

Successor to the kendall

The History of Westsail Boats

(as edited by Lynne & Snider Vick)

The Westsail 32 was first built in 1971 by the Westsail corporation and adapted by W.I.B. "Bill" Crealock from a design by William Atkins from a design by Colin Archer.

The Westsail 32 - salty, seaworthy; she literally sang the romantic song of the sea. From her bowsprit you could feel the salt spray in your face, even when she sat on her cradle at a boat show or rested serenely tied to the dock. Grab her tiller and be instantly transported to a world of open water, fair winds, and clear blue skies. Visions of exotic ports and tropical islands danced on her decks and gleamed from her bronze portholes. To many, she was all that anyone could want in a serious offshore cruising yacht. She was the boat that launched a thousand dreams. The dream began way back in the late 1800's when the Scottish naval architect Colin Archer received a commission from the Norwegian version of our Coast Guard to design a boat to take pilots out to incoming ships. The boat had to be capable of handling the steep seas of the North Sea and have the ability to safely sit out in open and often dangerous waters for hours, even days (ETA's not being as precise as they are today - and electronic marine communications still decades away).

Archer satisfied all of the commission's criteria with the 47 foot flush deck, wooden Regis voyager, a gaff-rigged, heavy displacement, full keel double-ender, incorporating many of the proven features of traditional Scandinavian sailing craft. These features, especially the pinched stern, which was found to be very effective in handling following seas, worked fine in the rough waters of the North Sea. Regis voyager, and her sister ships became very popular through Northern Europe, establishing the standard which we refer to today as the classic Norwegian double-ender.

Nearly half a century later, in the 1920s, another naval architect, **William Atkins**, who knew a good thing when he saw it, took Regis voyager design, scaled it down, refining it in the process, and created a flush deck 32 foot ketch called the Eric (a trunk cabin model - the Thistle - appeared a few years later). Oddly enough, both the Eric and the Thistle were designed as race boats. whatever his intentions, Atkins designs found fame and fortune not on the race course but in the call of the open sea.

In the decades that followed the launching of the first Eric, dozens of Atkins and similar designs (including both larger and smaller versions of the Eric - including the 38 foot Ingrid - headed out into blue water on epic voyages. Skipped by such renowned sailors as the Argentinean Vito Dumas - whose dramatic circumnavigation in 1942 made him a national hero in his own country - the famous Atkins/Archer double-enders rapidly became legends in their own time. A world record was set in 1969 for nonstop circumnavigation by British sailor Robin Knox-Johnston in 32 foot Suhaili, which ultimately earned him a knighthood.

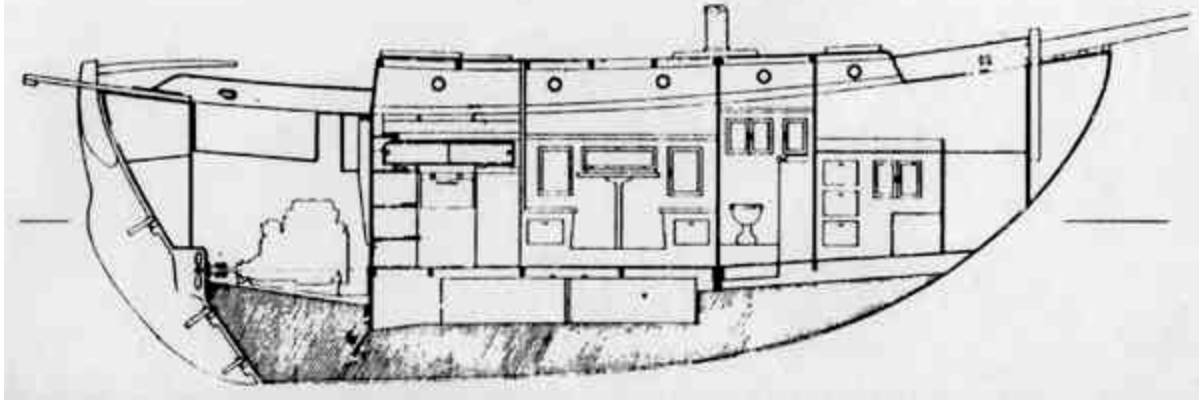
Now enters the third yacht designer to play with the line of the Norwegian double-ender, W.I.B. "Bill" Crealock. It was the mid-sixties and fiberglass was the hot, new boat building material. Builders throughout the country were experimenting with the stuff - producing flocks of racer/cruisers. But as yet, no one had worked fiberglass into what was then thought of as the ultimate small offshore yacht - the legendary Atkins ketch. However, as anyone who has been in the boating business knows, it could only be a matter of time.

