

San Juan Sailboats and Clark Boat Company



CLARK BOAT CO.

San Juan

**The right place at the right time
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The right place at the right time

A trio of factors combined to put the right people at the right place and time to create the Clark Boat Company and the San Juan line of boats. In the late 1960's, in Kent, Washington, near Seattle, Bob and Coral Clark had been building small one design racing dinghies, including Thistles and Lightnings. As the 1960's waned, a new space age material (no, not "TANG") was proving its worth in boat building. Thirdly, a new type of sailor who was neither a hardy, working waterman nor a Vanderbilt aristocrat was taking to the high seas. A young, growing middle class in America was discovering that you could do more with water than drink it and bathe in it.

In The Beginning

Coral Clark in "Learning to Sail- The Hard Way", tells a bit of the beginning story of the Clarks and sailboats, circa 1939.

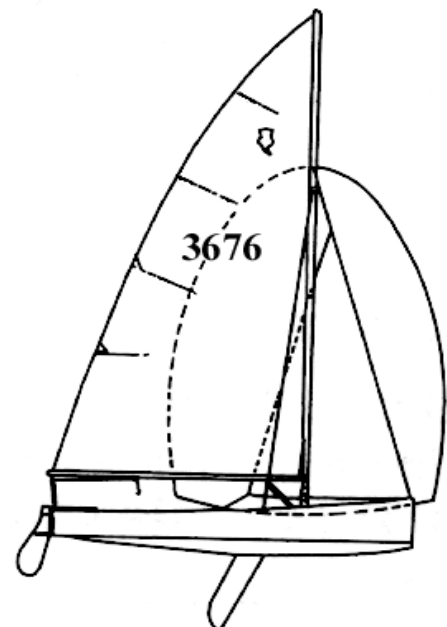
We had been married a short time when Bob came over to see me at the tennis court and announced he had bought a sailboat....being from North Dakota, (I) said ' what's that?' ...I soon found out! We put her in the water at the Toledo Yacht Club and proceeded to learn how to sail. In those days you didn't go buy a book about it- there were none!Nobody told me to ease the main sheet to avoid catastrophe. We went over so often we were known as the "Splash Clarks'.By fall we were good enough to try our first regatta. ..the swells were so big we couldn't see the masts of the other boats. We had really learned- we didn't capsize once.

Pearl Harbor came and Bob went into the Marines. (while he was gone) I put a new canvas deck on our little boat and sold her. Bob was most upset when he got home. I was paying \$2.50 per month for a garage (for the boat) and that was a lot of money in those days.

After the war, Bob returned home and had to have another boat. Four members of the Toledo Yacht Club were building Lightnings. Bob started ours in the basement, but after getting the ribs cut, we decided we needed a garage to finish it. It had dawned on him that he would never get her out of the basement after it was finished. So the cement block garage came first, and then the sailboat!

She was beautiful..mahogany planked, solid oak keelson ... 685 brass screws, all plugged...and weighed 1200 pounds- she was supposed to weight 700!

(Most of the fittings were home made, the halyards were manila rope- but we had a lot of fun in that boat. It was stable as a rock...We raced avidly, but not as avidly as after we started the Clark Boat Company in 1960.



The Clarks had moved to the Seattle area from Toledo, Ohio in the early 1960's to start a fiberglass boat building business. While Coral worked as a nurse supervisor, Bob set about making the Clark Boat Company into a viable business. The three sons, Don, Dave and Dennis, were busy attending school, but found time to help out whenever they could. The first boat with the "Manufactured by Clark Boat Company" label affixed to it was a Lightning, and it was one of the first fiberglass lightnings on the market. They also built OK dinghies, 505's and Clark Star class boats took first and second in the World's in 1970.

The Clarks were all involved in one design racing, later on primarily through their boat building efforts. The success of their sons, though primarily Dennis, would influence the design of the 21 in ways that clearly separated it from the competition. Dennis was later become a class champion in four separate classes, including the International 14 and The Thistle. Dennis still races today, primarily in Lasers. In addition to racing, boat building was something the Clark family did, and did well.

The three sons were all interested in some phase of the boat business. Don had a degree in engineering, with additional training in Naval Architecture. He started down the design path. Don was very involved in the design of a number of their boats. Dave had a degree in Management, and he entered the sales and marketing side of the business. Brother Dave Clark was no-nonsense - the business head of the brothers.

Dennis was the young hot-shot sailor, who made a serious run at an Olympic berth in the Flying Dutchman Class. Dennis started the Clark Sails Loft in 1971.

Glass Reinforced Plastic Fiber (GRP-Fiberglass) had been in serious marine use for most of a decade, with such builders as Hinckley and Pearson now fully engaged in the glass boat construction in the US. Hinckley had begun to build their prestigious Bermuda 40 in fiberglass in 1960, and the material was proving durable in the Marine environment. With fiberglass as a moldable building material, billed as maintenance free, companies could mass produce and sell boats at a reasonable cost and a reasonable profit.

The growing American middle class had the disposable income to explore something. For many, that something was sailing. In addition to interest, there was also increased opportunity. There were many new flood control and power plant impoundments that were complete or were taking shape across the country in the 1960s, meaning that you didn't have to live near a natural body of water to enjoy water sports.

The C-Lark

The first 'Clark' boat was the Clark's version of the International 14- the "C-Lark". The C-Lark 14 is an open 295 lbs daysailer made by the Clark Boat Co. The boat was built in the early 70s. Over 1,000 hulls were made and the design appears more oriented toward the racer. With a 5'8" beam and 133 sq.ft. sails (including a loose-footed mainsail) the C-Lark promised excitement, stabilized by a swinging centerboard drawing 4'9" in fully extended position. In its day, there probably were not many faster dinghies. Nevertheless, the boat has a roomy cockpit which will accommodate up to four on a leisurely daysail. C-Larks were once a very popular boat in the NW.



CLARK BOAT CO.

The age of the inexpensive trailer sailor

Into this economic environment springs the Venture 21. According to "Practical Sailor", "The age of the inexpensive trailer sailor began with the Venture 21 in 1965." The success of the Venture caught many other builders off guard, but they eventually responded. There was the inevitable wave of imitators, including the Catalina 22, the Santana 21 and the Cal 21, and our hero, the San Juan 21, all of whose designs were finalized in 1969.

The first trailer sailors were designed for the first time sail boat owner. They were a way to ease people into sailing without the burden of having slip rentals or club memberships. It also appealed to the free spirits' who wanted to explore a different body of water every weekend. The plan was to get people to buy a trailer sailor, have them enjoy, and then move them up into a larger and pricier boat in the same line, a successful model employed by the automakers for years.

A step above the rest - Boats built by the Clarks typically followed some common manufacturing methods of the time. There was gelcoat applied to a hull mold, followed by a hand laid up hull. This means that San Juan hulls are typically solid, in contrast to boats that were manufactured with a 100% chopper gun method. . The interior 'pan' would be a formed in a mold with a chopper gun. This is a cheaper way to make components was used on less critical items, such as the hull pan or liner. The interior pan was then laid into the hull and attached to it, often using a fiberglass resin and strand mixture.

The decks were typically of balsa core sandwich construction. A fiberglass deck and a fiberglass interior overhead surrounded a balsa core. This allowed for a strong yet light deck. The down side of this construction is that, left un-maintained, the deck fittings will leak water into the balsa, which will then rot and lose its' strength. This leads to, at best a soft deck , and at worst, an unsafe condition and an ugly mess.

