

Thoughts and tips from Three-time Olson 30 National Champion, KEITH LORENCE!

by: Joni Monnich

This month the Bay Area Olson Newsletter becomes the mouthpiece for the National Olson Organization (is the whole country really ready for Miss Goodwinch?). With that in mind, I thought it would be a great time to talk with three-time Olson 30 National Champion, Keith Lorence of Sobstad Sails.

I called Seattle to talk with Keith and had the serendipitous pleasure of discovering that he was here in my own backyard spending the weekend sailing on a Melges at the San Francisco NOOD Regatta.

Keith was raised in Southern California and had the excitement of his first sailing trip when he was just six weeks old, he always asked his parents why they had waited so long! Keith's Dad, Herman Lorence, had been a member of the 1939 MIT sailing club while attending school there. Herman continued to be an active sailor in Southern California and when Keith's parents divorced, father and son spent every weekend together on or around sailboats. Keith said that he relished that time and rather than ever rebelling against it as many teenagers might have, he absorbed as much as he could loving every minute.

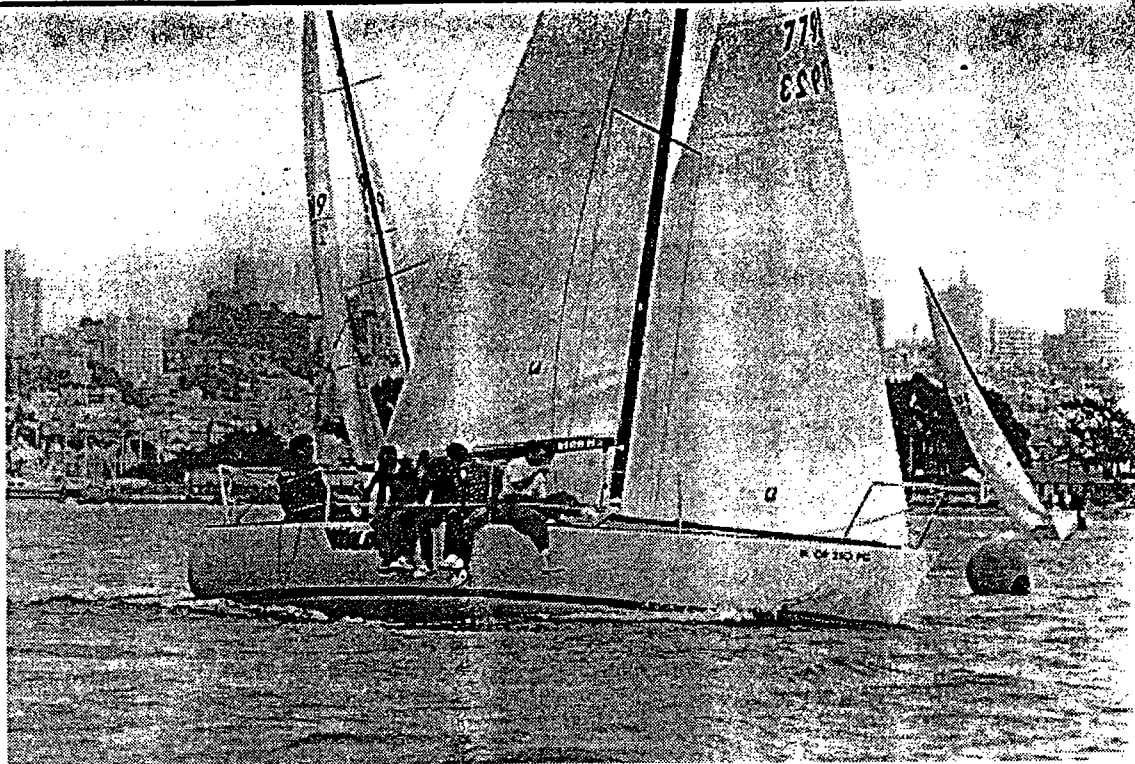
With an early start like that it's no wonder that Keith has won three Olson 30 National championships - Tactician for Rush in Seattle, 1982; Driver/tactician for Wildfire both in San Francisco, 1993 and once again in Seattle at the 1995 Nationals. In talking with Keith I had hoped to gain some insight or maybe reveal a trade secret or two as to how he had accomplished this very impressive record. Initially his answer to my question



Keith—Laying in the first 8 panels of his new custom boat.

was straight forward enough — his approach to sailing is everything on the boat needs to be right and you need to do everything you can to sail as fast as possible. A little vague in terms of specific ideas, so I decided to try a different tack so to speak. I asked, "What do you think are five things that someone shouldn't do, if they want to win a National Regatta?" Keith quickly replied. "Don't use electronics!" He feels that you spend too much time looking at the numbers, dials, readouts, reset buttons etc., and of course interpreting what all that means — when you need to concentrate on making the boat go fast. "Electronics are a distraction, a crutch, especially in a one-design fleet — you know if an Olson 30 is going fast or slow!" Keith has taken all of the electronic equipment off Wild Fire including the knot meter, although recently he has been thinking about putting the depth sounder back on — "running aground

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Wildfire at the San Francisco Nationals

is definitely slow!”

