Love At First Sight- CATHEXIS

**CATHEXIS AT FIRST SIGHT**
By Steve Blecher, J160 Hull #14

It was a hectic Monday in September of 1997 when Bob Miller, my partner, came into the office and dropped a glossy four-color folio on my desk with the comment, "This is one you should look at." He knew I had been helping a friend look for the ideal large, offshore, performance cruiser and had just returned from the Newport Boat Show with his wife, Maryann. Evidently the Millers had spent the better part of the afternoon talking to one particular broker about one particular boat and Bob had that all knowing look in his eye.

Having been sailing on other people's boats (including Bob's Mason 44) for over 40 years, I had developed some distinct ideas about how I would use a boat and compromises I would make in buying one. My ideas were largely shaped by the ease with which Etchels, Sonars and Deerfoots are handled and make a good turn of speed with only a 100% jib. As I flipped through the folio, I focused on my friend's requirements and desires for his future boat with little thought of my own. However, as I read the specifications and design philosophy, I perceived a boat that fit my ideas to a "T." I looked up at Bob and said, "I'd buy this boat; leave it with me."

Following a conversation with my friend, we determined that he was not interested in a boat of this magnitude at that time. However, my interest had been piqued. Lingering in the back of my mind was a promise I had made to my wife, Amy, at her request before our marriage almost 30 years ago: "There would be no boat." She knew what boats entailed. I had abided by this promise all these years and had satisfied my interest in sailing by crewing for friends and chartering. But I hoped that she might now be willing to reconsider.

Arriving home that evening, I simply said to Amy, "A man has to have a boat his own age." She seemed to immediately understand the drift of my comment and, surprisingly, did not fight it. I handed her the folio, and she casually looked at the pictures. She made some snide remark about my mental state, since I had always espoused a philosophy about the brilliance of not being a boat owner, just a fun loving crew. But, I was of sound mind, and a J-160 was that ideal boat.

A few days later she shocked me by suggesting that we go to the Norwalk Boat Show to see if J Boats was exhibiting, for she too, had been thumbing through the folio. As it turned out, they did not exhibit, but we did look over several cruising boats in the 40-foot range, and Amy began to formulate her own list of what accommodations she wanted on a boat. The accommodations on the J-160 began to look better and better.

For the next few weeks, I studied the J Boats website which contains extensive information about the entire brand. In fact, I can almost say that the information available on the website made a major contribution to my decision to make such a major investment. Then Amy admonished me that I could not place an order for a boat that I had never sailed. Returning to the office, I had Bob Miller contact Tim Mariner, the broker from McMichael in Mamaroneck, New York, the man with whom he had spent so much time in Newport.

Tim arranged for a test sail on another owner's boat in Newport in late October. The Millers came along, as did Jim and Priscilla Fulton, on whose Pearson 40 I had cruised for a decade. Come that fateful October day, Jeff Johnstone and Tim took the group on a tour of the TPI plant in Warren, Rhode Island, so that we could understand the process by which J Boats were molded and built. Then we drove down to Newport to sail aboard BROUHAHA. All the appropriate critics got to try the helm and were amazed at how effortlessly she performed. We went upwind and then popped the chute for the ride back to the mooring. On the mooring, we crawled all over the boat and its cabins to get a better understanding of how she was outfitted and equipped. All of my critics came back to the navstation where I was sitting with "thumbs up." We were very impressed with the thought which had gone into the design of this yacht- Amy decided that cruising on this boat would not constitute "camping out." We were making progress.

I drifted out to the cockpit to talk with Jeff and Tim about what is involved with acquiring one of these products of modern engineering. Bob said later that he thought I was whipping out my checkbook. Not quite, but we worked out a timetable, and Tim Mariner went to work over the next week to make it happen.

Actually, Tim assumed the role of "project manager" and had as much excitement and enthusiasm for the project as anyone. In a series of meetings at my house and his office, we went over lists of optional equipment, what other owners had done the commissioning process, sails, and electronics. And he supplied Amy with the necessary fabric samples. The order took shape, and we got in the queue to be hull #14.

