BEN SEABORN: - Copyright 1999 by Steve Bunnell,

Seattle, Washington

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Had Ben Seaborn watched the start of the 1960 Swiftsure race he could have felt only pride. The premier Northwest offshore event since 1930, Swiftsure victories greatly enhance a designer's reputation. No less than seven of Ben's designs were entered in 1960. For a yacht designer to have one or two boats in Swiftsure is a good thing. To have a class or overall win is a very good thing, generating the nautical buzz that sets one's designs apart.

Kate II, a 1946 Seaborn, corrected out first over all in that 1960 Swiftsure. A 1956 Seaborn speedster, *Sea Fever*, won the prestigious A.A. (big boat) class. Seven designs from one yacht designer in one race (before fiberglass knockoffs) is an impressive success (two years later, there were 10 Seaborn boats in the Swiftsure. Over the years, Seaborn designs took first overall 5 times, a total matched only by Bill Lapworth). By any standard, Ben Seaborn was a successful sailboat designer. Yet just 5 months prior to that June Swiftsure, Ben Seaborn, severely depressed, took his life.

So ended the career of a man legendary and somewhat mythical in Northwest sailing circles. Compared to Bill Garden, Ed Monk Jr. and Sr., Ted Geary, Robert Perry and other NW yacht designers, his 30-something design total appears modest. Near the end of his life, Ben Seaborn told Dick Philbrick, a partner in Seaborn's *Sea Fever*, that he was a failure as a yacht designer. Not true, of course, and had Ben lived to work in the fiberglass age, he may well have become one of America's top sailboat designers. Rather, Ben's suicide had more to do with personal tragedies, family legacies and alcoholism.

It seems apparent now that Ben's fate was clearly charted. His father, Charles Seaborn, a respected Northwest shipwright and yard foreman, liked to drink and, like his son, had bouts of severe depression. He apparently took his own life in 1924 by filling up his pockets with boatyard lead and stepping off a party yacht into the black Puget Sound night. Charles had recently taken out a large life insurance policy naming Ben's mother as recipient. Charles' death might well have ended Ben's nautical activities had not his mother soon married a prominent Seattle sailor, Ray Cooke. Thereafter, Ben and his twin brother Jack were completely immersed in the Northwest sailing and racing scene.

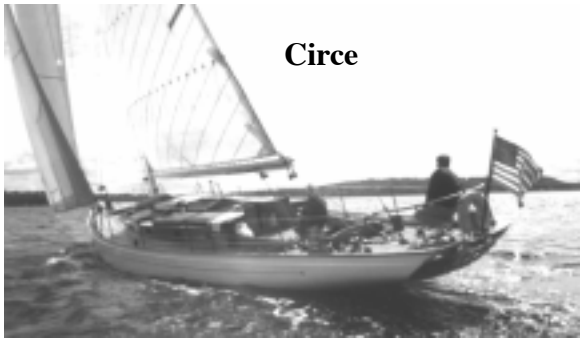
While other teenage boys dreamt of girls and fast cars, Ben Seaborn raced aboard large sailboats. He spent hours drawing boats on paper. Norman Blanchard Jr., a close childhood friend, remembers Ben's intense study of magazine boat reviews. Ben absorbed all the yacht club race talk and he thought long and hard about what made for boat speed. He crewed extensively aboard Cooke's 40' schooner *Claribel*, a fast boat with a winning NW record. In 1930, Cooke and the Seaborn boys sailed into Victoria B.C.'s Cadburro Bay, ready to compete in the big PIYA (Pacific International Yachting Association) regatta. All the serious hardware was there; Ted Geary's hot sloop the *Sir Tom* was ready to take on the Canadian "R" boats *Lady Van* and *Lady Pat*. Geary's earlier race boat, *Spirit II* was also competing, as was his super fast schooner *Red Jacket*.

The main event was a race from Victoria west around the Swiftsure lightship in the entrance of the Strait of Juan De Fuca. Ray Cooke and the Seaborn boys won that first Swiftsure, and to complete a great race week, Ben's mother drove *Claribel* to first place in the ladies' race. It was a happy crew that brought *Claribel* back to Seattle.

Later that summer, Ray tried to get *Claribel* down to California for the start of the Trans Pac but equipment failure forced him back. He did make the race however, crewing aboard the powerful 120'

schooner *Invader*, with Ted Geary as skipper and Douglas Fairbanks as fellow crew. That experience hooked Ray Cooke on ocean racing. He came back from Hawaii eager to build or buy a boat capable of winning the Trans Pac. It didn't take him long to learn that young Ben Seaborn had thoughts along those same lines.

