



▲ Don Le Page sailing Zephyr #256, *Front Runner*, one of the cedar strip-planked boats built in the 1990s. Don is an example of the older, highly experienced yachtsmen gravitating to the Zephyr class for intense competition amongst likeminded sailors of a similar generation.  
PHOTO: ZEPHYR CLASS ARCHIVES

the Zephyr generated a momentum from participants' enthusiasm that kept the class continuously operating at a national level. The Zephyr Owners' Association has been a crucial part of this process and has generally had a committee with the fundamental interests of the class at heart. Class Secretary Rob Ebert has for over 25 years guided the class through a number of challenging phases and ensured the key aspects required to keep a class running were carried out. This sort of unseen work is vital to any class and Rob's efforts benefitted hundreds of Zephyr sailors. Provided this level of participant support remains, it's very likely the Zephyr class will continue for many more decades.

Said Des, 'The Zephyr was given its name from a gentle breeze in the Greek Islands. My boats tended to be gentle little boats, sweet in their lines, so I called the first one *Zephyr*.'

# 4

## A Tilt at the International Stage

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'If they go to England for the International meeting at Prince of Wales Week, they should give an excellent account of themselves.'

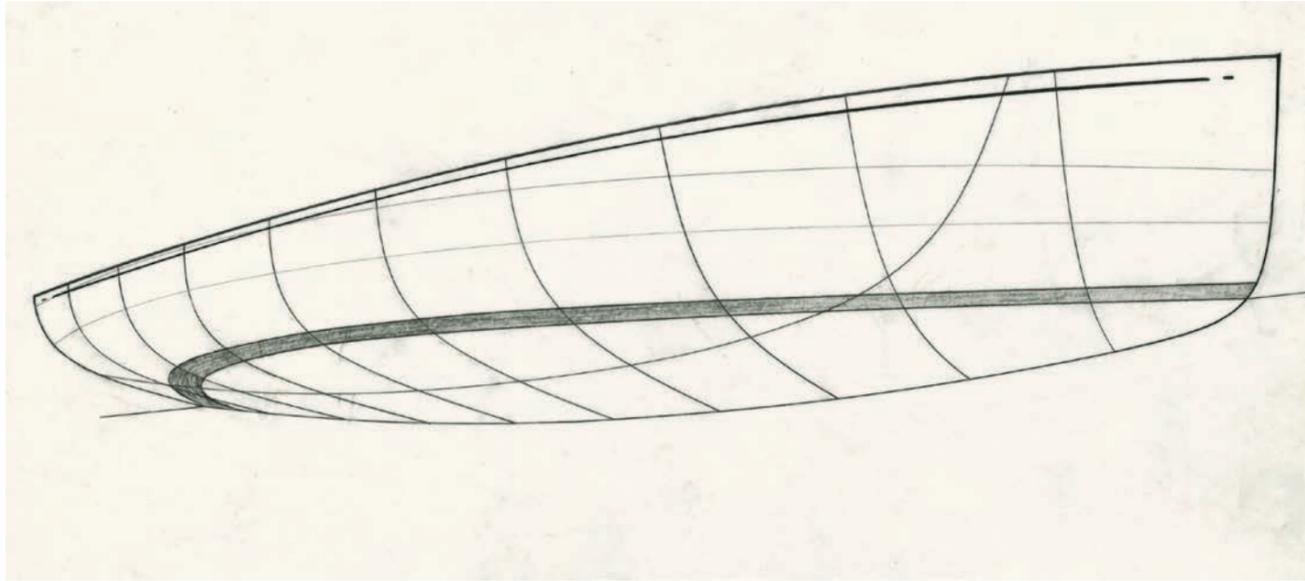
—Sea Spray, February 1958

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In 1957, part-time Zephyr sailor and reigning Cherub-class champion, Ian Pryde approached Des Townson to design an International 14 racing dinghy. This design, although only resulting in one boat, had far-reaching consequences for Ian Pryde, Des Townson and the New Zealand centreboard sailing fraternity.

The International 14 class originated in the United Kingdom in the late 1920s and its premier regatta, the Prince of Wales Cup, raced at Cowes, was regarded by many in New Zealand as the blue ribbon of international dinghy racing. Well known sailors Geoff Smale, Ralph Roberts, Laurie Davidson, Peter Williams, John Lasher and Lloyd Brookbanks were participants in the Auckland International 14 fleet racing and for a short period the class, while never strong in New Zealand, was of significance. In comparison to the similarly sized Z-class, the International 14 was an expensive, complicated boat and beyond the budget of most local sailors.

In the early 1950s, local sailors became enamoured with the idea of participating on the international racing scene to a higher level than just the existing 18-footer annual trans-Tasman regattas. The prospect of Peter Mander and Jack Cropp racing in the Sharpie class at the 1956 Melbourne Summer Olympic Games was an exciting development towards discovering where New Zealand sat on the world centreboard sailing scene. From



▲ The Mistral's final lines drawing of February 1959 has been lost, so in 1983 Des Townson drew a three-dimensional Mistral hull. Before the computer era, hand rendering 3D shapes was a complicated process. Des was a very good draftsman and his plans were not only detailed with respect to content but also precisely executed.

SOURCE: TOWNSON ARCHIVES

boats you find they generally return slightly so you got that pretty little transom that the Zephyr's got, but which is hideously dangerous downhill. Mistral is as good a set of lines as I have drawn of a small boat.'

The resulting boat closely followed the Zephyr in many details. The hull was cold-moulded construction using three skins of 1/10 in radiata veneer and bonded with resorcinol glue. Design uniformity was guaranteed with all hulls built from the same mould and sails from the same pattern held by Boyd & McMaster sailmakers. The mainsail plan was identical to the Zephyr and spars were Oregon timber.

The first Mistral launched was Robert Brooke's #8 *Sparkle*. Robert recalled, 'I'd been sailing Bob Salthouse's Q-class *Nimble* and I wanted one, so I took a day off work and went out to Morrin Road. I said to Des, "I've been sailing *Nimble* and I'd like to build another." He told me I was wasting my time because he was about to start building the Mistral which he felt was an improvement on *Nimble* and would be a better boat for me.'

Des had already promised sail number one and the 'Mistral' name to Graham Fulton as a ready-to-sail package so he offered Robert the first hull off the mould and sail number eight with the potential to back itself on the sail. