

Moore 24

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When you think about it, the Moore 24 -- indeed, the whole ultralight phenomenon -- could hardly have been born anywhere else but Santa Cruz. Long an enclave of the fabled 'California lifestyle', 'Cruzers in the late '60s enjoyed the same enviable combination of sun, surf, *avante garde*, eccentricity and big-wave power sailing as they do now, but with the extra dose of weirdness and free thinking mandatory back then. Stir that primordial soup up a bit and the concept of a planing keelboat -- probably the most radical advance in sailboat design since the fin keel -- seemed not only logical, in Santa Cruz it was downright *inevitable*.

Although the first production Moore 24 wouldn't roll out the door Moore's Reef until 1972, the boat traces its roots back to 1968 when MORA (Midget Ocean Racing Association) announced they were going to hold their own TransPac for boats under 30 feet. It was to leave from Sausalito the following June.

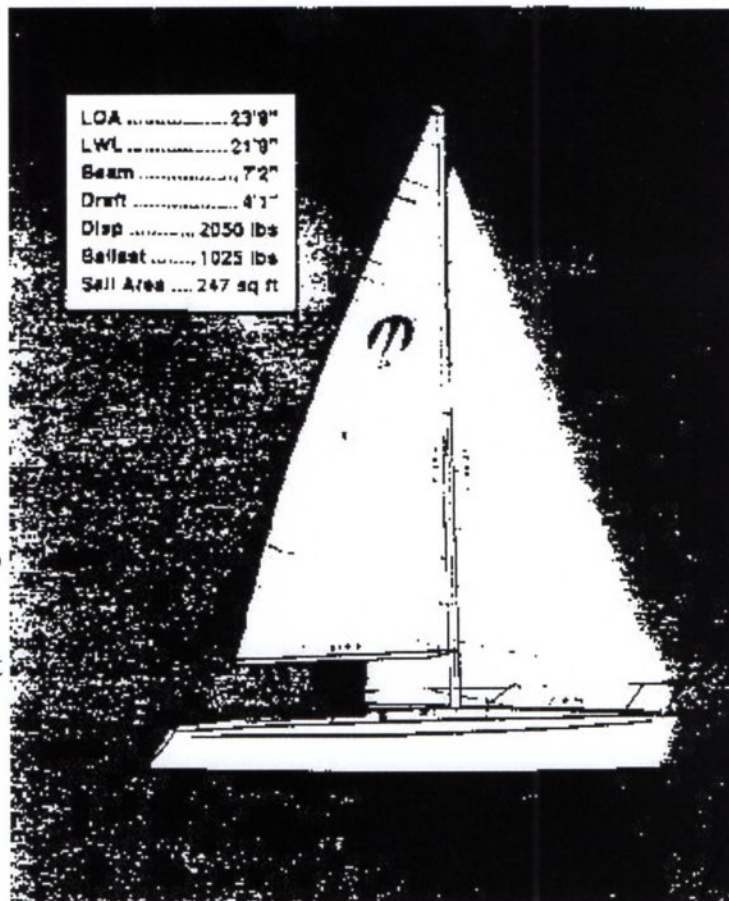
George Olson, then 29 and a longtime surfer, surfboard designer and sailor of the endless long swells of Monterey Bay, decided to create the boat that would win that race. This was long before he became famous as the creator of the Santa Cruz 27, Olson 25, 29, and 30 and other boats. In fact, in '68, George was employed in the rather humble occupation of 'hod carrier' -- the guy who carries bricks up a ladder for the mason.

"I played around with boats as a hobby," he says.

To George's way of thinking (and budget), the challenges to create a boat with the same keel, displacement and sail area as a Cal 20, but longer and faster, with the most waterline possible. This was an extension of the thinking that created *Sopwith Camel*, a maxed-out, masthead 'Cal 20-plus' he'd built with Wayne Kocher. The previous year, they'd sailed it to victory in the MORA long distance race to Newport Beach.

"That was before 'ultralight' had even been coined," says Olson. "And even though a lot of people think we set out to create a real light 24-footer, we really went at it the other way around. We had all this Cal 20 stuff laying around -- so we started with a given displacement of 2,000 pounds and made the longest boat we could."

Olson figured the new boat also had to rate decently under the then-in-use Cruising Club of America (CCA) rating, so 'a friend of mine from Cabrillo College got us in to use their computer, which at that



time had only like 64 functions but took up two rooms,' says George. 'Still, we were able to to ask it things like, "If we decreased the beam so many inches and increased the waterline, how much faster would we go?"'

The result of the number crunching was *Grendel*, a 24-ft fiberglass rocketship built of fiberglass over a male mold. Although the MORA TransPac never happened, *Grendel* (named for the monster in *Beowulf*) proved a terror on the water, winning the 1970 MORA season championship and that year's MORA Long Distance, which finished in Ensenada.