We moved onto the second point — being what Keith called a gadgeteer. He described this as having lots of strings and tweakers to play with. “If you have too many things to pull, you don’t really know which adjustment has decreased or increased your speed and you lose track of your ultimate goal of speed.”

Keith also felt that particularly at a National event it was very important not to become caught up in what he called ‘local battles’ — the reference being to getting yourself into a luffing match or a tacking duel with just one boat while 5 or 6 boats sail past you. A friend once summed that concept up for Keith with this statement, “You can’t win a regatta with one race, but you sure can lose one with a single race!”

A fourth point was having your boat well prepared. Granted money is a factor for most people, but do everything you can to avoid boat failures — nothing is worse than losing a race because a block blew up. Inspect your boat before a race, replace things before they start to wear whenever possible. Prior to a Nationals, Keith always replaces all his halyards — “The boat can’t be the excuse for not winning,” he emphasizes.

And his final point, I think probably the most important for Keith, is to keep in mind what he called the ‘grand or global view’. Keith is definitely an instinctual sailor, someone who is very much in tune with the boat.

The kind of sailor who could drive with his eyes closed and be able to tell you where and how fast the boat is going. He describes how he takes a bird’s eye view of a race, almost as if he was looking down on a chess board or in this scenario a race course — seeing where the mark is, where the competition is, and keeping in touch with the wind conditions. The old adage of getting your head out of boat. Many of us or at least speaking for myself don’t have all those years of experience and would certainly love to improve the instinctual side of our sailing — Keith’s advice,) “get yourself out on a Laser and really get a feel for the wind and the way the boat handles in different situations, particularly downwind where it’s just you and the boat.”

Keith’s other strong recommendation was to go out and do one on one tuning with another Olson. He feels that this is the fastest way to learn what improves your boat speed, particularly if you organize it so that one boat is sailed at a ‘constant’ while adjustments and changes are made on the other boat. A great way to find out what makes your boat fast and more important, what makes it slow!

Other points that Keith felt help him win this year’s Nationals: Wildfire is owned by Mike Ellis and she has spent most her life being dried stored in the warm climate of Gold Hill, Oregon where she was sailed the one month out of the year when Klamath Lake is deep enough to not bang your keel on the rocks at the bottom of the lake . . . this makes for a very dry and therefore a light boat. Crew work — Keith’s

crew is made up of a group of close friends who have sailed together for many years in a variety of situations, always sharing the same goal of winning and enjoying themselves in the process! Keith talks about the Saturday race at the Nationals where they had placed 18th. Having won every race the boat had been in during the past season, he felt tremendous pressure to win the Nationals, but with a day like that the championship certainly didn't feel within reach. Escaping the strain of the Yacht Club, Keith and his crew went back to his house cooked themselves a good dinner, enjoyed some wine, and savored how much fun they had been having. In spite of the loss, they came back the next day relaxed and ready for another day of fun sailing. Thanks in part to that positive attitude they went on to place St., 2nd, and 2nd in the final day of racing thereby winning the National Championship. Keith stresses that it's important for the crew to be relaxed and upbeat, there is no yelling on the boat and his crew is confident in their ability to win.

The conversation comes around again to highlight what Keith feels makes a winning boat, or what can help a boat move up in the fleet

- 1) Simplify your boat
- 2) A boat that is prepared
- 3) Simplify your mind
- 4) Good crew
- 5) Aim your boat in the right direction and sail it as fast as you can
- 6) Get your head out of the boat and look at the 'grand view'
- 7) Have your sail maker come

and sail with you — he can give you tips on setting up sails and tuning the rig

Keith also spends quite a bit of time single handed sailing his boat, even if it's just to get out and

relieve a little tension that it's a great way your boat and how Keith whispers odd, but he also course and taking Wild-Ventura ready for her, of us, race you

sion for a few hours. He says to get completely in touch with it feels in different conditions. that I might think this is a little talks to his boat — on the race even on the trailer. He recalls fire down to the Nationals in and as she sat on her trailer the long trip ahead he said to "We've got a lot of work ahead there's going to be lots of toughing, but if you do well I promise a new paint job when we get home!" Needless to say she had a shiny, sleek bottom upon her return!

And what can we expect from Keith in the future: Well, he is in the process of launching his brand new, custom designed 52' Wylie cruiser — a cold moulded, wood boat which actually weighs 2000 lbs. less than a Santa Cruz 52. But he isn't going off world cruising just yet. Keith looks forward to being at next year's Olson Nationals in Santa Cruz. Last year it was that easy-to-spot hot pink jib (what came to be lovingly known as the 'gay blade'), next season Keith alludes to a new light #1 in pale blue of course, and a one-of-a-kind, Sobstad exclusive: a tie-dyed spinnaker. Sounds like fun as always on the water for Keith and his crew!

Wildfire in Seattle
(with a pink jib!)

