



# Champion

Smith may be the English language's most common surname, but in the keelboat phonebook there's only one Jud. Olympian Carol Cronin takes tea with a sailing legend

I first met Jud Smith in 2002, early on in my Olympic Yngling career. I was a nobody and already committed to another sailmaker, but this white-haired gentleman spent half an hour explaining how to sight my spreaders for symmetry (sometimes in very un-gentlemanly language).

He could have been off schmoozing with other teams (his customers); instead, eyes twinkling as we talked tuning technicalities, he was helping me to improve.

Most of Jud's competitors have probably had similar help from this lifetime sailmaker. Making sailboats go faster is Jud Smith's passion, not just his profession – and Jud loves to talk. 'It's a fun thing to be able to help other sailors sail up to their potential,' he tells me, during our lengthy chat in his 'corner office'.

As president of Doyle One Design, Jud works out of the Salem, Massachusetts loft. And while 'corner office' is technically true, it's only because his nondescript desk is tucked out of the way of a big work table where almost all of the company's one-design sails are built. 'All we do here is one-design,' he explains... but through the glass dividers is an open floor big enough to produce Doyle Superyacht sails.

As we chatted, sewing machines and workers' voices chattered away happily. There are fewer people who want to learn the trade these days, he says; young sailors go pro now, instead of working in a loft during the week and sailing at the weekends as Jud's done since he was a teenager.

I ask him what keeps him excited about sailmaking, 40-plus years later. 'There's a certain amount of pride,' he replies, sitting up a little straighter in his chair. 'There's a piece of you that's in every one of those sails. You always want to make the best sails you can, and have those sails perform. We make a ton of sails for the Star Sailors League, and more and more are in the finals and often winning. The guy who won the Star Worlds this year has our jibs. I enjoy

making sails and I like to see them do well.'

Another bonus: his job keeps him young. 'I'm 61 and I get to go out and sail with a bunch of 30-year-olds. I've found the youth. It's just like being 30 again!'

#### Four decades of winning

As a skipper, Jud's won world championships in four different classes: Mumm30 (1999), Etchells (2006), Sonar (2013) and J/70 (2018). The most recent is his current favourite, 'because it's hard to win a regatta at home. Definitely more pressure and the expectations are higher.' He also won the Star Springs in 2017, finished second at way too many worlds (six in the Etchells alone), and won another handful of big regattas as a crew – most notably the 2017 J/70 Worlds as bow for Peter Duncan. Yes, that's back-to-back world championships at opposite ends of what he calls 'the funnest boat I ever sailed'.

#### Four decades of sailmaking

When asked about industry changes since the 1970s Jud says 2009 drew a big line in the sailmaking sand. 'Literally everything dropped by 50 per cent, so that was a



tough period.' It was also the start of a new Olympic quad, minus one important keelboat class; Doyle had produced 350 Yngling sails in 2008. 'Half a million dollars' worth of business just shutting down.' He shakes his head. 'No surprise that there are not nearly as many sailmakers as there were 10 years ago.'

Through those tough times local classes kept the one-design department going. 'You actually could say that the Rhodes 19 picked up during the recession,' he says, 'because the people who owned them said "I know things might be bad, but I'm going to get a set of sails. I've got this boat and we're going sailing."' [Dave] Curtis always told me that one-design is somewhat recession-proof!

What wasn't recession-proof were the bigger keelboat classes. 'Farr 40s and Melges 32s and all that stuff began to fade away,' he remembers. 'All these pro sailors all of sudden had nothing to do. So where do they show up? I started to see them at all the Etchells regattas.'

His customers might consider Jud himself to be a professional sailor, but he makes a sharp distinction between what he calls 'the old-time sailmakers' (the only option when he was young) and getting paid to sail. 'I don't think I'd want to be a full-time pro sailor now,' he says. 'I'd rather go home at night...'

When the J/70 came along in 2012 the pro sailors quickly found work there too. 'I think the class took off in part because it was cheaper than the big boats; the right boat at the right time. It's probably our biggest class right now.' A J/70 will plane in 15kt, he says: 'If you sail hot enough. It's a mini little big boat. Personally I have no intention of ever going back [to big boats], so it's kind of neat.'

Another reason for the runaway success of the J/70: all age groups can sail. The helm can be 'someone old and get away with it'. And hiking doesn't require 'hanging like laundry, which would be a bunch of 20-year-olds. That's why I think the class will keep going.'

But the pro aspect is a problem. 'There are so many regattas now, so there's a need for pro sailors because otherwise no one is going to have any crew.' But 'the cost has got pretty out of control and obviously you worry about it hurting the class.'

He claims he was the only top skipper at the 2018 worlds with an amateur on his team... that's one amateur. 'There are at least 10 boats that definitely go the full pro route, but it's got even deeper than that. In the top 20, 15 boats had at minimum two pros onboard, and most of them had more than two. So that's a conundrum; if we're going to have all these regattas then maybe there's no other solution... but it gets very expensive for small boat racing.'