A couple other longtime surfer/sailors in the area then were Ron and John Moore, who had recently moved their 505 shop to Santa Cruz from Campbell. Around the same time, the *Grendel* mold was being stored in a barn up in the Santa Cruz hills, and it narrowly escaped destruction in a fire that razed the structure. Then the owner of the property got tired of looking at it sitting in his yard and worse fate threatened. In one of those pagan hippie bacchanalian rites so popular at the time, somebody hit on the idea of riding the mold to destruction down one of the canyons. 'The giant skateboard of death' or something. Fortunately, Ron sensed the potential of the design and showed up a few days later with a rescue party and a big truck.

Thus was born the partnership of Ron and John Moore and George Olson, and the next chapter of the story: the creation of the Ultimate Wednesday Night Boat for Monterey Bay -- *Summertime*.

The first thing the trio decided was that the 'UWNB' needed a little more beam than *Grendel's* 5 feet and change. No problem. They just jammed a few 2X4s in the mold and pried it apart until it looked about right. A foot more beam looked pretty good, and the glass and resin started flowing.

Wednesday nights would never be the same again. The partner were expecting a downwind hot rod, but to everyone's surprise, the boat pointed well, too. Off the wind, the high, flaring bow kept the boat's head above water while surfing and the V-bottom made it track so well that the faster it went, the easier it was to control. It wasn't long before locals started pounding on the Moore brothers' door going, "I gotta have one of those, too!"

With Olson going on to other projects, Ron Moore refined the *Summertime* design for limited production -- or so he thought. Since the molds for the Moore 24 were taken off *Summertime*, the basic hull is the same. But from there on out, things changed rapidly. Ron redesigned and relocated the keel (6 inches forward and with a different foil) and rudder, moved the rig a foot forward and changed it from masthead to 15/16ths fractional, lowered the lead ballast both in terms of weight (1,025, down about 100 lbs from *Summertime's*) and location (it now starts 8 inches below the hull). he also shortened the boat slightly to 23 feet, 9 inches, and raised the freeboard of the little flush decker a few inches to give it sitting headroom below -- in the process creating the Moore 24's distinctive 'double sheer' lines.

"What I was really aiming at was to make this boat the first of the big dinghies," says Ron, whose Moore's Reef soon became the spiritual center of this wild new design concept called 'ULDB' -- ultra light displacement boat. "You know, a boat you sail *on* rather than in. Up until then, boats like the Cal 24 were designed as 'small big boats.' We were looking at it the other way around."

And 'Fast is Fun' was born.

The first four boats were offered as 'kits' -- Ron and John supplied the parts and the owners completed the boats themselves. The first production boat to actually wear the Moore 24 name was hull #5, which was built in-house in 1972. After that, the Moores were out of the 505 business and full-time into the

Moore 24 business.

"John and I, with maybe one other guy now and then, built the first 25 or so boats ourselves," says Ron. Then, until about 1979, a team of four put in some 1,200 man-hours to hand-craft each boat, including five days fairing the underbody alone. Where speed was the essence on the water, quality was the byword at the Reef, and a finished 24 was a thing of beauty both inside and out. A Soling sailor examining the keel on a stock 24 once remarked, "Buddy Melges doesn't have that nice a keel on his own Soling!"

"I've always believed in integrity and building the highest-quality product possible," says Ron, who became a sole proprietor of the Reef when brother John left to pursue more landbound pursuits in 1975. "Not only does it reflect well on me, but people can go out and beat the heck out of these boats like you're supposed to, have a lot of fun, put a smile on their faces -- and not have to worry about whether they'll make it home or not." Fortunately, when the ULDB craze took hold and boatbuilders began springing up all around the Reef, that pride in craftsmanship became a hallmark of all Santa Cruz boats.

At \$6,600 apiece, the newfangled Moore 24 -- 'the Ferrari of sailboats' -- sold like hotcakes at a truck stop. And just as quickly, the little giant-killers started changing the face of sailing. For example, though IOR was never considered in the Moore 24 design, *Poltergeist* (hull #7) was campaigned as an IOR half-tonner on Monterey Bay, proving so unbeatable that IOR died out in favor of PHRF. A similar phenomenon occurred in Hawaii, where *Succuba*, a kit boat, annihilated the competition in local MORC racing.

Locally, under a PHRF handicap that's ranged from 150 to 156 over the years -- about the same as your average 30 to 35 footer costing twice as much -- the 24 has amassed an incredible record. To do it justice would take a supplement about half again the size of this issue. But just to give you an idea, here's a quick waltz through the last 15 years. Unless otherwise noted, a Moore 24 was both first to finish (either in class or overall) and first in division in all these races: 1975 Año Nuevo Race; 1976 Hawaii YC Race Week; 1977 Marina Del Rey YC Berger Series; 1978 MORA Long Distance Race (to San Diego); 1979 MORC International Regatta (Florida); 1980 Singlehanded TransPac; 1981 Trans-Tahoe; 1982 Ensenada Race; 1983 Michelob Cup (raced in North Carolina, the 150-boat PHRF fleet was the largest in the Southeast); 1984 (and '85/'86) United Way Regatta in Santa Cruz; 1985 Sir Francis Drake Regatta (British Virgin Islands); 1986 Trans-Folsom Lake Regatta (broke 21-mile course record by 30 minutes); 1987 Singlehanded and Doublehanded Farallones.

