

GOOD OLD BOAT

The sailing magazine for the rest of us!



MARCH/APRIL 2008
ISSUE 59
www.goodoldboat.com



\$8⁰⁰ (Canada \$8⁰⁰CDN)



Jeff Williams at the helm of *Gryphon*, his 1986 J/40.

YACHTSHOTS BY

The slippery J/40

A racing wolf in cruising sheep's clothing

by Phillip Reid

SERIOUS BUSINESS WOULD BE A GOOD NAME FOR THIS BOAT, I thought. *Gryphon*, her actual name, is proclaimed on her transom in bold, blood-red letters. OK, a mythical giant raptor also seems a suitable namesake. Lean, sleek, gray and white, with shiny stainless-steel accents — this is not a boat for the faint-of-heart.

Her owners, Jeff and Raine Williams, are easy-going, unassuming folks who love to sail and sail fast. When we met, Raine (pronounced like rain) had just started managing our marina and Jeff was working on the prototype of an independent unmanned submersible for the nearby university. They were living aboard *Gryphon*, while trying to adjust to life ashore again after a six-year circumnavigation. The adjustment was temporary; at about the same time we became good friends, they were able to fix their timetable for departure for the British Virgin Islands, which they are now using as a base for a while before taking off again.

While cruising, Raine and Jeff asked a lot of *Gryphon*, and she delivered more than once in rather boisterous conditions.

Gryphon is a 1986 J/40 (hull #6), designed by Rod Johnstone and built by Tillotson-Pearson in Rhode Island. A breakthrough for Rod and J/Boats, the 40 cracked the

cruising market for a company that was already enjoying every success on the racecourse. TPI built 86 of these boats between 1985 and the early 1990s. Though it was intended for performance-minded cruisers, in its first year of production the 40 won its class in the Chicago-Mackinac Race and *Sailing World* named it U.S. Boat of the Year in 1986.

Ignored them all

Full or modified full keels, skeg-hung rudders, heavy displacement, and split rigs all figured in the prevailing conception of the serious cruising boat when Rod Johnstone drew the J/40, ignoring them all. *Gryphon* and her sisters sport fin keels, spade rudders, tall sloop rigs with marked mast bend, hydraulic backstay adjusters, hydraulic vang, and, for a cruising boat of the time, light displacement. (As an interesting side note: Robert Perry, noted designer of many traditional cruisers, said in a review in *Sailing* magazine, “The J/40 was my favorite boat of 1985.” Rod also ignored principal IOR characteristics that, he claimed, made a boat difficult to sail shorthanded.

The bow, stern, draft, and sailplan all depart from IOR conventions. Rod wanted the boat to sail well with mainsail

Feature boat



You're likely to find the *Gryphon's* mascot animal just about anywhere from the V-berth to the anchor chain locker to the nav station or galley, this page. He has also been into mischief in the main saloon on the facing page by removing the engine cover and serving up a bottle of wine on the folding table. Notice the unique placement of the engine and excellent access to it. What a concept!

alone, so he gave it a big main with the mainsheet and mid-cockpit traveler just in front of the wheel. Like Ted Hood at the same time, Rod objected to large genoas for larger cruising boats and drew the boat to sail fast with a jib smaller than most fast boats were flying at the time. Jeff and Raine report that he succeeded. *Gryphon* points decently and keeps up with other boats under main alone. With a main and working jib (Dacron, not laminate) as her standard sail plan (she only flies a main and genny on long downwind legs or when beating in less than 10 knots), Jeff and Raine report out-sailing larger boats. Under main and jib — no chutes — she ran the Indian Ocean from Chagos to Madagascar a full day faster than boats that left at the same time. Jeff reports that he and Raine have enjoyed blowing away big boats, including some cats, in the Virgins.

Moderate displacement

In spite of all that, it's just as easy to distinguish the J/40 from today's performance-oriented boats as it was to set her apart from the IOR boats and traditional heavy cruisers of her own day. You won't see the wide, squarish stern, dagger with bulb keel, or extreme beam of many of today's designs. And, while a light cruiser in her day, her displacement would be considered moderate now. In fact, by today's standards, she is a moderately conservative design. In the opinion of a great many ocean sailors, of course, that's a good thing. It certainly contributes to comfort at sea. On her world cruise, *Gryphon* sailed in company for a while with a Slocum 42, a heavy double-ender.

"Raine and I would get grumpy around 22 knots of wind speed and the Slocum folks would get grumpy around 24 knots," Jeff says. That's not a big difference in comfort. And though she was built to go fast, she was also built tough.



Just after dusk on the Pacific coast of Panama, *Gryphon* collided with a large log floating just under the surface. She was making 6 knots at the time. Both Raine and Jeff knew the log hit the rudder hard. When they got a chance to make repairs, Jeff said she needed only a bit of glass repair to the 1 square inch where the impact occurred and to have the packing gland tightened up.

“They are still using the upper bearing, even after sailing around the world.”

