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Under sail in Rockport Harbor, *Tordzus's* new sloop rig shows to advantage.

photo by Bill Bichell

She Even Feels Like the Old “*Tordzus*”

by Stephen Florimbi

The Hall family hauled the boat from its sixty-year home on Lake Winnepesaukee to have her sister built here at the Shop. When *Tordzus* first rolled down the driveway, a group of us

were outside re-stacking the cedar pile. We stopped and gaped. Her wide decks flexed with every bump; she seemed to want to melt over the trailer. “What is that?” we all murmured — a question which now I’ve almost grown tired of hearing, but always enjoy answering, “*Tordzus* is a boat that has been loved and cared for, for many years.”

I was the apprentice builder on her from start to finish. Kevin Carney was the chief instructor and Tom Jenkins and Eric Thierry were the other major apprentice builders on the project. But I don’t think there was anyone in the

shop who didn’t pitch in a hand at some point or other — so this was, in every respect, a group effort.

Tordzus had been built to race about a century ago. Her lines and dimensions were typical of the North Jersey skimming dishes of the time. Builders built them quickly, raced them hard, then left them forgotten in the mud for the newer faster boats being built all the time. At twenty-five feet long, nine feet wide and only two feet deep from the top of the deck to the bottom of the keel, it was amazing for this boat to have been sailing up until five years ago.

When she came she was ready for retirement. She could be twisted and turned, lifted and pried in almost every direction. Virtually every frame had been sistered, and most were badly rotted. The deck beams were in comparatively good shape, but there was little holding them up. What was left of the sheer clamp was only a three-quarter by three-quarter piece of oak. Only small boards wedged from the frames up to the deck beams kept the side deck from collapsing. She was a catalog of creative ideas striving to keep her afloat—the mast step was held together with hose clamps!

Our goal was to make her strong and to bring out the full glory of her form. We wanted the family’s love for the old *Tordzus* to come through in our work. We wanted to change her into a better boat, but we didn’t want to compromise her identity—she still had to look and feel like the original, at least like we thought the original looked and felt when it was first built.

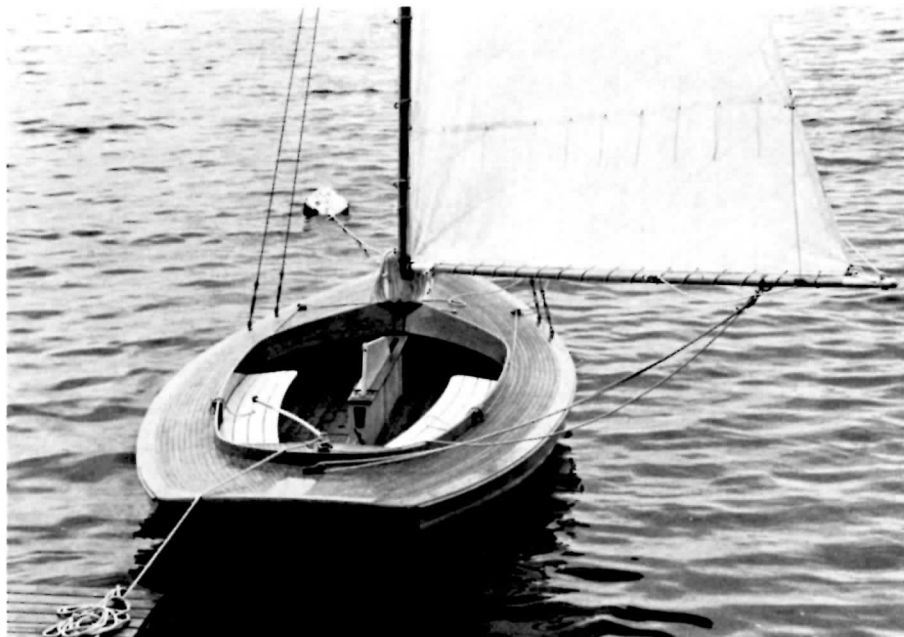
With Dave Dillion’s masterful help we took the lines from the *Tordzus*. She had to be twisted into shape, leveled, sectioned off and measured. (I was glad this one was not in the mud). All of our measurements were transferred directly to the lofting table using a system Dave had come up with over his years of lines-taking.

