

Remembering Bill Lapworth



Bill Lapworth, Carl Chapman (builder), and Mille and George Griffith at the launch of *Cassandra*, L36-1, in 1954

>> BILL LAPWORTH RACED CATBOATS ON the Detroit River at age 12, but his rendezvous with history came in 1964 in Southern California with the launch of the Cal 40, a boat of his design that many believed would be a disaster. Not only was it built in fiberglass (“they’ll melt”), but instead of a traditional long keel it had a mere fin (“not adequate”) and an aft-hung spade rudder (“too exposed”).

Then a Cal 40 won the 1965 Transpac overall, and for years afterwards Cal 40s dominated

ocean racing. It was a new day. Look at the profile of most boats now, and you’ll notice a similarity. The Cal 40’s aft-hung rudder proved effective at handling the boat at speed, which was a good thing; Cal 40s tended to go faster than oceangoing boats before them.

The Cal 40 was the second designer-owner collaboration (after the L-36) between Lapworth and George Griffith, who got the build under way at Jensen Marine by purchasing hull #1 and guaranteeing a run of 10 boats.

In speaking of Lapworth, who died in early April, Griffith recalls, “Bill was an easy guy to work with; we just naturally hit it off. I sat across from him at a table and sketched out a very flat midsection for the Cal 40, with a hard turn at the chine, and he had the kind of brain that could work ideas into a cohesive whole. I think they wound up building 160 of those boats. In all the boats he designed, Bill was a pioneer in light displacement, which sort of caught on.” **▲ Kimball Livingston**