

# BUILDING A FLEET

## *Editors Preface:*

*The heart and strength of our class organization lies in our fleets, with its health being directly related to the amount of participation in organized Lightning sailing taking place at the local level. If the Lightning is to maintain or improve its position among a host of competitors for the individual's recreational dollar, it is essential that we select activities that will appeal to the diversity of people who are the Lightning Class — newcomers to sailing, daysailors/occasional racers, and "hard core" racers.*

*The following two articles were written at my request as a means of helping all our members revitalize their fleet, or start a new one. I have known Rick, from Raleigh, NC, and Jonathan, from Knoxville, TN, for many years, and consider them to be two of the best "fleet builders" in the class. I hope that application of their ideas will yield positive results for you as well.*

## ORGANIZING A FLEET

by Jonathan Lange

The organization of a fleet is really no different than the organization of any other voluntary association. Churches, unions, civic clubs, neighborhood associations, all are non-profit associations organized around shared interests and values. If you take a look around these days, all voluntary associations are under stress. Because we are interested in building strong fleets we tend to look only on how hard it is to hold together a fleet or racing program at a yacht club. But talk to the neighborhood pastor and he will tell you that participation at activities is down, leadership is tired, and the budget is hard to raise. Mobility, lack of time, T.V., and people becoming more "private" all contribute.

Because our activity or action is racing and not religion doesn't mean that we can ignore that the basic building block of the organization is the person to person relationship. Organizations are just a complex series of relationships. Building the organization is then a task of strengthening and expanding these relationships. This is the organizational approach we are taking in building Fleet 500 in Knoxville. What we have to offer the new potential member is a great boat (Lightning) **and** the friendship, comradery, help, fellowship (if you will) that an organization fosters.

Activities flow out of interests of the participants and we

learn these interests by asking questions of them and sharing our vision of what a large and active fleet might do. We avoid the "nay sayers", people who say, "One-design sailing is dead." or "We used to race here, but nobody cares anymore." We get away from those people because they sap your energy. We don't depend on one activity to build the fleet. No single regatta or boat show will do the trick. Activities are carefully planned for success. Organization is built on small victories—a good picnic, a successful family sail day, a good turn-out at race day.

Leadership is important. Someone has to set the pace, develop the relationships and organize activities where members have an opportunity to get to know each other. Accountability should be built in early. If someone says they will be at the lake on Sunday and doesn't show, they get a call asking why.

Realistic goals are set in growing organizations. Our goal was eight registered boats and we met it. Next year we expect some attrition and still want to grow by four boats.

The results in Knoxville have not been miraculous. But in a time when one-design sailing is supposed to be dying, and in an area where the largest fleet (Thistle) turns out three and four boats on a Sunday, we have laid the foundation for a strong and growing fleet.

## CREATE (OR REVIVE) YOUR OWN FLEET

by Rick Ferguson

You can have a lot more fun with your Lightning if you have some like-minded friends to share it with. If you're fairly new to it, you'll learn faster and become more competitive too. In any event you'll enjoy it more, so start a fleet if there isn't one near you; or if your fleet is inactive, light a fire under it.

I had always liked Lightnings but never owned one, because I wanted to race and there were no Lightnings around my area to race; so I sailed in the boats that were

around, but continued to admire Lightnings. Then Tom Hudgens came to town with his red Lightning; with that raked mast she looked fast even on the trailer. Before long, another Lightning showed up at open club races, that of Michael Rees. A friend of mine who was also a Lightning admirer suggested that he and I should buy one jointly; that would make three boats, and we began to think about building a real fleet on this beginning. Here are some of the things that worked for us. They are not my ideas; Tom was

the most experienced and the ringleader, but we all worked together to make it happen, and now we have an active, competitive 15-boat fleet.

We started by trying to think of anyone who might either have a Lightning somewhere in the area or who might be interested in one. We turned up a motley collection of wood boats, old camp boats and reasonably modern boats and invited everyone to a meeting to discuss the possibilities one evening. We became real detectives, following up every lead. If someone saw a Lightning on the water, we'd try to meet him; if that was not possible, we'd get his sail number and look him up. If someone found a boat in a garage, we'd track down the owner. In a short time we had enough to charter a fleet with ILCA.

