

FOR HUSTLE AND PLAIN FUN

The versatile Snipe is one of racing's best buys, as its top skippers will gladly testify

by **THOMAS ATKINSON**

IF YOU THINK the color picture on the previous pages showing the intense rivalry between two Snipe skippers fighting for the 1958 national championships represents an unusually crowded situation you are wrong. Disaster may seem imminent as the red boat piles in on the white one, but Snipe racing habitually rides the hair-line of the hair-raising. Fred Schenck, the 1957 national champion, recalls a race 19 years ago when his boat was completely swamped by the second marker in a 40-mile wind. "We bailed like crazy with a bilge pump, bucket and sailor's cap. By the time we reached the third mark we were up and sailing again—and we won." Schenck's racing memories also include the time a shroud parted on a competing boat, threatening sudden collapse of the mast, sails and rigging; the crew grabbed the mast and held it up for the rest of the race.

Unlike many class boats which were designed as pure racing machines, however, the Snipe offers more than speed and thrills. It is a miniature yacht as well as a racing boat, and despite the fact that newer and faster classes continually appear, the Snipe

is more in demand than ever. Snipes, in fact, are so much fun they have become the most popular boat in the world. Today there are more than 8,000 of the little 15½-footers in commission, sailing out of 250 active racing fleets from Trieste to Tokyo and even in such Iron Curtain countries as Poland, and last year over 400 more were added to the class.

The Snipe was designed in 1931, in the early Depression years, by Magazine Editor and Naval Architect William Crosby. He set out to build a family sailing boat that would be low-priced enough to stay within the restricted family budgets of the times and furthermore would be properly balanced in sail plan for any wind condition or body of water from mill ponds to oceans; small enough to hoist on a trailer, thereby greatly extending the sailing range of the boat; and sturdy enough to take any beating a family might give it. And Crosby succeeded on all counts. The Snipe has a moderate sail area (up to 115 square feet), making it an easy boat to handle. It has a high boom which helps prevent boom-cracked skulls. With a minimum racing weight of 425 pounds it is easy to trailer from

race to race. As for cost, the first Snipe built from Crosby's plans was constructed by a 14-year-old boy, Jimmy Brown, in Pass Christian, Miss. It cost him \$67. Even on today's inflated market it would cost him only \$185, and he could get a ready-built Snipe for \$675 to \$1,000. For \$160 more he could get dacron sails (main and jib). A Snipe fully equipped for a national championship (including trailer, two sets of dacron sails, etc.) would set him back less than \$1,500.

The rapid growth of the Snipes established that Americans were looking for just such a safe, economical boat. Within a year after Crosby finished his design there were enough Snipe skippers to form the Snipe Class International Racing Association. By allowing only moderate changes in the design since, SCIRA has seen to it that a well-maintained old Snipe today will still have an even chance against a brand-new competitor. As if to prove the amateur can match the professional builder, John Wolcott, last year's national champion, built his winning Snipe right in Ithaca, N.Y. while attending classes at Cornell. No kit man, Wolcott started

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TED WELLS, THREE TIMES NATIONAL CHAMPION, IS THE DEAN OF SNIPES SAILORS

from scratch, drawing full-sized plans from those in the two-page Snipe rule book.

"In the evenings I would kick the guys out of my room and spread the plans out over the floor," recalls Wolcott. "When I was finally ready to build, I rented a loft downtown." Since the Snipe is one of the few major classes where a home-built boat stands a chance of winning a top championship, Wolcott's victory puts him in an exclusive group among racing skippers.

Snipe enthusiasts like nothing more than explaining why they believe their little yachts are the most fantastic craft afloat. The man most entitled to speak on Snipes is Ted Wells, 52-year-old dean of Snipe skippers. Wells, winner of more championships than any other Snipe sailor, is the author of one of racing's most important books, *Scientific Sailboat Racing*. He got his start in Snipes quite by accident. One Sunday afternoon 20 years ago, he and his wife drove from Wichita, Kans. out to Santa Fe Lake to watch the boats for a while. He saw the Snipes perform, and was intrigued with them.

