THIS year it is exactly 10 years ago that the Laser was introduced. 1971 is considered as the starting year of the unmatched Laser success because as from that year the mass production started. Since that time, the Laser Class has experienced a fantastic growth. On average 10,000 Lasers per year have been sold and therefore it is not amazing to see that the 100,000th Laser is now sailing on the water.

There is just one Class which can touch the success of the Laser. This is the Sunfish which, with 160,000 boats sold, is still the largest Class in the World. *Ed Note: We believe this honour lies with the Optimist, but certainly no dinghy can beat the growth of the Laser. The history of this boat however goes back to 1958 and the quality of the sailors which you find in the Sunfish Class is not of the high level of the average top sailor in the Laser Class.

A great number of well known International and Olympic sailors were attracted to the Laser and bought one as a first choice or in addition to their own boat. On the other side, the Laser has produced quite a substantial number of top sailors who achieve the very best results in other Classes as well. Just think about all those Laser sailors who attained such excellent results in the Finn Class.

CANADIANS

To the success story of the Laser belongs of course a history and that is what we would like to tell you about.

The "big boys" behind the Laser are three Canadians, designer Bruce Kirby, his friend Ian Bruce who initiated the idea and the well known ex-FD sailor Hans Fogh, the former

right-hand of "wonder-child" Paul Elvstrom of Denmark, and nowadays a sailmaker in Toronto.

The funny thing of this story is that the Laser was not at all designed in the first place as a racing boat. Ian Bruce initially asked Bruce Kirby to design a small sailboat which could be used for recreation purposes and which could be transported easily on the roof of a car. Nothing was said about measurements or weight and so Kirby could interpret this order as he wished. Ian Bruce, an industrial designer in those days, was looking for a small open dinghy for a client who sold leisure and camping equipment. Unfortunately this client withdrew his order and the plan stayed for a year on Bruce's desk. Suddenly, the American magazine Yacht Racing decided to organise a regatta named the Americas Tea Cup for small sailboats costing less than 1,000 dollars. Kirby, who was at that time still the Editor of that yachting magazine, phoned Ian Bruce immediately and told him that this would be the ideal opportunity to introduce his new boat. So, the old plans were dug up again and it was found that the dinghy could be built at Bruce's own little shipyard which he ran as a kind of hobby. Bruce got very interested and decided to risk a gamble.

Hans Fogh, who produced the sails, would sail the boat. He did this very well because the boat was first in its Class. Thereafter the attention and all eyes were fixed upon the boat and Kirby and Bruce started to realize that maybe some business could be done. That's why the development of the "Weekender", as the boat was called, was continued.

After the races for the Americas Tea Cup Regatta, a start was made with a thorough programme. During these tests a number of mast sections, sail shapes, mast rakes and mast positions were tried out. Kirby drew up three new sail plans, of which the sail area remained the same but with different shapes.

The final tests took place near Montreal on a cold weekend in December. Hans Fogh, Ian Bruce and Bruce Kirby sailed against each other and tried several mast-sail combinations. The final choice was made during that weekend and since that time nothing has changed. During that same weekend the definite name was found accidentally. During a party at the Royal St. Lawrence Yacht Club a young student talked to Ian Bruce and told him that he thought the boat needed a modern and somewhat scientific sounding name. Bruce answered, I think you mean something like Laser. Later that evening Bruce went to Kirby and asked what he thought of it. Kirby was immediately enthusiastic and it was decided to call the "Weekender" the "Laser".

THE DESIGN

Kirby decided to design a boat which would be attractive to both a beginner and a regatta sailor.

One of the most difficult decisions in designing a boat is the choice of the crew weight. Weight has a lot of influence in the calculation of the displacement, which in turn influences the shape of the hull. For example a hull which is ideal for someone weighing 60kg would lay too deep below the water level for a sailor weighing 90kg. After considering this point for a long time, a crew

weight of 78kg was chosen as a starting point. This meant that a sailor of 90kg would not be too heavy and one of 65kg would not be too light.

The second big problem was the buoyancy in the front of the hull. In order to reduce the hull weight, Kirby did not want too much freeboard. However, a low bow could be inclined to bury in waves, in strong winds and at high speeds. This could be solved by giving the boat a rather full bow but this would make it slow in light winds and sailing upwind. That is why the bow was kept rather fine under the water line and rather full above it.