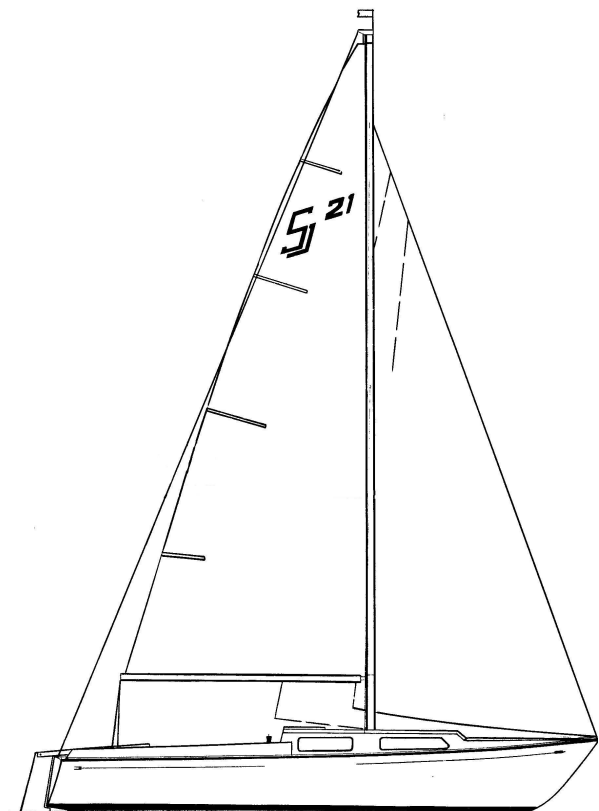
The SJ 21 decks overlapped the hull, and these were 'pop riveted' together. The interior seam was glassed over, while the exterior was hidden by a screwed on rub rail. Another interesting practice was that the Clarks vacuumed their hulls and liners together. They would spread a lightly catalyzed putty called thicksol over one surface, put the hull and liner together, and put a vacuum pump on the two for twenty four hours. This gave them one of the first no void hull to liner assemblies.

Later boats would have a better joining of the deck to hull joint. The SJ 23, for example has a hull to deck joint consisting of a flange that is sealed and bolted to the deck. The hull flange is actually an extension of the top of the hull, turned inwards to create a lip that the deck rests on. The deck is mechanically fastened with machine screws through the toe rail. The toe rail adds a tremendous amount of reinforcement to this area.

The San Juan 21 is Born

In addition to above average construction, Don Clark, designer of the San Juan 21, couldn't help but add some features to the Clark boat that would ultimately set it apart from her contemporaries. Many builders took the low performance-low price ratio a bit too far for the race bred Clarks. Often the late sixties trailer boats had a keel that was more akin in appearance to a thick slab of wood or a cinderblock than to the slick NACA foils you see on keels of today. The San Juan 21 has a fiberglass skinned, foil shaped keel and rudder- something taken for granted today but a real rarity at the time. In addition, the San Juan's swing keel retracts completely into the hull, allowing for the ultimate in easy trailering and shallow water launching. The third unusual feature was gasketed keel trunk - to minimize turbulence from the keel slot when the keel was in the down position. And they couldn't help but race them. The Clarks organized the first San Juan 21 Championships in 1971.

The Clarks had the design and were confident they had a winner, but they needed to hustle and have a little luck to make the Seattle Boat show in the winter of 1970. In the fickle early days of trailer sailing, to miss the current market was to miss a tide that might not come back. The first San Juan 21 was barely ready in time, but it was a hit, with seven orders taken at the show. The San Juan 21 Mark I was designed for the Northwest, where rainy day sailing is a common occurrence, and ventilation down below was nice but not essential. Hence, the first Mark I's had no forward hatch. This contributed to a strong foredeck but little air circulation if someone actually tried to sleep down below. Some later first generation boats had a large round, screw in deck plate added for ventilation. The 1973 re-design of the Mark I deck added a forward hatch as well as softening the line of the cockpit coamings.



Another early comment about the 21 was that the entry was quite broad, which made the boat pound in chop. The dilemma was, that in such a small boat with a narrower cross section, if someone went forward to the bow pulpit to tend the jib, step off or set an anchor, the bow would sink too low, or possibly the boat would roll. The SJ 21's broad entry eliminated that problem.

The SJ 21 was also designed to address the difficult trailering and launching that affected some other sailboats in this length range. To be easy to trailer and launch, the 21's narrow beam and completely retracting keel allowed the boat to ride low on the trailer (between, not above the wheels) and launch in 2 feet of water. The seven foot

beam, while a dream for trailering, gives the 21 a more tender feel than some of her contemporaries, something dinghy sailors didn't mind, but it did affect some first time sailboat buyers. Everything is a compromise, and so it went with the 21. Albeit a very successful compromise.



The San Juan 21 proved a great success, and by 1972, the Clark Boat Company had produced 400 of the sprightly craft, with another 250 projected for the following year. Overall, 2600 San Juan 21's would be produced, and while not matching the 10, 000 Catalina 22's produced; it was a success by almost any measure.

The San Juan 21, along with their successful production of Lightnings, Thistles, the International 14 and the C-Lark, had enabled the Clark Boat Company to gain a reputation as a producer of well made, easily sailable boats that provided a solid value for the family sailor. It also gave the firm a cash flow that would allow expansion.

The Eastern US

The Clark Boat Company saw big possibilities in the eastern US, and began a push toward a larger East Coast presence. Don Clark in particular saw that 21's had sold well in the east, despite the additional expense of trucking them across the country from Kent, Washington. In the mid 1970's the little 21 was becoming a significant player in small sailboat sales in the Carolinas and Florida. Middle Tennessee also showed strong interest in the 21. Clark responded to this by searching for a site for an East Coast Factory. By late 1970, it was evident that the Clark sons could manage the western operation, so Bob and Coral moved to New Bern, NC to assist with the management of the new eastern factory.