"As we were leaving," Wells recalls, "we stopped at a pop stand and I asked if anybody had one of them for sale around the lake. Somebody did, and I bought it for \$100." From then on, Wells was a victim of Snipe mania. Twice since, during the Kansas droughts of 1953 and 1956, the lake has evaporated out from under him but, undismayed, he took to neighboring lakes to win trophies.

"You get so much interfleet competition in the Snipe class," says Wells, "that it gives us a much higher percentage of very good skippers than any other class can claim. The competition is so stiff that when I get out ahead in a race I get a very insecure feeling, particularly in light air. I think about hitting one flat spot without wind—if I do, I've had it. One poor tack can cost the lead."

Fred Schenck recalls just such a time when he outfoxed the old master. "It was during a race at Long Beach," says Schenck. "It was rather hazy and the boat I was in rounded the leeward mark behind Wells, who was in the lead. Ted didn't spot the next mark. We saw it, but kept quiet and followed along behind him, letting him think he was heading straight for it. After a while we jibed for

the mark and went into first place."

Carlos Bosch, son of Jose Bosch, who heads international Bacardi rum interests, and an international Snipe champion, is equally decisive—and also partisan. "Competition is why I love the class," he says. "In any average fleet you'll see four or five Stars. But in the Snipe race you'll see 15, 20, 40. It just isn't as thrilling to compete with four when you can face 40."

This year's midwinter Snipe champion, Harris (Terry) Whittemore III, is quick to defend the Snipe on another point. "How often have I heard," he says, "that Snipes are good little boats for junior to grow up in and learn on, but when he grows up daddy will buy him a big boat? This sort of talk is pure rubbish. Doctors, lawyers, dentists, architects, brokers, industrialists, engineers, scientists, executives and even European royalty, as well as carpenters, plumbers, masons—people from all walks of life sail Snipes. I'll sail anything because I like to sail, but to achieve the tops in Snipes is one of the most difficult challenges in sailing."

Whittemore was first introduced to sailing as a lad when his father treated him to a trip to Newport in 1937 to see the America's Cup races. He has since built up one of the most successful Snipe fleets in the world on Lake Quassapaug, Conn., where his family owns 2,000 acres of farmland. The mantelpiece in the Quassapaug fleet's new yacht club glitters with silver, and a good percentage of it is Terry's. So good is the fleet that when John Wolcott graduated from Cornell he took a job in Bridgeport, Conn., near Quassapaug, just to sharpen his talent. A year and a half of racing against such skippers as Whittemore and he had his national championship.

Whittemore himself has never won the nationals, though twice he has placed second—once behind Wolcott, earlier behind Harry Allen, another Quassapaug skipper. But this may well be his year. He has been sailing better than ever. This Sunday, August 2, the 1959 nationals get under way at Lake Fort Gibson, Okla., and for the next five days Whittemore will be challenging 63 other skippers to show him why he can't do it. Ted Wells, along with John Wolcott, will be among them, in what should prove to be the most competitive nationals ever. The winner automatically becomes the U.S. Snipe entry in the Pan American Games in Chicago at

the end of August and in the Snipe World Championship in Rio this October.

Admittedly, it is a long step from the day the eager Snipe owner buys his boat to the day he races in such championships, but it is seldom more than a short step to the day he nerves himself to enter a local regatta. However, it takes practice, endless practice, to make a top racing skipper. "Of major importance in this matter of winning consistently in top regattas," says Whittemore, "is acquiring complete confidence in your boat and sails. This is absolutely essential, and practice is the only answer. If you have complete confidence you will be able to attain concentration of all your senses for the duration of any race."

Fred Schenck, of Newport Beach, Calif., winner of the 1957 nationals, is a good example of what Whittemore means. Schenck was so determined to gain confidence that he practiced sailing with a sail bag over his head. Thus, with a companion watching out for him, he acquired the proper feel of the boat at each point of sailing. "With the bag over your head," Schenck points out, "you can learn to feel mistakes: luffing, pinching or sailing too low. In luffing, the boat is flat on the water. In pinching, the boat is heeled over a little. Sailed correctly the boat is heeled to the best angle. If you want to foot, your boat heels more yet, but if you fall off too much your boat flattens out again. You learn this by the seat of your pants, so to speak."

