

THE NEW ZEALAND CLASSIC YACHT JOURNAL



THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE CLASSIC YACHT ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND INC.

P.O. BOX 69-172 GLENDENE, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND.

ISSN 1175-804X

www.classicyacht.org.nz

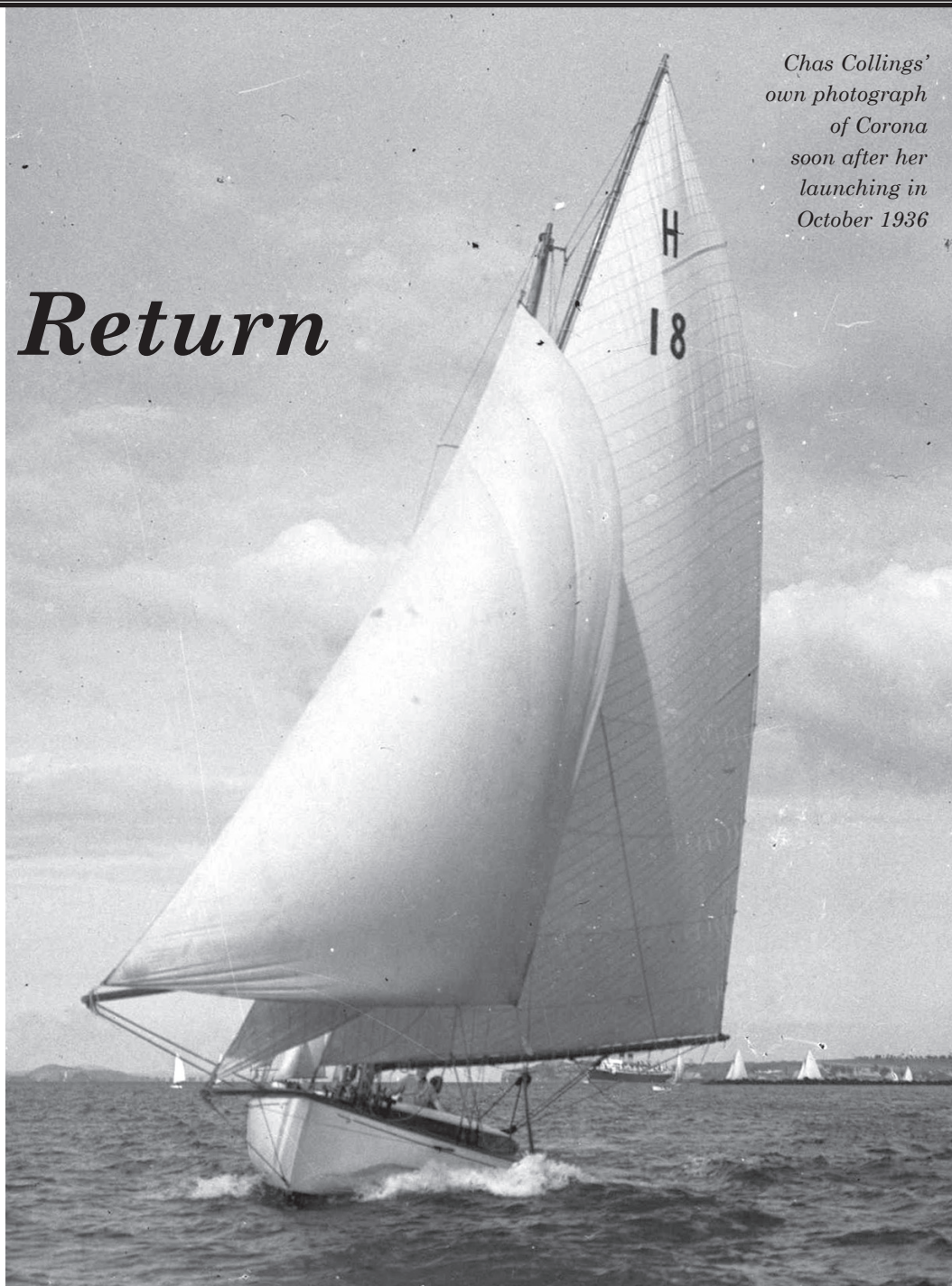
Issue 76 – June 2011

Corona makes Stylish Return to the Water

By Harold Kidd

If you had to choose the best mullet boat ever, you would have to make up your mind between two yachts, the 22 footer *Tamariki* and the 26 footer *Corona*. Both were built in the 1930s, both were the best in their class for many years, and both were designed and built by Charles Collings of Collings & Bell in St Mary's Bay.