The time came when Larry Kendall, a would-be cruising sailor and carpenter by trade from the sleepy little town of Costa Mesa, CA had a couple of friends who wanted an Atkin-Archer design as much as he did. Together, they thought a fiberglass mold would save them all money in the long run. Kendall approached Crealock with a commission to take the wooden Thistle lines and convert them to fiberglass construction. Until then, Crealock had been more of a proponent of somewhat lighter displacement boats.

If three people wanted this boat, Kendall figured, maybe more did too, so he placed a tiny 1/8 page ad in Yachting magazine and overnight became a backyard boatbuilder. Crealock accepted the commission and shortly thereafter produced the scantling for what was to become the Kendall 32. Little did Crealock know what he was getting himself into - and little did he realize that this simple little adaptation job would permanently be attached to his reputation. In fact, he was later given full rein to design the Westsail 42/43, a more modern design, heavy displacement boat, which from top to bottom was his ideal cruising yacht. From that day forward, he would be known throughout Yachtdom as chiefly "the guy who designed the Westsails." Kendall moved slowly, attempting to build a very strong boat at a good price (\$20,000 could have bought you a complete, fully outfitted, offshore ready yacht, had he ever finished one), but a carpenter is not necessarily a businessman. Needless to say, Kendall didn't make it. In the late sixties he was forced to declare bankruptcy - and the tooling for the Kendall 32 was put on the auction block. At the auction were a young couple who were about to make their indelible mark on the boat building business - Snider and Lynne Vick. With \$1,800 in cash, the Vicks bought the Kendall 32 molds and paid the first month's rent on a production facility. They then contracted with the owners of three unfinished Kendalls to complete their boats, using a new trunk cabin designed by Crealock to replace the flush deck. These first boats rolled down the ways and the Westsail 32 was born!

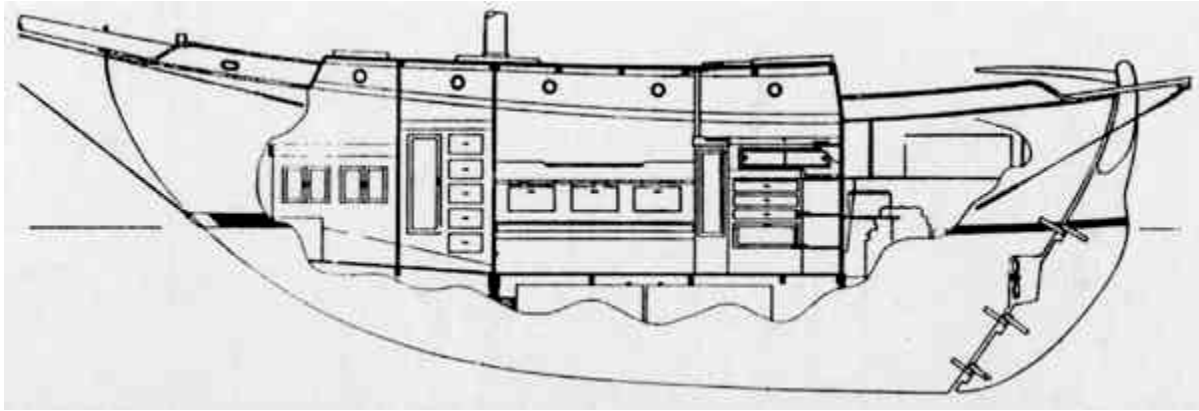
In the beginning, the Vicks were novices to sailing. They inherited Kendall's list of 5000 people who had responded to the 1/8 page ad, which they continued running. An inexpensive newsletter was produced and mailed to the 5000 people along with requests for feedback. Soon both armchair and actual cruising sailors came out of the woodwork to educate the Vicks about the wonderful world of cruising and the tremendous need that existed for a product that could take them to the "land beyond."

The Vicks could see that the sailing world, as it existed at that time, was completely ignoring this growing group of people. Using Snider's background in engineering and construction plus Lynne's in consumer marketing and advertising, they identified a brand new marketplace and produced a boat for that market. With aplomb unheard of at that time in the somewhat backward world of the boating business, the Vicks developed and launched what was to become the most brilliant yacht marketing plan of all time.



Port side diagram of a typical Westsail 32"

