



# Flicka Friends



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## FLICKA - A Happy Little Ship

By Bruce P. Bingham

Flicka's origin dates back to the late 1950's when I was serving Navy duty in Rhode Island. I had built an 8' sailing dinghy, and every Saturday morning I'd go off to explore the harbors and backwaters of Narragansett Bay. One of these jaunts took me up a river just south of Wickford where I found two derelict wooden sailboats.

I made some quick sketches and was able to walk off some rough dimensions. I later learned they were Newport boats, and most of them measured between 22' and 28'. These boats had large working cockpits with small cuddy cabins forward.

There was enough left of them to show that at one time they had a single forward bunk and a small galley, but only crouching headroom. They appeared to have been cat-ketch or cat-schooner rigged.

My curiosity was aroused. Farther up the river, I was lucky enough to find a couple of old lobstermen who could tell me more about my discovery. They said the boats were all that were left of a fleet of over 100 that had sailed out of Wickford, Jamestown, Point Judith and Newport around the turn of the century. Newport boats were used primarily to tend lobster pots on Block Island Sound. A few had been fitted with engines and were still operating during the 1930's.



**Bruce Bingham sailing s/v SABRINA  
on a Quarter broad reach.**  
© Bruce P. Bingham 2001

The weather on block Island Sound during any season (except for late the summer months) is noted for going from flat calms to raging gales, with every little in between. Yet the lobstermen had to work year-round to make a living. The Newport boats were built to serve their openwater needs.

The Newport boat and the Cape Cod cat seemed to have developed during the same period for the same type of work. On the surface, many similarities are apparent - the plumb or tumble-home bow, the kicky sheer, the dinghy steer and large outboard rudder. The Cape Cod cat, however, never had to sail the long distances required of the Newport boats. More often than not, the fishermen of the Newport boats spent days on end at sea.

The character and ruggedness of these boats appealed to me so much that I started playing with the lines while I was still in the Navy. I was able to find line drawings in Howard Chappelle's classic on small American sailing craft. But my Navy time ended and the sketches lay dormant for some

ten years, not reemerging until 1971, shortly after I opened my San Francisco design office. Once again my enthusiasm for the Newport boat's potential was rekindled. I had in mind applying the Newport hull to an enclosed small cruising boat.

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I wanted to keep the new design within the minimum budget of amateur builders, so the hull length was reduced to 20'. I thought from the first sketches that full headroom might be possible. The solution was to locate the cabin sole directly on the top of the inboard ballast and to employ a high main deck crown as well as an extremely high deck crown. The latter two elements helped keep the appearance of the cabin side height to a minimum.

In practice, we've found both the deck and cabin top quite comfortable to walk around on, particularly when the boat is heeled.



**s/v SABRINA on a broad reach  
with a Trinkia dinghy in tow.**  
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While I personally favored the cat-ketch or cat-schooner rig, I felt it would be too difficult to sell to the general public, so I opted for a tall 7/8 sloop rig with a short bowsprit. I've since altered that to a more modern masthead rig, giving the boat larger heads'ls that she is able to handle easily.

Flicka was chosen as the design's name, because it seemed to reflect the personality of the boat. The word is Swedish; it translates as a happy, vivacious little girl.



**s/v SABRINA on a beam reach  
with a Trinkia dinghy.**  
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Preliminary drawings were submitted to all of the boating magazines in late 1971 as a design for amateur construction. The Flicka was an instant success, so much so that "Rudder" ran a seven-part, how-to-build series. Over a five year period, more than 400 Flicka plan packages were sold, the majority going to Australia and New Zealand, Sweden and the state of California.

Most of the backyard Flickas were of fiberglass construction, although quite a number of photographs arrived in my office depicting Flickas a strip-planked and carvel-planked wood. They ranged from absolute sparseness to the utmost elegance. Some were even built with sprung-plank teak decks. As Flickas were finished and commissioned, I began receiving letters from owners describing remarkable passages of thousands of miles. Four of these owners started out on round-the-world cruises. I assume that some of them have completed their circumnavigations by now. The last letter I received before closing my California office was from a couple who had reached the west coast of Africa and reported they were having a great time and still loved their Flicka.