To help the new Snipe owner to get the best out of his boat—and the practicing skipper to improve his performance—SPORTS ILLUSTRATED has sought out the considered advice of the best Snipe sailors in the country on the finer points of tuning and handling their lively little craft. Here is what they have to say—an expert's guide to Snipe sailing:

TUNING

"Beginners in the art of tuning," says Whittemore, "often make the mistake of getting bogged down in relatively minor preparations, such as constantly sanding the bottom of the boat. Actually, such things have less to do with winning a race than things like carrying the proper helm."

Unlike many class boats, a Snipe, Whittemore goes on, should carry neutral helm, except when going to windward, when it should carry slight

weather helm. A rule of thumb for achieving neutral helm on Snipes is to place the mast as far forward as the restrictions allow and the centerboard as far aft.

Once the skipper has achieved neutral helm, Whittemore continues, he should allow the boat to heel ever so slightly when going to windward. This creates limited, but desirable, weather helm. With this slight weather helm the boat will work herself up to windward, so the skipper does not have to force the boat up.

Most skippers sail their Snipes with loose stays. When going to windward the luff wire of the jib should take most of the pressure. This prevents the luff of the jib from sagging off when close-hauled. As for the leeward stay, it will then be loose when sailing to weather to allow the crew

to trim the jib in close. Once the Snipe is tuned she is set for racing in both light and heavy winds.

PRACTICE

Fred Schenck has some good advice to sharpen and make more interesting the many practice sessions needed to attain proficiency: get yourself a "sparring partner." Practicing against another boat not only provides the very essence of sailboat racing, man-to-man competition, but is a great help to the beginner in getting his tactics down pat. When the skipper goes into his first real race it is advisable, says Schenck, to follow the leader. "Everywhere he goes, you go. Eventually you will come to a situation where you can lead." And there are certain basic tactics he should keep in mind.

AT THE START

In most races the start is to windward, but due to the vagaries of the wind, few starts, if any, are directly into the wind. One end of the line, therefore, will be more favorable than the other. A good way to determine the favorable end prior to the start is to sail down behind the line on a starboard tack, then head up into the wind across the line. If a skipper can cross the line at an angle of more than 45°, the windward end of the line is the more favorable, otherwise the leeward end is best.

On a windward start there is usually only one perfect way to go over the line: close-hauled on a starboard tack and closest to the favored end at the gun. Because of the general congestion at the favored end, however, the skipper will sometimes be better off to pick another spot. Unless he has to win in a particular race, Whittemore acknowledges, he will try for a spot on the line where there is an opening. "Don't try to start in the group," Schenck agrees. "This is where accidents easily occur."

Whittemore commits himself to one end of the line or the other about a minute and a half before the starting gun. He then sails down the starting line on a port tack, looking for an opening where there are no other boats. If he finds it he comes about and sails down the line with the opening. This puts him on the desired starboard tack in relatively undisturbed air.