Cooke and Ben conspired, planned, and distilled a new boat. Cooke bought a load of golden teak out of a scraped Navy ship. He set Ben and Jack to pulling spikes out of the teak down at the Blanchard Boat Yard. Ben concurrently developed plans for what was to become the 54' sloop *Circe* (later lengthen to 63'). It is a credit to Ray Cooke that he took 17 year old Ben Seaborn seriously, for *Circe* went out to win the 1934 Swiftsure, the first year of her long racing career. Suddenly, the buzz at the Seattle Yacht Club was about this kid Seaborn who had actually designed a great boat for old Ray Cooke.



Circe

During those hard Depression years, Ben worked part-time for the Blanchards while taking Engineering courses at the University of Washington. In 1935 he took up Norman Blanchard Jr.'s challenge to "...build a good-looking family cruiser that will really sail" and came up with a 42' sloop that the Blanchards hoped to market as the "Blanchard 42." A prominent Seattle sailor, Charlie Frisbie, liked what he saw and ordered the *Tola* built in 1937. A near sistership, the *We're Here* came down the Blanchard ways in 1939. Both vessels were prominent Northwest racers for the next 20 years.

Ben's association with the Blanchard yard sent him in critical new directions. In 1938, Claire Egtvedt, president of the Boeing company, had Walter Lynch design a 63' pilothouse ketch, the *Navita*. Built by the Blanchards, the ketch was so beautifully detailed that the yard crew referred to it as "Norman's masterpiece!" Egtvedt, impressed by young Seaborn's grasp of mathematics and naval architecture, hired him to design (and later skipper) a fast chase boat for the Boeing 314 Flying Boats (the Pan American Clippers). Ben stayed on with Boeing into 1941 soaking up engineering methods and working on various facility layouts including the design of a B-17 (bomber) production line.

However, Ben's love of sailboats did not wan. In 1938 he designed a 26' racer/cruiser (foreshadowing the Thunderbird?) of which the Blanchards built three. Seattle sailor Keith Fisken purchased one and was so impressed by the performance that he quickly ordered a second Seaborn boat, this time a 31' vessel, he named *Romp II*. That boat proved to be the most successful race boat of Ben's prewar designs. Completed by the Blanchards in 1939 and considered very fast, *Romp II* didn't really hit her stride until the late 1950s and 1960s when she was campaigned by Bill Baillargeon under the name of *Mistral*. The boat won overall in the 1966 and 1968 Swiftsure races - the smallest boat ever to have done so.

Romp II

The Mistral/Baillargeon story is a sweet one. Bill had watched the boat being built as a young boy. He kept track of it, bought it after the war ended, fiddled with the rig (almost all of the Seaborn boats were re-rigged eventually - for better or worse!), bought new sails, put together a crack crew and for a period of years was nearly unbeatable.

Two other prewar Seaborn designed, Blanchard built boats helped solidify Ben's reputation. The 35'

Nautilus I and sistership ***Sunda*** compiled impressive racing records from 1939 into the 1950s. Ben modified the traditional full keel on this design, placing the lead forward in an aft-tapering teardrop shape. ***Sunda*** traveled south to become a feature in Southern California ocean racing, completing over 28 runnings of the San Diego to Ensenada race. ***Nautilus I*** remained in the Northwest, and has been lovingly refurbished over the past 10 years by Seattleite Bill Van Vlack who actively races her in the Northwest WYRA (Wooden Yacht Racing Association) series.

Ben's last prewar design came down the ways just prior to the outbreak of hostilities. The 62' yawl ***Neoga II***, a spacious cruising vessel recently spotted in Maine, did much to confirm Ben's talents as a large vessel designer, a talent that served him well over the next four years of wartime work.

Before we move on to those years, it seems appropriate to speculate on the sources of Ben's "boy genius" success. (As you may know from reading Wooden Boat issues #137 and #138, Ted Geary was Seattle's first "boy wonder.") Ben's earliest years were with a renown boat building father. He crewed aboard one of the most successful Northwest racing yachts. He apparently studied every new yacht design in great depth, read everything nautical, and as he was to do throughout his life, kept himself apprised of the "cutting edge."

Those activities were not especially unique and similar backgrounds did not produce 26 year old men with several winning sailboat designs to their credit. Ben Seaborn had talent. He had a great eye for hull shape, and apparently, he had the mathematical and intuitive engineering skills to turn ideas into vessels just a bit more efficient, just a bit faster than contemporary Northwest designs. Even now, nearly 40 years after his death, Ben's peers remember him with phrases like "mathematical genius" or "Ben had strong opinions, and most of the time, he was right!" Unfortunately, they also remember that by the late 1950s, his binge drinking had begun to discredit his talents. Tales of his Seattle Yacht Club bar rantings still emerge among veteran sailors.