#### Bookend world championships

Though only separated by one year, Jud's two most recent world titles (2017 and 2018 in the J/70) were so radically different he feels they could be considered non-matching bookends to an entire racing career. When I ask why, I expect comparisons of crewing vs skippering. Instead he focuses on differences in preparation and strategy, proving (without ever stating) his own depth as both a sailor and a campaigner.

#### 2017 WORLDS - PORTO CERVO Preparation

As he remembers it Jud only signed on with Peter Duncan's team for the 2017 Europeans in Hamble. 'I said, "OK, I'll go do the one regatta. I'm going to see how the sails are set up and you guys can keep looking for a crew."' But I was never supposed to be on that team [for the worlds]. That was never the plan.'

It blew hard for that entire regatta, Jud says, eyes wide with memories of the Solent's wind against current. 'When it's windy there it's really windy,' which is why so many European boats sailed five-up rather than the US norm of four. 'I'm not a little guy. And even so we were light against these five-up teams.' But they got better each day, and 'Next thing I know, we're talking about the Italian Nationals!'

**Opposite:** Jud Smith (right) and Peter Duncan's winning crew at the J/70 Worlds in Porto Cervo in 2017. The following year Duncan and Smith would work together as training partners... although that arrangement later had its 'moments'. For Smith's team on *Africa* (left) it all turned out fine: in a high-scoring regatta they won the 2018 world title by a single point from Italian Bruno Pasquinelli; Pete Duncan's *Relative Obscurity* finished 4th

Jud laughs. 'I said, "Italy, whoa! If my wife could go, I'll do that."' They won. 'So by that time,' he adds, with another chuckle, 'if they had someone else in mind they forgot about it.'

The team arrived at the worlds in Porto Cervo ahead of their competition. It was 'blowing like stink, and we had four or five really good days of sailing.' Confident in their speed, they focused on boathandling. 'Who does this, who puts their hands there? Who moves their foot to there? How do we get the pole deployed faster? Those are the things we were working out.'

#### Racing

Just before the regatta a full mistral arrived; practice and the first two race days were blown out. 'We sat on the dock for two days which was actually perfect for us,' Jud remembers, smiling. 'It gave us a chance to rest up.' Once the regatta got underway all that early practice paid off. 'We just got better,' he says.

'We got better at tuning the boat. We got better at trimming the sails.' And the courses were set for what he calls 'a proper-length race' – because class guidelines, which specify a one-hour target time for each race, were ignored. 'Start, go close-hauled for a while, be a little patient, and then just chip away.' They won the six-race regatta with just eight points, 15 points clear of second.

#### 2018 WORLDS - MARBLEHEAD

Marblehead has been Jud's home port his entire life, but he calls the 2018 worlds a 'goofball regatta' and – only slightly more diplomatically – says the racing was 'far less perfect than Porto Cervo'.

Though that was partly due to unsettled weather, one-hour races with 91 J/70s on a single starting line made for a very crowded course. 'We're in these scrappy little situations, just a pile of boats,' Jud says, frowning. 'Maybe two or three times in the entire regatta we got clear enough to put the bow down and let it rip a bit.' Superior boat speed alone wasn't going to win this time around.

#### Preparation

Months before the regatta Jud (expecting typical 'Marble-dead' conditions) predicted that it would be a high-scoring event; that proved correct, even though there was more wind than expected. He also knew he couldn't win without practice, because he didn't start sailing sportboats until his mid-50s; 'I can't go into a J/70 cold turkey. I've got to be



thinking about it.' So he organised several two-boat training camps with Pete Duncan. 'He's a good one to tune up with. We had the same sails, and we could compare set-up very quickly.'

But toward the end of the summer the relationship soured. 'We were ready to kill each other about two weeks before the worlds,' Jud admits. 'No one would want to lose a test. If they were starting to lose they'd wait for a header and tack. "Oh, we won that test." And I'm like, "Oh my God. This is such bullshit. We're not learning. This is a complete waste of an afternoon." It was brutal.'

Jud admits being a purist about tuning didn't help. But perhaps the biggest issue was Duncan's superior height, especially in the breeze. 'It's pretty hard for me to be the helmsman and sailmaker, brand new boat and hear from my tactician that they're "same speed, a little higher". If I heard it one more time...'

Good teams in high-pressure situations are bound to have disagreements, he points out. The only way to work together is to respect and trust each other. But it wasn't until midway through the final five-day session that Jud felt as if he could consistently hang with his tuning partner. 'We changed our set-up a little so we could finally hold them, maybe win a test or two.'

'But a lot of the time we were worse than him... They were on fire.'

What Jud didn't do to prepare for the 2018 worlds was develop speciality sails. 'When I heard some of the other sailmakers working on fuller jibs for Marblehead, I'm like, "Yeah. Bring it on, man. Been down that road." Any time I tried it it was a disaster, because the J/70 just gets overpowered too quickly.'

'The jibs have to get through the whole range.' Instead, his team talked through what they could do to power up their all-purpose jib in light air. 'And I said, "Dude, let's just tie the tack forward." That worked out great.' He smiles.

'Mainly we just learned to use the sails better. When sailors say, "I'd like my jib to be user-friendly," I'm like, "Good."'