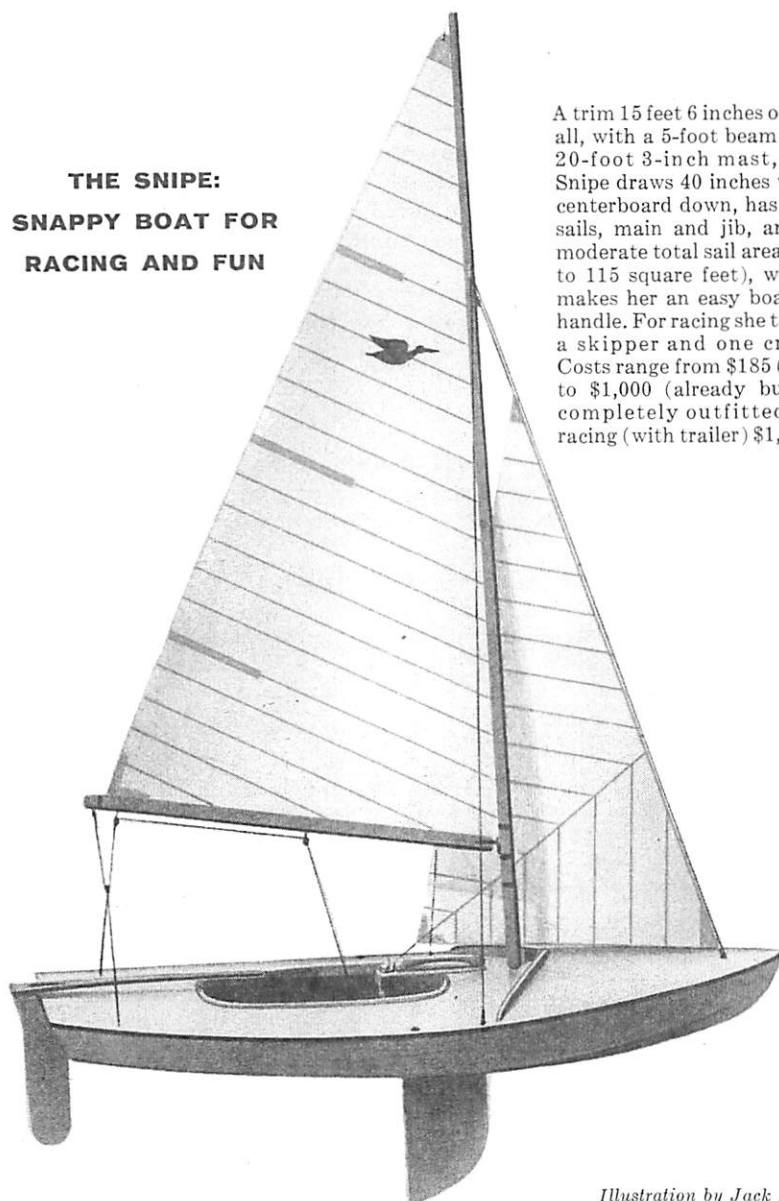
"Before the gun you must keep looking for that opening," Whittemore stresses. "If you get it, there will be only one or two other boats around to bother you. But don't go over the line early. In this year's mid-winters at Clearwater, Fla. I was in first place going into the last race. All I had to do was be within two boats of Commodore Allen Levinson when he finished and I had the series. I miscalculated the start and was over just before the gun. I had to go back and start at the tail of the fleet. Luckily, I caught him at the last windward mark and beat him."

WINDWARD SAILING

"There is a razor's edge," says Whittemore, "just short of luffing which the skipper should strive to attain. Below this razor's edge the skipper may go faster but he will be moving off the wind and off the most direct line to the next mark."

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THE SNIPE: SNAPPY BOAT FOR RACING AND FUN



A trim 15 feet 6 inches overall, with a 5-foot beam and 20-foot 3-inch mast, the Snipe draws 40 inches with centerboard down, has two sails, main and jib, and a moderate total sail area (up to 115 square feet), which makes her an easy boat to handle. For racing she takes a skipper and one crew. Costs range from \$185 (kit) to \$1,000 (already built); completely outfitted for racing (with trailer) \$1,500.

Illustration by Jack Kunz

When sailing to windward, he emphasizes, the beginner should trim close both the jib and the main. If the wind is strong, let off the main a little to hold the boat fairly level. Here the jib will backwind the main somewhat but the beginner should ignore this. If the wind is moderate or light, pull in the sails, and then let off both jib and main up to an inch in order to gain a more effective air foil.

ROUNDING THE MARKS

When approaching the windward mark it is almost imperative to do so on the starboard tack with the right of way. A skipper on a port tack cannot round it until there is an opening to get through the starboard tack boats, unless it is a starboard hand marker and the skipper purposely overstands the mark (see *Bob Mosbacher on rounding windward marks, SI, May 18*). The beginner should not overstand the mark because if he blows this tricky maneuver the extra distance will cost him precious seconds.