The rudder post on the J/40 is a stainless-steel tube about 4 inches in diameter. It turns on a lower bearing mounted into a fiberglass receiver in the exterior hull. Jeff reports that the Harken rudder bearings last most owners 10 to 15 years. They are still using the upper bearing, even after sailing around the world, but the lower one, which sits in water most of the time, has been replaced.

Easily visible

The chainplates are $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch stainless steel, 4 inches wide. They're conspicuously mounted to the main bulkhead, which is a very good thing in Jeff's opinion: "Once the sealant ages and leaking begins, it's obvious and gets immediate attention. Our chainplates exhibited crevice corrosion at the glorious age of 20 years. We were able to see it and do something about it because of the convenient installation." Because they are exposed, Jeff polished the chainplates to a mirror finish.

Raine and Jeff live in a sensibly laid out, well-appointed interior. Curved companionway steps lead to the U-shaped galley to port or to the starboard aft cabin with a queen-sized quarter berth (the inboard part of which was converted to house battery stowage). Forward of that is the modified nav station with swing-out seat and electronics console. The main salon is luxurious for four and perfectly comfortable for six. There's an L-shaped settee to port and a straight



Feature boat



YACHTSHOTS/BVI

This J/40 is no slouch, and that's just the way owners Jeff and Raine Williams like it. *Gryphon* goes to weather in the Virgin Islands with Raine on the high side.

puter monitor and other displays. On a light-displacement boat intended primarily for short-term cruising, stowage was an issue, so they added cabinets in the main saloon and, a year later in New Zealand, in the aft cabin.

A belowdecks autopilot replaced an undersized cockpit model. For navigation and communication, Jeff and Raine added integrated instruments and an SSB radio. For comfort, they added refrigeration, a watermaker, and vacuum insulation for the icebox. To meet the new power needs, they upgraded to new AGM batteries, a high-output alternator, a 1-kilowatt inverter, solar panels mounted on deck, a wind generator, and a separate engine-starting battery. They mounted a radome and antenna on a tubular stainless-steel stern arch. With passage-making in mind, they divided the

one to starboard. A large teak folding table fills the space between these settees for dining.

A fiddled side table next to the port settee hides the engine, and there's full maintenance access underneath. The forward cabin includes a V-berth with stowage under, lockers, and another head with shower to port. Jeff says the second head is overkill for two but was nice when cruising with another couple. The molded-in head compartments are white with varnished teak trim. The teak trim throughout the boat is above average.

Curved hand-laid-up laminated doorways and table corners are finished with laminates up to 17 layers thick. Raine likes to varnish (so long as it's interior work), so *Gryphon's* interior, including her teak-and-holly sole, gleams. Art pieces from their world travels hang from the bulkheads. Some J/40s, by the way, were offered with a "Herreshoff interior": white bulkheads, ceilings, cabinetry, and overheads with teak trim.

Teaching diving

Raine and Jeff left corporate jobs and cold weather in the early 1990s to teach scuba diving in the BVI. They didn't know how to sail. The manager of crewed yachts for The Moorings approached them about working as charter crew. They said they didn't know how to sail. The manager told them they could learn on the job. Indeed they did. Both now hold master's licenses. They bought a Whitby 42 to live aboard — a boat that couldn't be more different from *Gryphon*. While they enjoyed the commodious living aboard the Whitby, after gaining some experience cruising the eastern Caribbean between charter crew assignments, they realized she wasn't the boat for them. They fell in love with a J/44 but couldn't afford one and started looking for a 40 instead. They found *Gryphon* in their price range in 1997. She was set up as a weekend cruiser, so fitting her out for their hoped-for circumnavigation would be a serious project.

While working at "real jobs" in Massachusetts, these two sailors got busy on *Gryphon*. With a double income, they could afford to hire out much of the work. They did an epoxy bottom job and replaced the stanchions, bases, lifelines, and standing rigging. They kept the running rigging for part of their circumnavigation, switching it out in New Zealand. They added a swing-out seat for the stand-up chart table and built a fold-down false front panel that hides the electrical panels and provides mounting space for a flat-screen com-

“Raine and Jeff left corporate jobs and cold weather in the early 1990s to teach scuba diving in the BVI.”

anchor locker with a glass-reinforced panel for improved collision protection, added an inner forestay for a storm sail, a life raft, new hatches and portlights, and storm covers for the portlights. After making it down the U.S. East Coast and into the Caribbean, *Gryphon's* Volvo 2003T began giving them trouble. Before heading for the Panama Canal, they rebuilt it with some friendly expert help from a fellow cruiser.

Some experiences

I asked Raine and Jeff to relate some highlights of their experience with *Gryphon* (much of which has been documented in the pages of *Ocean Navigator* and *Cruising World*, on their website at <<http://www.j40.org>>, and on the official J/Boats website <<http://www.jboats.com>>. They said:

“Sailing under the Newport (Rhode Island) Bridge and realizing we wouldn't be coming back... reaching Bermuda for the first time on our own... having the Miraflores lock gates of the Panama Canal open and Pacific water under *Gryphon's* keel for the first time (the dawning realization that the Caribbean was 30,000 miles ahead, not 50 miles behind)... raising the Marquesas after 3,000-plus miles... the America's Cup 2000 in Auckland... island-hopping in Tonga, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands... 10 days on a deserted island with friends... crossing the (expletive deleted) Indian Ocean, with Jimmy Buffett blasting from the stereo ('I have been a-round the world... well, almost)... Madagascar... 3 weeks of downwind bliss across the Atlantic... seeing Martinique... anchoring in Antigua once again.

