

' A B R U S H with S A I L '

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2008 (PART TWO).

In the August 2007 edition of 'A Brush with Sail' I ran a story about Geoff Stagg and his history making, John Spencer designed 'Whispers II'. The interest in that piece of Kiwi sailing history was amazing, with comments and questions coming from around the sailing world.

Although Geoff was the subject of that story, many of those who wrote to 'BWS' wanted to praise the late John Spencer and many wanted to know about other Spencer boats, especially 'Infidel', the late Sir Tom Clark's, 61 footer launched in 1964.

Although 'Infidel' was sold to a US buyer in the early 70's and renamed 'Ragtime,' there is still a generation of Kiwi sailors who follow her continually amazing exploits with fond affection. 'Ragtime' continues to be a living memorial to her designer and builder and like NZ based 'Whispers II,' continues to have a succession of owners who care for her in a manner befitting a grand lady. A lady who still really knows how to boogie!

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'RAGTIME' LOOKS SOUTH, TO TAHITI!

Ragtime is restless, and maybe a little homesick. With a record 14th Transpacific Yacht Race to Hawaii fresh under its wooden hull, the 65-foot ocean-racing veteran will return to the South Pacific waters of its birth in the 13th Tahiti Race starting from San Pedro in June 2008

Owner/skipper Chris Welsh of Newport Beach, Calif. said the resurrection of the race after a 14-year hiatus was too tempting to pass up.

"For a West Coast sailor, Tahiti is Everest," Welsh said after filing his entry. "I felt it was compelling, like here's the race, you've got the right tool to do it, and who knows how many times in your life you'll have that all at once?"

Other early entries are Doug Baker's Andrews 80, Magnitude 80, from Long Beach, and Allen Hughes' Open 60, Dogbark, Seattle. Another high-end Long Beach boat, Bob Lane's Andrews 63, Medicine Man, is verbally committed.

The 3,571-nautical mile race will start Sunday, June 22, at 1 p.m. off Point Fermin in San Pedro, cross the equator and finish at the historic Pointe Venus lighthouse on the north end of the island of Tahiti, six miles east of Papeete.

The race has been run intermittently a dozen times from 1925 to 1994. The record is 14 days 21 hours 15 minutes 26 seconds---an average speed of about 10 knots, modest by current standards---established by Fred Kirschner's Santa Cruz 70, Kathmandu, in 1994, the last time the race was run.

Ragtime, long admired for its sleek, black, low profile hull, was designed and built in New Zealand in 1964 by the late John Spencer. Originally christened Infidel, it was brought to Long Beach in the early 70s, renamed and in 1973 sailed by a local crew of eight that stunned a skeptical racing community by snatching Transpac's Barn Door prize from the record holder, Windward Passage, by 4 minutes 31 seconds---still the closest first-to-finish in race history. Then followed another win in '75!

More information about the race, visit www.transpacificyc.org

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Following on from reading the information on the 2008 Tahiti Race, I thought it only right that we get Chris Welsh to explain to us the current state of play in the life of 'Infidel' / 'Ragtime'. Read on.....

'Ragtime'. How One Thing Leads to Another! *By Chris Welsh.*

There's something amazing about Ragtime (John Spencer's 65' ex-Infidel). She is still competing head to head with boats 45 years her junior.

I don't think there is another boat in the world doing that. Her striking and unique design draws admiration wherever she goes. And her colorful history of winning races in events as varied as day sailing on the Hauraki Gulf to twice winning overall, the distance challenge of 'Transpac'. Infidel has sailed more 'Transpacs' than any other boat and has over 100,000 blue water miles under her keel. Amazing durability on every front.



'Infidel' launch 1964.

The ability to still play on the same race course became a compelling reason to look at what could be done to optimize her in line with current handicap systems.

The first step we took was a new rudder a year ago, designed by naval architect, Alan Andrews. Alan sold me on the benefit of the rudder due to only the wetted surface area being rated vs. the efficiency of the shape. Given thinner carbon posts, a better new shape could be made with less frontal area and a deeper higher aspect ratio. This was the first step down the path to addiction.

