

The Ambassador

“Fleetwood” is the only one Concordia Yawl in Germany. 99 boats of this type were built at Abeking & Rasmussen on American account – and finally demonstrate the international reputation of the yard.

There are a lot of nice examples of the simplicity that sailors admire about classical yachts, to be found in the Baltic.

One of the most charming, interesting, and with respect to her history, most curious specimen has her docking place at the little harbor Mönkeberg on the east side of the Kiel Fjord, where she swings in the light swell. She’s a 40 ft. long yawl with a filigree mizzen on the aft overhanging stern. The typical American tumblehome catches your eye with its frames becoming a negative line above the water line up to the deck. The form stable hull makes a sturdy impression. Behind forward deck, that is nearly fitting free, and the wide and spacious side decks, a long cabin is placed that has four little oval windows. It ends in the front above two round portholes that seem to watch the visitor at the dockside. There is no better way to ventilate a moored boats cabin than with such portholes.

The anachronistic formed cabin roof looks like an old fashioned locomotive. It carries the usual sky-lights, Dorade vents and handrails and aft, above the companion way a sliding hatch that is not known in this country (*Germany; the translator*). It used to be the usual way to bring light and air into the cabin, when weather was good. The storage of the stock anchor in small blocks right behind the main mast is quite unusual. The chain is stored in a canvas bag and the anchor line is fixed on a grating portside of the mast. A solution found during the practical experience of cruising sailors: the anchor equipment is situated in the middle of the boat on deck. It can be fixed with little effort, can be moved without straining one’s back and the anchor line can dry after use.

Comfortable as well as useful are the back rests on both sides of the tiller, -with this, the cockpit transfers to a couch. The name of the boat can be more easily found on the two life rings than on the bonsai- transom. “Fleetwood” is the name of this elegant yawl, and she stands, between the star under the forward and the sickle moon at the aft end of the fluting, for comfortable cruising for an almost completely American club of fans.

Anyhow, the discreet decoration lets the expert recognize: it’s a Concordia, one of the 103 boats, designed in 1938 by Raymond Hunt and Waldo Howland as a handy daysailer for the Buzzards Bay at the New England coast, well suitable also for cruising.

Owner Kersten Prophet invites you on board. Ever since he studied Naval Architecture, this tall and athletic man who was born in Eastwestfailure (*region in the center of Germany; the translator*), has lived in Kiel. His first boat was a locally designed Schwentine Cruiser. He found out about the legendary Concordia Yawls in the early 90’s through the American magazine “Wooden Boat” and started to collect further information. Soon a trip to the United States was inevitable. At that time the Schwentine Cruiser had been sold not only incidentally, that meant “I had a little bit of money in my pocket in 1995”. Nevertheless, as usual with cult objects, the well maintained Concordias on the market “were beyond my means”. After a persistent search Prophet found “Fleetwood”, and after long and hard negotiations Concordia No.20 came into the hands of the Concordia enthusiast.

After first repair work of the hull at an US Yard and a test cruise on Penobscot Bay in Maine the boat came back to Bremerhaven on board of an auto freighter. Close to the place where Abeking & Rasmussen shipped the yawls, mostly in serials of five, on American invoice.

In the winter of 96/97 Prophet was staying every evening and every weekend at his boats working place. “If I didn’t know you for so long, I would say, you won’t make it” were the words

of Wilfried Horns, Carpenter and head of the German Classic Yacht Club, one day in view of the work. Prophet consequently finished the work to its end and now, he can let things go, on board of his completely restored antique yawl.

As a normal situated family man with a job in a leading position he gives the impression of being remarkably relaxed. How does this go with a decades old wooden boat? “With the old Naval Architectures rule, the courage for gaps, the man in his end forties smiles. But seriously: you have to abandon the thought of having everything perfect and finishing tomorrow. You’ll never finish. But the private work on the boat shouldn’t ever get to be too much. That is important. How it is when it’s too much work, I remember quite well from the hard times when *Fleetwood* was new.” Therefore the beautifully preserved and sensibly rebuilt yacht has been cruising with unprotected light bulbs for quite some years. “The lampshades have been finished long ago. But I never had time to finish the holders.”

He pulls the lampshades and corresponding sketches for the holders out of one of the Concordia type lockers. Then he puts them in his bag. “Now that we talk about it, I could take them home to fit the holders”.

When Elizabeth Meyer sailed with Prophet on board of *Fleetwood* some years ago, “she took a bucket and deck brush, cleaned the cockpit and scolded me: *You should keep her tidy*” he remembers with a smile. However, *Fleetwood* is not untidy, but a boat for daily use. The white painted hull makes a good, practical and immaculate impression.

