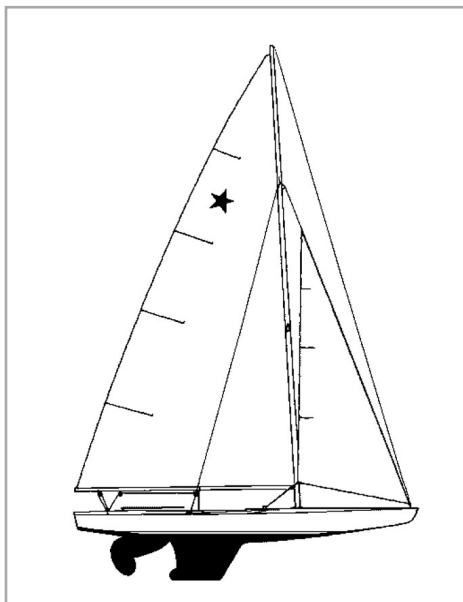


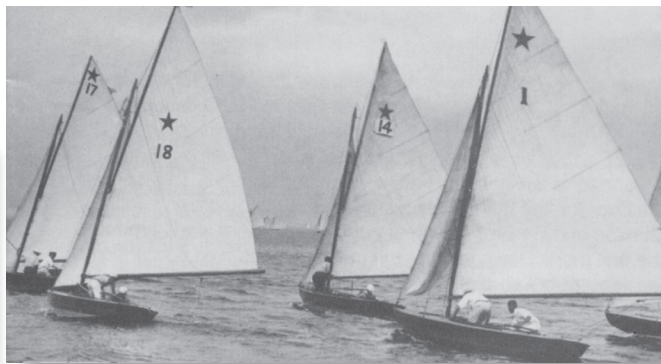
Star Boat Sailing in Racine

The present-day Star class racing sloop is an offshoot of a design called the "Bug", drawn in 1906.



The modern Star class racing sloop. *Courtesy of the International Star Class Yacht Racing Association (ISCYRA) and Tony Herrmann Jr.*

The Bug was an arc bottomed, 17 foot racing day-sailor with a 150 pound cast iron keel. Slab-sided, hard chined, and designed for easy building, it carried a high-peaked, but low, gaff rig. After four years of racing, it was conceded that the boat was too small, too wet, and too uncomfortable. 1910 saw a re-design, drawn by Francis Sweisguth; he created a boat that was a larger version of the Bug. The new boat, the Star, measured 22' 8 1/2" long, had a beam of 5' 8 1/4" and a cast iron keel weighing about 890 pounds. It carried a high-peaked gaff rig and was much like the Bug, only larger. Some twenty-five Stars were built between 1910 and 1911, inaugurating



Early gaff-rigged Stars. *Image from Starlights magazine, courtesy ISCYRA and Tony Herrmann Jr.*

the class. The Marconi rig began to replace "gaff-riggers" in the 1920s and the Star class made the change, too, moving to a low Marconi sail plan. A higher aspect ratio rig, the same one used today, appeared in the class in the 1930s. With a 31' 9" mast and a 14' 7" boom (this on a 23 foot boat), Stars carry a huge sail plan and, even though they are "main and jib" boats (no spinnakers are allowed), they are exciting to sail. Fiberglass construction replaced wood in the 1960s. The Star became an Olympic class in 1932; although they are no longer sailed in the Olympics, interest remains strong and the class is still highly competitive. More than 8,000 have been built to date.

Star sailing in Racine dates back to the late 1930s and in July, 1939, Racine Yacht Club's Herman Jansen, sailing with Herman Rotz and Edward Peipmeyer as crew, won the LMYA's Great Lakes Junior Championship in a racing series sailed in Star boats; they were coached by Chester Krusienski. It was an auspicious beginning for Star boating in Racine.

