

Classics Review

Elska

In 2022, the Dragon *Elska* will celebrate her 75th birthday.

In 1947, Richard Hesketh had her built by Woodnutt & Co, based on the Isle of Wight. Hesketh, a Scot who spent World War II in Sweden, named her for the Old Norse word 'elska', meaning 'love', and brought her north to the River Clyde. *Elska* had several owners over the years until, in 1971, in poor condition, she was bought by three 24-year-old friends, Chris Shields, Alex Blair, and Ian Davidson, who like *Elska*, were born in 1947. The three young owners, low on cash, often slept aboard under a boom tent. They had some exciting moments racing as the genoa came free, shrouds loosened, bolts flew, and yet somehow, in the nick of time, rescue arrived. At some point thereafter she sunk at her mooring off Balmacara, on the Isle of Skye.

In 1983, Crispin Blyth, a chartered accountant and able shipwright, spied *Elska*, bow down and forlorn in a Skye field. Crispin bought the boat for £100, and trailered her to his mother's boatshed on Flamborough Head, East Yorkshire. Crispin's grandfather, then Honorary Commodore of the Royal Yorkshire Yacht Club, took one look at *Elska* and said, "I'll give you £400 to burn her." Instead, over seven years, Crispin lovingly restored *Elska*. The keel, planks, floors and main timbers are still original to the boat. The ribs, deck and fittings and a magnificent new curved ash and mahogany cockpit are new; the mast and boom were reclaimed originals of the same period, found in the roof of Lallows boatyard in Cowes. On August 4, 1990, Crispin relaunched *Elska* in Yorkshire, followed by a triumphant return to Cowes. The Royal Corinthian Yacht Club awarded Crispin the prestigious Dragonfly Trophy for saving *Elska* and for his gorgeous restoration. In 1994, Crispin decided to sell *Elska*. But before doing so, he sailed her one last time, taking 1st place on one day in Cowes Week in the Dragon Class competing with over 40 entries.

Marc Feigen, a sailor from New York (and later member of the New York Yacht Club and Vice Commodore of the Nantucket Yacht Club) saw an ad Crispin placed for *Elska* in Classic Yachting. He left work and took a train four hours north to Flamborough Head. "I bought *Elska* within 30 seconds of seeing her," recalled Marc. Navy Blue with a gold leaf cove stripe, *Elska* was shipped to Nantucket on the US East Coast where she is widely known as 'the prettiest boat in the harbor'. Marc races her in Nantucket and in 2000 and 2001, he won his class in the prestigious Opera House Cup race, the oldest and grandest wooden boat race in the United States. In 2008 Marc won the Opera House Cup itself. Before setting out to sail the 2008 Opera House Cup race, Marc's ten-year-old daughter Julia searched the beach for a lucky shell, which she gave him to take with him. Marc credits his victory against 60 boats, almost all larger, in force 6 winds, to the lucky shell (and to his able crew, Stephen Mead and Toby Smiles).





A year after *Elska* was launched, Prince Philip and Princess Elizabeth were given the Dragon *Bluebottle* as a wedding present. Ten years ago, Marc met the Duke of Edinburgh, and they discussed their love of Dragons. The Duke asked, "where do you sail yours?" "Nantucket," Marc replied. Prince Philip knew the waters, "beautiful sailing there," he said, "no rocks!"

But it has not always been all smooth sailing for *Elska*. This past summer, at rest on her mooring, she was hit and nearly sunk by the passenger ferry *Grey Lady IV*. When he learned this, her shipwright today, Woody Metzger nearly cried, as he had maintained *Elska* in near perfect condition. Luckily, she was not sunk, and Metzger and his partner Jim Donovan are confident in a complete restoration.

Elska has indeed overcome a few rocky moments, but with her original lucky hull, restored and rebuilt three times, *Elska* is ready to provide 75 more years of beautiful sailing to those who love her. For more information on *Elska*, please visit the Dragon Archive – www.dragonarchive.org



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