“Do you know how I extend the intervals of painting her? With normal car polish from the Home Depot in the red bottles. It just has to be free of silicone.”

Cheerfully Prophet talks about sailing, about little getaways into the Danish islands that are close to Kiel, or the weekly Wednesday evening sailing. And he raves about his boat: “Hunt gave the Concordia a very special frame form that makes her stay in a moderate inclining angle. The trick is a nearly flat line between chine and bilge radius. She runs on this surface. And I can sail her on my own. The sails are easy to handle. The upgraded roller furling of the genoa makes it easy. The mizzen holds her in the wind during the pulling up of the main sail.”

And then, of course the tour below deck starts. “I developed many things, but mainly only carried the typical style of a New England house on board”, Waldo Howland, who died in 1998, once said. That’s what the interior, with its countless special knobs and secured lockers, looks like. Last, but not least, best are the foldable benches in the main cabin. With their cast-aluminum hangers at their ends they are not light weights. On the other hand the bed is folded away with one hand and changed into a comfortable back rest.

Prophet has a tender, natural relationship to his boat that is expressed by the fact that he is on board one afternoon and evening a week the whole summer long, even though he has two children and a wife with a part-time job. Usually it is Wednesday, when he sails the charming yawl together with friends. Often he is on board an additional day during the weekends. Even during winter he regularly checks on *Fleetwood*. “I really like the boat and she is a perfect place to relax for me. On board I have room to take my mind off things and gather strength for the daily routine”.

Prophet doesn’t care about her behavior to go anywhere during driving backwards out of the dock place under engine: “she’s an old lady having her own way. You have to let her be and make the best of it.”

This wonderfully relaxed owner and his special yawl, the close harmony of both is impressing. And one, at least one Concordia “Made in Germany” should be in the country where she was built.

And the choppy sea of the windy Buzzards Bay, that Hunt and Howland designed the daysailer for in the late 1930’s, is a little bit similar to the Kiel Fjord during the typical offshore wind.

The Concordia Era

Designer C. Raymond Hunt (1908-78) is an authority, became famous as a successful 5.5m designer and sailor, inventor of the deep-V-frame of seaworthy motorboats and the Boston Whaler. Until 1947 four Concordias were built in the United States. In 1959 Abeking & Rasmussen got the order for the fifth. The A&R construction no. 4612 was the starting point of a unique story of success. The reputation of Henry Rasmussen and his employees in the United States began in the years before the war. The experience in wooden boatbuilding together with the economic Dollar/German Mark change rate and the low pay wages of that time in Germany, are the main reasons. A&R delivers the mostly completed boats in a growing number to the Concordia boat yard who was a perfect partner with final ideas and impromptu payment. In 1966, the last Concordia with the construction no 6422, the 99th one built in Germany, left the workshop in Lemwerder, close to Bremen by the river Weser. Most boats were built in a 39 ft version, but there were also many in a 41ft version as well. In the late 60's, the serial production of wooden boats in the growing industrial nation of Germany became too expensive for American owners, despite the experience and economic production techniques. Fiber reinforced plastics came into the worldwide market.

Book recommendation: Waldo Howland: A life in boats-The Concordia Years. Mystic Connecticut 1988. Elizabeth Meyer: Concordia Yawls. The First Fifty Years.

Pictures:

Relicts. Lightly negative frame lines and a yawl rig with simple fittings

Sails. The boat built in a series was ordered as a daysailer to be handled single hand. The designer distributed the sails for better handling. The long overhangs are typical for boatbuilding in the 1940's as well.

Simple convenient at that time – today a classic of yacht building history

Evening time. Owner Kersten Prophet (at the tiller) sails the boat together with friends on Wednesday afternoons and with the family during other leisure time. During the winter *Fleetwood* will be visited often.

Time voyage. The prism lemon distributes the light in the cabin. Skylights are roof like and protected. The eyes in the front wall of the cabin put air in the cabin, as well as the large Dorade vent. The winches are not self-tailing, the handle unsecured, and the fittings are made of heavy bronze.

A nautical antique for fine maritime living

New England style. The designer said that he only adapted the typical interiors of his home country onto the boat. He did that with an eye on practical and several useful details for the sailor.

Feel-good climate. Archaic vent window in the casing and large venting gaps in the lockers, a diesel fuel heater with stove plate and lining in the fore cabin provides dry and warm climate conditions. The type plate is rare proof of the final phase of serial wooden boatbuilding.

Genuine. The lines plan shows the short water line, the long keel, the shelf, many frames and floors. Not to forget the small inclined transom, the reason why the name of the boat can really only be seen on the life rings.

When she was build “Made in Germany” developed to a trademark

Translation *Kersten Prophet*, with friendly approbation of writer *Erdmann Braschos*