Collings served his time with Robert Logan Snr, then spent some time as a structural engineer in the Thames area. In 1903, he joined the Clare brothers in their boatbuilding business in St Mary's Bay as their designer. He soon took over



Chas Collings' own photograph of Corona soon after her launching in October 1936

the business, which became Collings & Bell in 1909, specialising in mullet boats which were amongst the best of their time. However, the firm began concentrating on motor launches, particularly Collings' square-bilge planing hull designs for racing, whale chasing and game fishing, which led to some advanced 'express cruisers' in the American style like *Ruamano*.

In 1934, Collings went back to his roots and built himself the crack 22ft L Class mullet boat *Tamariki*, following up with the crack 26 footer, the H Class *Corona*, for the Nunns brothers in 1936. Both yachts dominated their classes for years. *Corona* was a powerful sail carrier. On her 10ft 6in beam she carried 900 sq ft in her very high-peaked, almost gunter, gaff cutter rig. Her mast was

a towering 40ft, she had a 30ft boom, a 19ft gaff and a 15ft bowsprit. From end of bowsprit to end of boom she measured 45ft 6in. 2½ tons of lead ballast kept her reasonably stiff, standing in for the load of fish her ancestors had brought home to market. She was in a class of her own from the start and remained scratch boat in the fleet during the 18 years the Nunns owned her.

In the 1960s, mullet boat racing began to die out, only the 22 footers retaining a competitive fleet thanks to the efforts of the Ponsonby Cruising Club and the lure of competition for the Lipton Cup. The 26 footers are big craft, requiring a skilled crew and high maintenance. They stopped racing in the 1960s, replaced by the huge post-war brood of nimble keel yachts. *Corona*, like several other 26 footers, was

sold to the fishing industry, lost her rig and gained a tall deckhouse and a diesel.

Mullet boat enthusiasts Ron Copeland, Lee Chambers and John Hogan rescued her in the 1980s and started her restoration at the National Maritime Museum at Hobson Wharf. But their work stalled because of resource pressures on the Museum.

A couple of years ago, in an arrangement with the Museum, the New Zealand Traditional Boatbuilding School took over *Corona's* restoration at its Hobsonville facility. School trustees Robert Brooke and Ian McRobie put in a great deal of research to ensure that *Corona* took to the water as a faithful recreation of her original self. Serendipitously, Robert had a copy of her hull plans, which his father Jack Brooke had saved.

When Chris McMullen had a careful look at the plans, he could see on them, just faintly, the lightly pencilled outlines of her cabin top which agreed with her contemporary photographs.

Many hundreds of pleasant hours were put into the task by a bunch of volunteers headed by the jovial Ian McRobie, a man of great humour and leadership, who put in four solid days a week. Thanks to grants from the Southern Trust and magnificent contributions from the local marine trade, progress on *Corona's* restoration was consistent and tradesmanlike.

The big day arrived on Saturday 12th March when *Corona* was launched on the top of the tide from the old RNZAF flying-boat slip at Hobsonville. It was an unusual and rather dramatic day. The weather was



*Corona in
all her restored
glory on launch
day*

superb, brilliant sunshine with a light breeze. The crowd was much larger than expected. Civil Defence had warned of a tsunami following the earthquake in Japan the night before and recommended that people keep off the water. No unusual tidal effect was perceived during the launch but, in those early hours after the quake when the true extent of devastation in Japan was not yet known, a tsunami warning added spice to the event.

Corona sailed like a witch in the light breeze and got up to 7 knots to surprise everyone and gladden the hearts of her restoration team. It was a great culmination to a magnificent effort. Fittingly, her first race was in the Ponsonby Cruising Club's Vintage & Veterans' regatta on 10th April when she



acquitted herself well. These days, *Corona* can be seen at the Viaduct alongside *Jessie Logan*, *Wairiki* and a clutch of other fine classics sponsored by the Tino Rawa Trust.

Above: A glimpse into Corona's office as she steams past the finish boat in the 1930s.

Right: The core team of restorers, from left Robert Brooke, Morrie Ogden, Ian McRobie and Ian Stephenson.