This then became the rallying point for my family to work on a name and spinnaker colors. After settling on JAVELIN (because she is long, sleek and fast) and many colors of the rainbow for the chute, Amy and my two "20-something" sons were engaged in the project. The older is a medical student at Tufts, and the younger was commodore of the Dartmouth Sailing Team.

The hull was molded in mid-January, 1998. Tim orchestrated a family visit with Jeff Johnstone to see the layup in the mold. This was the first of a series of monthly visits to inspect the progress. Meantime, Tim and I would have weekly conversations about all the details of the boat. During these, he guided me into adjusting some of the options I had picked or omitted, keeping in mind the various uses the boat would engage in over its lifetime; day-sailor, cruiser, and distance racer. Tim's input, based upon his extensive experience as a sailor, racer, and broker, was invaluable during this process.

Amy's perspective on the boat took shape during this time. First of all, she became resigned to the fact that it was happening. Second, she asked whether the boat was going to "take over" our summers. I indicated that I really wanted the boat for the shoulder seasons of May/June and September/October when the winds on Long Island Sound are the best. Except for maybe a cruise to Maine in early August, I was not going to monopolize her summer weekends with the boat. Thirdly, she began to understand that the boat was an activity, which the whole family could enjoy together as a team, with each family member contributing to the experience in accordance with their abilities and desires.

Being the buyer of a new boat, especially as a person who had never previously owned a large boat, opens up a whole new dimension of sailing. There are so many decisions to be made, and each decision is a trade-off or a compromise. Some of the most significant decisions involve selecting the professionals and organizations to work with you on the project. This is where an experienced broker like Tim Mariner can be particularly helpful. Tim provided recommendations and introductions to people who would get the job done correctly and who could provide the required expertise. Tim also became the consummate sounding board as we examined each compromise and trade-off. In the end, it was always important to keep in mind how the boat was actually going to be used, so that the compromises resulted in the most enjoyment for the crew.

All through the spring, Tim and his staff at McMichael's coordinated the various components of the project. Tim led a trip to meet with Hall Spars and Brewer's Cove Haven Yacht Yard, which was to commission the vessel, during which we worked out various other details. For a sailor, awaiting the completion of your boat is agonizing, and I can only assume it is similar to a mother awaiting the birth of a child. But the calendar finally rolled around to August lst and TPI rolled out hull #14 in Bristol condition. Tim arranged to have the boat trucked to Cove Haven where she was given a coat of bottom paint, gently lowered into the water, christened, and rigged. Cove Haven added some improvements we had decided upon and Custom Navigation installed the electronics. Sail bags arrived, and we took a couple of afternoon shakedown cruises to identify the bugs. The staff at TPI and Cove Haven quickly addressed these, and by mid-August we were ready to sail her away.

Tim arrived in Cove Haven on a rising tide equipped with champagne. Tim, Jim Fulton, CJ Salustro of Quantum Sails, my son Jeff and his friend Joe Levin, joined me for a late afternoon departure down Narragansett Bay. At sunset, we rendezvoused with my brother, Tony, who was aboard a chartered boat off Wickford, Rhode Island, and he took a series of photos as we sailed off into the night for the run to Pilot's Point in Westbrook, Connecticut. Arriving there at 3 a.m. gave us some time to catch a nap before Amy drove in soon after dawn to welcome JAVELIN.

We have now completed our fall season of sailing in a variety of ways. We have day sailed and taken weekend cruises. We took a weeklong trip to Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard and got to enjoy all the special features of the boat. She has turned out to be everything she was supposed to be: a comfortable and fast performance cruiser which can be easily handled by two knowledgeable people and enjoyed by a fun crew. Guests have marveled at the combination of fun and fast sailing with full and spacious accommodations. As I review the project with numerous knowledgeable friends, my appreciation grows for the contributions of each member of the construction team and the smooth manner in which a competent and knowledgeable broker brought them all together for an integrated successful result.

P.S. 9/18/2023

The reason that the hull was white in the picture above was that I chose not to put green pigment in the gel coat. I originally thought that we would paint the hull green while she was being commissioned at Cove Haven in Barrington, but that would have taken another three weeks. I was so obsessed and anxious to get sailing that I was not going to wait another three weeks. So painting got deferred to the ensuing winter at Pilot’s Point.