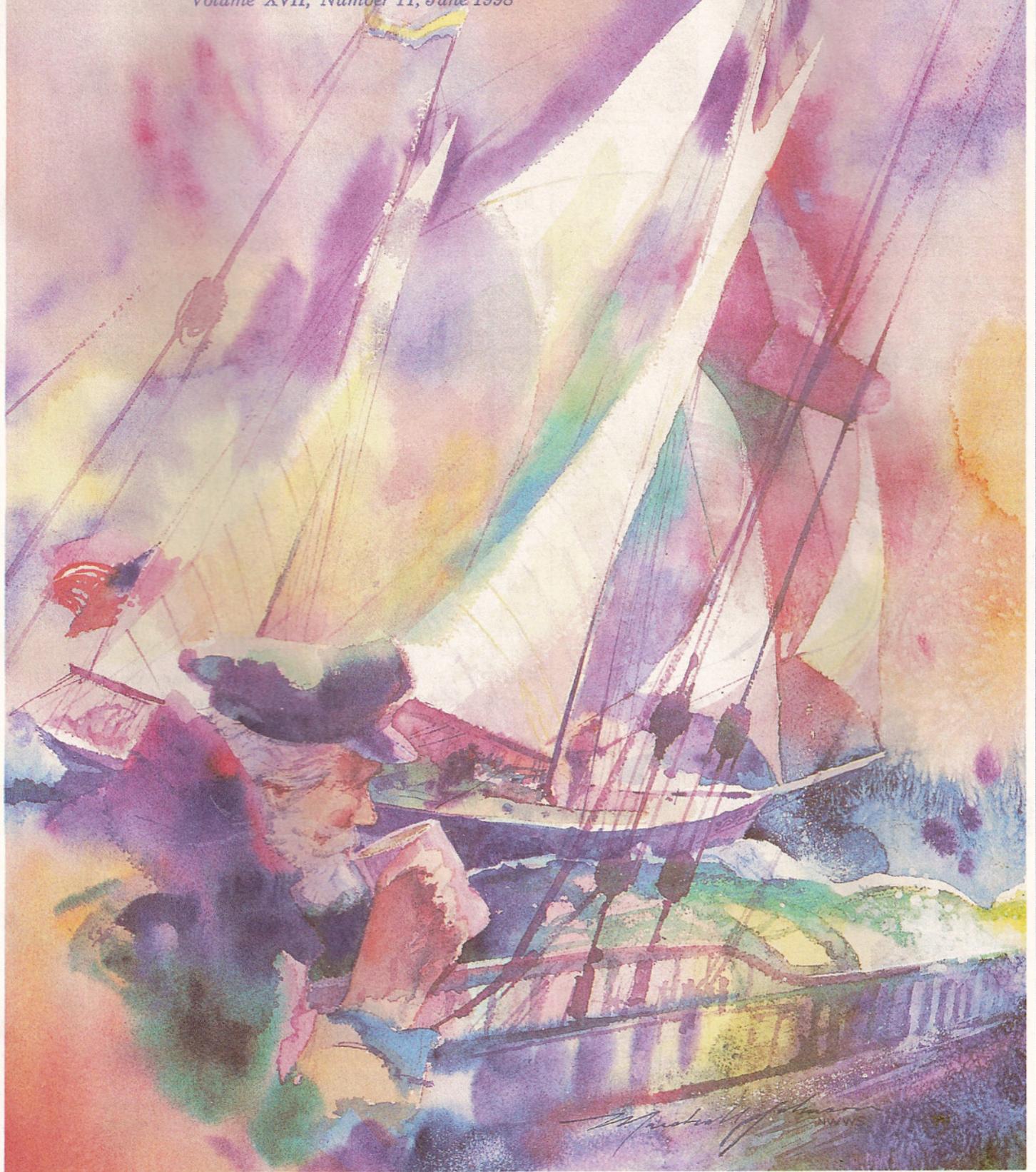


48° North

The Sailing Magazine

Volume XVII, Number 11, June 1998



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CONFESSIONS OF A RELUCTANT SAILOR

by Lorenzo Caricchio

I successfully avoided racing my Catalina 25 for eight years. From the day I bought it, as I sat with the salesman and selected options, I made it clear that I never intended to race. So why was he talking about mylar sails and two speed winches.

For eight years I happily day sailed, night sailed, and generally cruised around. When my more intrepid sailing buddies would urge me to race, I would counter them by saying that I didn't have a macho competitive nature. Or I'd say that I had such a competitive nature that winning would become an obsession.

Both statements were true to a degree. Ever since I was introduced to sailing I was drawn to its Zen-like qualities of becoming one with the boat, the water and the wind. A contemplative state in which one could transcend the narrow limits of the modern jungle we call progress. On the other hand, being a beast raised in that jungle of social and economic dominance I have

developed some instinct for the hunt and the kill.

Oh, there were other reasons for not wanting to race: Money for equipment and fees. Fear of hurting the boat. Finding the time. Finding crew, and others that I can't remember now. But the real reason was loss of innocence. A fear that the act of racing would sully the pure love I had for sailing. That the reality of having to perform the very thing that I enjoyed and fantasized about would destroy the aura of romance that surrounded it in my imagination.

But innocence has its price and naivete its dangers. So a number of years ago, when the opportunity was seductively placed before me, I reluctantly gave in to temptation; and with trembling, hesitant movements I approached the starting line of my first race.

Now, years later I curse my earlier innocence. My fantasy was like a dream in black and white compared to the

multicolored reality of rounding a windward mark ahead of other boats. The romance has turned to passion, and in the throes of this passion all sensations are heightened. The caress of the wind upon face and neck, the sibilant whisper of the sea at the bow, the boat's response to the slightest pressure of my hand against the helm, the deck heaving over wave after wave, plunging closer and closer to the finish then shuddering as a gust of pure, free energy from the sky sweeps us over the line. These are the true roots of the racing obsession. The danger and competition increase sensation exponentially.

My first love, my pure love of sailing has not gone entirely unsullied, but the insights and increased awareness I gained through racing expanded that love beyond its limited borders of fear and comfort to a place of understanding. Innocence is no longer, the fantasy not quite as fanciful, but the romance is now imbedded in the flesh of reality.

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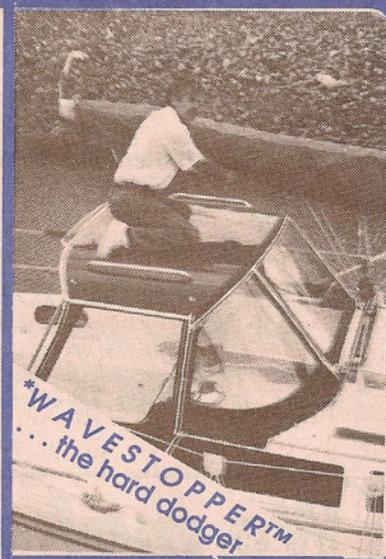
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