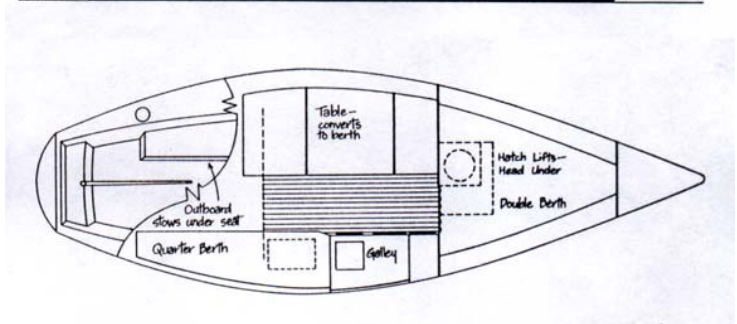
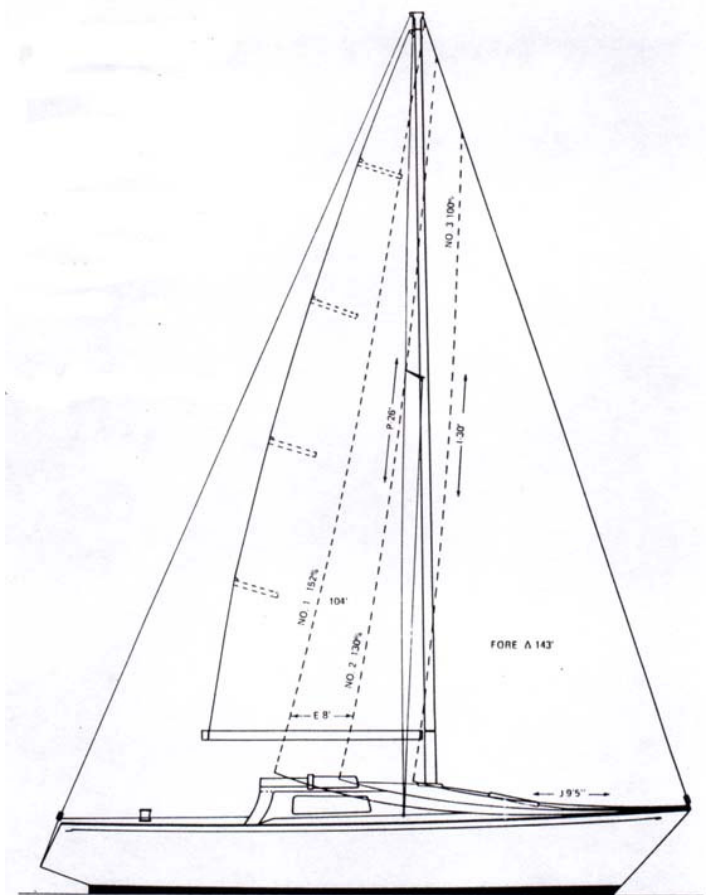
In 1972, the Clarks (Bob and Coral) helped form the Blackbeard Sailing Club, which would be incorporated in 1974, and buy its land in 1975. The club is still a hotbed of San Juan racing. In 1973, the Clarks sponsored the first "In the water" boat show that the eastern North Carolina area had ever seen, and were busy promoting one design racing (in the San Juan 21) in the southern region.

The San Juan 24

Riding the success of the 21, the Clarks embarked on a larger boat, a true keel boat, and 1972 saw the birth of the San Juan 24. The 24, unlike the 21, was designed outside the Clark 'house', by Canadian Bruce Kirby. Kirby, most noted for his design of the Laser, was brought in to design a racing keel boat that would be competitive in the IOR Quarter Ton class.

The Clark Boat Company, still located in Kent, Washington, had been building Kirby's Mark IV International 14 for a few years. Don Clark was president of the company and chief engineer, so he had been dealing with Bruce. Dennis Clark had won some major championships with the Mark IV. Suffice it to say that the Clarks and Kirby knew each other quite well.

When IOR (International Offshore Rule) boats became popular in the late 60s and early 70s the Clarks decided they wanted to get in on it. The International Offshore Rule was the popular, and now practically extinct, rating rule that let boats of a certain rating race as equals, even if they were of different designs from different manufacturers. When the SJ24 was designed, features like the pinched in stern and tiny transom were a result of designing for this rating. Kirby recalls the SJ 24 as "...one of my favorite wee yachts, and still my most successful design, except for the Laser." As a side note, Kirby's Sonar is gaining fast and will probably overtake the 24 in a couple of years.



Previously, Kirby had been asked by another builder to design a Quarter Tonner. This boat was designed under the Mark I version of the IOR, but the builder could not put the financing together and the project was scrubbed. At the same time, the late Peter Barrett, Olympic gold medal winner and for a time president of North Sails, was familiar with Kirby's efforts with the IOR.

The Clarks had spoken with Peter about IOR in general and Quarter Tonners in particular, and said they were interested in building such a boat. Peter suggested they talk to Bruce as he had already been working on a 1/4 ton boat.

Don Clark called Bruce and the project was on. IOR had now progressed to the Mark III version, so the boat Kirby had previously designed was out of date. This meant a clean slate and a fresh start for the Clark boat. Don Clark put two important restrictions on Kirby. The boat could not draw more than four feet, or be wider than eight feet. These were fairly severe restrictions in terms of maximizing performance and were imposed to make the boat more popular in areas with a depth problem (read: East Coast) and for those who wanted to trailer the boats, as eight feet was the common upper width limit at the time.

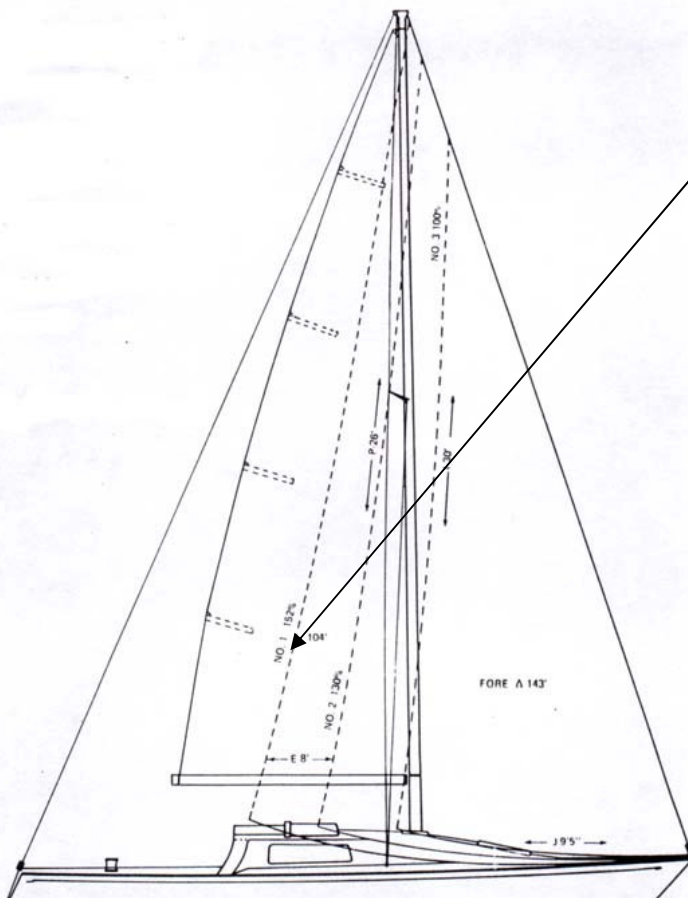
Kirby recalls "...Looking back after 30 years...I feel that Don's decisions might have been right, as the boat became remarkably popular, and in fact the restrictions might not have hurt performance very much. More beam would have helped with stability by getting the crew further outboard, and later Quarter Tonners were much wider.

The comparatively shallow draft did not seem to hurt in light winds, where the boat has always excelled, and a deeper keel would have added to wetted surface and perhaps slowed the boat down under these conditions. Upwind in fresher air a deeper keel was bound to have been better. But a shallower keel is always faster downwind...."



The SJ 24 was the first keel boat Kirby had designed, and so he was breaking new ground. In doing his research, Kirby polled his various friends and connections in the sailing community, particularly his old friend George Cuthbertson from C&C. George helped Bruce to understand some of the terminology in the rule and text books. Bruce's goal was to stay within Don Clark's restrictions and design a boat would result in a rating of 18 under the IOR.

As the boat was to be sailed in many places where conditions are predominately light, Kirby gave it a rounded or semi-circular sections to give it minimal wetted area. This type shape does not give much form stability, so he put a relatively heavy keel on the boat.