Jansen and his crew went on to race for the Sears Cup (the national championship series for junior sailors) on the east coast later that year, competing in Atlantic class sailboats. A parted head stay caused them to finish second in that series, losing only to Bus

Mosbacher who later successfully defended the America's Cup in 1962 and 1967. Quite a coup for Jansen!



Herman Jansen and his crew with the Moller Memorial Trophy after winning the 1939 Great Lakes Junior Championship. *Courtesy of Racine's The Journal Times*

In 1948, the Star fleets of Racine and Kenosha banded together and established the Western Lake Michigan (WLM) Star Fleet which is now primarily based in Racine. As of 2015, that fleet has been continuously active for some 77 years and over that period has included more than 64 boats, 100 skippers, and at least 150

crew members as participants; the list is too large to be recounted here, but stories about some of them have emerged over the years.

Gene Hardy was in at the beginning of early Star racing at the Racine Yacht Club. He sailed *Mirth* (#1333) before the Second World War and was the only Yacht Club member to have been killed in WWII service. He is immortalized by a plaque on the Yacht Club's mast.

Ca. 1943. *Steorra*, owned by Helmut Schumann and Dick Christensen broke loose from her mooring (Stars were not dry-sailed then) and sank, losing its keel in the process. Somebody in those days was a scholar – *Steorra* is Old English (9th century Anglo-Saxon, actually) for "star." Salvaged, she was given to Bill Berby and Kaiser (Kai) Kasabian, who rebuilt her as *Restless*, #1236. Kai later sold his share of the boat to Dick Rooney.

Little Joe (#2904) was sailed by Joe Tomasek, who set out to race one day in 1949 with a brand new set of sails. He got just a bit too close to the Race Committee boat and the starting gun blew a hole through his mainsail; the gunner was Joe's brother Carly and one can just imagine what got said after the race was over.

In the late 30s or early 40s Ernie Kuhnwald and Ray Nerad sailed *Vamp* (#1830) to Chicago to compete in a series there. Having only 15 cents to their name, they discovered some vegetable gardens and were able to avoid starvation. We have no information on how they did in the series (or which series it was) but those who knew Kuhny and Nerad can imagine the time they had.

Carly Tomasek was highly competitive and raced Stars for

many years. He is shown here with Herman Jansen after winning the 1948 Wadewitz trophy in Racine. 1956 saw Carly and Dick Wood at the Star North Americans in Milwaukee (Star5 goes about here). They were putting their boat together and, looking around, saw



Carly and Herman Jansen after winning the 1948 Wadewitz Trophy. Courtesy of Tony Herrmann Jr.

many well-heeled racers trying out bag after bag of new sails. Carly only had one set but he had a



Carly Tomasek and Dick Wood sailing *Galaxy*, #3623. The date of the photo is uncertain. Courtesy of Tony Herrmann Jr.

highly developed sense of humor. He and Dick put up his one set, took it down again, bagged it, and repeated the process—making it look like they were testing different sails. Only they knew.

One well-known Star sailor was Kai Kasabian, who started sailing them in the early 1940s. Once, in about 1949, Kai and Jim Rooney were in the old dinghy harbor getting their Star ready to sail to Kenosha for a regatta. They discovered that their main halyard was jammed and Kai sent Rooney, who says he weighed about 85 pounds at the time, climbing up the mast to clear it. The boat was in the water and even a little weight way up there made her pretty tender. Once everything was fixed, they set sail for Kenosha where Kaiser had already pre-positioned his BSA motorcycle. The ride back to Racine that night was a wild one, with Jim hanging on for dear life and the BSA hitting, maybe, about 90 MPH.