Ironically, or perhaps reflective of the delicate edge that often surrounds genius, Ben's "cutting edge" work came during his last decade, a period marred by depressions, sporadic yacht design and a growing sense of professional failure. For in many ways, his postwar career never matched the heady excitement of the World War II.

Katherine Seaborn launches a "Knot" class Liberty type ship - Oakland, Calif. Ben Seaborn to her left

During the prewar buildup, Henry J. Kaiser's many contracts included shipbuilding - shipbuilding that had to be super efficient to match military demands, and after December 1941, to match the rate of enemy sinkings. Kaiser needed design talent and he sought the best. Claire Egtvedt. the Boeing President impressed by Seaborn's talents, recommended Ben to Kaiser. With the speed that marked those frenzied days, Ben suddenly found himself part of a "brain trust" charged with designing ships and ship yards.

Working primarily out of Richmond, California, Ben and his bright co-workers did the job for Kaiser and America. They had tremendous responsibility, considerable freedom and a synergetic stimulation that is all too rare in our workplaces. The shipyards they designed for Richmond and Vancouver, Washington cranked out the Liberty ships at astonishing rates; Liberty ships that were continually tweaked and improved by the young designers (legend has it that Ben designed a Liberty ship rudder foil that saved significant fuel, employing aeronautical foil concepts he later applied to sailboat keels and rudders).

Near the war's end, Ben traveled to Montreal, Canada to study British "Corvette" design. Corvette's had proven to be the superior destroyer design of the war and the U.S. Navy wanted to copy

their best features. Ben returned to California and was designing an American Corvette production line when the atomic bomb ended it all. Ben stayed on with Kaiser after the war, leaving California in 1946 to move back to Seattle as a part of Kaiser's Permanente Steamship company. Accompanying Ben to Seattle was his lovely new wife, Katherine, a woman he had met through his war work.

Ben fully expected to flourish as a naval designer. He was 31 years old, enormously talented, vastly experienced by his wartime work and anxious to get some of his sailboat ideas down on paper. But earning a family living from yacht design in the wood boat era proved difficult. Not until the age of fiberglass were more than a handful of designers able to support themselves from design commissions and 1940s Seattle was not the center of American sailing. After leaving Kaiser in 1948, Ben found it necessary to work full or part-time for Seattle engineering firms, squeezing yacht design out a home office during his "spare" time.

Still, Ben's return to yacht design was not without promise. Wartime rationing and restrictions had generated considerable "boat lust." So as restrictions slowly lifted, boaters began pounding on designer's doors. Among them was Harbine Monroe, a rabid Tacoma sailboat racer, who commissioned Ben for a winning racer/cruiser. Monroe had owned Seaborn's 35' ***Nautilus I*** during the war years and had been impressed. The new 45' boat, ***Nautilus II***, proved fast from the moment of launching, winning the 1948 Swiftsure race for Monroe by beating the big yawl ***Dorade***. With that prestigious victory, Harbine became a Seaborn patron, commissioning a total of three boats from Ben's drafting table.

In that same 1946 year, two 46' Seaborn sister ships came down the Blanchard ways. ***Kate II*** was built for Keith Fisken, the pre-war owner of Seaborn's *Romp II*. Under Fisken and just two other subsequent owners, ***Kate II*** has proven an excellent racer/cruiser for some 52 years. Actively raced during her first 3 decades, she suffered from a serious weather helm until refit with a masthead rig. Her near sistership, ***Sundance***, still alive and well at Vashon Island, was constructed with a higher doghouse cabin for enhanced cruising amenities.

Even as the ink dried on those plans, Ben mused in new directions. Two race victories, one local and one far away, churned his thinking. An East Coast visitor, a 40' Owen's Cutter, a lightweight vessel built by the Owens Power Boat Company won the 1947 Swiftsure. Sheathed in part with "high tech" plywood, lightly ribbed, the boat proved very fast. The other influence on Ben was *Myth of Malham*, a winner of the English Fastnet and other major ocean races. Lightweight, ballasted with a bulb keel and constructed with a high, almost reverse sheer, *Myth* is now seen by many as the first modern lightweight ocean racer.

Myth's design came from a collaboration between her owner, J. Illingworth and British designer Laurent Giles. Illingworth, a Royal Navy officer whose long sea tours gave him considerable dreaming time, believed that a hull with long waterlines, minimum overhang and a shallow rocker should prove fast. Giles gave Illingworth what he was seeking in *Myth*. Across the ocean, the work of two California designers, Bill Lapworth and George Kettenberg, paralleled Giles' design. Lapworth, a seasoned International 14 sailor and eventual designer of the breakthrough Cal 40, had long believed that a great big dinghy ought to be the fastest ocean racer.

