





It's all hands on deck aboard *Eros*, aboard which good old fashioned muscle makes things move.

Photo by Martha Blanchfield

Racing *Eros*

Competing in a New England classic-yacht event aboard a British-built 1939 Gloucester-type staysail schooner may not be for the weak of spirit, but it will be exhilarating and the experience of a lifetime.

By Martha Blanchfield
For Points East

We are aboard the 115-foot *Eros*, where, aside from the core crew, most of the day's sailors are meeting one another for the first time. Some have day-sailed, a handful have raced, but few have experienced racing aboard a large, wooden classic yacht. This is a lifetime opportunity for us to not only take responsibility for sailing this vessel about the course, but also to race alongside other classics of all sizes and ages.

The yacht's crew and guests are competing in last August's Newport Classic Yacht Regatta – the final stage of the North American Circuit of the Panerai Classic Yachts Challenge – presented by the International Yacht Restoration School (IYRS). *Eros*, designed by William McKeek, was placed in the Vintage Grand Classics, Non-Spinnaker Division, and, once again, stacked against the American-built replica of the 141-foot, William Starling Burgess-designed Grand Banks schooner *Columbia* and the 72-foot, clipper-bowed, L. Francis Herreshoff ketch *Ticonderoga*.

Guests are given a briefing explaining the day's itinerary, then assessed for best placement for specific duties in locations around the boat. There's an experienced bowman who will keep a count to the line and watch for nearby vessels. At the helm, the start will be handled by a veteran sailor, stand-



Photos courtesy Martha Blanchfield

Eros under sail, looking mighty fine (top left), and up close with the crew while racing (right, and bottom left).

ing beside a guest tactician. Crewmembers facilitate all sail prep and trim.

Designed along Gloucesterman, or Grand Banks, schooner lines, *Eros* is 115-feet long with a 22-foot beam, and she's exceedingly comfortable belowdecks, whether in one of her four guest cabins or the saloon, or while roaming the cabin soles. She's sturdy, built to massive scantlings with three-inch Burmese teak planking (original to 1939) over steel frames.

With a displacement of 185 tons, it takes the full potential of her huge sail plan – 9,000 square feet when flying main, main staysail, jib, genoa and fisherman's staysail – to power her up. In prime conditions, *Eros* plows through waves at a 12-knot clip. To be effective, a lean race crew of 12 will move the boat around the buoys, but if the captain wishes to fly the fisherman's staysail, three to five more bodies should be added.

After leaving the dock, one of the first jobs we tackle is raising the mainsail. *Heave, heave, heave!* An all-

hands job powered by a lineup of strength, the process is orchestrated by a caller whose eyes navigate between the top of the sail, the crew at the mast, and the queue of hauling hands on deck. About 360 feet of halyard is required to raise and lower the sail. The main staysail comes next, followed by the genoa and the jib.

Depending upon course, conditions and crew, the 1,200 square-foot fisherman's staysail will be hoisted last. This light-air sail neatly fills an upper void between foremast cap and main topmasthead, and the deck. On *Eros*, her owner says, "We can point fairly high with the fisherman in light winds, maybe 50

degrees off the wind. The heavier the wind, the more it needs to be closer to a beam reach. The sail pulls really well on a broad reach."

Managing the fisherman is no easy task. For each raise and drop, two to three sailors are required at the mainmast-mounted winch, two to three additional hands at the foremast, and an eyes-on observer or two. A raise-drop-and-swap to the other side is required each

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Photo courtesy Martha Blanchfield

Eros with a bone in her teeth, flying her big fisherman (trapezoidal) sail up high.

time the boat tacks.

For this four-cornered sail, the timing for hauling halyards up at its upper fore-and-aft corners (essentially the sail's head) must be evenly orchestrated, along with a careful monitoring of the other two free sheets that flap wildly in the breeze until the sail is in position. Getting the sail up takes strength: It must remain somewhat free to move about in the wind until its halyards have run their course. Once up, it does not require trim unless there are extenuating circumstances.

When the fisherman is dropped to the deck before a tack, some members of the hoisting team are assigned to the task of grabbing, gathering, and often sitting upon loose yardage to keep it under control. If it's to be raised again after the tack, the sail is shifted to the other side and secured, and halyards are readied for a repeat haul.

Depending upon the course and Mother Nature, the number of times that this sail is raised and doused can vary from one to many. One of the permanent crewmembers says that, on longer races, such as ones in the Caribbean, the fisherman may be shifted side-to-side more than 10 times in an afternoon. The boat does not usually sail with a spinnaker.

Tacking *Eros* is a slow, calculated effort that originates with the letting out of a few feet on the active headsail

sheet as the boat comes close on the wind. At just the right instant, the active sheet is set free, and all energy shifts to the other side, with a fast and furious haul of nearly 100 feet of sheet snapping madly in the breeze. The new active sheet is tamed at just a few aft blocks, then wound round a massive drum winch. With elbows flying on the now-active side, the trimmer starts to sheet in, and the No. 1 grinder starts to spin. A relief grinder stands nearby, ready to take over if needed.