In the meantime Ian Bruce kept himself busy with the whole construction of the boat. As an industrial designer he had a thorough knowledge of materials. Originally, the hull should have weighed 54kgs but in the end this was not possible. The final weight became 56.7kg which is still far lighter than comparable dinghies. This light weight was achieved by the application of ultra light Airex foam re-inforcement in the hull and deck.

PANCYPRIAN CHAMPS 1981

THE second Pancyprian Laser Championship took place in Limassol Bay, Cyprus.

Five races were sailed over the weekend in light winds, giving a clear advantage to the lighter weight sailors. The first four in the overall ratings were aged eighteen years and under.

ANDROS KARAPATAKIS of Larnaca dominated the series by winning all five races convincingly.

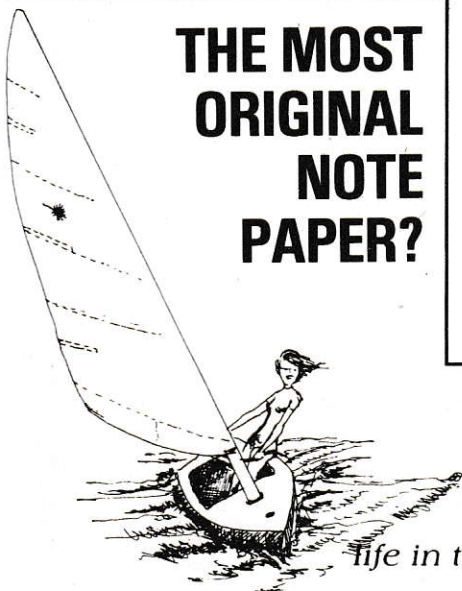
Results were as follows:

- 1st. ANDROS KARAPATAKIS
- 2nd. JOHN DIMITRIOU
- 3rd. RICHARD HICKS
- 4th. ANDROS ECONOMIDES



L. to R. Dimitriou, Economides, Karapatokis, Hicks.

THE MOST ORIGINAL NOTE PAPER?



life in the fast lane with LORIE

SUCCESS

Since the year of its introduction, in 1971, the Laer has experienced a tremendous growth. It isn't suprising and the reasons are easy to see. Kirby described his brainchild as "the right boat at the right time". He is right. The demand for a light, simple and cheap singlehander with excellent sailing characteristics has become, since the seventies, increasingly apparent.

Regatta sailing in a Laser remains relatively cheap, due to the strict one-design principle. Laser sails are being computer cut and production methods are the best. The strict class rules hardly leave any space for making changes to hull, fittings and spars and in this way costly experiments and investments in new materials are not necessary. Finally, most boats will be transported on the roof of a car which eliminates the purchase of an expensive trailer.

The great success of the Laser required a fast expansion of production. Soon a second factory appeared in North America so that it was not necessary any more to transport Lasers from the East to the West coast. Also

outside North America, the Laser concept was received with great enthusiasm. A third plant was quickly opened in England to supply Europe so the first Lasers in Europe were sailed in England. On the Continent the first Lasers were launched in Holland and Sweden. New factories followed in New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, Japan, Brazil and South Africa.

By the way, all factories are under the umbrella of Performance Sailcraft, the factory which originally started the Laser production. The builder's monopoly seemed to be one of the greatest obstacles for the International Status recognition by the International Yacht Racing Union. Many within the Union were of the opinion that this went against the principles of the IYRU, but on the other hand some recognised that this monopoly is a guarantee to the one-design principle of the Class. In the end, the progressive thinkers won. In 1974 the moment arrived, the Laser was recognised as an International Class.

Since that time the rapid growth has continued and there seems to be no end to it.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

"Anything this painful has got to be good for you"

Graham Gilbert on Laser sailing!

2nd DIERRA PAINTS REGATTA—PORTUGAL

ALFREDO SANTOS made a clean sweep of the 2nd Diera Paints Regatta held in Lexioes, near Oporto between 24-26th July. Entries from as far away as Italy enjoyed good winds, 30°C temperatures and warm hospitality offered by this regatta and Diera Paints. Santos won the regatta with 4 wins. The second and third places were not quite so straightforward with Fernando Telen just holding off a strong challenge from Luis Pessanha.

In all a regatta to be marked on the calendar for 1982.



L. To R. Pessonla, Teles, Santos.

A letter from District 17 secretary, Lorie Davis arrived at our office on the paper illustrated. What about a photograph Lorie?

"WARNING"

Old Chinese proverb say "people who climb masts with the hull supported risk breaking mast!"

(Veeli good for Performance Sailcraft.)

