

# Sandeman: Laughing all the way

Barney Sandeman is a yacht broker who sells some of the most beautiful yachts on the market. And he also has one of his own, which we sailed...

Words & Photos: Dan Houston

We were at the BCYC in Cowes last year, the yacht regatta some people call the Panerai, but that always begs the question: "Which one?" There are Panerai in the States and in Europe too – there's even a Transat Panerai. You race for a massive great watch... well, ah, more likely you race for the owner or skipper to win a massive great watch.

Some old salt once said to me – and I like the old salts – "Racing yachts... they go round and round a course to go nowhere and then the one that gets nowhere fastest, ee wins the prize!" The statement came with that faux baffled expression of surprise, but even at that age I also knew he was missing the point.

The clean Olin Stephens bow profile of *Laughing Gull* scimitars the waves with a bold and buoyant style, like so many of her sisters





Because it's not until you race that you know if you're going to get the best from your boat, is it? Well it's a personal choice whether you race your boat or not. Anyhow it was raining at this BCYC event and Barney Sandeman, the yacht broker, offered some shelter below in his gorgeously-maintained Sparkman & Stephens inboard yawl *Laughing Gull*.

This is the signature S&S brand yacht, in the style of *Dorada*, which, winning the Transat West to East in 1931, put the fledgling New York design partnership on the map – with a ticker-tape parade in New York no less, to celebrate their brilliant win.

*The sunlight on the varnish, cosy cabins, the smells of an old boat... it all got under my skin I guess...*

Others followed, *Stormy Weather*, 1934, winning the Fastnet race in 1935 (as *Dorada* had done in '31) and so on.

Being on a S&S inboard yawl is like being in touch with those guys back in the 1930s who were also trying to establish a business in a time of depression, as much as winning a yacht race in the days of sextant and trailing log.

But the inboard yawl is not all about racing. I was lucky enough to interview the great Olin in the late 1990s and at the end of a two-bottle-of-wine supper I asked him what kind of boat he would design if you took all the rules away and just wanted something that was as seaworthy as she was fast. And I'll never forget it, without a flicker of pause he said: "*Dorada*" and I think a lot of owners of these marvellous designs would agree – they are legendary sea-keepers, as comfy in a gale as they are able to extract the slightest zephyr of air and track off across the water.

And Barney just loves to sail his *Gull* as much as race her or show her off at events. "We go out of Poole with the children and tend to find dolphins," he says with that calm delight sailors have for dolphins.

We plan for a feature – maybe on anchoring say, and in Barney's professional broker style, he adds: "Yes and let's do lunch, we can go to Studland Bay, I know just the place."

But then it was the end of the season and a whole winter passes. I still need that anchoring feature, but it's midsummer by the time we get our sail.

*Laughing Gull* is even more stately and polished than I remember as we motor out to her swinging mooring in Barney's rubber dub. Barney has a few boats here, awaiting new owners; *Nausikaa* the 8-ton Gauntlet once owned by Graham Greene, now owned by art dealer David Messum (£140k) and



*Josephine* (£180k), the 1954 Philip Rhodes design which was one of the main founding yachts of the British Classic Yacht Club.

It takes about five or ten minutes to get the covers off, start the engine (Yanmar 3QM30) and slip our mooring. In fact times on my photos show a cup of espresso coffee on deck, Barney getting ready to hoist the main and a south view of Brownsea Island (the mooring is on the north) all within 15 minutes of getting aboard.

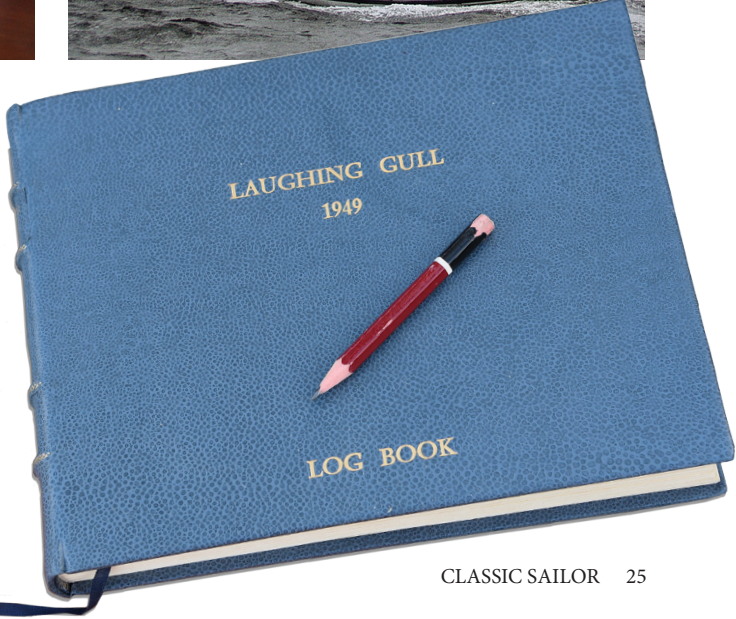
The day has brightness but there is a dark rain cloud to the North East, and the weather is coming from the NE. We sail out towards Old Harry rocks before finding a clear place to anchor in Studland Bay.