Then we started to convert others to the cause. First we needed visibility; people had to be aware of us to join us, right? We approached a local shopping mall about having an indoor Lightning boat show. We rounded up 9 Lightnings, from 40-year-old woodies to racy modern glass ones, cleaned them up and arranged them in the shopping mall. We got posters, brochures, yearbooks and so forth from ILCA and made up lists of used boats for sale, and lists of builders and suppliers to hand out. We made up forms for interested people to fill out and offered to take them sailing; many of us got good crew this way. Most important, we **followed up** every single response and made sure that person got taken for a sail on a Lightning. We tracked down used Lightnings for sale through ILCA and word of mouth (calling all fleet captains in the area) and matched them up with buyers; we didn't just offer them, we SOLD them. We tried to find out just what kind of boat the prospect was looking for and what his price range was, and then we went out and found a boat for him.

Now we had the beginnings of a fleet. The next step was to get everyone (and I mean everyone) involved in some joint activities. We made a push to get every Lightning owner to join the local sailing club, and before each club race someone was designated to personally call every Lightning owner and get him out on the race course. This was very effective in building participation and camaraderie and I recommend it as an ongoing practice. It also lets everyone know that you care about them and want to see them.

At the end of our first real club racing season we decided it was time to host a regatta for Lightnings in the general region. This was taken quite seriously and each fleet member was assigned a responsibility such as race committee, publicity, dinners, registration, etc. This was a big undertaking for us and it strengthened our bonds by bringing everyone together to work on a common project. The Borderline regatta is now an annual event, pulling 30 or 40 Lightnings and good competition from as many as eight states, and it continues to reinforce the bonds of our fleet. After a new member has had a job in the Borderline he truly feels a part of the group; it's like an initiation.

It's essential to keep the energy flowing over the off season. We scheduled a series of six weekly meetings one winter where we had a local expert come talk each evening on a different subject: tactics, tuning, rules, etc. and we invited everyone (not just Lightning sailors) to the meetings. We picked up a few more members that way. One Saturday we rigged a Lightning in a school parking lot on a trailer; we hoisted the spinnaker and rotated the boat back and forth in front of the wind giving spinnaker and rotated the boat back and forth in front of the wind giving spinnaker handling and jibing lessons to new members and anyone else who was interested.

It comes down to this: we have probably the best all-around small boat there is, but that's not enough to make it happen without real involvement from a few enthusiastic people. You have to be visible. Seek publicity any way you can think of, and plan all kinds of activities you can invite prospects to participate in. You have to be enthusiastic, friendly and outgoing; make people want to associate with your group. You have to plan activities that will keep everyone involved and give everyone something to do. And you have to keep in touch with everyone all the time. Let them know you're interested in them. And you have to keep doing all of this. But if you do a good job, you will attract some really great folks who will pick up the ball and run with it as you are getting tired and the thing will be self-perpetuating. You can use these ideas to rejuvenate an old, tired fleet as well as build a new one. Try it! You will make a lot of new friends and have a lot of fun.

## WANTED: THE PERFECT CREW

The perfect crew can have no name for he or she must be able to respond to any grunt or barely audible sound the skipper barks, and recognize it as his or her name. He or she must have ears as sensitive as a radar detector to be able to understand commands given when the skipper is facing the stern. And the crew must only speak when spoken to, or screamed at, whichever the case may be.

In appearance, the perfect crew must have two legs, with sticky feet like a fly's, and four arms — to hold a jib sheet, a centerboard pennant and untangle a spinnaker sheet at the same time. "Perfect" must also have 360-degree, X-ray

vision like Superman to see through sails, masts, and the skipper's head. Perfect can weigh as much as 75 pounds extra in heavy air, but must be able to miraculously lose the 75 pounds if the winds die. Another must is being clairvoyant and telekenetic — that way Perfect will never be caught in the bottom of the boat saying, "You never said tack!"

Lastly, Perfect must be humble. After a day of verbal and physical abuse, with the boat maybe coming in second, the next day in the newspaper Perfect's name becomes, "...and crew."

# BUYING A USED LIGHTNING

by Craig Thayer

Whether looking for yourself, or someone interested in joining the fleet, the process of buying a used boat can be both time consuming and sometimes frustrating. Often once a number of possibilities have been located, it can be very tough to pick "the boat" from among the rest.

