

# Tech Review

USED BOATS BY KURT HOEHNE

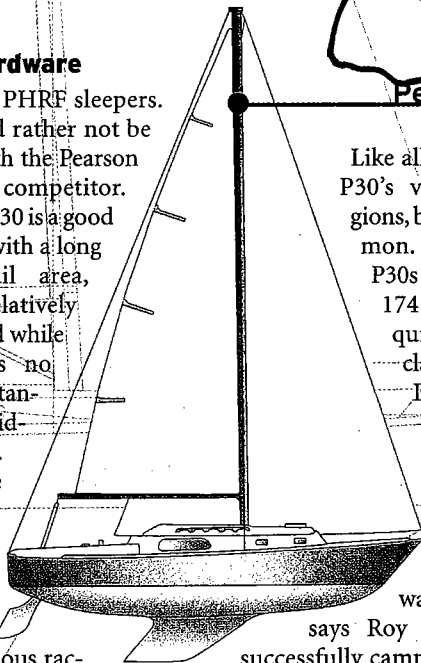
## Five Budget Racers

While "keelboat racing" and "budget" don't usually find their way into the same sentence, there are many used 20- to 35-foot boats that can be raced successfully at a reasonable cost. The following boats were chosen with a few things in mind. They had to be competitive in at least a couple of arenas, for instance PHRF and one-design, they had to have shown lasting value, and they had to be user-friendly enough to take non-sailing buddies for a ride.

### Pearson 30: Headroom and Hardware

Every region has its PHRF sleepers. Often, it's a boat you'd rather not be seen sailing. Not so with the Pearson 30, a bone fide PHRF competitor. First built in 1971, the P30 is a good all-around performer with a long waterline, ample sail area, modest beam, and relatively low wetted surface. And while at 8,320 pounds it's no lightweight by today's standards, it could be considered big-boned, not fat.

Throughout the 1970s the P30 was actively raced under several rules, but soon found itself in the wake of IOR and MORC designs. As serious racers migrated to purpose-built boats, the Bill Shaw design's cruising accommodations and good sailing manners ensured a long production run that ended at around 1,200 hulls.

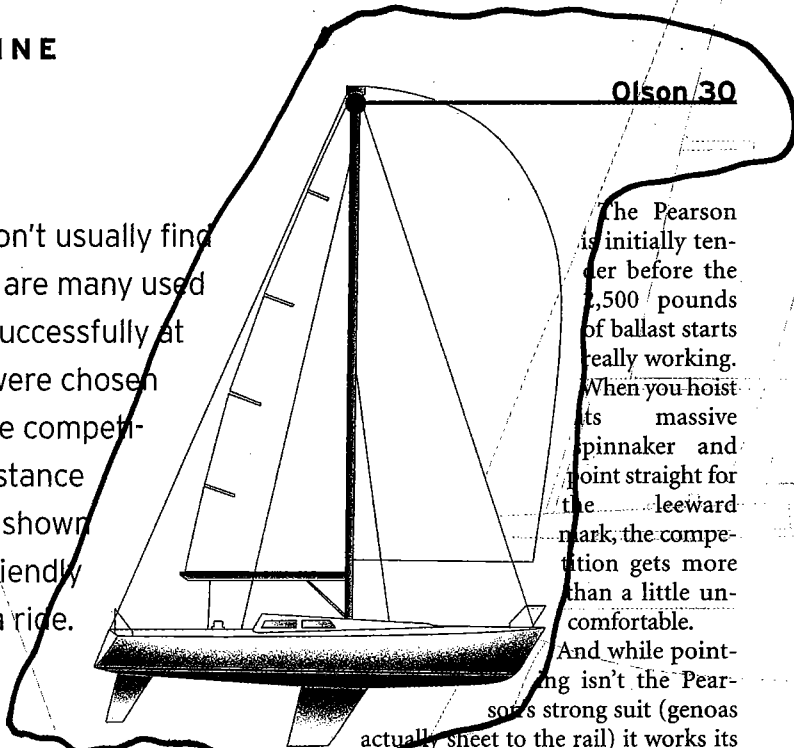


Pearson 30

Like all PHRF ratings, the P30's varies between regions, but 180 is fairly common. The Chesapeake P30s earned themselves a 174 rating, but have quite a competitive class. In fact, last year Dan Miller's *Knot-bobs* took first over nearly 150 other PHRF boats in the 70-mile Governor's Cup. "It's an incredibly cheap way to get into racing,"

says Roy Lappalainen, who successfully campaigned *Severn Run* for many years. "And then you have a weekender with full headroom to take the kids for a cruise." The P30's interior is simple rather than extravagant, yet more than adequate for cruising.

Olson 30



The Pearson is initially tender before the 2,500 pounds of ballast starts really working. When you hoist its massive pinnaker and point straight for the leeward mark, the competition gets more than a little uncomfortable.

And while pointing isn't the Pearson's strong suit (genoa actually sheet to the rail) it works its way upwind nicely even through a nasty chop.