There was nothing radically new in this thinking. The successful execution of "big dinghies" had previously been prevented by materials and technology. The accelerated research of WWII had changed everything. Now lightweight racing yachts could be constructed with aluminum, waterproof glues, plywood, nylon and other "high tech" materials able to withstand forces that quickly destroyed previous lightweight plank-on-frame boats. Then too, so much had been learned about aerodynamics and hydraulic forces. And who had worked for Boeing and Kaiser as cutting edge planes and ships were developed? Ben Seaborn, of course, who now contemplated new design directions from sleepy 1940s Seattle.

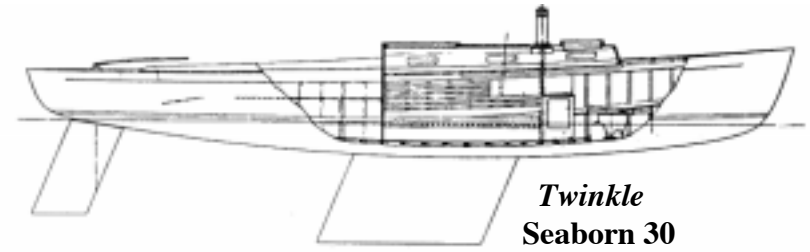
Before embracing controversial designs, Ben fulfilled a commission for a traditional displacement

racer/cruiser. During 1948 he drew the lines for the 42' *Stormy Weather*, a variation of the pre-war "Blanchard 42's." *Stormy Weather* reflected improvements to Ben's 1937 *Tola* design to better meet contemporary CCA rules. Yachting magazine noted that *Stormy Weather* was "...a smart and comfortable cruising sloop . . . lively in light to moderate weather."

At nearly 22,000 pounds, *Stormy* was no lightweight rather she reflected the long refinement of the full keel, canoe body vessel. Bob Perry has written that *Stormy Weather* was "very much in the style of the early Sparkman and Stephens and Rhodes boats. The basic approach was toward an offshore-capable meter boat. The style was first set in motion by the S&S design of the yawl *Dorade*. . . Drawings of *Dorade* would reveal that there is no distinction at all between the hull and keel, which were faired into one homogeneous shape. If you extend the line of the forefoot aft, you see a hull with excessive "rocker" or fore-and-aft curvature. Obviously, with this short a waterline, a lot of the boat was just along for the ride and did not displace enough water to contribute to sailing length.

"I had the pleasure of sailing in a similarly shaped Seaborn boat while I was in high school. The boat was the *We're Here* and it was a sleek beauty nearly identical to *Stormy Weather*. *We're Here* was fast to weather but a monster off the wind in a breeze. The boat rolled so badly that it was accepted by the crew as kind of a joke. You just put up the chute and hung on, trying not be pitched overboard. That behavior is typical of this style of design and, in fact, we saw it again later in the mid-IOR era boats, due to their anemic how and stern." Except for his final design, the 80' *Tatoosh, Stormy Weather* was the last "traditional" sailboat Ben Seaborn designed.

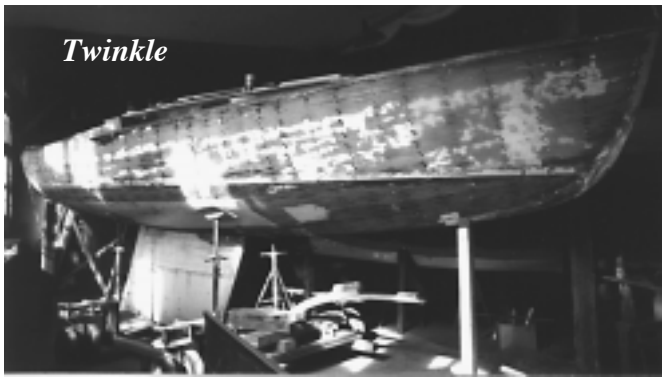
In that same 1948 year, Ben designed a radical trial horse to test new directions. He named it *Twinkle* possibily as a play on a hot California boat of time named *Sparkle*. The first independent construction for Martin Monson, a master shipwright for both the Grandy and Blanchard yards, *Twinkle* proved revolutionary. Seaborn hoped that she would be the first of a new class of "Seaborn 30's." That never happened, probably because *Twinkle* was, at best, a minimalist cruising vessel. The "Twinkle" class should have caught on for the boat proved (after some adjustments) to be very fast. A true lightweight in the twilight age of displacement, Ben wrote that the boat had "a new feel." Thirty feet overall, displacing a mere 5,300 pounds, *Twinkle* held 3,000 of those pounds in a slippery "airfoil" fin keel. A double-ended hull built with shallow hull rocker, equipped with a spade rudder and a tall rig, the forerunner of Ben's best 1950s designs had been launched.