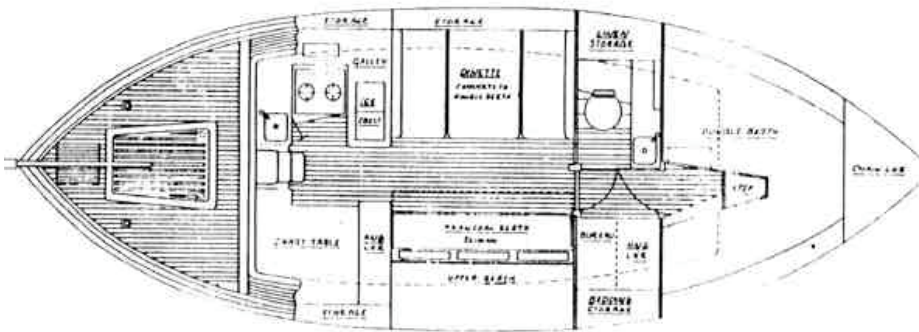
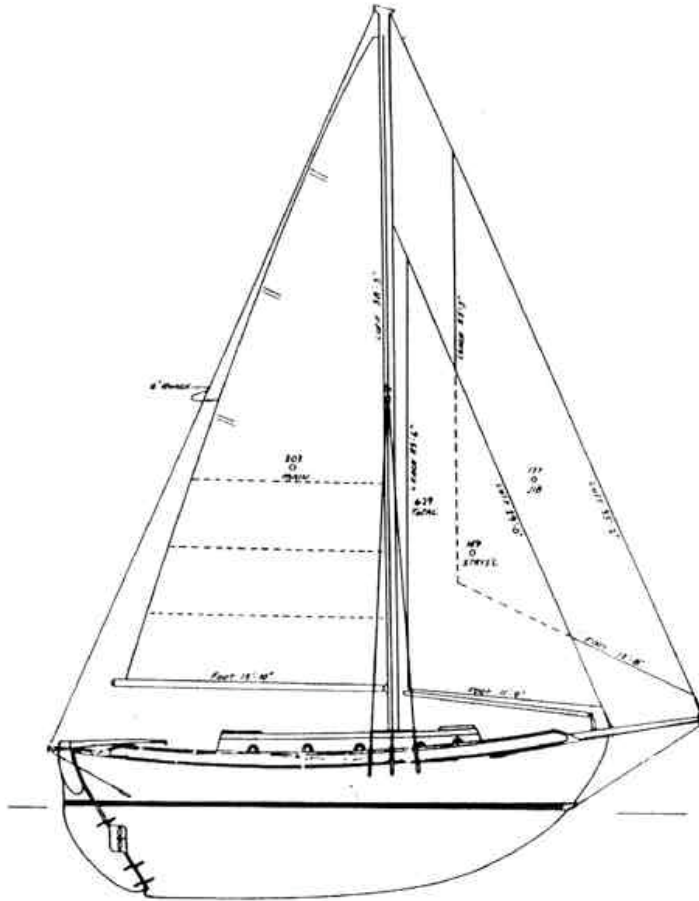
It took a mini-recession to bring it to fruition, combined with the coincidence of a Time Magazine editor enthralled with cruising sailboats. Once the recession took hold, the Vicks decided not to take it sitting down. Instead of pulling in their horns, they developed a full blown advertising and promotional blitzkrieg that was actually not as expensive as it appeared. Powerful, well-positioned one-third page and one-half page full color ads sprung onto the pages of the leading yachting magazines - proclaiming not only the virtues of the Westsail 32, but more importantly, the enticing romance of offshore voyaging. Beautiful four-color brochures awaited those eager souls who answered the call for more information. And that humble newsletter became a sixteen page, subscription quarterly, much of it in color, that fully extolled the benefits of the Westsail and the cruising life. Interested parties were directed to "cruising stations" which popped up in major cities across the country - where sailors, not salesmen, were always on hand to share their own personal experiences cruising aboard Westsails. The emphasis was on palm trees swaying in the breeze and white sand beaches - not upwind performance statistics or sail area to displacement ratios. "Westsail the World!" became the cruiser's battle cry of the early seventies.



Starboard side diagram of a typical Westsail 32"

From the beginning, the Vicks also offered the Westsail 32 in various stages of construction, from a bare hull and deck to a complete yacht loaded and ready for a circumnavigation. If you had the bucks, you could buy her ready to set sail. If not, you could build her yourself with Ferenc Mate's instruction book "From a Bare Hull" promising to show even the neophyte the way.

The Westsail 32 became such an overnight success, demand began to develop for a larger production cruising sailboat. During those days, an editor of Time Magazine found his way to the Westsail plant and indicated interest in running an article on the first fiberglass cruising sailboat in production. As coincidences so often seem to happen, the very day that the plans for the Westsail 42 were announced, Time published a four page article complete with a full page, full color photo of the Westsail 32 under sail. The dream was becoming more than a reality. .



Sail and deck plan of a typical Westsail 32"

Perhaps it was a sign of the times. Perhaps it was an outgrowth of the conscious raising, back to nature movement of the sixties. Perhaps it was the antidote to, to use the old Hopi word, Koyanakatsi - a life and world out of whack. Or perhaps it was an anti-establishment reaction to the traditional yachting world of blue blazers and white slacks. Perhaps it was the answer to a primeval call to return to the sea. Or perhaps it was just the fulfillment of a healthy lust for adventure and romance. Whatever the reason, both the Westsail 32 and the Westsail 42 became

an overnight successes. Soon folks were lining up to buy boats and waiting anxiously for their own private adventure to begin.