### Racing

The regatta began with a 20-25kt southeasterly, which in Marblehead means a whole ocean of fetch. Jud's team on *Africa* (Another Frickin' Raceboat I Can't Afford) managed a 7.14. 'It was really fun,' he says. 'One of the longer race-tracks. Waves were big, great rides. Everything seemed to be in proportion out there.' But defending champion Peter Duncan's team won the day with a 2.2. 'They looked unstoppable,' Jud says – though he claims that didn't bother him too much since they were using Doyle sails!

When the wind lightened up Jud prioritised risk reduction, never winning any races but almost always finishing in the top group. On day three 15 boats were black-flagged – including Duncan. 'We didn't want to burn our throwout on a



**Wing-and-wing... looks truly weird but on smaller J/Boats the fastest sailors have got it down to an art form. However, for the great unwashed this usually ends up in a crash gybe at the leeward mark while getting completely buried by sail fabric**

black flag,' Jud says. 'Save it for a race where you just weren't going to get it right.' By the end of the day Jud's team topped the leaderboard.

The next day turned out to be the last chance for racing and rain squalls shook up the results yet again. 'It would be dead and then the squall would come in, shift 30°,' Jud remembers. 'It was a full-on lottery. And we did three races...' After posting a 5.35 his team dug back from a bad first lap to finish 10th in the third race of the day, which put him back in front by one point. 'Fortunately, we caught a lot of boats back in that final race, because we actually hadn't had a very good day. Being conservative wasn't paying too well...'

On the last day after a long wait for breeze that never materialised – Jud's overnight lead turned into another world title, his second in the class. 'Looking at the scoreboard's a complete waste of time until the last day,' he laughs. In 11 races against 91 boats at a 'freaky regatta' Jud had averaged a 9.5.

### Speaking out for change

Jud loves sailing the J/70 but he sees room for improvement in the rules. 'I'm trying to get the class to move on various things,' he explains (with what might be an eye roll). He ticks off his two key issues: allowing spreader adjustment, and basing course lengths on fleet size. (Later, he adds a third: outlawing GPS.) 'Change for the good of everybody, right? I'm just trying to help out the customer.'

So after the worlds, when Drake Johnstone bought him a beer at Maddies (the famous Marblehead sailor's bar), Jud did a little family lobbying. 'We'd had a few, and I'm like, "Drake, we've got to get this spreader thing sorted. At Thanksgiving will you bring this up? You've got more pull than I do. It's in your blood." He was pretty good-natured about it.' Jud's grin fades. 'I don't think we'll get it done, but I have to pitch it.'

The current world champion has a responsibility to advocate for change, he

says. 'I won the regatta, so they can't think I'm just complaining.' Age is another reason Jud's speaking up more these days. 'You get to be 60 and you say stuff that you otherwise wouldn't say; you don't hold back.' He adds, 'I'm just trying to do it right.'

### Woulda-coulda-shoulda

Asked whether he has any regrets, Jud quickly responds: 'I wish I'd sailed the Star a little sooner.' Instead he focused on winning the Etchells Worlds, because after so many second-place finishes as both skipper and crew it became an obsession. 'Once I got that monkey off my back [in 2006] I started to sail Stars, to make up for lost time.'

Another item on this list: 'I kind of wish I grew up in Miami. Those kids get to sail year round.' In Marblehead 'we didn't know any better. I learned how to sail frostbitten. But that was only once a week, and our summer sailing season is short.'

And the personal life... 'I'm still married to my same wife after 30-plus years. Chose right that way, or she got stuck with me. Stuck with each other.' He laughs. 'So, yeah, no regrets on that.' He has two adult daughters: Lindsay works at the loft and Darby is a newly married schoolteacher in Florida. 'Maybe I'll be a grandfather soon, which would be OK.'

As for sailmaking, he has no regrets there either. 'Maybe I would have made more money doing something else, but it's been my passion.' He feels lucky to be able to do something he enjoys every day: 'Not everybody gets to do that and put food on the table.'

### Focus forward

In 2004, two and a half years after our first spreader and tuning discussion, I finally bought two jibs from Jud – which helped my team win two races at the Olympics. He hasn't forgotten, of course, but he doesn't gloat. 'I made Yngling sails for you and your team,' he says matter of factly. 'I made them for a bunch of teams... and finally made them for the whole world, for the Olympics.'

With keelboats now part of Olympic history, Jud will continue to focus on the J/70 and the Etchells – and try not to do quite as much sailing in 2019. 'I do worry about when I stop doing this,' he says, looking even farther ahead, toward retirement. 'I don't know if I'm ready for that; all of a sudden the music stops. Definitely a concern.'

For now he quotes the Patriots' star quarterback. 'Just like Brady says, "As long as I can go out there and not suck, I'm going to keep doing it." I'll just keep going to an easier class,' he says, thinking out loud now, 'where I'm not going to suck. Just scale it back...'

And then that famous eye twinkle returns, the one that makes all his chit-chat memorable and the reason he's the only 'Jud' in the sailing phonebook. 'But... I'll always love to go sail the Star whenever and wherever I can.' □

MAX RANGHI

