

HOME WATERS

NEW ENGLAND



Last Quarter 4/6



New Moon 4/14



First Quarter 4/21



Full Moon 4/28

The return of a timeless Herreshoff

Nathanael G. Herreshoff's boat is back in production as Alerion 26, marketed by Herreshoff Designs of Bristol, R.I., and built by Brion Rieff Boatbuilder in Brooklin, Maine.



By Dieter Loibner

In this world of specialization and compartmentalized marketing we have learned to live with “classics” and “modern classics.”

One represents the original spirit in a faithful manner by leaving the design largely unchanged, which appeals to real fans of “retro.” The other might be classic by the looks but uses modern technology to boost performance, which tickles a slightly different demographic.

Both approaches have validity, which is reflected by the burgeoning number of daysailers that have flooded the market in the last 15 years as participation in sailing declined and finding crew became more difficult. Such boats typically are designed for single-handed operation, have small and simple accommodations, but large cockpits for a handful of passengers.

While this concept seems to be tailored to the 21st-century, it follows the lead of Nathanael G. Herreshoff, one of America's foremost yacht designers, who started this trend more than 100 years ago.

Capt. Nat, as he was known, liked to go sailing after a

hard day's work, but it had to happen in a snap. Therefore, he kept his personal daysailer at the ready: a 26-footer with a waterline of 21 feet, 9 inches, a centerboard and a snug knockabout rig. He called it Alerion for a mythical bird-like creature. The boat was tucked into the lee of the L-shaped pier at the Herreshoff Manufacturing Company in Bristol (R.I.) Harbor. The sails were hanked on, so he was under way in five minutes or less. He configured the boat so he could handle all relevant tasks by himself without leaving the cockpit. When he returned to the dock, he tied up, doused and lashed the canvas and stepped off the boat, to hell with covers.

RETRO, NOT RELIC

Although Capt. Nat's Alerion design underwent several modifications during his lifetime and later, it always remained close to the original spirit. Now, more than 70 years after Capt. Nat has left the building, his boat is back in production as Alerion 26. It is marketed by Herreshoff Designs of Bristol and built by Brion Rieff Boatbuilder (www.brionrieffboatbuilder.com) in Brooklin, Maine, in cold-molded cedar that's sheathed in 10-ounce fiberglass cloth.

Make docking fun

4 You don't want just anybody cutting a hole through your hull. That's why Billy Joel — and plenty of other boaters along the East Coast — called Bill Jennings when they wanted a bow thruster.

'Overboard!'

8 Michael Tougias shares part of his latest book, including lessons learned by the surviving crewmembers of a 45-foot ketch struck by a rogue wave.



On Sailing

14 Rolex Yachtsman of the Year Bora Gulari is named for a sudden, strong wind. Perhaps that explains why some were surprised the award went to a Moth sailor.

New Gear

16 Store your dink without worrying about dings; Dive N Dog davits can handle some serious weight; and the spray-free way to keep away pests.

DEPARTMENTS

- 3** Calendar
- 12** Mishaps & Rescue
- 13** Fishing
- 15** Sailing
- 16** Book Notes

HOMEWATERS

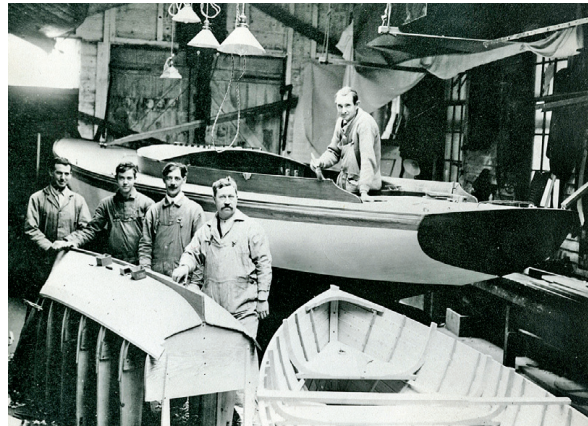
Backbone, framing and floors are made from Douglas fir. The boat has a minimal interior with sitting headroom, V-berth, small galley and head. The weekender version adds a built-in cooler, sink, freshwater tank and stove. The sloop-rigged boat has a fixed keel, displaces 4,800 pounds and carries 315 square feet of upwind sail area on aluminum spars. Available options include a 10-hp Nanni 2-cylinder inboard or a Mastervolt-Bellman E-propulsion electric drive.

"As people have been scaling down, the Alerion seems to fit the bill for fans of classic styling," says Adam Langerman, who partners in Herreshoff Designs (www.herreshoffdesigns.com) with Halsey Herreshoff, Capt. Nat's grandson and president of the Herreshoff Marine Museum/America's Cup Hall of Fame. "These boats were built since 1977, with the main marketing instrument being word-of-mouth propaganda," Langerman says.

The boat has been available on and off through the years, outsourced to builders like Carroll Marine in Bristol or Proper Yachts in Stratford, Conn., and several boats were finished by Herreshoff, who owns the rights and the molds. Now, with Brion Rieff Boatbuilder, the model is back in production. Rumery's Boatyard (www.rumerys.com), in Biddeford, Maine, offers its own centerboard-version of the Alerion with different dimensions and specifications.