In order to make the process as efficient and painless as possible, it is suggested that a game plan similar to the following be used:

A. Pre-Search Decisions (to be asked of yourself or the prospective buyer)

1. What are my goals?

Do I want to race or daysail, and if I want to race, at what level of competition do I seek to be successful?

2. What can my budget afford?

Have I included the costs of miscellaneous items that may be needed prior to using the boat (such as new fittings, insurance, trailer and boat licenses, spare tire, new covers, materials for any hull repairs, life preservers, club membership, etc., etc.)?

3. Does the boat need to be self rescuing, and if so do I have a preference as to builder and series (i.e. foam versus air tanks, wood trim or no wood trim, and preferred cockpit design)?

4. Would I be interested in a boat that needs repair work?

Do I have the tools, know how, time, and place to work should a boat needing repair be available at an attractive price?

5. How far am I willing to drive to find a boat if none are available in my own city?

Obviously the answers to these questions are needed before any serious looking starts, as they will dictate the direction of our search. We should know whether we want a potential national champ or an older non competitive but solid boat well suited to daysailing. Now the hunt may begin.

B. Beginning the Search, or Where Do I Look?

One of the best places to look for a used Lightning is in our neighbors' back yards. It's not uncommon to find available boats under tarps or in garages within a few miles of where we live. The owner is usually not actively trying to sell the boat, but if you stumble on an inactive sailor he may become very interested when a prospective buyer appears. The local paper and sailing club newsletter and bulletin board are two other excellent sources of leads.

If you live in an area where Lightnings are scarce, you might try contacting fleet captains of Lightning Fleets located within an acceptable driving distance to determine if they know of any current or possible boats for sale. They can often give you additional information about boats that are or were in their fleet.

Finally, the monthly listing in I.L.C.A.'s *Flashes* is an excellent source of generally newer, very competitive boats across the country.

C. Comparing the Candidates

Unless you've been fortunate enough to locate "the boat" close to home, you'll have to inspect and compare the boats you've located via long distance phone calls to the owners. To do this as efficiently as possible, a list of questions should

be prepared beforehand so that by asking each owner the same questions none are forgotten, and each boat can be compared to the others on more nearly an "apples to apples" basis. Once the questionnaire is assembled, make it easy for yourself and run off a number of photocopies. A sample questionnaire is shown below.

Owner \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ w: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Boat # \_\_\_\_\_  
Builder \_\_\_\_\_ Weight \_\_\_\_\_ Yr. Built \_\_\_\_\_ Asking price \_\_\_\_\_  
Color: Topside \_\_\_\_\_ Bottom \_\_\_\_\_ Deck \_\_\_\_\_ Interior \_\_\_\_\_

**Hull:** general condition, any damage, delamination (fiberglass), rot, cracked ribs (wood), condition of gelcoat, paint, fairness of hull, particularly in bunk areas

**Flotation:** self rescuing, foam, air tanks, location-hollow floor, seats, bulkheads

**Wood trim:** condition of if present-spray rails, coamings, seats, floorboards-teak or mahogany

**Rig:** spar & boom-builder, condition, age; spinnaker pole

**Fittings:** location of controls, Harkers, adjustable traveler, drums or blocks for c'board, vang, luff, etc., etc.

**Rudder:** wood-solid or laminated, or fiberglass composite-condition

**Tiller:** wood-solid or laminated, or aluminum tube-condition

**Trailer:** age, condition, builder, lights work, fenders, tires, spare, mast support, tie down straps, inspected, paint or galvanized, bearing buddies

**Covers:** type and condition of mast, rudder, trailing, storage-summer & winter

**Other Equipment:** anchor, paddle, fenders, life jackets, lifting bridle, etc.

**Sails:** make, year, condition, number of sets, spinnaker-dynae or nylon-colors

**Additional comments:** race record or boat not raced, where stored summer & winter, remarks from previous owners & others familiar with boat, price negotiable?

D. The Final Decision

You've now helped the phone company to stay in business, and are armed with fact sheets on several boats. Some of them are probably incomplete as after several questions you determined this particular boat was not of interest and you moved on to the next. From those remaining you should now have a pretty good idea of the two or three finalists.