For the cautious novice or first-timer, a safe spot to sit is on a settee in the windowed deckhouse, forward of the helm. From there, one can observe the interaction between the helmsman and the tactician. You can watch the aft crew shift the boom from port to starboard. In full-on race conditions, in brisk winds, two to three sets of hands may be needed to cinch in the lines between blocks, while a grinder and a crewmember at the huge aft winch take up the slack. During a tack, from the deckhouse vantage point, one can also watch the team or individual that must move the runners on either side of the boat in advance of a headsail flip – as well as the dance between port and starboard jib-trim teams.

Eros is beamy enough to remain dry while strolling the decks in moderate seas. Her heel is not extreme, and she plows through the waves with force. A walk to



Photo by Martha Blanchfield

The sails aboard a 115-foot Gloucesterman schooner are big, and accordingly, heavy. Dealing with them takes teamwork.

midship allows one to better observe an additional pair of trimmers responsible for working the main staysail, the team handling the fisherman, as well as the foredeck hands who call for adjustments to trim genoa and jib.

For those so inclined, a race aboard a large classic yacht provides a long, seemingly endless list of benefits – some tangible, some not. These might include teamwork, challenge, new friendships, superb scenery, clean air, spiritual development, and a whole lot of history.

American businessman Henry von Berg financed the building of the William McKeek-designed vessel to celebrate his marriage to Jean White, daughter of a British lord. *Eros* was built by the Brooke Motor Craft Company in Lowestoft, England, in 1939. First bestowed with the name *White Bitch* (a combination of his wife's maiden name and her family's devotion to dog breeding), the schooner was later mercifully renamed *Jeanry*. A change of name to *Eros* was made following World War II.

On her very first cruise, to the Isle of Wight, off the south coast of England, she was expropriated by the British Royal Navy to serve as a coastal patrol boat. Tragically, her owner had little time with his vessel; an Air Force pilot, he was killed in combat. After the war, the Royal Navy offered to reinstate ownership, but von Berg's widow and the White family decided against repossession.

Jeanry was put up for sale. A few years later, Greek billionaire shipping tycoon and rival of Aristotle Onassis, Stavros Niarchos, purchased her. Rechristened *Eros*, she began new chapters in her logbook, becoming a familiar sight in ports around the Mediterranean. The schooner eventually fell upon neglect, until 1992, when her third owners embarked on an 18-year, museum-quality restoration. This project would ultimately restore and upgrade her to world-class-traveler status.

Eros retains many of her original details, from authentic turnbuckles to the Burmese teak planks of her hull. Since 2016, under stewardship of her fourth owners, *Eros* has been earning a classic-yacht-racing pedigree in Atlantic waters. This past summer, she completed her second season in New England, competing in Nantucket Race Week's Opera House Cup Regatta, the Panerai Herreshoff Classic Yacht Regatta in Bristol, R.I., and the Newport Classic Yacht Regatta.

Eros and crew will again spend the winter season in the Caribbean. First port of call will be Antigua for the Antigua Charter Yacht Show in early December. The yacht will return there to compete in the Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta 2019 in April. She will also participate in other regional races in the tropics.

Classic yacht racing aboard a vessel of *Eros's* size is a magnificent experience. In the New England area, there



Photo by Martha Blanchfield

The crew takes a well-deserved break, using a sail to create a temporary lounge.

are lots of classic yacht events, but very few classic yachts with the capacity to welcome aboard large groups of charter guests craving hands-on regatta action. *Eros*, courtesy of her sheer size and design, easily accommodates and fascinates a full complement of zealots, from shellbacks to novice sailors. Take it from me, you don't want to miss this experience.

Martha Blanchfield is a racer/writer/photographer with a keen interest in San Francisco Bay regattas. As editor and founder of the digital magazine RenegadeSailing.com, she profiles the international waterside lifestyle and occasionally pokes fun at the loves and lives of sailors. Her photography and copy appear in "Nautique" (Netherlands publication), the "Panerai Classic Yachts Regatta" annual, "San Francisco Chronicle," "Latitude 38," "J/Boat" newsletter, Points East, "Classic Yacht," "Adventure Sports Journal" and soon "Classic Boats" (U.K.).

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Some New England classic regattas

New York Yacht Club Annual Regatta

Newport, R.I.
www.nyyc.org

Vineyard Cup (classic division)

Vineyard Haven, Mass.
www.sailmv.org

Edgartown Race Weekend (classic division)

Edgartown, Mass.
www.edgartownyc.org

Camden Classic Cup

Camden, Maine
www.camdenclassicscup.com

Castine to Camden Feeder Race

Castine, Maine
www.camdenyachtclub.org

Camden to Brooklin Feeder Race

Camden, Maine
www.camdenyachtclub.org

Eggemoggin Reach Regatta

Brooklin, Maine
www.erregatta.com

Corinthian Classic Yacht Regatta

Marblehead, Mass.
www.corinthianclassic.org

Opera House Cup

Nantucket, Mass.
www.operahousecup.org

Panerai Herreshoff Classic Yacht Regatta

Bristol, R.I.
www.herreshoff.org

Panerai Newport Classic Yacht Regatta

Newport, R.I.
www.iyrs.edu

Indian Harbor Yacht Club Classic Yacht Regatta

Greenwich, Conn.
www.indianharboryc.com

Heritage Cup Classic Yacht Regatta

Glen Cove, N.Y.
www.hempsteadharbourclub.com