Twinkle
Seaborn 30

Twinkle features a deep cockpit with high combings (to escape that cold NW wind), a low cabin for reduced windage, a 3/4 rig stepped over a steel bulkhead arch. The sheer is minimal as is the overhang. It's clear now that variations of *Twinkle's* features appeared in every subsequent Seaborn design. *Twinkle's* 1949 launching established Ben's "modern" look.

Twinkle proved that most of Ben's thinking was right. While the fin keel needed at least one location adjustment, the boat proved fast and stable on all points of sail. Alex Kimball, a Bainbridge Island sailor, has nurtured and raced *Twinkle* for some 16 years. He replaced the original sail rig with one from a J-29 and the boat really came alive. Alex, who has extensive experience racing Bill Lapworth designs, says that



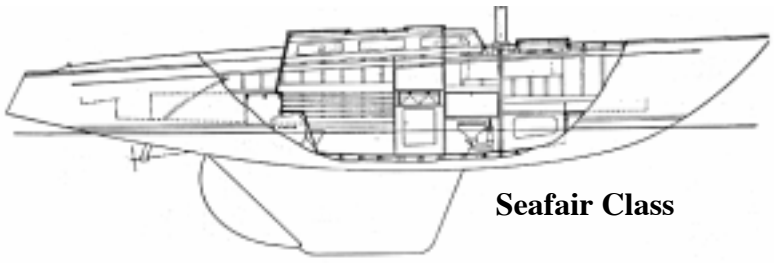
Twinkle will "sail circles around most Lapworth boats," and that she has hit 13 knots running off the wind and is so well balanced that she will steer itself for long periods. Currently undergoing an extensive rebuild in Port Townsend, the revitalized *Twinkle* will undoubtedly again dominate the Wooden Yacht racing circuit as well as humiliating many PHRF plastic wonders (it helps that Alex is a first rate skipper!).

Tacoma region late 1950s

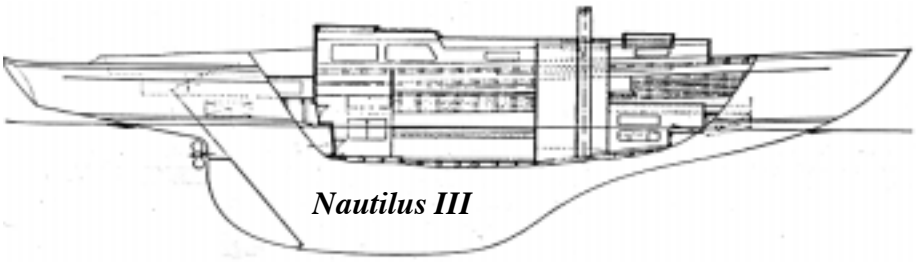
Ben published an article in the March 1950 Pacific Motor Boat magazine entitled "Modern Trends in Cruising Sail Boats." His words confirm his movement away from displacement craft. "As things stand, it is safe to predict that the lighter boats are here to stay. . . While we predict that the lighter boats will become more and more popular as time goes on, it is obvious that their general acceptance will depend upon how willing the public will be to give up a certain amount of tradition. In accepting the lighter boats, be prepared to understand that they will be more sensitive and therefore will require greater skill to sail well in racing competition. . . Just because you won't admit it, speed is nevertheless a very important requisite to a satisfactory cruiser (foreshadowing "fast is fun!"). . . As to the appearance of the lighter boat, it will grow on you . . ."

In 1953, he backed his words with a design, creating the new Seafair class with the cruising amenities *Twinkle* lacked. The first 32' Seafair, *Romp*, became the Seaborn family boat and is fondly remembered by Ben's daughter Patricia. Displacing only 7,500 lbs, *Romp* may well have been the first lightweight Northwest designed racer/cruiser. To gain interior space and maintain a low profile cabin, Ben utilized a true reverse sheer. He finished off his "radical" design with a reverse transom. Yet for reasons unknown, he returned to a keel mounted rudder. The Monson yard built 13 Seafairs, a respectable wooden boat production run. There probably would have been more Seafairs had the interior headroom been more that 5'8," although sailors in those days were content with interiors we would now find impossibly cramped. There are still a few Seafairs plying N.W. waters due in large part to their long lasting wedge-seam cedar planking as well as the quality of Monson's construction. Ben drew a stretched 38' version that proved popular, especially in British Columbia. ***Kaisun***, a 38' Canadian Seafair, has done extensive ocean cruising, something the boat was never really intended for.