The ideal situation if time and distance permit (which may be the case if you've found a boat that is not advertised for sale) would be to visually inspect the boat and equipment, but other people are also involved in a search process. Therefore limited time is available for us to reach a decision, and unless we were lucky enough to find "the boat" in our own backyard, the purchase agreement must be made by phone.

The sale should be contingent upon a satisfactory inspection when the boat is picked up. Should the boat not be as represented or expected, the deal can then be dissolved. This may result in coming back empty handed after a long drive,



but this definitely beats the alternative of now owning a boat you're dissatisfied with.

It's OVER! The pre-purchase butterflies are gone, now possibly replaced by the feeling of "I wonder if I got a good deal?" If you've followed the "game plan" through from the

initial steps in part A to a careful inspection when you drove to pick up the boat, you should have little to worry about except how to enjoy your new boat to the fullest. See you on the water!

## BACK TO THE BASICS

by Ken Read

The technical sport of sailing. The numbers, shapes, designs and theories boggle the mind. What ever happened to good old fashioned know-how? Well it seems to have gone out with the Model T. Today's world class sailors have to be architects, engineers, air and hydrofoil experts. They attempt to outsmart mother nature, something that has been proven almost impossible over the centuries. High tech materials for hulls, sails, masts and even rigging are a must for the competitive sailor. But what can the average sailor learn from this. Sure we can get all wrapped up in the high tech world. But how soon we forget the ideas and strategies which have worked for the winning sailors for years.

In 1986 I spent ungodly amounts of time sailing J-24's. We were the defending World Champions and felt a new pressure that I had never felt before. I had to defend, and to make it worse, defend in my home waters. So the immediate response was to look for a breakthrough. The entire summer before the Worlds was spent trying new keel shapes, sail cloth and design developments, rig tensions and mast step locations. I guess in a sense it was a good learning experience, finding out what was really slow. Our attempts for a breakthrough were a complete washout. What it did build was an ulcer. So right before the Worlds we went back to the basics, taking the tuning guide which I had written one year earlier and setting the boat up exactly to it. The keel went back to the shape that had always worked in the past. We basically did a complete shift due to the inherent frustration of searching for the perfect solution to breakaway speed. As it turned out it was the best thing we ever could have done. The last chapter of the regatta was a happy one for the home team, but not after we had to re-teach ourselves to start on the correct side of the starting line. Once we did that, WOW what a great sport!

The basics are what we learn in sailing school, young or old, as sailing is introduced as a relaxing yet competitive sport. We are taught to attempt to identify with nature and fellow human beings. So why are some people better sailors than others? First of all, a sailor must learn how to develop a

feel or a sense of how a sailboat reacts to different wind strengths. This is just a sense, but a sense which is developed from time on the water. There is no substitute for time in a boat, as any successful racer keys on the fact that this is the most important strategy leading to success. The next step is the transformation of natural to technical sailor. How do you manipulate a boat into reacting quicker and making it easier to handle for the crew. Here is where the hard part lies. On big racing boats where there are so many variables to control the organized group splits the technical aspects to better learn to utilize each particular function. For example, there will be a computer specialist, sail trimmer, rig trimmer, helmsman, tactician and crew organizer. One person would be extremely diluted to attempt to master all of the functions. In the dinghy, where there are far fewer variables, one person can attempt to master, but it is still the top people who give important roles to the crew. This leads to a group that stays together longer and begins to gell as a team, as well as presents a checks and balance system against the high probability of a mental lapse. We have all been involved in races where after a mediocre finish a crewmember finally speaks up to say, "Hey, I thought as the breeze got lighter you wanted to let the backstay off?" As you peer over your shoulder you realize that you got caught up in the tactical moment, that the backstay is still set up for the moderate air of the last beat. If the entire crew had been together and people felt confident in making suggestions within the bounds of the particular expert, the team would have changed gears more efficiently.

As a beginning racer or a seasoned veteran, the sport of sailing is far from mastered. We should kick back and concentrate on the fundamentals more often to ensure a growth of skill. It is far too often that people tend to bite off more than they can chew, and end up diluting their own skills, leading to frustration and eventual failure on the race course. When in doubt, go back to the basics and the sport will become much more enjoyable.