The rig was typical of IOR masthead rigs of the time – short Boom, and big fore triangle. The San Juan 24 was one of the first to use the swept-back spreaders to help lock the mast in and help the backstay provide really good tension on the forestay.

Kirby confesses to being nervous about his first keelboat's performance. "I was particularly happy when Don Clark phoned me after the first sail in the boat to say that it had all gone very well... in particular,...I asked him what the wake looked like and he said "what wake?"

The relative unseaworthiness of some boats designed to exploit the extremes of ratings rules would be proven later in the decade during the Fastnet Race. The San Juan 24 both suffers and benefits from being designed to this rating. Up wind the SJ 24's handle like a dream, but dead downwind under spinnaker, she can be a little 'squirrely' based on the narrow underbody in the aft sections. Still, the boat proved to be (and continues to be) extremely safe and popular.



The designer recalls "The statistic about the SJ 24 that I have always liked is that in the mid-70s, when IOR was popular world-wide, the (San Juan) 24 was the most measured IOR boat in the world by far. There were hundreds of them with IOR certificates because nearly everyone who bought one had the boat measured so he could race in Quarter Ton events."

As with all prototypes, SJ 24 Hull #1 would have some peculiarities. Actually the Clark Boat Company didn't work in engineering changes on a particular schedule, and while they kept good records, all boats were kept in one book, so a new deck on a San Juan 24 might be in the book between changes to other San Juans.

The first SJ 24 had teak rails not anodized aluminum and teak hand grabs on top of the cabin. She also had no reinforcement on the bottom between the galley and the dinette and has as a molded fiberglass face on a 3/8 thick bulkhead at the forward end of the Galley. Later SJ 24's had other differences as well. Clark Boat Company dealers referred to the Flat Transom model as Mark 1 and the Wedge Transom as Mark 2, so a boat with a flat transom with motor mounting track is an earlier boat, while a molded wedge on transom for vertical mount of scissors type motor mount is a later boat (probably a post '75) around hull 645). The boats got a slightly longer rudder in the middle of the production run after the downwind spinnaker 'antic's became apparent.

In 1976, the sailmaker at the local Raudaschl (now North) loft and a friend ordered two SJ24s with the high performance keel from the North Carolina factory. The keel is also known as a Lowenslaw or Kirby keel. Those of you who have seen a Kirby 25 will recognize the shape. These two boats were used as demonstrators for Raudaschl sails and raced quite successfully around Toronto in the late 1970's - early 80's. It appears that these were the only two SJ24s with the unusual keel. Matta II is at ABYC in Toronto (www.abyc.on.ca) and the other one is sailing on the Ottawa River, near Canada's capital (having passed through the hands of another ABYC member, who commented that it was the best boat that they ever owned).

Matta II and her sister also have non-standard rigging, as the mast, mast step and boom are from a C&C24. Neither of these changes (the rudder or keel) seems to affect performance much, as all 24's have similar PHRF ratings. While both rudder designs are approved, the modified keel boats are not legal for class racing.

Also, the forward hatch changed on the 24's (as they did on the 21's and other Clark designs). A fiberglass hatch is indicative of an earlier boats, while a smoked forward hatch is a later boat, starting around hull 877, 1978. In addition, Clark changed from the round tube spreaders to a tapered foil spreader, again around 1978. There were a few with inboard engines.

Regardless of the variations, the San Juan 24 continued to be a hit throughout the 1970's. It enjoyed significant success on the IOR ¼ ton circuit, and has enjoyed 30 years worth as a one design, with fleets across the country. As hull number 1000 rolled off the line in 1978, the boat's IOR days were heading to a close, but its' one design future was (and is) bright. The magnificent San Juan 24, the most popular Quarter Tonner ever, along with the SJ 21, allowed the Clark Boat Company to lay claim to playing in the big leagues among performance keelboat builders, as they had done in the performance dinghy business in the late 1960's.

Also important is the fact that The Clarks continued to sail their boats. "We find it is important to sail our boats to know the rigging, tuning and fitting placements necessary for ease of competitive sailing, and good family cruising. We encourage our workers to sail also, so that they will have a good knowledge of the sport and hobby which supports their position in the company" Don Clark.

Don and wife Jerie won the Yachting Cup regatta in 1972 and 1973, and were second in 1974. Dennis and Don continued to sail the Thistle, with Dave crewing occasionally and sailing his San Juan 21 as time allows. (Bob and Coral claimed Dave was the best crew they ever had.)

1975 - Big Changes

1975 was another big year for the Clarks and their San Juan line of boats offering the customer options while minimizing big cost changes (totally new molds) was a Clark business philosophy from early on. Most of the San Juan line would be available in fixed or swing keel configurations, and the 21 would even have deck options. The San Juan 21 and 24 continued to sell well and two versions had been developed to cater to different needs of the boat buying public.