32" SeaFair *Romp*


Seafair Class

In between *Twinkle* and *Romp*, Seaborn designed ***Nautilus III*** for Harbine Monroe. Completed in 1951 as the first of several Blanchard built 40' "Swiftsure Class" boats, ***Nautilus III*** pushed the traditional hull



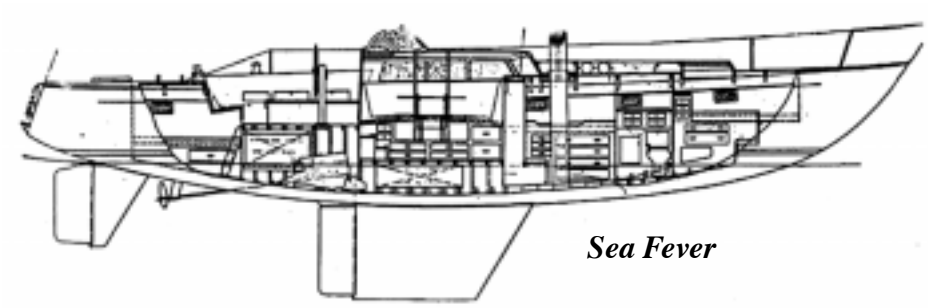
Nautilus III

lines of *Stormy Weather* in new directions. Again, Bob Perry: ". . . beginning with *Nautilus III*, Seaborn never used the concave stern counter profile again. The stern is also wider. There is far less rocker to the hull, the forefoot is more distinct and the leading edge of the keel is steeper. The stern wider, the rocker decreased, the forefoot became more distinct and the keel's leading edge steepened." Displacement was considerably less than earlier designs and Ben's ideas paid off as the Swiftsure class boats dominated Seattle racing for several years.

Five years later, a big white sloop pulled alongside the Orcas Island docks, not far from the ferry landing. Dick Philbrick tied the boat off and headed up toward the Orcas Hotel. Midway he met the dockmaster, a friend not much given to sailboats. The dockmaster took a long look at Dick's new boat and loudly proclaimed, "Well, goddamn, I see they finally got smart and stuck a mast in a Chris Craft!" So began the life of *Sea Fever*, the 51' racer/cruiser that may have been Seaborn's finest effort.

There was indeed a link between Chris Craft and *Sea Fever*. Three Seattle sailors, partners in a Chris motoryacht, began to talk about their ideal sailboat. Dick Philbrick, Otis Lamson and Benjamin Gardner really liked the bright open cabin of the Chris. They had all spent time aboard racer/cruisers in the Northwest gloom and they wanted no more of dark, claustrophobic cabins. They also wanted a performance sailboat, having cut their teeth racing Stars, 110s and Flatties (Geary 18s). Furthermore, the partners wanted boat speed - especially under power. Frequent calm days are a part of Northwest cruising and the partners appreciated the ability of their Chris Craft to get around at 10 plus knots.

They knew of the 50' *Legend*, a Wendall Caulkins designed yacht tearing up the Southern California race circuit and reputed to motor at 9 knots. The partners flew south to look at this flush deck Hawaii race winner. While they liked *Legend* a lot, they thought they might as well talk with Bill Lapworth since they were in the area. After listening to their parameters, Lapworth said sure, he could design such a boat, but he really felt they should go back to Seattle and contact Ben Seaborn. Then, Lapworth pointed out, you'll not only get a cutting edge racer/cruiser, you'll get one designed by a man who understands Northwest conditions. Plus, Lapworth said, you might not realize it, but Seaborn is on the cutting edge of modern lightweight design.



Sea Fever

The partners returned to Seattle and did commission Ben to design their boat. Otis Lamson, an engineer by profession, contributed significantly to the boat's mechanical systems, not the last time that collaboration would improve a Seaborn design. The project quickly became the buzz of the Seattle yachting community. Roger Schuemann, a fellow Seattle YC member, wanted the same boat with a cruising orientation. A contract was struck with the Vic Franck boat yard to build two boats for $45,000 each. Both were to be 53' loa, 12'7" beam, draft 8'7" and displace just under 32,000 lbs. In the end, Schuemann's boat, *Helene*, was heavier due to traditional plank on frame construction.

Seafever, on the other hand, was one of the first lightweight "cold molded," large yachts constructed in the Northwest. Perhaps "semi cold molded" is a more appropriate description for 1&1/4 by 2&1/4" coved mahogany strips were glued and edge nailed over light oak framing to create a "seamless"

fair hull. That hull remains strong and true today and Dick Philbrick figures that the boat is overbuilt and possibility could have been constructed with even lighter framings.