As for a single performance that really showed the boat's acumen, both George and Ron hearkened back to the windy '75 Año Nuevo, when *Poltergeist*, one of the smallest boats in the race, trounced the entire fleet boat for boat by almost an hour, finishing in a screaming reach in nearly 50 knots of wind. An instance that will always stand out in our minds is the '87 Doublehanded Farallones Race, when Dave Hodges and Scott Walecka blasted *Adios* under the Golden Gate in near 30 knots of breeze, so far ahead of the rest of the monohull fleet that we thought they'd dropped out and come home early! Luckily, we decided to take a picture anyway; it's the opener to this article.

"This is a boat that really likes waves," says Hodges, a Santa Cruz sailmaker who's got as many hours and wins under his belt on a Moore 24 as anyone going. (Other hot Moore 24 alumni include Will Baylis, Jeff Weiss, Texans Graham Greene and Richard Ceralde -- and of course 'young gun' Morgan Larson, who steered Weiss' *Tonopah Low* to a recent victory in the Nationals held in June in Santa Cruz.) Hodges and Walecka go way back as friends and sailors of Walecka's *Adios*. Together, they've won three of the last four Doublehanded Farallones and innumerable Santa Cruz events. "That's the biggest difference between a Moore and another boat in the size range," says Dave. "And that's why you can't really compare it to a J/24 or Olson 25. They're really built to do different things. For instance, a

Moore is one of the best upwind ultralights around. But in flat water and light to medium air, a J/24 will probably outpoint it.

"Get out in the ocean and it's a different story. In the ocean, there's nothing in the size range that can touch a Moore 24 upwind or downwind. They're also the easiest ULDBs to sail shorthanded. I've gone out just goofing around with my girlfriend and my dog and done 20 knots."

For all its speed, agility, quality of construction and fun quotient both on the race course and daysailing, however, it takes a major stretch of the imagination to classify a Moore 24 as a 'racer/cruiser.' Though the mahogany/Bruynzeel ply interior is beautifully fit and finished, and makes excellent use of the space available, there just ain't that much space. One sailor described getting comfortable below in a Moore as "trying to put on a set of foulies that are one size too small." The first impression of the windowless interior that pops to most people's minds is "dark."

In response to popular demand, Ron Moore came out with the Moore 24 SC (for 'sport cruiser') in 1984. The SC or 'sedan', featured a redesigned deck with a small cabin, which did wonders for the feel of the interior. Besides adding a little welcome (sitting) headroom, light from the windows made the boat about twice as big below as its flush-decked sibling. Though the sedan caused some grumbling in the ranks as to sanctity of the Moore's one-design status (the SC deck weighs slightly more), after it came out, nobody ordered another flush decker. The last 28 boats were all SCs.

The last Moore 24, hull #156 was built in 1988. The molds stand ready for #157, but so far, no takers. What with the economy and sailing both in a state of flux -- and plenty of perfectly good, wave-hungry 24s out there on the used boat market (prices range from about \$7,000 for a beater to \$17,000 for a full-on racer) -- these days Ron Moore spreads his eggs among many baskets. In addition to a new 20-footer under development, current projects include building missile parts, composite houses for use in Antarctica, and exotic car parts.

George Olson has also been away from the wild and crazy boat building business for a number of years. He now designs and builds amusement park sets for Disney and Universal, among others.

But like the big swells that roll through Monterey, the Moore 24 continues on as strong as ever. In fact, there's been something of a resurgence of the Santa Cruz fleet in recent years, which some weekends puts as many as 20 boats on the starting line. Other fleets are active in Southern California, Dallas/Ft. Worth and on Flathead Lake, Montana, of all places. (The Bay Area fleet fragmented in the mid-'80s after political infighting, although a number of individual boats still compete in local Bay and Ocean handicap events.) And, true to the Moore's 'big little boat' roots, many are trailered to and from races in the Northern California Lake Circuit.

Ron Moore feels that sooner or later, the cycle will come full circle and people will once again start ordering Moore 24s. "Probably full-on custom boats for people who can appreciate the performance -- and the fact that these days this is a \$20,000 boat," he says.

Although our Boat of the Month articles are aimed primarily at the design, to summarize this one we have to depart slightly from the regular format. It's difficult enough to do justice to any boat or fleet without mentioning the people who sail them; with the Moore 24, it's impossible. This is one of the fun-lovingest and funniest groups of sailors of any design. And the most helpful both to each and to other sailors in general. As room here's running out fast, please refer to 'Beware the Dreaded MDS' back in *Sightings* for some of the insidious way sailing a Moore 24 preys on the human mind.

Quality, performance, product support, people -- you name it, this fleet's got it. Any way you look at it, the Moore 24 is one of the real class acts of West Coast sailing.

-- latitude/jr