

READER BOAT: Sakonnet 23

by Gary "Luke" Lukoski

"When a thing is out of the usual and pleasing to contemplate it is romantic. When an object is nicely proportioned and has retained some well-proven ancient quality, it is romantic looking. I suppose to a sailor a romantic vessel is one that looks like a good sea boat, one which has a good sheer and nicely proportioned ends: in short, a vessel that he falls in love with at first sight, as we all did when we saw the *Rozinante*."—L. Francis Herreshoff —*The Compleat Cruiser*

When I first read those words over 20 years ago I was taken by the simple description of this breathtakingly beautiful boat, as described in LFH's classic book on the art of cruising. I was a sailing professional at the time working for the largest sailmaking company in the world. I sailed every day on really fast, but to my eye, rather ugly boats. They were tools to play the racing game with and had no visual or emotional appeal to me. They had no soul, no heart, no character. I was stuck in a sailing no man's land. I needed a romantic boat and I knew there had to be one out there. With luck and patience I hoped I would find it someday, somewhere.

One day I finally got tired of sailing around in circles and trying to win obscure yacht races. I left the sailing business with no regrets and over five years passed without me stepping aboard a sailboat or even thinking about sailing. Then I read a series of three articles in Issue #126 of *WoodenBoat* magazine about a Joel White designed daysailer called *LaLa*. This was a simple little boat with pleasing lines done by a designer whose work was influenced by LFH. Amazingly, I also had a personal connection to this boat. *LaLa* was built in the central Wisconsin town I had grown up in, by a builder I had worked for as a bottom grinder and "gopher" in the late 70s. The stars seemed to be aligned. Had I had found my romantic boat? Was it love at first sight? The answer was yes, with complications. Business, home and family commitments, along with an endless restoration project of a 1950 Chris Craft, left me with no time to even dream about building this craft. I forced myself to put *LaLa* out of my mind and another five years passed swiftly.

Then one bright fall day I stood dumfounded, staring at my romantic boat in St.



Petersburg Florida at the annual Strictly Sail Boat Show. Dave Davignon of Edey and Duff had taken this design and come up with a fiberglass production version called the Sakonnet 23. Now I had a problem. Here was a boat I longed to have, and it was there for the taking. Could I pull the trigger on the checkbook? Sadly, the answer was no. We had just purchased a new house, and the Chris Craft was draining my boat fund daily. I couldn't commit the money and I knew it. I walked away dejected, with Dave's card in my hand, knowing it was only a matter of time. Four more years passed. The Chris Craft was sold, life was good, my wife Joy liked the boat and one morning I woke up knowing the journey was nearing an end. We ordered a new Sakonnet 23 in July 2006. She arrived in December and the romance began to bloom.

Hull #75 became *Joyride*, and so far that's what it has been. We live on the shores of Tampa Bay and *Joyride* sits waiting for us on a boat lift in the back yard. We enjoy half-day and occasional all-day excursions around the islands, channels and shallows of this unique piece of Florida. Sometimes we go out for just an hour after work and sail two miles into the bay and back. Lack of a cabin is not a problem. We enjoy the

view and the fresh air. We observe the weather, the birds, dolphins, manatees and fish all from about two feet above the water and the friendly confines of our cozy padded cockpit seats. When the destination is upwind, we trim in tight and point high. When we go downwind if we're not feeling lazy, the spinnaker goes up and the miles go by quickly. On a long haul, we trim the sails until the boat steers herself. Then we just sit back for the ride. If we decide on a shore lunch, the centerboard comes up and the 22-inch draft lets us ease up into the shallows and we wade ashore. Lunch is on board or on a sandy beach, whatever looks more comfortable at the time. A sandwich, a cool glass of white wine and then some fruit for desert is the prelude to a nice read or afternoon nap.

The Sakonnet 23 is a traditional looking but performance oriented daysailer. It's a design that Joel White did in his spare time on a whim. Writer Thomas McGuane was the driving force who persuaded Joel to finish the design for him and then had the first boat built, strip planked and cold molded. This collaboration produced what they believed to be the perfect blend of looks and performance in a traditional daysailer. It's a keel/centerboard design with 900 pounds