Changes on the SJ 21

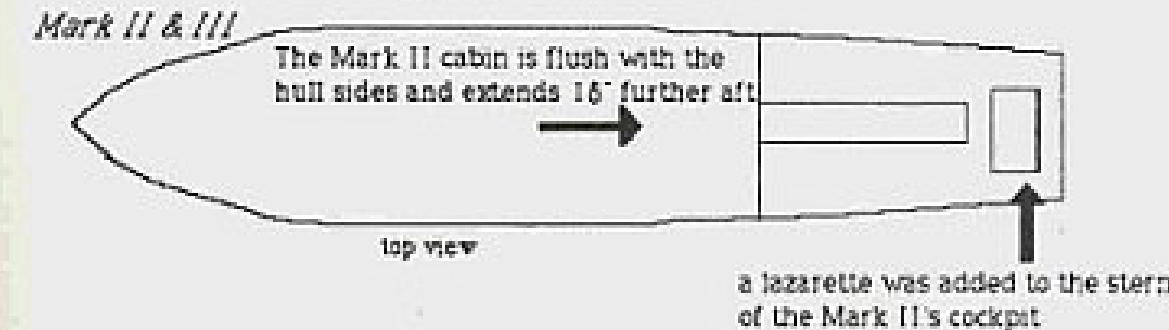
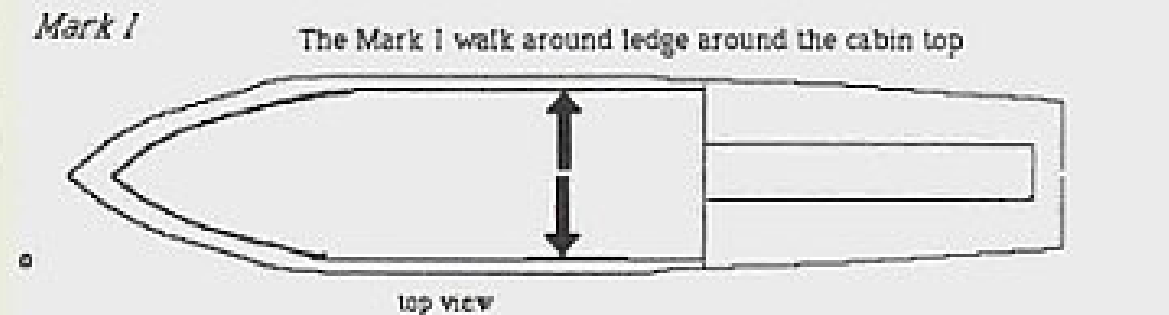
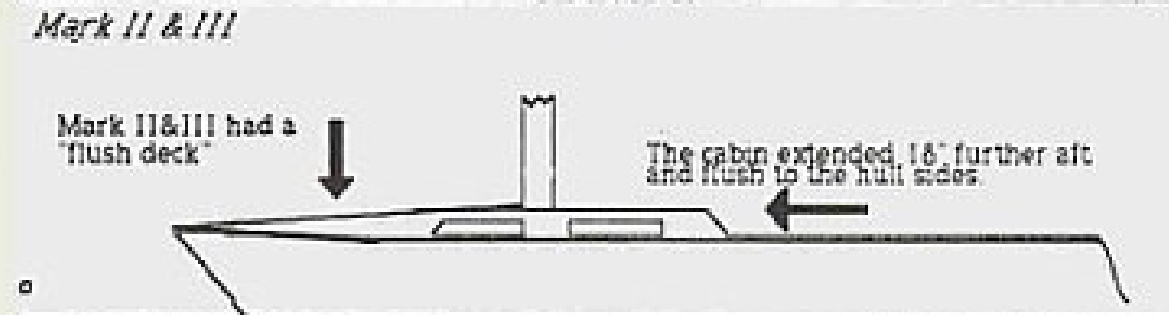
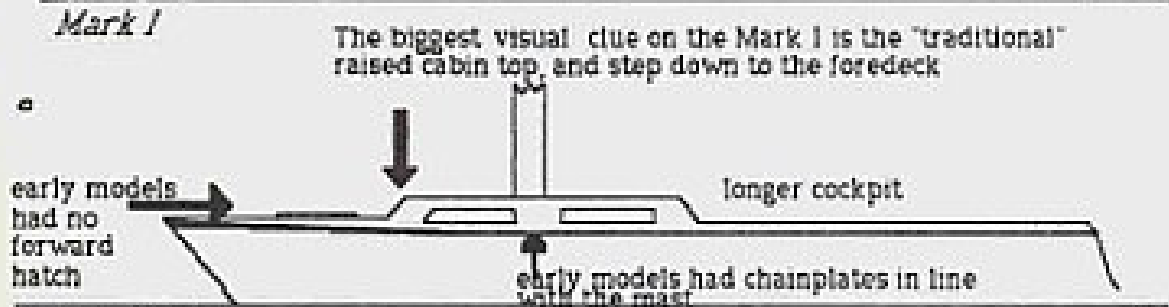
A radical redesign of the deck on the 21 led to the Mark II in late 1974. This occurred around sail number 1000. The hull remained unchanged, but the deck was transformed to allow for more interior cabin room. The cabin sides were now flush with the sides of the hull, the cabin came 18 inches further aft, and the foredeck was now one continuous line from the mast to the bow. This produced a boat that had far more interior room and a flat stable foredeck.

All things come at a price, and the San Juan 21 cockpit was reduced to account for the increase in cabin space. Both Mark I and Mark II were produced concurrently, until the last of the regular run Mark I's was produced in 1977. After that, only a few Mark I's were produced on a special order basis.

The San Juan 21 mythology has Mark I's as better race boats, and Mark II's as better cruisers. The results don't seem to bear this out, as Mark II's have been quite competitive, particularly in working sails division. Boat weight can make a critical difference, but the Mark II's weights have fallen in the admittedly wide range of Mark I weights. Later Mark III versions looked like a Mark II but with a significantly different interior 'pan.' West Coast Mark III's seem to have continued the lazarette, while the east coast factory eliminated the lazarette.

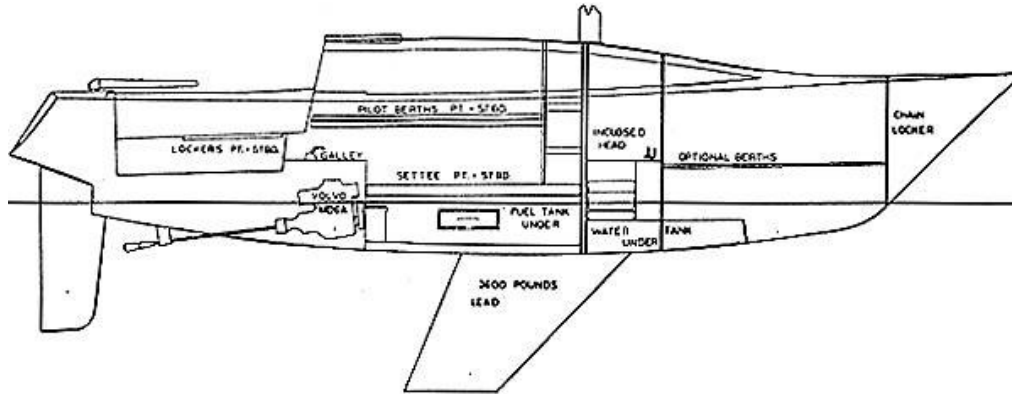
A few fixed keel San Juan 21's were produced, and some others have been re-fitted with fixed keels over the years. The 'factory' keel was a regular 21 keel, glassed in place, with the keel slot filled. Its performance is no better than the swing keel version but with the elimination of the keel 'trunk', the cabin has vastly more space.

The Official San Juan 21 Field Spotter's Guide The 20th Anniversary Edition



Changes in the lineup

Also in 1975, Designer Bruce Kirby again teamed up with the Clarks to develop the San Juan 30 – ½ tonner. This big San Juan was designed to build on the success of the 21 in One design and PHRF racing and the San Juan 24 in IOR racing. The Clarks wanted to follow up the SJ 24 success with a Half Tonner. Kirby did a lot of work on the project but all the way through the Clarks were concerned that it might not be wise to spend the money on the bigger boat, so the project was put on hold for while .



Kirby, however, had grown fond of the design, and had one built by the Gougeons. It was their first major monohull project and they did a great job. The boat was

the 30-foot Accolade, cold molded in cedar and finished with varnished topsides. In addition to being a beauty, she was fast. The boat won a lot of races in the summer of 1974.

Kirby recounts”...The first time she was off the dock we were still installing the nav lights because the race was to be a 60 mile overnigher. We used a flashlight taped to the backstay as a stern light. The rules said the engine had to be in working order and it was, but there was no exhaust system, so I'm glad we didn't have to use it! We won class and overall in the Riverside - Stratford Shoal race by 22 minutes corrected time in a large, mixed fleet....”

Accolade also won class in the 230 mile Vineyard Race by 36 minutes, and beat all of the boats in three of the five classes above them. The racing success sold the Clarks on the design. They bought the mold over which Accolade had been built, added 5/8th of an inch to it (the thickness of Accolade's skin) and made the plug from the SJ 30 from that. They offered two interiors - one just like Accolade with upper and lower quarter berth and only a head forward of the mast, and a "cruising" version with more normal layout. Both seemed to work well and the SJ 30s won a lot of Half Ton and other IOR events. Because the production boats came out heavier than Accolade we were able to put the rig up a bit to meet the half Ton rating.

Like the 24, the 30 has aged well. Going to weather, the San Juan 30 not only keeps ups with modern boats, but it beats most of them. A San Juan 30, with the sails trimmed right, can outpoint an Olson 30, which is very important, since its performance downwind is not so good. She has a strong masthead rig and a PHRF of 165 and a modest stand up interior that sleeps 6.



