

A Tale of Resurrection

The little boat that could



BY ALEX FOX

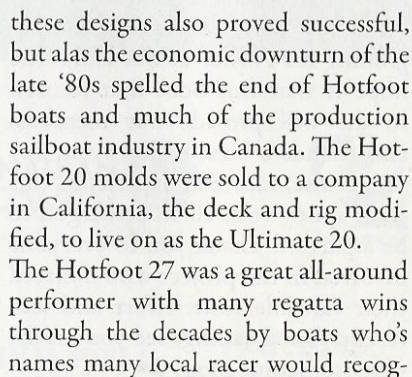
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What is the value of a 27-foot sailboat, in a time when many marinas are re-configuring for 30 to 60-footers? I would suggest quite a bit, especially

in the case of one Hotfoot 27 named *Haytor*. This is the story of how a yacht club community rallied to bring a special little boat back from the brink—to live on and sail for many days to come!

FIRST, A LITTLE general history of the Hotfoot 27, a Canadian sailboat that was designed by Doug Hemphill in 1981, and built with fibreglass by Hotfoot Boats, right here on Vancouver Island. The roots, or family tree of the


27, could undoubtedly be traced back to another small speedster from the mid seventies, the J-24. Doug's first design was the Hotfoot 24, similar to the J, but with a weighted daggerboard instead of a fixed keel. I believe three of these were built out of cold molded wood, one of them, *Arkle*, is nicely restored and still raced today. The Hotfoot 27 proved a great success, selling well and spawning the larger Hotfoot 31 and smaller Hotfoot 20. Each of



nize; *Fetish, Jaguar, Horizon, Caliente, NVS, Footloose, Slick* and yes, *Haytor*. I had my first Hotfoot 27 experiences racing with the late Bill Lloyd on *Footloose*, back in 1988. I'd just moved to Victoria to work as a sailmaker. Bill was a very good sailor, but he lived up in Shawnigan and often couldn't make it down to race. His generosity with *Footloose* was pretty amazing, letting Andria Scanlan, Aubrey Eichel, myself, and others take the boat out for Wednesday night races, Sunday racing and even regattas. The Hotfoot was the perfect, easy-to-throw-a-crew-together race boat. Sometimes there were five or six who would show up, sometimes three or even two. I have great memories of friendships forged and fun racing from those early Hotfoot 27 experiences and to this day, it's still one of my favourite rides.

THIS STORY IS about one particular Hotfoot 27 *Haytor*, which returned to Victoria after Tim Knight, Don Sargent and Ken Pohl located her up island, sitting unused for the better part of the last decade. The trio cleaned her up, redid some rigging, replaced some gear and presto, the perfect post Covid club race boat! Unfortunately, there was a small setback to the program. When on the way out to a race start on a puffy Wednesday night, *Haytor* was t-boned by a 30-footer. A total accident, neither boat saw the other, the result was a big shark bite out of *Haytor's* port side. It was a setback for sure, but the partnership was undeterred, repairs were undertaken and she was soon back racing again in Royal Vic's around the buoys and distance races—with some good success, I might add.

FAST FORWARD TO the Rum Race, boxing day 2022. This is an annual affair, an always well attended pursuit race around Discovery Island. The day began in a nice puffy westerly >



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with a fleet of 20 or so, including four Hotfoot 27s. Rounding the island counterclockwise was the call and as the race progressed the wind gradually died away to nothing and then shifted 180 degrees to the east. The lead group of boats, which included *Haytor* and *Fetish*, had worked in along the north edge of Chatham Islets trying to find favourable current. During this time, boats were pointing in all directions, waiting for the next zephyr to appear—an oh so familiar rock hopping scenario, that most of us are quite familiar with. The combination of little steerage and strong current, found *Haytor* a little too close to Strongtide and well, you know what's next... bang! Hey, we've all been there. You know the saying "There's only two types of boats... those that *have* run aground, and those that *will* run aground." It's never fun, and it's often a bit of a surprise. The good news, *Haytor* was only doing a couple of knots and appeared to barely slow down. At this point the easterly was beginning to fill, and the catspaws were turning into a nice seven to 10 knots. I was sailing on *Alchemist* that day and as we sailed past *Haytor*, both under spinnaker, I glanced over and noticed that only one of the crew was on deck and that they were pointed back toward the club, rather than to the finish line off Cattle Point. The boat seemed to be sailing fine though. After finishing, the fleet returned to the club. I noticed *Haytor* was over at the hoist with slings in place, which seemed odd, as she wasn't a dry sailed boat. Then a collective of expletives as *Haytor* was lifted. As the hull cleared the water surface we could see that the keel was not there. "Holy s***! The aftermath and inspection revealed a large hole where the keel had been and the remnants of the keel stub. Credit to the crew, who somehow stemmed the inflow of water and nursed *Haytor* back to the hoist. Now what?

So, as would happen in these situations, an insurance adjuster looks at the damage and evaluates the cost of repair. *Haytor* was clearly a write off, as the economics of a professional yard repair didn't add up. It's always a sad thing when a good boat's sailing days are done, but wait. Maybe there's a solution. Full credit to those with the vision, who saw and opportunity, when most would have just let *Haytor* go to the scrap bin. Step 1: Salvage the keel... Check! Step 2: Acquire the boat from the insurance company... Check! Step 3: Bring in the experts, Campbell Black from Blackline, Dave Richardson and Doug Hemphill to survey and evaluate the possibility of repair... Check!

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Step 4: Recruit people with the skills and time to rebuild the keel stub and repair the boat. Enter Vidas Stukas, Dennis Woodward, Ken Pohl, Paul Gibson, Dave Vogelaar, Ben Power, Nick Banks, Gerry Weisgerber and more (sorry if I missed you). There were of course some skeptics and naysayers, but once the ball was rolling, support for the reclamation project grew!

SOME 600 HOURS later, after a huge effort by the team headed by Vidas, the keel was back on and the rudder and transom were also repaired and upgraded. The materials for the project cost between \$3,000 and \$4,000. Now, this was a week before Swiftsure, Royal Victoria Yacht Club's commodore, Stephanie Bacon was determined to sail *Haytor* in the

Inshore Race. On Monday the boat was launched. On Tuesday the Rig was back on and on Wednesday the survey was completed. The verdict was better and stronger than new! On Thursday, new insurance was acquired and on Friday the PHRF certificate was given. Then the outboard went back in, the safety gear was stored, the sails were inspected (some patching required) and the boat was ready to go. Whew!

STEPHANIE, ASSEMBLED A crew made up of Connie, a first time racer, Matt, a new member from Kingston, Roger, a long time racer, and yours truly. As we motored out to the start line, it occurred to me, how wonderful to be a part of such a positive project. It would have been an easy thing to just let *Haytor* go, but that would have been a shame. This is a story of resurrection and rebirth. A locally designed and built boat living to sail and race another day, thanks to the extreme efforts of the sailing community at our club. What could be better than that! So, the cherry on top, we made it to the start of the inshore and competed well in Division 1 against a fleet that included two other Hotfoot 27s and a Hotfoot 31. When the wind came up, the genoa grew a few more holes so Matt and Connie patched them on the downwind leg but we found our footing and sailed well as a new team. The boat was solid and performed just like it could and we won the day! How's that for a feel good story.

The best part, this is only the beginning for *Haytor* at our club. The hope is that this boat that refused to die will provide our members and friends a boat to learn on, day sail, cruise, race and experience this great sport we're all so privileged to be a part of. Thank you to everyone involved in the project who donated their valuable time, effort and materials. Good sailing, see you on the water sometime soon! ▀