"As an example of how precious seconds can be at the mark," says Whittemore, "in the district championship at Quassapaugh two weeks ago all 19 boats rounded the first mark within 49 seconds of each other."

Schenck has a word of advice on heavy weather: "Don't try to play it as close as you might in light air. When you come to the mark have the sheets prepared to let the sails out as you round the mark. You've got to be ready to act much quicker than

otherwise. In light air you can come up with jib cleated but in heavy air you should prepare to let the sails out sooner."

CREW

There is only one crew member on a Snipe, and a great deal depends on him. Here is what the top Snipe skippers look for in a crew:

Carlos Bosch: "The most essential quality in crewing is being able to take orders and following them to the letter. I don't care if my crew is my father, brother, or who—if he crews for me he must take my orders even if he is positive I'm wrong. After the race my crew can tell me I'm a stupid jackass for doing what I did—that's part of the fun of the sport."

Terry Whittemore: "They have to have an urge to win equal to my own. They have to have complete confidence in my tiller handling. If I have as crew a skipper experienced in his own right, he will know the importance of acting instantly when the seconds count, while at the same time automatically keeping the boat in good balance. At the same time he must be able to trim the jib within a fraction of an inch to whatever final adjustments the man on the tiller determines. He must handle a multitude of jobs without having to be told the sequence verbally. Moreover, he must serve as another pair of eyes, advising me on arising situations and generally keeping me posted in a language familiar to us both. This allows me to concentrate on maintaining maximum hull speed."

Fred Schenck: "He should know tactics, and he should be able to keep the skipper informed of what's going on, keep him on his toes, work with him on a minute-to-minute basis. I would say the ideal weight for a crew is about 150 to 160 pounds, and 5 feet 10 or 11 is about the maximum height to work comfortably."

Ted Wells: "I want a crew to be interested in sailing, not in talking. A race is no time for a chat."

HULLS

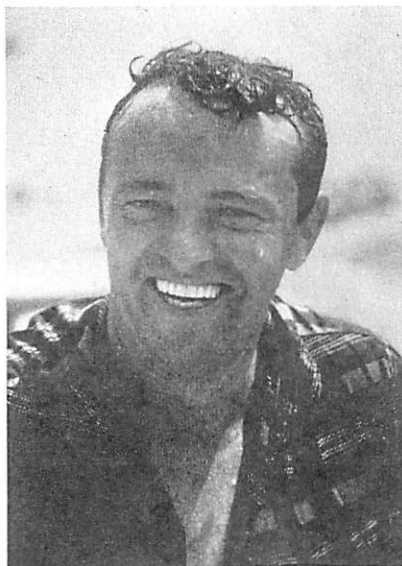
Snipes can be built of either wood or fiber glass, but most boats that win important regattas are wood. This is purely a matter of preference: fiber glass is a relatively new material and since most skippers who win the big regattas have sailed the same hull for a good many years, it is *ipso facto* likely to be a wooden hull. They not only have confidence in their wood boats but win with them and so are reluctant to change. Nevertheless, several of the top skippers have decided to try fiber glass, including Ted Wells and Fred Schenck.

"They have said that a fiber-glass hull cannot win the nationals," says Schenck. "I disagree." Schenck plans to use fiber glass in the nationals this year.

For the man who cannot give all the time he would like to his craft and who wants to spend his time sailing, not working on his boat, fiber glass is the answer. It saves countless hours of maintenance during a season. Fiber glass is in effect seamless, so there is no calking; color is impreg-



JOHN WOLCOTT built his own Snipe while a student at Cornell, then went on to beat the top skippers in the 1958 nationals.



FRED SCHENCK, winner of the 1957 nationals, recently switched from a wood to a fiber-glass hull for this year's title.