With so many Pearsons out there, they range in price from \$6,500 to more than \$20,000 depending on condition and equipment. With a couple of crisp headsails, a spinnaker, a main, and a racing bottom, it's a trip back to a kinder, cruiser time.

### Olson 30: Ahead of its Time

George Olson, part of California's Fast is Fun ULDB crowd, drew and built the Olson 30, a boat that was so far ahead of its time that it only recently caught up. Beginning in 1978, Pacific Yachts produced more than 225 30s before modifying the boat to become the Olson 29 in 1984.

Irony surrounds the O30. Doubters questioned whether a 3,600-pound boat with an outboard would be seaworthy enough for offshore work. Olsons have beaten a far more regular path to Hawaii

## J/35

than other 30-footers, picking up a load of shorthanded silver along the way. Longevity of the lightweight boat was brought into question, yet properly maintained, hard-raced, 20-year-old O30s abound. Would there be a market for a 30-footer with minimal accommodations and an outboard? The latest trend in interior-less lightweights is but an echo of the Olson 30's initial blast.

The key to the O30 is performance. It's fast in every wind condition and it's thrilling downwind in a blow, under control yet accelerating to every puff. This is all done without canting keels, water ballast, sprits, or carbon. The masthead rig spreads ample, but not overwhelming, sail area. Like most ULDBs, it's extremely responsive when everything's done right—or for that matter, wrong. The helm is light and well-balanced, making the Olson a true driver's boat.

Over the years a few variations have appeared in the fleet. Double spreader rigs started appearing. A conversion kit is available to switch from single to double spreaders, but it should be noted many skippers feel the single spreader rig can be just as fast. Elliptical rudders are allowed as an alternative, though it's not clear if they offer significant advantage. The basic construction is solid, though many boats have installed what is fondly called a "beam of destiny" athwartships at the mast below deck to keep the hull and chainplates from migrating inward under load.

ULDBs usually don't encounter loading problems, but when skippers started stacking their rail with 1,300 pounds forces multiplied. This year the class weight limit has been lowered to 1,100 pounds, which

will take pressure off the hull and pressure off the skipper to find the crew.

Active O30 one-design fleets still dot the West Coast, and the national championship moves around from year to year. Most boats are drysailed, keeping that ever-important weight to a minimum. Boats are frequently trailered long distances, though a vehicle with some serious towing capacity is required and stepping the keel-stepped mast is not easy.

The Olson also makes a fine giant killer in PHRF. Rating around 100, it's usually dwarfed by the boats in its class. If clean air is to be found, the Olson might well leave the big boats in its wake. Prices on O30s range from around \$10,000 to nearly \$20,000 with good ones going around \$14,000-\$18,000. Good sails, cut for a region's normal conditions, are critical. A main, No. 1, and spinnaker total about \$6,000, and a No. 3 is a must as well.

### J/35: Always a Rule Beater

Even though the J/35's core strength is as a great one-design boat, its place in history may well end up being as the boat that bridged the myriad handicapping systems of the last 20 years.

Introduced in 1983, the J/35 class provided a haven for serious racers as IOR collapsed and IMS struggled to find its feet.

Rod Johnstone's design thumbed its nose at all rating systems, was fast for its size on every point of sail, and big enough to take on virtually every race course. The powerful rig and clean lines truly came into their own when owners

learned just how many people to stack on the rail. It has won under every handicapping system.

As North America embraces IRC and hangs on to PHRF and Americap in some areas, the J/35 may well be the best budget option. Already proven under the latter rules, the J/35 looks good on paper for IRC as well. A study on the PHRF-NE web site shows that IRC may rate the J/35 slightly slower relative to PHRF while the Tripp 36 and IMX 38 would both be rated marginally faster and the Mumm 36 would remain relatively the same. Under PHRF, the J/35 often gives a First 36.7 a bit of time and under IRC they're virtually identical. "Based on the information I have," designer Rod Johnstone says cautiously, "I think it would be a very good

## Santana 20

boat under IRC. It has a low center of gravity and doesn't take any penalties for high-tech material."

The J/35 still has a strong one-design following, assuring national level competition and good resale value. There are still active fleets on the East Coast and in the Midwest.

The class is considering putting limitations on the number of new sails purchased per year.

According to Detroit fleet captain Bill Wildner, a competitive used boat can be had for \$40,000-\$50,000. Some can be had for less than \$40,000 while a newer, ultra-clean J may top \$70,000. With around 300 boats out there, some will always be available and most of them are already rigged for racing.

The J/35 is not without its challenges. Racing sails cost about \$3,200-\$5,000 apiece. While it doesn't necessarily take rock stars to hit the 35's target speeds, a good crew is necessary to handle all that power in a blow. And keeping close to the maximum class crew weight of 1,650 pounds is vital. The Tillotson-Pearson construction was sound, but boats that have not had the sump reinforced should have that done. And, of course, as with any older boat, there may be some issues with wet cores and localized delamination.

## Ultimate 20