There is an SJ 30 near Kirby's home in Connecticut that wins a lot of silver ware every summer, including class on Block Island Race Week once or twice. Most of the SJ 30's ended up on the west coast where they continue to win. It is reported that an SJ 30 has sailed around the world.

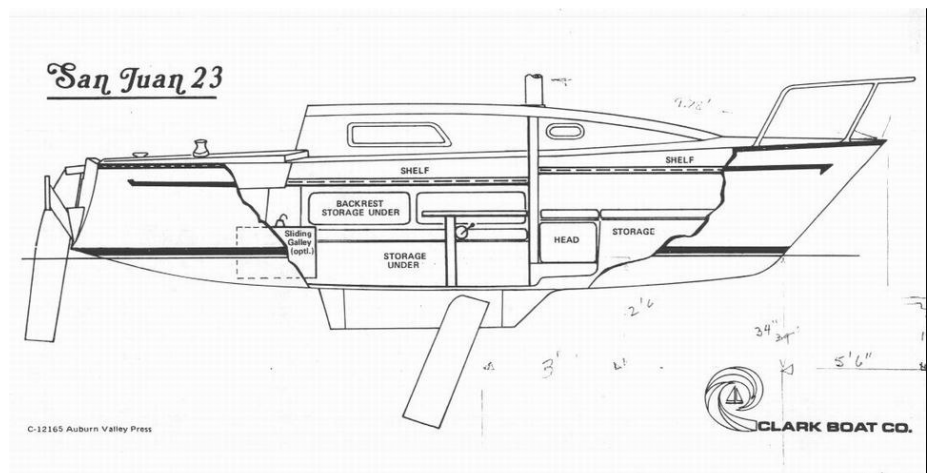
1975 also saw the debut of the Don Clark designed San Juan 26. The 26 was a shoal keel/centerboard boat which was an attempt to tap into the large trailerable cruiser market. It did have a deep keel option, though few were made. With its shallow draft and easy launch capability, it was targeted toward an East Coast audience. For racing, the San Juan 26 has a PHRF rating of 246, which is not much faster than the 21, and certainly behind her little sister, the 24. Because it's designed to be trailered, it has a real small keel and a short mast (the main sail is approximately the same size as a J22). It was not much of a racer, which might not be as problem for many boats, but people expect a San Juan to be able to hold her own on the race course.

The 26 had standing head room, and a head compartment. The advertised weight was 4400 pounds, so one needed more than a rice burner pickup to pull them. The 21 had done well in the east, in part, due to the shoal friendly nature of its swing keel. And the hoped that the shoal draft 26 would be another East Coast hit, but such was not the case. The 26 did not fit the race boat culture of Clark, and was deemed by some as not attractive. In 1979, the more race friendly 7.7 would replace the 26.

1976 was spent promoting the line, focusing on the new San Juan 30 and the San Juan 26. In addition, the Clark Boat Company was looking for designs to 'fill out' the line and fill in the gaps between boats. During 1976, Don Clark was at work on another shoal keel-centerboard cruiser, the San Juan 23, as well another large racer-cruiser, the San Juan 28. The San Juan 21 and 24 Classes were experiencing strong interest in racing on both coasts, and the factory supported these efforts.

1977 - The San Juan 23 & 28

The San Juan 23, one of 1977's new entries, was a scaled down SJ 26, with a large cabin and smaller cockpit than many of her contemporaries. The 23 was advertised at 2700 lbs., with 960 of that in the keel/centerboard, although, as typical with many Clark designs, many boats ended up heavier than that. She was advertised with over 5 feet 8 inches of headroom and accommodations for 5.



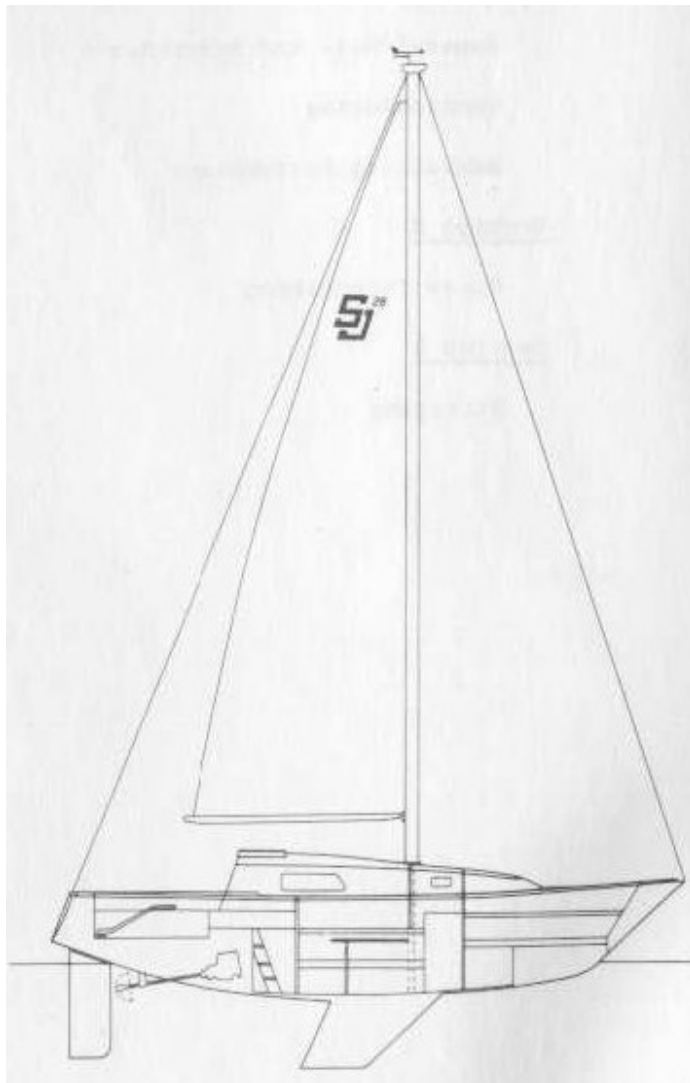
With a PHRF of 240, she was at least as fast as the 26, and much easier to trailer. He 23's also came in a fixed keel/tall mast version, although the vast majority was the keel/centerboard combination. The 23 showed its Clark racing heritage by offering some items not usually found on cruising boats of that era - items like a mid boom traveler and racing blocks. The SJ 23 was solidly built, featuring a hull to deck joint consisting of a flange (an extension of the top of the hull) bolted to the deck. The hull flange is actually turned inwards to create a lip that the deck rests on. The toe rail adds a tremendous amount of reinforcement to this area.

The SJ 23 was like the SJ 24 in styling, and in rig. It is a masthead sloop with large genoa. The 23 doesn't sail well under main alone, and likes to be kept 'on her feet' to sail swiftly. That said, she can be quite competitive in PHRF.

The 23 sold well, listing close to 700 hull numbers. The San Juan 23 was carried on after 1983 by the new builders (more on that later) attesting to its popularity. A few SJ 23's were offered with the same fixed keel as the SJ 7.7, and at least one has a wing keel .