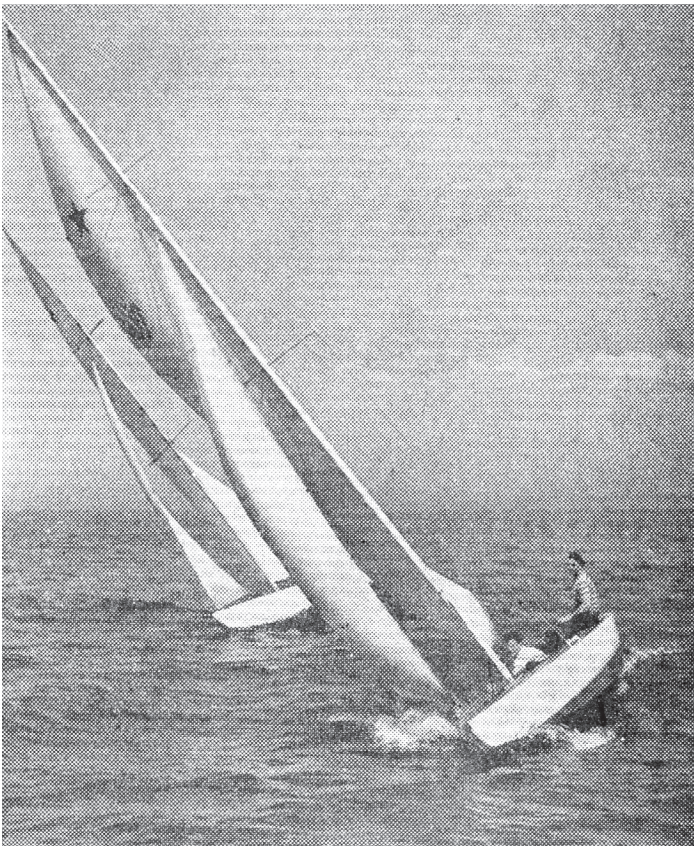
Kai owned several Stars across many years and built one, *Trim* #5243, himself. She was like a fine piece of furniture. Kai was a consummate craftsman, boat-builder, and sailor; he passed away in 2008 of Mesothelioma, an asbestos-related cancer. A memorial trophy in his name is in the Yacht Club foyer; it includes a model of *Trim* Kai's son Curt, also a Star sailor, keeps his father's tradition alive.



The model of Kai's *Trim*. Model by Steve Wheeler.

Stars are photogenic boats. Shown below are *Vamp*, #1830 racing in the RYC regatta in August 1944 and *Flight*, #3266 which was owned by Ted Shimkus and Ollie Anderson.

The Star class has produced some outstanding sailors over the years. Racine's fleet counts Tony Herrmann Jr. as one of them. Tony has competed in Stars for years, winning a number of individual regattas, and scoring frequent top-10 finishes in numerous Star World Championships and regional and international "Silver Star" events (Silver Star status is awarded to top finishers in regional and district events and qualifies one for racing in continental events).



Vamp, #1830 in the lead. The other boat in the photo is Gene Hardy's *Mirth*, #1333, sailed by his brother Ernest after Gene's passing. Image courtesy of Racine's *The Journal Times*.



Flight, #3266. Courtesy of Tony Herrmann Jr.



Presentation of the President's Award by Bill Allen, president of the class in 2008. *Courtesy of Tony Herrmann Jr.*

In 2008, International Star Class Yacht Racing Association president Bill Allen presented individual President's Incentive Awards to the founding members of the Western Lake Michigan Star Fleet. In the photo are: (top row L-R) Bill Allen, Butch Grasser, Bill Berby, and

Herman Jansen. At the bottom are Al Kronsoble (at left) and Carly Tomasek. Carly, sadly, passed away in 2015.

In 2015 Racine's Star fleet numbers some thirteen boats, eleven of which normally sail in local events.

The continuous 77-year record of Star sailing in Racine is alive and well under the Western Lake Michigan Star Fleet banner. Racine can be proud of the fact that not many fleets around the world have remained active for so long.



A publication of the RYC Historical Committee, a volunteer group dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of RYC's rich history. Written by Steve Wheeler using historical information, excerpts, and illustrations from Tony Herrmann Jr's archives and notes from Jim Rooney.