Off the water damage to our mast led to the ordering of a new, slightly fractional carbon rig. As the new rig is 300 pounds lighter it has a higher righting moment. More righting moment, bigger sails, so the new rig is 30 inches taller and with a big roach, the new main is 9% larger for downwind performance.

A few hundred pounds of gear and interior weight was removed as well. And while we were at it, new bottom and topside paint was applied. A new open pulpit was constructed, and all through hull fittings were replaced.

The next project was unexpected. One 'Bariet' winch base was starting to show too much corrosion to be serviceable, and a search on the inter-net led to an offer of a whole 'Bariet' winch package from a ULDB 70, at a price slightly above the cost of one new base.

When the crate arrived, it was like Christmas! Among the 16 or 17 winches was a whole coffee grinder setup including the big drums, gears, etc. After looking at our narrow cockpit and dis-functional ergonomics, it was back to Alan and 'Dencho' for a new cockpit layout, integrating the grinder, new trimming positions, and a new location for the hydraulic panel. The layout is still tight. But compared to history, it feels like a ballroom!



'Infidel' in 1965. The original cockpit.

The next step was a very experienced crewmember, Mark Olson, identifying that maybe we had unnecessary righting moment and a bit of excess lead in the keel. After more consultations with Alan, a new smaller shape for the existing lead bulb was designed, and with the help of 'Dencho', 1,000 lbs of lead was shaved away. The new bulb was svelte and clearly faster, with minimal rating penalty. In the light air of the 2007 'Transpac' Race we felt we saved half a day with the lighter configuration.



'Ragtime' 2007. The cockpit, 40 + years on.

After 'Transpac', and with loose talk of a Tahiti Race in the air, I started to wonder what sort of changes an entirely new keel would bring. The existing keel still weighs 10,500 lbs. with a fin with a 5' chord, thick cross section, and bulb at the bottom. Half the fin was steel and the other half lead, so the CG was not optimized. The design parameters were to maintain the current righting moment and the current maximum draft of 11'.

After a quick review, Alan thought a new design with all of the lead in the bulb and an optimized steel fin would be 1,500 lbs lighter. This on top of the 1,000 lbs. we already removed from the keel. The new fin would have half the frontal area and half the wetted surface of the current fin.

Like a junkie, I was hooked, compelled by the prospect of removing so much more mass and drag from the boat. If I did not do the work I knew I would go crazy trying to cross the horse latitudes on the way to Tahiti without the lighter configuration.

The project was bid, orders placed, and last week, the boat pulled from the water. A day later, the old keel was off and a mold of the underbody made and forwarded to the keel manufacturer to insure a close tolerance fit between the new keel flange and the boat. In order to spread the loads the keel flange is 12' long and close to 24" wide, so a close fit is important to minimize drag. The flange on the just removed keel was as much as 1.5" from the hull in places, necessitating gross amounts of filler to fair it in. All of this was removed prior to taking the mold.



Seeing the boat today is strange. The hull without rig or keel is on a belly cradle with rollers, wrapped in canvas and stored in a warehouse. Ten days ago with the rig, in she was ten stories tall; now, only eight feet, but it is the cocoon stage in a strangely exciting metamorphosis.

When the new keel is fitted we expect Ragtime to have significantly less drag than she ever has sailed with, less weight by 3,000 pounds from just a few years ago, and more horsepower than ever before. The change should pay off the most in light air or marginal surfing conditions. I

It is hard to contain my excitement when I think about the boat teed up to catch a wave with so much weight and drag left behind!

Our current goal is the Los Angeles to Tahiti Race in June 2008. I'm not sure I can rationally explain the attraction for racing to Tahiti. I just find it so



compelling. More of the Ragtime drug I guess and since the race is only run every decade or so, a rare opportunity.

I think this is our last major optimization of Ragtime! After a new rudder, new keel, new rig, new sails, hull repairs, frame repairs, new electronics, a new cockpit, and new coffee grinder winches, there is hopefully not much left to do.

Except maybe to find our way to New Zealand for a homecoming visit?

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