The other new 1977 boat, the San Juan 28, and later the San Juan 29, was a large racer-cruiser designed by Don Clark. More than 300 San Juan 28s were built after its introduction in 1978. It became one of the most popular boats in the Clark line.



The difference between an SJ28 and SJ29 is really nothing more than the builder. The 28 was built by Clark, while the 29, a 28 with a few cosmetic changes, was built by the successor, San Juan Manufacturing. There is a rumor that the SJ28 was simply a downsized version of the San Juan 30, but this is not true. The SJ 30 was Bruce Kirby design, and while there is a family resemblance, the SJ28 is a different boat. A quick look at the underbody of the hull confirms that. A year after her introduction, the SJ28 finished second at Yachting's One-of-a-Kind-Regatta in Annapolis, finishing behind a San Juan 24.

The layup of many Clark Boats continued to consist of high-quality gelcoat with a skin coat of cloth, or mat, plus roving.

According to the Clark's in "Practical Sailor", "Hulls were hand laid solid fiberglass. Generally the hull thickness at the bottom is 7/16"; topsides are 3/16".

In a 2003 review of the SJ 28 in Practical Sailor, Don Clark comments that "Sheets of mat were used, along with small amounts of chopped mat laid by hand between the roving. Few of our boats had blister problems."

As with others in the line, the 28 featured balsa cored decks and marine plywood in areas where hardware was attached.

As with the 23, the hull-deck joint is an inward turning flange on which the deck sits; the two sections were bedded in polysulfide. Unlike the 23, the 28 had a solid glass toerail.

A shortcoming that the 28 shares with the 23, 24, 26 (and the 21 Mark II) is the use of a wooden bulkhead inside the cabin to which the chainplate is attached. This chainplate will almost certainly leak if not regularly maintained, and that section is susceptible to rot.

Practical Sailor summarizes their review of the the boat by saying “The SJ28 was designed and built by a company whose owners were performance-oriented and used to sailing boats to their limits. She displays good performance...the cockpit is large enough for four to six...or a race crew, to sail with elbow room. It's small for dockside entertaining...more than 20 years after their construction, the living quarters in our test boat showed little sign of wear, despite the boat's hard use as a racer and cruiser. There's good headroom and cabin space, augmented by the ability of the saloon table to stow up against the main bulkhead. “

1979 San Juan 7.7.

1979 saw the introduction of the San Juan 7.7. With the IOR rule no longer a factor, and the San Juan 26 not performing as hoped, Don Clark decided to fix the shortcomings that the IOR rule had imposed on the popular SJ 24. Her narrow beam, a requirement for trailering, had significant limitations. Her downwind performance had always been an issue due to her narrow aft sections, sometimes inducing the dreaded ‘death roll’. A death roll is one thing on a Laser. It is quite another on a 24 foot keel boat. The bar for Don Clark’s new design had been set very high. He had to design something faster than the famous SJ 24, and something that would challenge the stranger from the east – the J-24. .

The result was a whole new race boat in the mid 20 foot range, the San Juan 7.7.

The Clarks still believed in the concept of the racer-cruiser, so the 7.7 had significantly better accomodations than a J-24, for example.



In the days before extensive computer testing, exact ballast amount and placement was often a designers’ best guess until sea trials had been completed. The 7.7 was 3200 pounds with a 9.5 foot beam. She came only with a fixed keel, and was a bit under ballasted at the outset. The thought was that light weight could be an asset, and that adding ballast was easy with a wide beam boa – just put more crew on the rail!

On the east coast in particular, light weight is essential for light air performance, however, the SJ 7.7 as initially design, was simply over powered. The fix was a keel 'shoe' which was added to the bottom of the keel. The shoe added 4.5" of keel extension and 125 pounds to the weight. The 7.7's fixed keel drew four feet without the shoe, approx 4' 6" with it.



The halyards on the SJ 26 had been external, but the halyards on the 7.7 were internal. Both masts pivot for unstepping. In fact, the mast sections for the 26 and the 7,7 were the same. The 7.7 has the same stick as the 26, but less sail area because of the fractional rig. It is also designed to be 1000 pounds lighter, and the performance in improvement over the 26 was nothing short of incredible. The improvement over the performance of the 24 was not so dramatic, however the downwind stability was distinctly better. The 7.7 won is share of races in the early 1980's, but the timing of the launch was not good.

Incredibly, a San Juan 7.7 (not meant to be an ocean racer) won a leg of the "Conch Republic Cup" race in May 2002. The race series, from Key West to Cuba pitted American and Cuban boats in a 'lull' in the hostilities between the countries.

After racing to Cuba the previous day, the San Juan 7.7 Moolooba raced in the 61-mile race to Habana, with an 8 a.m. start outside of Malo Pass and a finish line at Ferro Morro (Castle). Winds were out of the east at 18, gusting to 25. Mooloolaba (San Juan 7.7-Peter Goldsmith) set her spinnaker at the start and carried it until 1 hour from the finish line when the gooseneck broke. They finished with an asymmetrical only and won on corrected time over the previous winner, Cuban boat Thumper.



The 7.7 carried on the 'wedge deck' styling that was popular from the mid 70's on, and it had become a San Juan family 'trademark'. It gave a sleek look to the boat, while limiting headroom forward. As with many Clark boats, the brochure weight and the 'as manufactured' weights varied some, with brochure weights being generally 500-1000 lbs lighter than actual manufacture. It could be that Clark brochures listed hull weights, which, together with mast, boom and rudder, would account for the difference.

The Sj 7.7 is 'trailerable', but as with any boat with a 4 ft draft and over 9 ft beam, prudence and the proper permits are required. Around 210 San Juan 7.7's were made over its production run, many with the inboard OMC saildrive propulsion. A few were outfitted with single cylinder 7 hp dielsel inboards.

Into the 1980's

The racing future for Clark boats continued to look promising. The 1977 San Juan 21 Eastern Nationals at Columbia, SC, had drawn an amazing 58 boats. The 1980 and 1981 events, at Columbia and Charlotte, had drawn 70 and 63 boats respectively. Yacht Racing Magazine had featured Galen Freeman's San Juan 21 in "From the Experts", and by 1978, Clark Sails was the largest sail loft in the Pacific Northwest.

In an effort to meet customer needs (and wants), The Clark Boat Company would often produce specialty versions of their boats. One such event happened in 1981, and is related by San Juan sailor Steve Freeman.

Steve and Bob Lee, both San Juan Sailors in the New Ben area, had agreed to deliver a San Juan 21 boat to Sarasota, just north of the Sarasota Sailing Squadron. Part of the deal was that Bob and Steve could use a boat belonging to this Marina in the San Juan 21 Mid Winters. Steve had brought along a new set of sails to use in the regatta, fully expecting to be quite competitive.

In the first race the boat seemed sluggish on each tack, and Steve and Bob noticed that boats just came up to Leeward and sailed on passed them. Despite their best efforts, Steve and Bob could not figure it out the whole day. They could get no boat speed despite all of their best tactics and techniques.

At the conclusion of the day, they headed back to the marina, which was a new at the time) dry stack marina. Were watching how things worked.

"...We saw one SJ taken out of the water, with a Fork lift. But what was unusual was the Fork lift had a cradle on its forks, and the SJ was floated onto the cradle and it was lifted out and put in a space on the yard. Next to be taking out was our loaner for the race.

