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SAILING

83-year-old S.F. yacht proves age doesn't have to be an issue

By Carl Nolte

The America's Cup races might have the fastest boats in the world, but those high-tech wonders can't hold a candle to the yacht *Dorada*, which at 83 years old has just won the 2,225-mile Transpacific Yacht Race from Long Beach to Honolulu. It was the second time the

"She's a beautiful thing. ... San Francisco Bay is where I grew up, and San Francisco is her home port."

Matt Brooks, owner, comments on the Dorade after the 83-year-old boat wins Transpacific Yacht Race

Dorada won the Transpac — the first win was in 1936, 77 years ago.

The latest victory was at the end of July, and after a brief stop in Sausalito to put the boat in prime condition, the *Dorada* returned Thursday in triumph to a welcoming ceremony at the St. Francis Yacht Club on the

Yacht continues on A7



Liz Hafalia / The Chronicle

Matt Brooks (blue shirt) sails the *Dorada* across the bay from Sausalito to dock at St. Francis Yacht Club in San Francisco.

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FROM THE COVER

83-year-old yacht proves that its age need not be an issue

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San Francisco Marina.

"San Francisco Bay is where I grew up, and San Francisco is her home port," said Matt Brooks, who owns the boat.

The *Dorada* is a throwback to the days when sailing yachts were lean and beautiful.

It is 52 feet long, but only 10 feet, 3 inches wide, which makes it unusually slim. It is a wooden boat rigged as a yawl, with a tall mainmast and a smaller mast aft of the helm. The planking is of mahogany, ribs are of white oak. The masts are Sitka spruce and the deck is wooden as well. It is painted a gleaming white. It looks like a classic.

Built for the ocean

The *Dorada* is significantly different from the 72-foot-long, high-tech, twin-hulled catamarans that are challenging for the America's Cup. The *Dorada's* top speed in the Transpacific race was 15.9 knots; the America's Cup boats can do 40 to 45. But high-tech boats are as fragile as fine china. San Francisco Bay is too rough, too windy and too dangerous for them. It is not likely that they could even sail beyond the Golden Gate Bridge. The *Dorada* was made to sail on the oceans of the world.

There are other sailing vessels of *Dorada's* vintage, but they sail in harbors, or on occa-

sional brief trips in the blue water. But Brooks wants the *Dorada* to live the life it was designed for: deepwater racing.

He plans to enter the *Dorada* in other races the boat entered — and won — when it was new, including the Transatlantic race from New York to England, and the Newport-to-Bermuda race.

"When I told people I wanted to take this boat and repeat its history, they said I was crazy. They said the boat was too small, too fragile and too tender, like an antique piece of furniture that would be ruined," Brooks said.

"But that's what they told the designers when it was new."

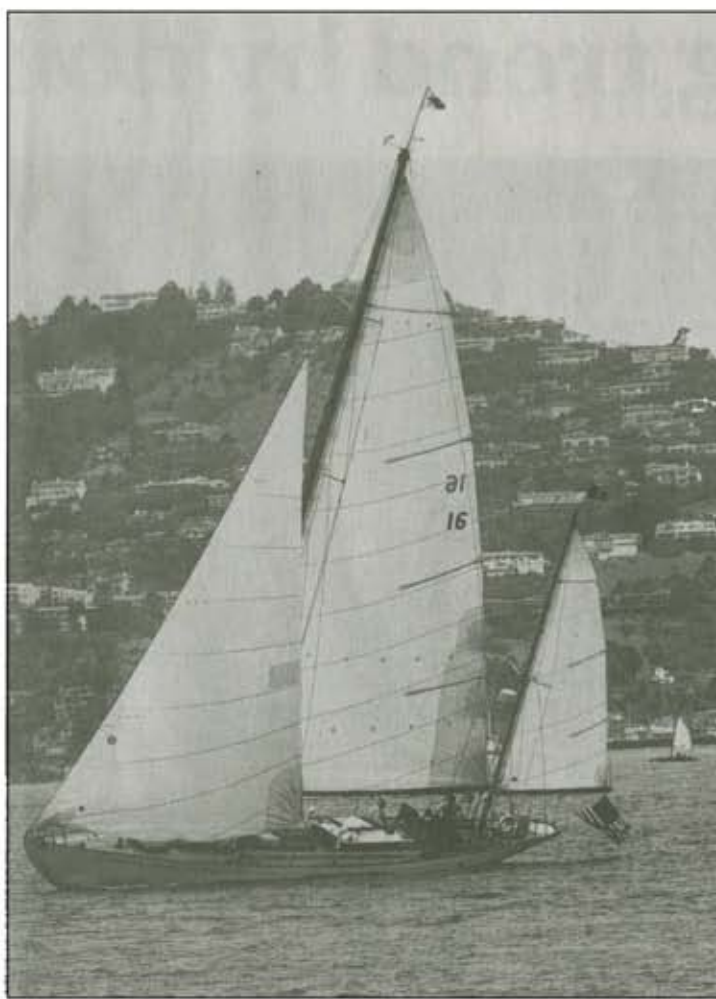
Brooks, who is 62, won't say anything disparaging about the high-tech boats that seem to be having problems in San Francisco Bay.

"There is nothing wrong with high tech," he said. "This boat was the high tech of yesterday. The heritage flows from one to the other."

Dorada's beginnings

The *Dorada* was designed in 1929 by Olin Stephens, who was only 21 years old. It was launched in New York City in 1930. The boat's design was a radical departure for ocean racing yachts of the time. The older boats were bigger, heavier and stronger.

When *Dorada* won the 1931 Transatlantic Race it made



Liz Hafalia / The Chronicle

Matt Brooks sails the *Dorada* across the bay from Sausalito, where it was spruced up after winning the Transpacific race.

Stephens' reputation. He went on to be one of the most famous yacht designers in the world and lived to be 100.

Dorada had no engine and no radio on that voyage, and Brooks likes to tell how the crew learned where they were by hailing a passing fishing boat and how they found out they'd won the race by exchanging flag signals with the Lizard Head lighthouse in England. The

crew was asked to dinner by King George V and got a ticker tape parade on Broadway on their return to New York.

The boat won many other races, and by 1936, *Rudder* magazine called the *Dorada* "unquestionably one of the outstanding yachts of all time."

The boat was owned by James Flood of San Francisco when it won the 1936 Transpacific race. Brooks is the *Dorada's*

15th owner.

He and Pam Rorke Levy, his partner, were looking for a classic boat in 2010. It was the bottom of the yacht market, Brooks said.

"Nearly every classic yacht was for sale," he said. "We knew the *Dorada's* history and the romance of it. She's a beautiful thing."

'It was worth it'

Brooks paid \$880,000 for the *Dorada* and then spent 1½ years refitting the boat. A trim man with gray hair who is in the real estate business, Brooks wouldn't say what the refit cost. "It was expensive," he said, "but it was worth it."

Now, Brooks said, the *Dorada* "is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Under her classic veneer we made her a modern boat."

This meant new masts, new sails, new engine and modern electronic equipment, including navigation software. Still, Brooks carried a sextant on the Hawaii race.

There was a seven-person crew, including Ben Galloway, 31, a veteran sailor, who is the skipper.

"We had luck and good, old-fashioned sailing skills," said Levy.

The *Dorada* will stay on San Francisco Bay for a while, with a berth at the Schoonmaker Point Marina in Sausalito, then be trucked to the East Coast so the boat can be entered in the Newport-to-Bermuda race next year, and then the Transatlantic Race.

"When we are done, we will see what other races to run," Brooks said.

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