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Lowell Orten North



December 2, 1929 -
Birthplace: Springfield, Missouri

“In my wildest dreams I wouldn't have imagined where North Sails has gone.”

When Lowell North was 14, he re-cut the mainsail of his Star boat. A year later (1945), Malin Burnham, one of San Diego's hottest sailors, asked the young North to crew for him in the World Championships. They won. “It wasn't me Malin wanted,” North has said. “It was my mainsail.”

North went on to win four world's championships as skipper in this elite class. Nearly as impressive, he finished second in the world's five times. He brought home a gold medal in the

1968 Olympics, prompting *Starlights*, the Class magazine, to call him "the perfect Star sailor." North had won another Olympic medal (bronze) in the Dragon class (1964). He was known for rigs so refined that occasionally something would let go. Shortly before one race, the main halyard parted. North and his crew, Peter Barrett, lowered the mast while on the water, threaded the mains'l into the groove, and raised it in time to make the start.

Obsessed by the shape of speed on the water, North applied his degree in engineering to sail making. He opened his first North Sails loft in San Diego in 1957. From the beginning, his was a scientific approach. He was among the very first sail makers to embrace computer modeling. He hired other champion sailors -- "Tigers," he called them -- to demonstrate and sell his products. He figured anyone who could make a sailboat go fast could also be a good businessman.

Winning skipper Dennis Conner was the first to use North Sails in the America's Cup in 1980. In 2007, North Sails 50th anniversary, eleven of the twelve syndicates entered in the America's Cup wore sails by North.

- Roger Vaughan

Links of Interest:

["The San Diego Bay Star Fleet: 1925 to the Present Day..." \(Google Books\)](#)

[Star Class website's profile of Lowell North](#)

[Video on history of North Sails - "50 Years of FAST"](#)

[Lowell North Wikipedia page](#)

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