Well the Fork truck just went to the take out spot and lowered the steel forks into the water, and the boat was brought ...Stern to the dock, and lifted out with the Forks only. What was such an impression on Bob and I was that the Boat we had take to Florida. Was on a trailer with rollers everywhere instead of a couple of boards covered with carpet, like we all know. And at EVERY roller...the hull was indented at least 1/2 inch. Well....when the Fork Lift came up with our SJ, the boat just kind of rocked like Grandmas rocker on a hardwood floor. We walked up just under and to the side of the boat and could not figure out why NO Dents.... especially with all the weight on just a few inches of hull .

At this moment the Driver saw us and realized we had used this boat...and then he said..:" how did she do for you in the race"? "You Know she has a double or triple thick bottom...and probably weighs about 1,000 pounds more " !!!!
At that moment in time...Bob and I were exonerated for our racing Inability...and as for racing the next day....NOT...we packed up and came back to NC.

San Juan 34

In 1980, the company introduced the largest sailboat yet-the San Juan 34.This is another Clark boat that was well ahead of her time. She is foam cored with rod rigging, standing 49'6". The keel drew six feet, so she is a bit deep for the East Coast. Many owners have described the 34 as bullet proof and very fast. The 34 generally has a 130 phrf. Many of the 34's intended as racers with pipe berths, but others were cruising class with more finished interiors. The lay out is classic with forward vee berth which is quite long. The head a little cramped for showering but not bad.

The Clark 34 began life as the "Crown 34" manufactured by several northwest companies. The Crown 34 was designed by Hein Driehuyzen, who worked as the manager of Calgan Marine in North Vancouver, BC. The boat was designed in 1974 more or less to the IOR rule, with a large fortriangle, tall mast and narrow transom. Hull number 3 was launched in August of 1975, as *Moody Too*, and it is still owned and actively raced by the original owners .

The molds where sold to GlassFab of Monroe, WA, who built the boat as the "Sun Yacht 1030". The molds were later sold to Dave Clark of Clark Boat Co. Clark mildly redesigned the boat, removing the Skeg, modifying the galley, and adding mid-boom sheeting added. Around 50 San Juan 34 were sold between 1980 and 1988.

All three versions are active in the Pacific Northwest PRHF racing scene.

The last Clark boat, the SJ 33, is a bit of a mystery boat - not much information is listed, and she was produced by Clark for only two years, 1981 and 1982. San Juan 33 only weighs 6000 pounds. It is a fast racer, and has a PHRF of 129-141 in some places. They are still actively raced in several places, including Tennessee, Arizona, Florida and Lake Champlain. . San Juan 33 S is also known as an Eagle 33 by Pedrick .

The Boom and the Bust

The sailboat market which had boomed in the 1970's was quickly fading as the 1980's progressed. Clarks sold their company in the spring of 1984 to San Juan Manufacturing, which made boats for a few years. The bankruptcy of this group led the boat molds and rights to be split between two groups, one on the west coast and one on the east.

The Eastern group used the molds to make a very limited number of boats in the Tanzer factory in Edenton, NC. Both of these groups continued to make boats until 1988. Boats made in mid 1984 and after would be post Clark. Many of the post Clark boats had minor cosmetic changes to keep up with the changing styles. The San Juan 29 (former 28) and the 'big window' version of the San Juan 23 are examples. There were a very few 23's made with the new style galley, but it is doubtful any made it to the East Coast. The San Juan 21 and 23 were the most popular boats from "San Juan Manufacturing" and limited production carried on until 1988.

Bob and Coral Clark continued to live and support San Juan sailing in New Ben, NC until their deaths. They sailed a San Juan 34 "Big Juan" for many years in eastern North Carolina. Don Clark runs a bicycle shop in Ventura Beach California and Dennis owns a cabinet making shop in Gig Harbor, Washington. Dennis still sails actively, most often in the Laser Class.

A trio of factors had combined to put the right people (the Clarks) at the right place and time to create the San Juan line of boats. Bob and Coral Clark, later joined by sons Dave, Dennis and Don, took a small builder of other people's designs and made a competitive, full service boat company whose designs live on today on the race course and the cruising grounds, and quite often- on both! The Clark's approach combined with the early work of one of North America's top designers (Bruce Kirby), enabled the Clarks build sailboats that are destined to be sailing (and racing) well into the 21st century.

2008

The boats sail on. The San Juan 21, 23, 24 and 28 have active owners associations. The San Juan 26 and 7.7 have a combined owners group that has an active email exchange, and the Crown 34/San Juan 34's have a web page as well.

The Clarks often used standard sailing hardware, and so parts are relatively easy to get. Many owners of inboard boats have 'repowered', and sailmakers continue to do a good business in San Juan sails. The San Juans live on well into the 21st century. A google/yahoo search will turn up a number of resources for these fine boats.

USED BOATS

In addition to the 'normal' items to investigate in looking at any used sailboat, there are some specific items to look at on San Juans. Due to common design and construction methods across the line., many of these will be applicable to most of the San Juan/Clark boats.

All San Juans used some degree of balsa coring in the decks. A fiberglass deck and a fiberglass interior overhead surrounded a balsa core. This allowed for a strong yet light deck. The down side of this construction is that, left un-maintained, the deck fittings will leak water into the balsa, which will then rot and lose its' strength. This leads to, at best a soft deck , and at worst, an unsafe condition and an ugly mess.

All fiberglass decks will have a slight amount of spring to them. Walk around on the deck and check for spots that are 'softer' than other areas. While on deck, look closely at the mast step and around it. Make sure that the rig has not been set up so tight over the years of sitting around that the mast has not compressed the deck structure. Take a screw driver and tap around the deck for any soft spots or balsa rot.

Cockpit floor - This is another area to look at for core rot. Walk (don't jump) up and down the cockpit putting pressure down and listen and feel for any movement in the flooring. It should not make a cracking sound or be soft. If you jump, you may hear some cracking.

Inside the boat, look at the top and the bottom of the compression post for any type of cracking do to stress from the rig. The foot of the post is often a fiberglass post step. Knock around on this to make sure that the water has not rotted this.

When looking at a used SJ's always look at the interior attachment points for the chainplates for the spreaders. These were often attached to wooden bulkheads that attach to the hull. Make certain that a leaking chainplate has not weakened the wooden bulkhead.

On the SJ 24, investigate the condition of the starboard chain plate bulkhead, open the locker and look at the wood inside, Main of these boats came with a plywood shelf take this out and look all the way down towards the bottom. Make sure the wood has not been stained by sitting water.

On any boat with an OMC saildrive - consider carefully its condition - While a solid engine is a pleasure to operate - parts (and people to work on them) are becoming more rare.

San Juans were initially well built for what they are - coastal cruisers and one design racers. Boats like these will not be as heavy as those from builders such as Cape Dory or Pacific Seacraft. They will hold up for many years with proper care.

San Juan 21 <http://sanjuan21.net/>?

San Juan 24 <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SJ-24/>

San Juan 23 <http://www.geocities.com/Yosemite/Rapids/5493/>

San Juan 26/7.7 <http://www.trpeople.com/SJ26/SJ.htm>

San Juan 28/29/30 <http://www.sanjuan28.org/>
<http://pub38.bravenet.com/forum/show.php?usernum=3241819681&cpv=1>

San Juan 34 <http://www.merricks.net/crown34/>