Both Kate and I had always wanted a Flicka of our own, and decided to build one in 1974. We constructed a superb hull in fiberglass. I spent many hours on just the carving of the bow and quarter scroll work. Kate drew up an authentic planking plan, including butt and end seams. Business



s/v **SABRINA** sailing beam to weather.  
© Bruce P. Bingham 2001

pressures kept us from finishing the work, however, so the plug was sold to a group of builders in Santa Barbara, CA. Unfortunately for the Flicka, they were bankrupt within a year.

Bill Luther, who had worked for me as a freelance draftsman and was a longtime admirer of the Flicka, was convinced of her potential on the market. On his own volition, he set out to find a company willing to purchase the existing mold. The young Pacific Seacraft Corporation not only took a chance on the Flicka but on Bill Luther as well. He's still with the company, in charge of Flick production and promotion.

In 1978, our longtime dream of having our own Flicka came true. I became the proud owner of Pacific Seacraft's hull number 25 - the **SABRINA**.

The Flicka was never intended to be a high performance boat; the prime criteria were seaworthiness and a comfortable, livable interior for long distance coastal and offshore cruising. Even though I had heard some pretty remarkable stories of better than 5 knot averages, it was only when I began to sail the **SABRINA** that I became a true believer. Within four days of her delivery in Oyster Bay, New York, with an unfamiliar crew and an unfamiliar

boat, we managed to pull off an astonishing fourth in cruising class on the 200 mile "Round Long Island Race." We were still attaching hardware and tuning the rig on the starting line.

After 125 miles, we were sailing neck and neck with such reputable boats as a Cal 25, a Seafarer 33, and a Tanzer 22, among others. We were the smallest boat in the race, and we were doing what was mathematically impossible. Even I could not understand why. She just seemed to do everything I asked and to do it extremely well.

Her light air performance is truly phenomenal. She's able to out ghost boats as much as 15' longer. What she seemed to like best, though, is the really heavy stuff. With a double-reefed main and a jib or storm stays'l, she is an absolute thrill to sail. When the going really gets tough, and the other boats are running for shelter, the Flicka seems to be in her element. She's not a particularly dry boat when going to weather in these conditions, but she's weatherly, responsive and surprisingly comfortable.

Our first opportunity to really put the Flicka to a test was on a trip between the Stamford and Newport boats shows. A distance of 108 miles. We left Stamford on the leading edge of a cold front with a steady 20 knot breeze and higher gusts. We ticked off the miles in 19 hours - a 5.68 average.

Twenty larger boats left Stamford at the same time, yet the **SABRINA** was the first to arrive in Brenton Cove at Newport (and she was towing an 8' dinghy and loaded down for cruising). Allowing for favorable currents, that's a 1.33 speed/length ration - equal to that of most racing machines. Five and one-quarter knot passages have become almost routine over the last 6,000 miles aboard the **SABRINA**.

Although I have posed the question of her incredible speed potential to members of the design staffs of both McCudry and Rhodes and Sparkman and Stevens, even they have been unable to come up with a plausible explanation. One of the more interesting theories, suggested by Philip Rhodes, Jr., was that her long waterline and abrupt ends "fooled" the water into thinking she was a larger boat, hence her hull speed increase accordingly. at 5 1/2 knots, the quarter wave is fully 5' or 6' aft of the transom, yet the boat never seems to have a tendency to squat.

Whatever the reason, she is extremely fast. The design stood the test of time, and it has surpassed my highest expectations. Of all my designs, the Flicka remains as my greatest source of pride, and the **SABRINA** my greatest joy.

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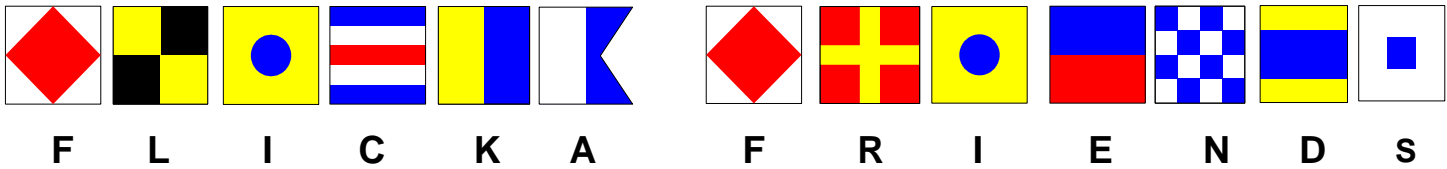
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Do you own a Flicka? YES NO Hull Number \_\_\_\_\_ Boat Name \_\_\_\_\_

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