next

Olin James Stephens II

April 13, 1908 - September 13, 2008
Birthplace: New York

"I was lucky; I had a goal. As far back as I can remember I wanted to design fast boats."

Arguably the most famous yacht designer of the 1900s, it's not just that Olin Stephens lived one hundred years, it's that he was working, contributing to the sport he loved until the day he died. Olin Stephens' mind was always open. He never allowed himself to stop learning.

As an apprentice naval architect at age 19, Stephens cut his teeth on the design of the elegant 6-meters that were in vogue. But the "radical" 52-foot yawl, *Dorade*, Stephens designed in 1930, was the portent of things to come. Without computer analysis or tank testing, Stephens relied on

instincts and intuitive judgments to design the slim, light and lovely *Dorade*. When Stephens won the 1931 Trans-Atlantic race with *Dorade* by four days (corrected time), any doubters were silenced. New York gave Stephens a ticker tape parade. Yacht design would never be the same.

Stephens' began his America's Cup career with the co-design (with Starling Burgess) of the J-Class *Ranger* in 1937, and ended it with *Freedom*, the last 12-meter to successfully defend the Cup (1980). Like Nat Herreshoff, Stephens has six winning America's Cup designs to his credit (*Intrepid* and *Courageous* twice).

Stephens boats were not only fast in their day, picking up silverware wherever they raced, but a treat for the eyes. He believed attractive boats were also faster. Many make the list of all-time classics: *Stormy Weather, Bolero, Gesture, Finisterre, Brilliant, Dyna, Mustang, Tenacious (Dora)* …. Then there are his Blue Jays, Lightnings, and Interclub dinghies.

"I was lucky," Olin Stephens wrote in his autobiography, *All This and Sailing Too*. "I had a goal. As far back as I can remember I wanted to design fast boats."

- Roger Vaughan

Links of Interest:

Profile of Olin Stephens by John Rousmaniere - from New York Yacht Club

YouTube video on Olin Stephens - from Mystic Seaport

Database of Sparkman & Stephens designs on sailboatdata.com

New York Times Article on Olin Stephen's death

Olin Stephens Wikipedia page

Back to 2011 Hall of Famers