My idea to photograph the sequence and to do tidal heights and show how the tide will rise and fall and therefore how much anchor line to let out is pointless – the range here is only around 2m at Springs. See p76 for that. But Barney lets out rope anchor line – which is kinder to the seagrass, home of the seahorses in this area.

We zip ashore in the dinghy and walk past Joe's café and up the lane to the *Pig on the Beach* hotel and its Greenhouse Resataurant with views over the isle of Wight. Barney's great company and the talk turns from how we got into sailing to broking to the market. Despite selling



**Tea's up! From the deeply comfy cabin. Note the slatted fold-down bunks which otherwise act as backrests. Below far left: the varnished galley and Davey Hot Pot solid fuel stove; below sailing in the 40s and *Gull's* logbook**



some of the swankiest yachts in the wooden boat fleet Barney remembers getting into sailing in Cadet dinghies in Poole harbour.

"My mother thought I should have a go at sailing a real boat aged 10 rather than building model sailing boats and so Parkstone Yacht Club beckoned, with crewing in Cadet dinghies until I could afford my own – talked my mother into letting me keep my boat in my bedroom in the winter (it just fitted in); better for varnishing!

"That was the 1970s and we had no technical clothing like you see the kids wearing today; we sailed in jeans and life jackets with collars, and no doubt Dunlop Greenflash plimsolls..."

We discover we'd both been in Antigua in the mid 80s (I was on the schooner *Vanessa Ann*). "I worked as a deck hand and mate in the on a Swan," Barney says, "but the boats that caught my eye were the few classics that were in West Indies at that time – we'd crossed the Atlantic with the





**Laughing Gull**  
**1949**  
**LOA 44ft 3in**  
**LWL 30ft**  
**Beam 10ft 8in**  
**Draught 6ft**  
**Displacement**  
**26,146 lbs**  
**Ballast 9,500**  
**lbs (outside)**  
**300 lbs**  
**(inside)**  
**Sail Area 888**  
**sq ft**

Nicholson ketch *Aile Blanche*; the Fife ketch *Belle Aventure* was lying in English Harbour looking like a movie scene, and I saw *Sumurun*. I'd seen her in Corfu when she was called *Erna*, and was spellbound; we were lucky enough to spend some time on a Samuel White TSDY called *Caramba* in Greece in the summer holidays while I was still at school and I can still remember those days on that boat – the sunlight on the varnish; the cosy cabins; smells of an old boat... it all got under my skin I guess.

“And in English Harbour *Sumurun* had become *Sumurun* again and her crew had T-shirts with the Fife dragon on them but more than that they were more like a brotherhood... was it the boats?! I remember swimming over to the Alden Schooner *Puritan* at anchor and meeting the wonderful bunch aboard and being given the deepest glass of rum I can remember... the boats were different and so were their people and I believe and hope this is still the case – not better – just different.”

We reminisce about our footloose and fancy free past: the guy who ran Pizzas in Paradise; Mrs Malone's laundry and Kong's varnish work...

“So how did you get into yacht broking Barney?” “My father had a marketing company and after some time working for him I felt selling/doing something I loved would make more sense...”

“But people are not sold boats; they buy them – first base has to be the love affair and so basically we have to oil the cogs to help this to happen – finding people the right boat for them is vital and sometimes hard when they are not completely sure themselves and what and why that should be?”