The keel is one piece of 48' x 18" Alaskan yellow cedar. Steel floors stiffen the hull (recently replaced with epoxy/wood units) and support a hollow steel fin keel, one that is lead filled and complete with a trim tab. That's right, a trim tab in 1956! Bob Watt, an early *Seafever* crew member told me that they really never mastered the trim tab. He suspects that they adjusted it too strongly. With the tab set, the boat would climb to weather like blazes but lost speed due to turbulence. In the end, the tab wasn't used much although Watt feels it would have been effective had they kept adjustment under two degrees. And *Sea Fever's* trim tab apparently played into America's cup boat development. Dick Philbrick told me that Rod Stephen's Sr. went sailing aboard *Sea Fever* and was intrigued enough by the trim tab to tell his sons all about it. The rest is America's Cup history!

***Sea Fever* at Diamond Head**

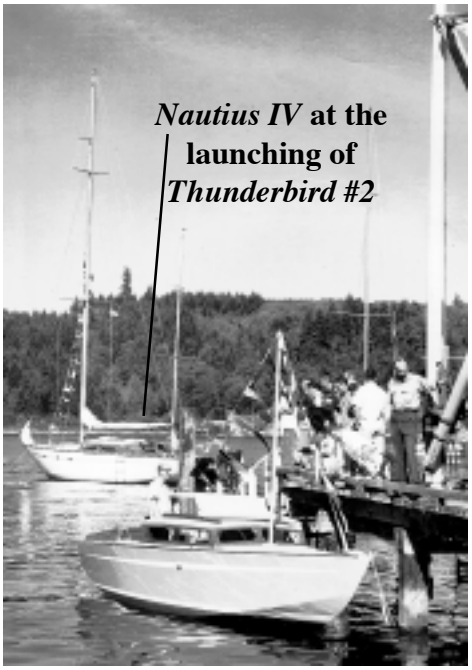
Sea Fever's speed was everything the partners wanted. In all the long distance Puget Sound races as well as two TransPacs (to Hawaii), *Sea Fever* always placed well and often won her class. She is a great ocean boat, one so stiff and stable that Dick Philbrick told me "I would go anywhere in *Sea Fever*." And she is fast! Some of the veterans who have raced her use the term "sled" and remember reaching across the Pacific at a steady 12 knots with peaks of 18! Eighteen knots from a wooden racer/cruiser designed in 1955! Not bad, even today. Bob Perry, Seattle's premier sail boat designer, once wrote, "If it weren't for the international success of the Thunderbird, I would chose *Sea Fever* as the archetypal Seaborn boat. As a boy living on Mercer Island (Seattle), I would make frequent bike trips down to Lake Washington to gaze at *Sea Fever*, the biggest, meanest and fastest boat around, a real "machine."

So she's big and mean and fast, what of her less racy sister, ***Helene***? She's every bit as successful. Five generations of Scheumanns have cruised ***Helene*** all over the Pacific Northwest, returning time and again to Southeast Alaska. She's a big, roomy, comfortable vessel, full of light even on gloomy days, (the cabin is taller than *Sea Fever's*), fast under sail or power, and in owner Dick Scheumann's mind, the perfect Northwest cruiser.

The two Seaborn sisters may not be as sleek and sexy as some of the latest plastic rockets, but all the parts are there: flat sheer, wide stern, shallow rocker, long waterline into a reverse transom, tall rigs, all metal fin keel.

Harbine Monroe, the "Nautilus" man, found *Sea Fever* intriguing. He consulted with Ben on a 47' variation to be named ***Nautilus IV*** with *Sea Fever's* hull tweaked with a bit more rocker. Topside Monroe insisted on a more traditional bow and stern shape. ***Nautilus IV*** had a hollow fabricated steel keel, plus a steel rudder, skeg and trim tab. Monroe agreed with Ben on a big, naturally lit cabin with an open, airy interior. *Sea Fever* and ***Nautilus IV*** caught the attention of serious British Columbia sailors. ***Penelakut***, a 45' version of ***Nautilus IV*** with a Sea Fever transom was launched in 1959 from the Vancouver Shipyard. Owner Bob Ross cruised and raced the boat for the next 39 years. A 51' near-Sea Fever sistership, *Crusader*, was known and respected throughout B.C. until her unfortunate sinking some 15 years back. There may have been other Seaborn designs or knockoffs built in Canada where Seaborn's work enjoyed considerable respect. A final Nautilus variation, the 38' *Concubine*, was Danish

constructed in 1960 for Tacoma sailor Alan Teige. Alan sailed the boat for the next 38 years, often singlehanding his "concubine" up to Desolation Sound. Currently undergoing renovation, *Concubine* remains a lively cruising vessel ideally suited to Northwest waters.



