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RACING TUMLARE

To some, the Tumlare is the comeliest yacht of all. This one also has a record-breaking string of victories and now new owners who have rebuilt her

WORDS AND PHOTOS NIGEL SHARP



In April 1937 a meeting was held at the Royal St Kilda Yacht Club (which, since 1961, has been the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron) to select a new one-design class, one that would be economical to build and able to cope with the often-challenging conditions of Port Phillip (Bay). The Tumlare, which Knud Reimers had designed four years earlier, had only recently come to the attention of the club, but the attendees unanimously agreed that this would be the right boat. Things then moved quickly with five boats being built by three different builders in time for the start of the next sailing season that November, and another following soon afterwards. Two of these first boats were built by Charlie Peel in Brunswick, a Melbourne suburb, one of them for Joe White who was the commodore of the Royal St Kilda Yacht Club and who named his new boat (sail number 94) after his daughter Yvonne. Joe was keen to expand the class and so at the end of that season, he sold *Yvonne* to a young man called Don Banks who renamed her *Doffie*, then commissioned another Tumlare from Charlie Peel. She too was named *Yvonne*.

The second *Yvonne* was finished in time for the 1938/39 season when she won her first two races with Alick Rose at the helm. Around the same time, another boat owned by Joe – the 1929 Peel-designed and built 53ft (16.2m) gaff cutter *Acrospire IV* – was skippered by Selim Nurminen, a Scandinavian immigrant who had arrived in Australia in 1926. After Selim spent much of the war working on mine-sweepers at Williamstown Naval Dockyard, Joe asked him to skipper *Yvonne* at the beginning of the 1949/50 sailing season. Selim accepted, and so began an extraordinarily successful partnership of boat and skipper. In Selim's hands over a period of 21 years, *Yvonne* won 17 Tumlare Victorian state championships, the last 11 of them in successive years, and folklore has it that no boat has ever won more races on Port Phillip. After Joe died in 1959, his daughter Yvonne made sure that Selim was able to continue sailing the boat that bore her name.

Although Tumlares (referred to in the plural by some as Tumlaren) were

also built and sailed elsewhere in Australia – about 22 throughout the country, it is thought – they have always been most numerous in the Melbourne area. The fleet there had its heyday in the 1960s, '70s and early '80s both in terms of the numbers of boats competing – as many as 14 for many years – and the quality of the racing. *Yvonne* continued to sail there until 1999 – although little is known of her history during the latter part of that period – when she was sold to John Jackson in Adelaide. Several Tumlares had been built in Adelaide, mostly by JP Clausen & Sons whose proprietor Peter Clausen had attended the April 1937 meeting at Royal St Kilda YC, and Tumlares have often migrated between the two cities.

YVONNE'S SECOND LIFE

Although John Jackson intended to restore *Yvonne*, poor health prevented him from doing so and she was laid up in a shed in Goolwa, about 40 miles (c70km) south of Adelaide, for about 15 years. Then, in 2016, Melbourne Tumlar sailor Roger Dundas heard that *Yvonne* was on the market. Roger has restored and owned two other Tumlares – *Avian* which he has now had for about 20 years, and before that *Zephyr* (originally *Zefir*) – and was keen to do whatever was necessary to get *Yvonne* sailing on Port Phillip again. So while forming a syndicate to buy her back, he and Ferdi Darley, a shipwright who has had his own business in Williamstown since 2000 and who has worked on various Tumlares, drove to Hindmarsh Island and then towed *Yvonne* the 500 miles or so back to Melbourne.

As well as Roger and Ferdi (who would provide invaluable technical advice for the work that would be needed to bring *Yvonne* back to life, as well as space in his shed) the syndicate also included Antony Perri, Chris Clapp, Charlie Salter (who also owns the 1948 Adelaide-built Tumlar *Sirocco*) and Mark Chew. For the next six years, this small but dedicated team would get together in a corner of Ferdi's shed, mostly on Fridays, to gradually restore *Yvonne*, although for about a year and a half, covid restrictions only allowed work to continue intermittently.

Work started by removing the canvas-covered plywood deck, while leaving the coachroof in place ("although in retrospect," said Antony, "I think we should have taken it off. It would have made life so much easier.") The fact that *Yvonne* had survived neglected in the dry heat of South Australia to still be in salvageable condition is largely due to the fact that

Below
4107 is(L to R)
Charlie Salter,
Roger Dundas,
Ferdie Darley,
Antony Perri,
Chris Clapp, Mark
Chew



her ¾in (18mm) planking is Huon pine, the wonderfully durable timber unique to Tasmania. Just two pieces of about 5ft (1.5m) length had to be replaced. Most of the seams were still extraordinarily tight although some, which had been misguidedly worked on at some point, needed some attention. The original centreline components are of jarrah (a heavy West Australian eucalypt) and were in good condition, as were the floors and the stringers. The ballast keel was dropped to allow inspection of the silicon bronze keel bolts which were found to be in perfect condition and so were reused.