What to watch out for

Jeff says he can't fault the design or construction of the boat at all. He does caution that when it comes to original fittings and equipment, prospective buyers should not assume that

Continued on Page 71

J/40 and her rivals

Comparisons with the competition

by Ted Brewer

FOR THIS COMPARISON I'VE SELECTED FOUR EXAMPLES OF FAST light- and ultra-light-displacement yachts from some of North America's top designers. They are quite different but each would be a delight under sail. A sail aboard any of them in a good breeze would be quite an eye-opener to those who believe heavy displacement is the only way to go to sea.

I recall being with a crew "road testing" one of Rod Johnstone's J/44s. The light touch of the helm, the speed made good to windward, and the feel of the narrow hull and long waterline cutting through the light chop was a joy. The quality of the light and bright interior, finished in L. Francis Herreshoff-style, with beautiful varnished teak trim setting off broad expanses of gleaming white paint, was also a refreshing and handsome change from the all-too-common dark teak interior.

The oldest yacht in this group, the C&C, is moderate when compared with the very light J/40 and the ultra-light Santa Cruz 40. As she was designed years before either one, that could be expected. Nevertheless, she was, in her day, a rather advanced design. The surprise was the Peterson-designed Islander 40. She seems moderate for a competitive 1985 design although she is still undoubtedly an excellent performer.

The things I like about the C&C and the Peterson are their ample draft and high-aspect-ratio fins. Both have good displacement and a high ballast ratio, so their deep fins will provide great stability and make them superb weatherly boats when beating to windward in a stiff breeze. The heavy ballast and deep draft will also make them more forgiving when slightly overloaded for a long voyage, although the draft will limit the areas they can safely explore.

More stability

The J/40 offered a choice of drafts and, while her low-aspect-ratio fin is fine for harbor hopping and coastal cruising, the 6-foot 6-inch option would lower her center of gravity and add to her ultimate stability and her windward ability. The longer fin would be a good choice for blue water, whether the intent is racing or cruising.

Bill Lee has long been a proponent of ultra-light yachts, and his Santa Cruz 40 is no exception. I expect that she is the one yacht in the group that can reach planing speeds, given the proper conditions. Regardless, she has proven to be fast in any weather. Due to her ultra-light displacement, she will also be the corkiest of the group in a seaway and could be very uncomfortable in light weather if there were a big left-over slop and not much wind.

While a terrific downwind sleigh ride and a fun boat for coastal cruising, the Santa Cruz 40 would not be my choice for bluewater voyages. The major problem is that an ultra-light boat is never at her best when overloaded. Bill Lee's creation is at her best when sailing minimally laden and with a lean, sharp crew on a 10-day race to Hawaii.

A J/40 with a 5-foot draft would be a fine choice for coastal



J/40



C&C 40




Santa Cruz 40



Islander P-40

cruising, particularly if the cruising were in an area noted for shoal water — the Chesapeake, the Bahamas, and areas of Florida and the Gulf. She will prove comfortable, able, and quite capable of showing her heels to most boats her size. She will also cross oceans, of course, and is far more seaworthy than many boats that have done it before her.

With the deeper draft option, the J/40 is capable of extensive bluewater voyaging if you can resist taking along all the modern and electrical comforts. The J/40 is a yacht, not a floating house. As long as they recognize that fact, true sailors will find her to be an absolute thoroughbred in every way. 

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	J/40	C&C 40	Santa Cruz 40	Islander P-40
LOA	40' 3"	39' 7"	40' 0"	39' 7"
LWL	34' 0"	31' 6"	36' 0"	30' 10"
Beam	12' 2"	12' 8"	12' 0"	11' 10"
Draft	5' 0" or 6' 6"	7' 0"	7' 0"	7' 2"
Displ.	16,700 lb	17,100 lb	10,500 lb	17,000 lb
Ballast	6,200 lb	7,900 lb	5,000 lb	7,700 lb
LOA/LWL	1.184	1.257	1.110	1.257
Beam/LWL	0.358	0.402	0.333	0.384
Displ./LWL	190	244	100.5	259
Bal./Displ.	0.370	0.462	0.476	0.453
Sail area	786 sq ft	743 sq ft	760 sq ft	734 sq ft
SA/Displ.	19.4	17.9	25.4	17.8
Capsiz. no.	1.90	1.97	2.20	1.84
Comfort ratio	25.6	26.3	15.8	29.0
Year designed	1985	1972	1982	1985
Designer	Rod Johnstone	C&C	Bill Lee	Doug Peterson