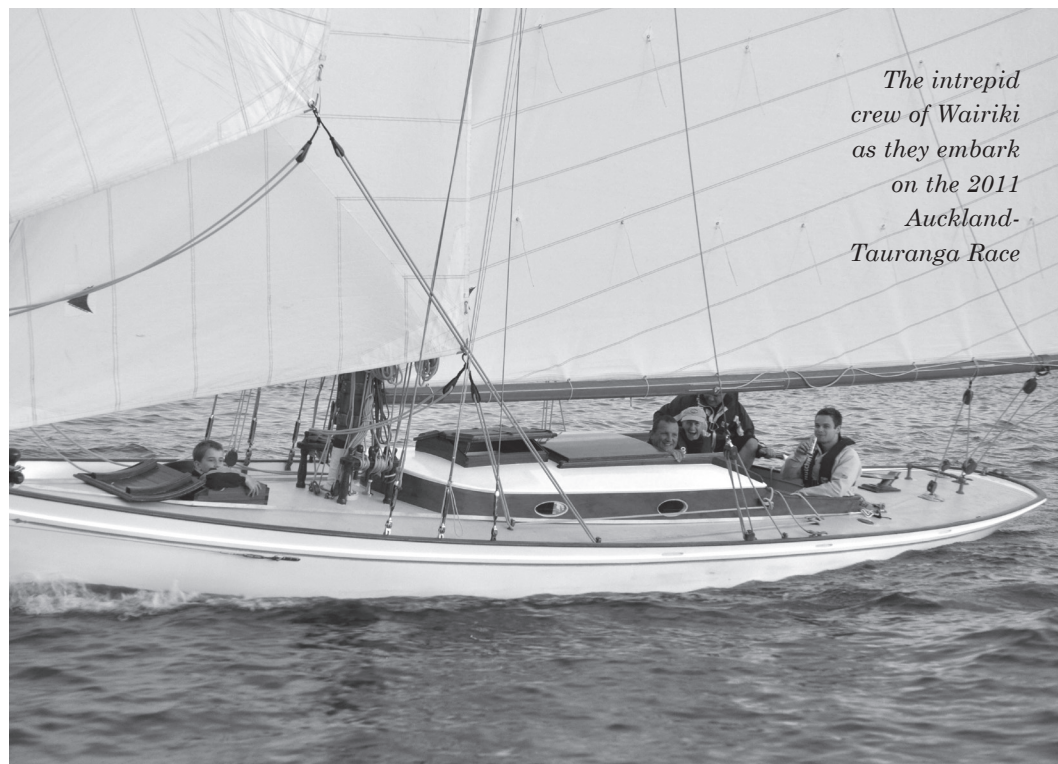


Chris Miller Photo

Wairiki's heroic dash to Tauranga

Jason Prew is a son of the Bay of Plenty where Prews grow fine kiwifruit. Jason's freshly-restored *Wairiki* had a remarkable history in the Auckland-Tauranga Ocean Race; she came 1st on handicap in 1926, 1928 and 1930, 2nd on handicap in the very first race in 1923 and in 1925, and 3rd on handicap in 1927. What could be more natural than *Wairiki* tagging along with the moderns in their Tauranga race on Thursday 21st April? Jason's crew were his brother Daniel, his nephew Connor, Shane Appleton and our intrepid Secretary, Joyce Talbot

The start was a drifter, 2 - 5 knots, and that prevailed



The intrepid crew of Wairiki as they embark on the 2011 Auckland-Tauranga Race

Tony Stevenson Photo



*'Gutsy' CYA
Secretary Joyce
Talbot helmed
Wairiki from the
Mercury Islands
to Auckland*

Tony Stevenson Photo

right out to Channel Island. As dark fell, it came up to 15 knots from the SE requiring a board out to the Barrier. Later it blew up to 25 knots around the Hole in the Wall. *Wairiki* still carried full rag, even her topsail, as the crew considered it safer to feather her through the gusts than drop the rig and reef in the murk.

This tactic paid off as daylight brought lighter NE conditions and *Wairiki* was still in touch with the main bunch of moderns, never more than 30 minutes behind. In fact, off Whangamata, she was making ground on the fleet, surging up to 10 knots on occasion. The main bunch crossed the line at the Mount

around 1700 on Friday the 22nd; *Wairiki* was still only 30 minutes behind them after over 30 hours racing in all kinds of conditions.

Needless to say Jason and his Argonauts received

a heroes' welcome at Tauranga. The trip home was in cruising mode, three reefs and 'small' headsails, just Jason and Joyce, with Joyce helming all the way home from the Mercs. Lots

of guts, that woman!

I asked Jason if he'd do it again tomorrow. He said, "No, not tomorrow, but next year for sure!" I haven't asked Joyce yet ...

Harold Kidd

Watch Out for Floaters



Recent storms and high tides have increased the amount of flotsam and jetsam in and around the Waitemata Harbour, a fact the CYA's engine guru James Mobberley knows only too well. On a recent diving and fishing trip James' 1925

Lane Motorboat Co. launch *Falcon* struck what is thought to be a partly submerged rogue marina pole. She sustained sufficient damage to her hull that, after emergency at-sea repairs, she had to be nursed back and slipped immediately at a boatshed kindly made available at no notice by Peter Boardman (MV *Lady Margaret*).

The repairs were undertaken at the Geoff Bagnall yard in Milford. *Falcon* is now better down below than the day she slid down Lanes slip in Mechanics Bay.

Alan Houghton

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