Four of the original blackwood ribs had been replaced in the 1980s following collision damage, but all of the 104 remaining ones had become brittle and needed renewing. "One of the hardest jobs of the whole project was getting the old nails out," said

Antony. "It was a slow, painful task." To ensure the hull shape was maintained, there were always two original or new ribs in place each side of any rib that was being worked on. Each of the new ribs was laminated, but not glued, from two pieces of spotted gum which came from offcuts of the new planking for the 1903, three-masted coastal trading vessel *Alma Doepel* which Ferdi and his team

are restoring in Melbourne. The two parts were steamed together and then pushed down through the gaps outboard of the beamshelf and stringers and inside the planking, then driven into the centreline pockets with a "kind of crowbar." The two parts were then riveted through the existing holes in the planking with copper rivets which were donated by Geoff Martin who had intended to use them to restore another Tumlar before changing his plans. "This was one of several really generous donations we had," said Antony. "The rivets had been sitting in Geoff's shed for 15 years, and he said 'you might need these'."

While the existing hanging knees were left in place, additional knees were fitted in way of the chainplates, extended downwards and fastened through ribs as well as the planking to address a known Tumlar weakness. A 14ft (4.3m) rotten piece of the starboard beamshelf and some of the deck beams were renewed in Douglas fir. A new 3/8in (9.5mm)-thick plywood deck was then fitted and sheathed with epoxy and a loose weave glass cloth to replicate the look of a traditional canvas deck. The coamings had a few splits which were locally repaired, and a 5/16in (8mm)-thick veneer of blackwood



*Clockwise from top left:
Roger and Ferdi
collecting Yvonne from
Goolwa; Yvonne's arrival
in Ferdi's shed; Doubled
up hanging knees in
way of the chainplates;
The cockpit looking aft;
Launch day in
Williamstown;
Yvonne, ready for work
to begin*



YVONNE

DESIGNED
Knud Reimers, c1934

BUILT
Charlie Peel, Melbourne, 1938

LOA
27ft 3in (8.3m)

BEAM
6ft 3in (1.9m)

DRAUGHT
4ft 2in (1.3m)

SAIL AREA
215 sqft (20m²)

was fitted to the inside face of the cockpit coamings to strengthen them.

The top of the mast – which may have originally been a Dragon mast left behind after the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games – needed a new 10ft (3.1m) section of Douglas fir scarphed to it. “The general ethos of the restoration was to reuse as much as possible,” said Charlie “but we decided that having done all this work there was no point in putting the old rags up, so we put a bit of money in the pot and got new main and jib.” These were made by Mark Rimington while a new genoa and a recut Dragon spinnaker were donated to the boat.

Towards the end of the project there was much discussion about *Yvonne*’s colour scheme. She had always had white topsides and a light blue deck but now it was decided to do something different.

“After some gentle push-back from the Tumlare old guard, they now agree she looks brilliant,” said Charlie.

“The important thing is that we are genuinely having a lot of fun doing this,” said Roger, part way through the project. “There is a really positive energy coming out of it, retelling the history and also enjoying the camaraderie of the process, and the knowledge that at the end of the day there is a beer... or two.” Without doubt, Ferdi’s guidance throughout proved invaluable. “It has been amazing,” said Antony who many years ago built a 15ft (4.6m) clinker sailing dinghy and a 7ft (2.1m) tender. “I feel as if I have now done my shipwrighting apprenticeship!”

Yvonne was eventually relaunched at the Royal Yacht Club of Victoria in Williamstown in October 2022 – within a week of the 84th anniversary of her first launch into the Yarra River – to be reunited with nine other Tumlares currently in commission at the top of Port Phillip. Her first post-restoration event was the Classic Yacht Association of Australia’s Cup Regatta. On the helm was Dave Allen – who is normally seen helming *Sayonara*, the 1897 Fife-designed gaff cutter that has been based near Melbourne for the past 25 years – with Ferdi and experienced Tumlare sailor Kath Solly crewing for him. They proved to be a particularly effective combination, taking line honours in three of the four Tumlare races. Soon afterwards *Yvonne* received a visit from Selim Nurminen’s four daughters who were able to share many memories of sailing on her.