“All boats are a compromise, except their beauty of course, we try not to compromise on that – but it is easy to be distracted once you start looking for your dream boat and easy to forget what you were trying to achieve – there is no point looking for a three cabin layout if friends and family will only be sailing with you once or twice a year. And a boat that works well for most of the time is what is needed... this is hard to remember though.”

“And how do choose your boats?” “It is important to try and establish the true condition of the boat's structure from recent surveys or yard work; I hope we know our clients and the type of boats they want – not always Fife, Alden, S&S and so forth – many of the boats we list are termed classic yachts, conforming to fairly strict criteria for that full accolade but I hope all of our yachts qualify with such qualities of construction and seaworthiness, beauty, grace and style – they need to have an almost natural quality about them. They cannot fail to inspire.”

It was the same process for Barney himself as he bought *Laughing Gull* in 2011.

“I will never forget sailing in a race in France and watching the three S&S yawls *Stormy Weather*, *Dorade* and *Sonny* chasing each other in about 15-18 knots of breeze all at maximum power and looking like radio controlled boats on a pond sailing faster than their scale... actually they were like a pod of dolphins, so totally natural, nothing holding them back, all beautiful...”

“I'd always wanted an Olin Stephens design between 1930 and 1950 but never thought I would be that lucky – a client owned her and knew I loved the boat – we did a deal eventually, partly I believe based on her former owner knowing we would care for the boat, nearly five years ago now.

“Olin Stephens looked for balance in everything in his life and I admire that – his designs always remind me of this and

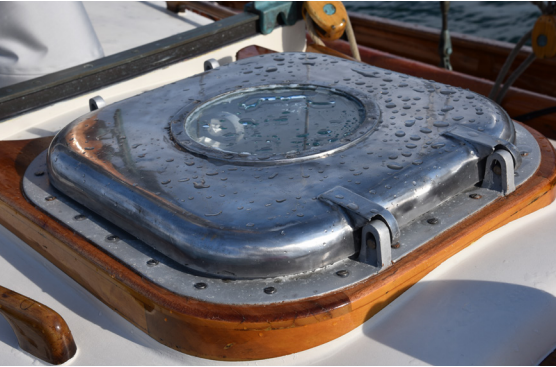
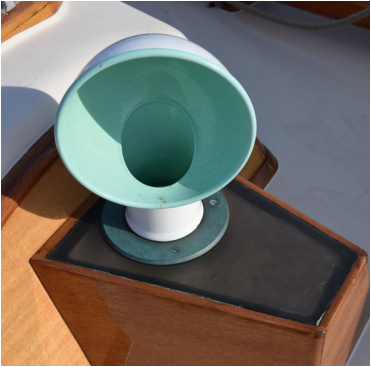
*All boats are a compromise, except their beauty of course – we try not to compromise on that*

*Laughing Gull* displays his ethos from the moment you see her on a her mooring to the moment you take her helm – it's an incredible thing really.

“She was built for Percy Chubb II, a wealthy insurance broker and commodore of the New York Yacht Club in 1948. Given a free hand, Olin did however have to cater for Chubb's near 7ft height with appropriate standing headroom below. Built by Jakobson of Oysterbay, New York she was launched early in 1949. Articles on her construction and specifications appeared in *Yachting Monthly* and *The Rudder* that year. Rutger ten Broeke, her last owner, is an author and journalist, and a member of the board of editors and co-author of the *International Encyclopaedia of Yacht Designers*.

“In an interview for the Dutch Magazine *Spiegel der Zeilvaart* in 1995, he asked Olin Stephens if he remembered the design of *Laughing Gull* and Stephens replied: ‘Yes, certainly, Mr Chubb was a good friend and client and *Laughing Gull* was his second commission’. Stephens was then asked: ‘Do you remember anything specific about the design?’ He replied: ‘I gave her stronger overhangs than usual. I found her more beautiful that way, and I always believed that a beautiful boat is a fast boat.’”

Despite having no self-tailing winches Barney likes racing *LG* and is keen to take her to a classic Mediterranean regatta – he likes the idea of more sunshine. “But she's so easy, I often sail her on my own and the best times are sailing her with family, out here, looking for the dolphins. And cooking; cooking on board is always great – everybody's cooking tastes better on a boat.” ★



**Top: *Laughing Gull* sails back into Poole Harbour with Brownsea (Island) Castle in the background. From far left: Sestrel Moore steering compass; appropriately-named dorade vent; alloy submarine hatch; period Merriman winches**