Dave suggested that to get her shape to be exactly as we wanted, we should remove the caulking. *Tordzus* promptly turned into a rubber band and started

letting go a few planks which had to be quickly driven back in with sheet-rock screws. We supported only the ends of the keel to help her sag in the middle and get some of the hog out. Leveling the boat was quite a trick since the water line had been creatively free-handed in previous years. We managed a fair job by squinting though our water level at a faded scum line. We chose to take the lines from the starboard side, then with line levels, plumb bobs, chalk, and a lot of head scratching and help from Dave, we set up a three dimensional grid on and around the boat from which we referenced all our measurements. The method we used was a form of triangulation which Dave Dillion is describing in the Museum Small Craft Association forthcoming small craft documentation manual.

No matter how big a face lift you give it, an old and tired boat still gives you lines and measurements that reflect its weariness. Lofting became an exercise in actually reconstructing and redesigning the *Tordzus* shape. It would have been easier simply to change the lines to make them fair and pleasing to our eyes, but it was much harder to have the boat look and feel and still be the old *Tordzus* (only better). The Hall family supplied photos and home movies of the old boat as far back as the Thirties. We watched the movies over and over again, trying to get a feel for how she looked in earlier days, and what it was like to sail her. Still we had to remind ourselves that the boat was already at least fifty years old when the Halls first acquired her. Consequently, the lofting was crucial.

Kevin's keen eye picked out the smallest details of her lines and brought them out on the lofting. His persistence and knack for seeing small nuances throughout the project ultimately brought out the personality of *Tordzus*. "Let's raise it up a bit more in the bow," he'd say. And while we fiddled with the battens, and readjusted lines, he would disappear to the office to get another look at an old photograph, then come back to give the final word. Often he would bring a picture to show us just what he meant. "See how it used to



Tordzus's cockpit off the Hall's dock on Lake Winnepesaukee.

photo by Stephen Florimbi

have that little rise in the bow, that's what we want."

Kevin's instruction was invaluable throughout the whole project. His patience gradually rubbed off on me until, by the end I felt myself seeing what had to be done and working it through until my work came out just how I had envisioned it should. When we were finally satisfied with the lofting, Kevin said in his calm way, "O.K., we can start making molds."

Every step of the way we had to decide if we should keep the new *Tordzus* exactly like the original, or if we could make an improvement without jeopardizing her identity. Having the old boat at the shop was a great help in seeing where she was hurting the most and where she needed more support. The original had sawn frames. We decided to go with steam-bent frames to save wood and make building easier. The original had no floor timbers; only small beams supported the cockpit sole. We decided to add floors to help keep her shape. The dimension of the sheer clamp was increased from a three-quarter square member to a one-by-four-inch piece of oak, a substantial change which we felt would help keep the boat from hogging and give the deck beams a little more to hang onto. We also increased the deck scantlings and added a carlin and a cou-

ple of knees to the side deck structure. All these changes were fairly straight forward.

The Halls were completely open to these kinds of changes. If we could change something to make it last longer, they were not at all averse to it. They definitely saw *Tordzus* as a long-term investment. They were incredibly encouraging. Every month or so, Sid and Betty would show up at the shop carrying cameras and singing their enthusiasm. We would help them climb aboard to get a closer look at what we had done. Sid would always remember another story about growing up on the old boat or about his father's love for it. "It feels like the old *Tordzus*," he would say. I'd know then we were on the right track.

The biggest and most obvious change we made (besides all the bright-work) was changing the rig from a cat-boat to a sloop. It was very evident to us that the old cat rig was prying apart the boat's delicate spoon bow. The mast had very little to support it and the shrouds were pulling it almost straight down into the stem area. It didn't seem likely that even a new boat could withstand that kind of pressure for very long. Sid recalled water rushing through the bow when they sailed her in any kind of a wind. And then there was the weather helm of the cat rig. The home movies

showed the helmsman hanging on to the tiller for dear life. "Oh, yes!" said Sid, "When I was growing up being able to hold onto the tiller was a test of manhood." The bend in the forged-steel tiller showed he was not kidding.

Kevin made up the new drawings, explaining his methodology as he went. He placed the maststep on the bedlogs, just in front of the centerboard trunk, where we had found evidence of a former mast step in the old boat. This took advantage of the added support of the bedlogs on the keel. He thought it would not be necessary to change the total sail area but instead to cut the mainsail and add approximately the same area to a jib. The idea behind this was to move the center of effort forward and reduce the weather helm.