EVOLUTION OF DESIGN

The Herreshoff Alerion 26 evolved from some logical sources and one serendipitous incident. First, it possesses the genes of Capt. Nat's personal daysailer, the Alerion III, which was built in 1912 (he had two others before). "Right around that time my grandfather started spending winters in Bermuda, so he designed a boat that he could sail there," says Halsey Herreshoff. "My father, Sidney, had worked on Alerion III, so he asked Capt. Nat how he liked it.



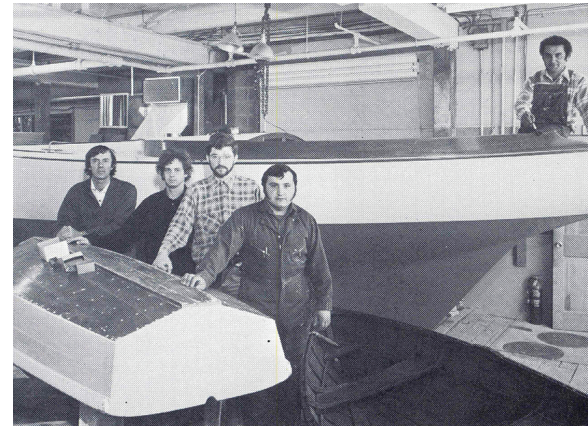
Working on Alerion III at Herreshoff Manufacturing Company in 1912 are, from left, Ernest Adler, Charlie Sylvester, Henry Vincent, Jim Clarkson and Willard Kenny; Halsey Herreshoff (left) and the shop crew strike a similar pose while building Alerion 26 in his shop in the 1980s.

My grandfather expressed satisfaction with the sailing abilities, but found it a touch too tender and wet in choppy conditions."

So Capt. Nat added some ballast to Alerion and modified the half-model to increase beam, forward volume and overall length by about 1 foot. This boat was built in 1914 (No. 732S) for Elias Cornelius Benedict, a Wall Street investor who named it Sadie. It was one of Herreshoff's most beloved designs, with a long and successful career under various owners.

At the end of her sailing career, Sadie was donated to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, but eventually found its way back to the Herreshoff Museum where she was restored to mint condition and is taken out to sail again.

Also in 1914, Capt. Nat scaled up the modified Alerion by a third, which became the Newport 29 cruising class. That boat was 36 feet overall with 29 feet of waterline. It had a fixed keel while the original Alerion and Sadie had centerboards and external ballast. The yard initially built three (Dolphin, Mischief and Comet) in 1914 and a fourth



one, Paddy (now known as Teaser), in 1926. Comet was lost in the Hurricane of 1938, but the three survivors still are cruising and participate in classic regattas. An updated version of the Newport 29 also is on offer by Herreshoff Designs and Brion Rieff Boatbuilders.

The last piece of the development puzzle for the Alerion 26 came in the person of Isaac B. Merriman Jr., a Herreshoff supporter and the last owner of Capt. Nat's Alerion III, which he donated to the Mystic (Conn.) Seaport.

"It was around 1977 when he called to say that he missed Alerion and asked if we could build him a slightly smaller version of that boat in fiberglass," Halsey says. "It was one of my father's last projects and we used Sadie's lines, but adjusted the size down." (Halsey pointed out it was "11/12ths of 3/4 of the Newport 29.") All these iterations gave the modern-day Alerion 26 its size and mien, a touch shorter than Capt. Nat's original, but with a fixed keel.

FROM ONE-OFF TO BELOVED CLASSIC

But Merriman's influence also was felt way past the commissioning of this retro-style daysailer: While Merriman was taking delivery of his new Alerion in Key Largo, Fla., Halsey's mother, Rebecca, managed to convince him to donate his estate to the fledgling Herreshoff Museum, which put it to good use by acquiring some of the old buildings that once housed the operations of the Herreshoff Manufacturing Company. Merriman, Halsey remembers, was an emotional man. He liked the new Alerion very much, but sold it to one of his good friends, who took it from Florida to Nantucket. There the boat created a healthy interest that warranted the start of a production.

Subsequently, the boat received a taller Marconi rig — which improved light-air performance — a small auxiliary inboard engine and a special setup for the self-tacking club-footed jib, so it could be used with a roller-furling system.

Unlike the modern classics that combine retro looks with contemporary design and technology (i.e. fin keels, spade rudders and carbon rigs), the Herreshoff Alerion 26 sticks to its guns, with few concessions (inboard engine and aluminum rig) to the modern era. By and large, it is still informed by Capt. Nat's original idea of a simple boat that he could sail on a moment's notice and all by himself. ■

LOA: 25 feet, 4 inches; **LWL:** 20 feet; **BEAM:** 7 feet, 2 inches; **DRAFT:** 3 feet, 7 inches; **DISPLACEMENT:** 4,800 pounds; **BALLAST:** 2,525 pounds; **SAIL AREA:** 315 square feet; **PRICE:** \$130,000 sailaway.



Sadie, the gaff-rigged ancestor of today's Alerion 26, during a day sail in Bristol last summer.