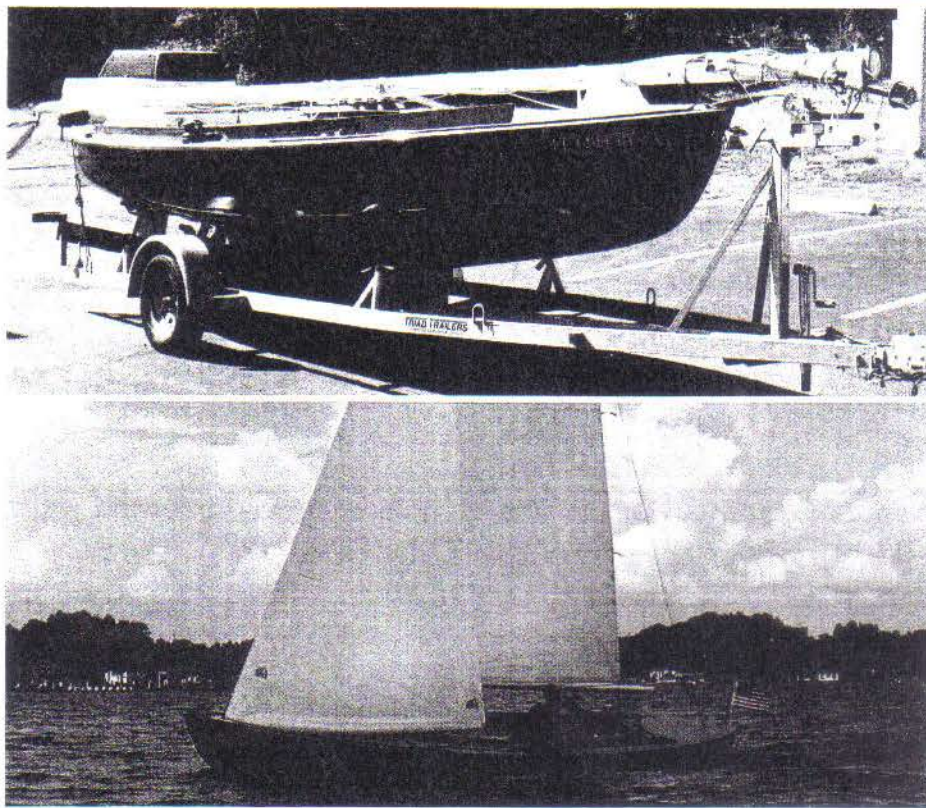
of lead ballast in the keel and a 200 pound centerboard. Rigged and ready to sail, Sakonnet 23s weigh in at a lean 2000 pounds. This gives them the stability of a keel boat with the draft and performance of a dinghy.

Norton Boat Works in Green Lake, Wisconsin, built the prototype *LaLa* and Edey and Duff built a mold off of that hull. Edey and Duff started building this design in 1994 and to date have delivered 88 boats.

The rig is modern with a tapered aluminum mast, small foretriangle and large main. This makes it easy to handle when shorthanded. A sharp pull on the backstay quickly flattens the main and depowers the rig without the hassle of reefing. She sails well in moderate and heavy air with the main and working jib, but this combination is seriously underpowered in under 10 knots of wind. A genoa increases performance dramatically in lighter winds. We have sailed upwind in over 25 knots of breeze with a flat main and working jib and stayed quite comfortable in our snug cockpit. The bigger waves do occasionally come on board and foul weather jackets keep us dry and happy. Reaching in a good breeze with this light, narrow boat is by far the most exhilarating and fastest point of sail. The cockpit is not self-draining, so the high output bilge pump comes in handy in these conditions. We ordered four sails from the local Doyle loft: main, working jib, 155% genoa and asymmetrical spinnaker.

The jib furling system is recessed into the deck with the drum hidden from view. This produces a nice, clean looking full sized sail and enhances performance. All those years of racing just don't go away overnight. Going fast in good trim with properly designed sails never looks bad and feels even better.

For a fiberglass boat, *Joyride* has plenty of teak trim. The cockpit coaming and rubrail have 12 coats of Epifanes varnish, and the floorboards are finished with multiple coats of top quality teak oil. This finish gives me something to do on non-sailing days, and the rewards are great in smell, feel, touch and compliments. Sailing is all about the senses. The smell of fresh varnish and oiled teak mingled with salt spray and wind on a clear bright day in an open boat have to be experienced to be appreciated. We get that every time we sail our little yacht.



Joyride under sail photos by Ron Hoddinott

The good times have been very good and the problems have been few. The finish quality of the boat is above average. "Down East" quality and a fair price is a New England tradition still alive and well at Edey and Duff. This is a great little boat-building company, and it was a pleasure to deal with them all through the building process and beyond. They offer a variety of options and are open to suggestions and individual tastes. We ordered the optional electric in-board motor which in my mind is one of the best features of the boat. It powers us at about three knots in silence and with two batteries you can do this for four hours. With this feature the boat becomes a silent, sunset cocktail cruiser throughout the canals of our neighborhood. What a nice bonus. Storage is plentiful under the seats and under the decks—actually more than we need.

When not sailing or sitting on our boat lift, *Joyride* travels by trailer to other interesting bodies of water. The mast is deck-stepped, and the entire set up from trailer to launch is about 30 minutes. We've got several new destinations in mind right now and others pop up every day. *Joyride* will be seeing some serious highway miles in the coming years as we check off places on our list.

Is this the perfect daysailer? For us, I think so. Sure there are times when we wish for a larger boat with cabin accommodations, and other times when we would enjoy a smaller camp cruiser/expedition boat, but this passes quickly. We know that in the next few years, *Joyride* will start to feel like an old pair of jeans or some Topsiders that are so broken in they feel like they belong on your feet. After a year with *Joyride*, we couldn't imagine being without her, and we don't expect to be longing for any other boat for a long, long time...maybe never.

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After years in the sailmaking business, Luke settled into a job as sales manager of a financial company. After thousands of races on boats of all sizes, he's found peace and tranquility sailing on Tampa Bay in a simple little sailboat with the most beautiful woman in the world.

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