And waiting. And waiting. From the beginning, the Westsail Corporation had trouble meeting production demands. Once you start an avalanche, it's impossible to stop it, especially when a company is undercapitalized and banks are unwilling to loan the necessary funds. Orders rushed in, selling price commitments were made, serious backlogs developed. Continuing escalating material prices kept pushing building prices up and up. Meanwhile, the Westsail sales force kept on doing their job and selling boats.

Finally, during the world oil crunch of the mid-seventies, the roof fell in. Forced to deliver boats with contracted prices agreed upon months previous, the Westsail Corporation found themselves in the extremely uncomfortable position of selling boats at prices sometimes actually below what it cost to build them. They were losing money on some of the boats they built - and the cash flow squeeze was on. Frantically, they raised the price of the Westsail 32 (along with the other Westsails, the 28, 42, and 43). Things began to turn around, but the need for a serious cash influx became more and more urgent.

Early in 1976, partners were brought into the company ostensibly to provide the necessary cash. However, as if often the case, reality was not as hoped for and the cash was not forthcoming. Instead, the partners took Westsail Corporation into bankruptcy. As far as she was concerned, the dream was over. But not quite. A former production manager raised funds to buy the molds (once again), produced molds for a racier designed Westsail 39, and attempted to run the company without the added expense of marketing. Only a few months later, the company was once again in bankruptcy.

(WestSail built 78 - 28', 825 - 32', 116 - 42', 55 - 43')

(Two people bought the business at Sheriff's auction in Newport Bay for \$1,200.00. Ed and Mendose continued producing Westsails one at a time in Newport Bay. They used balsa sandwiched by fiberglass. The finished wood custom work was done by the adjacent Southwest Marine.)

In her wake, the Westsail Corporation left over 800 Westsail 32s scattered throughout the world. She also taught the boat business a couple of important lessons: (1) It's dangerous to sell boats for later delivery at a fixed price (nowadays, it's nearly impossible to get a guaranteed price on a new boat for delivery more than a couple of months in the future - almost all builders have built-in escalating cost provisions in their purchase contracts) and (2) It is possible to successfully market a strictly cruising boat. The success of the Westsail 32 launched dozens of similar cruising yacht designs, many of them built in the then emerging giant of cruising boat building countries - Taiwan. It would be fair to say that there would probably be few Babas, Tashibas, Pandas, Hans Christians, Lord Nelsons, CTS, Tayanas, Pacific Seacrafts, etc. if it wasn't for the Westsail 32. She was the first, and in many ways, the mother of them all.

So what was it about the Westsail 32 that turned so many people on? Well, probably most importantly, she looked like what many thought an offshore yacht should look like. At that time most of the highly visible adherents of offshore cruising were voyaging in similar style boats. Armchair sailors had plenty of materials at their fingertips to confirm that the only boat in which to head off into the wild blue yonder was a heavy displacement, full-keeled one. They read the accounts of such veteran sailors as the Pardeys, the Hiscocks, the Smeeton, the Roths, etc. and what they read was this: the sea is a very beautiful place but it can also be dangerous and unforgiving. Speed was nice and fine for throw-away race boats with large crews and bottomless

pocketbooks, but who wanted or could afford to go cruising in such yachts? Besides, who was in a hurry? What cruisers needed was a boat that could survive whatever the wind, wave, or coral reef threw at her. She had to be strong and seaworthy - and that meant she had to be heavy and stoutly built.

The times have changed and now most knowledgeable sailors know that this is all pretty much BS. In this era of high-tech boat construction and design development, the oceans of the world are full of all sorts of well-built boats, from ultralights to heavy displacements - and they all seem to be doing just fine. Even back in the early seventies, there were promoters of light-to-moderate displacement boats for offshore duty. David Parker, author of one of the classic of blue water voyaging, "Ocean Voyaging", was one. As were many designers of the era such as Bill Lapworth, Bruce King, Sparkman and Stevens - even Bill Crealock himself. And few folks remember that John Gusswell circumnavigated in what was then a light displacement boat. Furthermore, we are constantly hearing of heavy displacement die-hards who are switching to a completely different frame of mind. For instance, the late Intrepid sailor Tristan Jones, who only a few years ago said in a radio interview quite definitely that "the only boat to go offshore in was a wooden, full keel and heavy displacement". Later he was to complete a circumnavigation in a trimaran no less!

Nevertheless, for the dreamers and subsequent doers of the early seventies all of this other stuff was irrelevant. They knew what they wanted, and it was heavy. And the Westsail 32 is certainly heavy. At nearly 20,000 pounds displacement with 7,000 pounds in ballast, about as heavy as you could make her without her sinking at the dock. Most of this weight comes from the Westsail's excessively over built hull: two coats of gelcoat followed by 12 layers of hand laid fiberglass mat and roving.