Nautius IV* at the launching of *Thunderbird #2

The final Seaborn chapter began in 1957 with the construction of Harbine Monroe's ***Nautilus IV*** at Ed Hoppen's Eddom Boatworks. During consultations, Seaborn was impressed by Hoppen's skills and inventiveness. As Ben mused that same year over a Douglas Fir Plywood Association design competition, he took his ideas down to Gig Harbor and consulted with Hoppen who he knew was intrigued with the possibility of plywood sail boats. Those meetings began a synergy that was to produce Seaborn's greatest legacy - the 26' Thunderbird, a hard chine "funny looking" plywood speedster that can be built at home. Although Ben realized little money from his Thunderbird design, it remains above all others, the boat most often associated with his name. The Thunderbird story appeared in Wooden Boat # 149.

The hugely successful Thunderbird was primarily a variation of Ben's 26' Sierra, a boat designed for two person cruising on Puget Sound. Eleven Sierra hulls were built at the Monson yard beginning in 1957. Initial performance in light air was not adequate, so Ben designed a higher 3/4 rig mast and modified the Sierra's fin keel into the "A" foil shape that has been so much a factor in Thunderbird performance. George Trusk, long active in the Thunderbird International organization and a retired Boeing engineer, pointed out that the Sierra-Thunderbird keel radius exactly matches that of aeronautical wing/air foil shapes. Equipped with their "wing" keels Sierras really took off. The cedar plank on oak frame hull had a soft chine, flat sheer, reverse transom and the Seaborn style low windage cabin. To the author's eye, Sierras are one of the best looking boats Ben designed. All the proportions are right and the boat somehow combines the best of tradition with an aggressive speedster look.

Thunderbird Internationals 1970s

World Champion Thunderbird *REV*

There are not many Sierras left in Puget Sound, victims in large part to the stresses and rot that the glass covered plywood Thunderbird minimized. For many years, Sierras were raced quite successfully. More might have been constructed had not the success of the Thunderbird been so great. Most important, a Thunderbird could be homebuilt where Sierras came out of a shipwright's art.

Ben's legacy concluded with the 1961 launching of the 80' ketch *Tatoosh* for Seattle sailor, "Boo" Pascal. Designed in 1958, the layout had less to with Ben's ideas about speed and more to do with Pascal's specifications for comfortable family

cruising to the South Seas. While *Tatoosh* is much more traditional in appearance than say, *Sea Fever*, the full keel shape reflected everything Ben had learned about underwater performance. *Tatoosh* will do 10-15 knots off the wind with a good breeze. Upwind performance is not outstanding, but the boat was designed for windward passages under the 200 hp Cat auxiliary! Built at the Vic Franck yard from1959 to 1961, *Tatoosh* reflects, in many ways, the final bloom of Seattle shipwright art. The woodworking and joinery are outstanding. She sports a huge main saloon, 10' by 13', two guest staterooms in addition to the master's suite and a crew quarters. There is full head room in the engine room. Photographs at the Franck yard reveal the *Tatoosh* "backbone," a graceful arc of bronze floors stitched from one end of the shop to the other.

***Tatoosh* at Chatterbox Falls**

Ben had not completed interior drawings for *Tatoosh* when he died so the commission passed on to Sparkman and Stephens. For many years, *Tatoosh* belonged to Peter Fonda whose South Pacific meanderings aboard her generated tales of life on the wild side. A few years back, Seattle sailor Bob Cadranell purchased *Tatoosh* and returned her to Seattle. Bob had fallen in love with Tatoosh years before in Mexico and "stalked" her until he was able to purchase her.

Following the death of his wife in December of 1959, Ben Seaborn's reoccurring despondency intensified. He told several people that he felt himself a failure and in the gloom of January Seattle, he hung himself. He was 45 years old. As too often happens, Ben Seaborn soon became more famous, more mythical in death, than he ever had been alive. Terms like "tragic genius," and "mathematical genius," became standard phrases whenever his name entered conversation.

Looking back, it's apparent that his significant talent was snuffed out through a combination of depression, alcohol and limited commercial success. Ben Seaborn did not design many boats. His resume states "62 units built from 30 designs." As a licensed Naval Architect he did contribute to the design and engineering of many vessels, both power and sail, commercial and pleasure. But in his mind, the sailboats were the litmus test, and their total number was not large. He never really earned his living through sailboat commissions, finding it necessary again and again to work for various marine engineering firms.

Still, his name, and certainly his work, lives on in the Pacific Northwest. In his time, he became a great, cutting edge designer. Had he relocated to Southern California or lived long enough to design fiberglass yachts, he might well be known worldwide. Fortunately, there are many Seaborn wooden boats still afloat, still cruising and racing Northwest waters. Most have been lovingly maintained and/or restored. And as any given WYRA regatta demonstrates, Seaborn boats are still fast - which was always his goal.

So you see Ben, you were indeed a success, a great yacht designer. It's time for us Northwest mossbacks to thank you. And we do!

"As to the appearance of the lighter boat, it will grow on you . . ."