Calculations of the old sail plan showed the center of effort almost directly in line with the center of lateral resistance, which accounted for the need for super-human strength to hold the tiller. We were very excited about the new plan. I was excited just to have been involved with the process even if the Halls decided against it. We knew the boat would sail better and probably last longer with this new rig, but it would mean a major change for the family. We all hoped they'd go for it. We gave them a set of the redesigned plans to pass around among the family members for their approval. When the news came that they would go with the new rig, we cheered the Hall family as the best customers in the world.

Apprentice Steve Garrand immediately began work on the rig, with Vern Spinosa as his mentor. The sails were contracted to Nat Wilson. The Hall's main concern about the rig was that it be simple and that the spacious decks be kept clear of lines and hardware to trip on. They wanted to pile on the people, lie out on the decks and have a good time, just like in the old days. Vern and Kevin solved this problem beautifully. Kevin designed a casting of a bronze collar to fit the mast. All the halyards could be led to belaying pins on this collar as well as the goose-neck on the boom. The foredeck was free of all lines except

the jib sheets which were run wide through small blocks on the covering boards back to a cleat on the coaming. Vern cleared the afterdeck simply by moving the main sheet block inboard, closer to the coaming. This turned the afterdeck into a virtual balcony where you could sprawl out and hang your feet off the transom. Sailing this boat was definitely going to be fun.

Sid and Betty had also expressed some hope that some of the old *Tordzus* might actually be saved and reused on the new boat. This notion truly challenged us, as there wasn't much left of the old boat that wasn't rotten. At least the old hardware was promising. The bronze blocks were still in fine condition. They were a unique teardrop shape mounted on the bright-finished afterdeck and added character that would have been difficult to duplicate. Steve Garrand found a way to clean up the old gaff, which stood out in my mind as being one of the prettiest pieces of wood on the whole boat. The coaming had an ornate breast hook which we tried saving but found that it too was rotten, so it was copied precisely. The bent tiller was reforged by Apprentice Muhtysr Ye and given a beautiful gentle curve. Once shined up and finished, with a fancy knot on the end, it added tremendously to the new *Tordzus*' character. Tom managed to use the old centerboard which Sid Senior had built nearly twenty years ago. He added some lead to help it sink, and the old board was better than new.

It was as if the old paint and tattered glass decks of the old *Tordzus* had, over the year, blossomed into a true yacht. Everything that could be left bright was: the clear pine decks, the oak kingplanks and covering boards, transom and coaming, and the clear douglas fir sole. She sparkled from head to toe.

The day of the launching Sid and Betty sat out at her mooring for over an hour admiring the details. I was worried that perhaps we had changed her too much, that now with her flashy appearance she would feel different, delicate and untouchable. My fears were soon allayed the next day, when she was finally rigged and ready for her maiden

sail. The decks came to life with children. The youngest generation of Halls ran aboard, circling the coaming as though it were a race track. The boat was refreshingly animated as we sailed into Rockport Harbor. It was no longer a pile of cedar and oak in the Shop's tin shed. I wanted to say to the children that this boat was not something that could just be made by machine and bought at a store, but that every part of *Tordzus* had been thought out and fashioned by hand. Every piece of wood was once a living tree that had to be cut, fitted, sanded, and stroked. Watching Sid let his son hold the tiller, as I'm sure his father had let him, I realized I didn't have to say a thing. The children would learn all those things as they grew up on *Tordzus* and took care of her. She would become to them what she had become to the rest of the family who had grown up with the original *Tordzus*. "You know," he said, "I can sit here and close my eyes and think I was sailing the old *Tordzus*."

That said it all for me. I knew then we had not just fashioned bits of wood together but had recreated memories and dreams that could live on through the future generations who would love and care for *Tordzus*. •A•

Apprentice Stephen Florimbi is just helped to finish a beautiful little Whitehall, and after helping out on the Sonder boat project, will be designing and building a small camp cruiser for himself as an independent study project.



Details like the deck planking ribbed into the king plank, and the coaming breast hook are pleasing to the eye, after the whole boat has been taken in.

photo by Stephen Florimbi