TERRY WHITTEMORE, first in the mid-winters but never a national winner, is in top form for the coming championship.

nated into the material so that yearly jobs of sanding and painting are cut to a minimum. The cost is about the same, but the money saved in upkeep makes fiber glass the better buy.

SAILS

Most of the top sailors have at least two or three sets of sails to handle the different wind conditions. Usually, these sails are of the maximum dimensions allowed under the rules. They have one set cut full for winds up to 12 mph, one cut less full for winds from 12 to 18 or 20 mph and a flat set for higher winds. An exception is Carlos Bosch, who uses only one set, and that the biggest possible within the class limitations.

Most skippers consider the weight of the boat so important that they seldom carry an extra suit of sails on the boat during a race. "The only time I carry an extra set on the boat," says Whittemore, "is when there are two races and no chance to return to the dock between them."

EXTRA GEAR

Extra gear that is practically must equipment for the Snipe includes jam cleats; boom-vang to hold down the boom when reaching and running in strong winds; hiking straps, under which the skipper and crew hook their feet when hiking; whisker pole to hold out the clew of the jib on downwind legs (a spare is advisable); tiller extension, to allow steering the boat while hiking; and, as many a lake skipper has found out too late, deweeders, a stiff wire with a curved end for removing weeds from the rudder.

A must on any boat is some sort of bailing device. The most recent, and what may prove to be the best, quick bailing device is a small electric pump. The total weight is only five pounds.

"I don't like to bail by hand. It breaks up the rhythm of the boat," says Whittemore. "With the electric pump you're set for all weather."

The primary purpose of extra equipment, according to Wells, is to make a race more comfortable for the skipper and crew. "I don't mean comfort equivalent to an easy chair in the living room," he explains. "I mean equipment that will cut down the physical exertion of the crew to a minimum and put less of a premium on athletic ability."

More and more skippers are finding a compass a handy item to have

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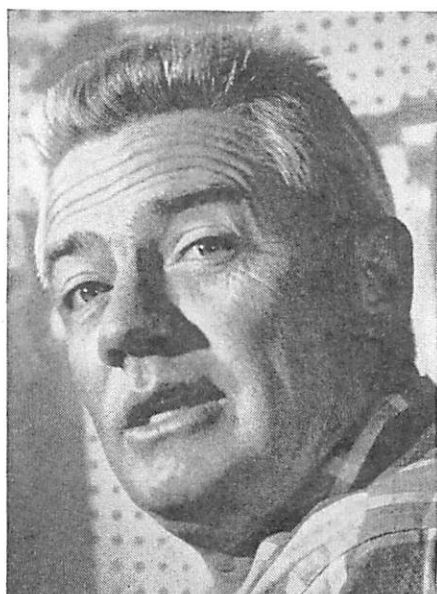
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SNIPES *continued*

aboard. "In the races at Clearwater, Fla. two years ago you would have been lost without a compass," Wells claims. "There was a fog, and visibility was only 100 feet. I came up on one buoy that even the committee boat couldn't find."

When sailing away from land the compass can also be used to determine wind shifts. If the skipper or crew, when sailing close-hauled on Whittemore's razor's edge, observes the compass shift, it means the wind is shifting. This in turn tells whether to tack



CARLOS BOSCH, son of Bacardi rum president, is the rebel among Snipe skippers.

or not. If the boat is pointing higher, that is fine, but if it falls off about 10° it is usually advisable to tack. Also, when rounding a mark, a glance at the compass will tell if the wind has shifted since the last time around.

"I don't take time out to read the compass myself," says Whittemore, "but I do call for a reading from the crew. My compass sits in a special holder at the top and end of the centerboard trunk so that it can be read even when hiking."

Once again Bosch is the rebel, ready to prove that no matter how much extra equipment is installed on a Snipe it is still the skipper and his crew that win the race. "I don't worry about anything but having a good sail," he says, "and doing the little adjusting to my craft designed to make me more comfortable in a race. Consequently, I can think straight and concentrate longer while fighting topnotch skippers for the lead." Which is precisely what most Snipe owners, sooner or later, will find themselves doing. **END**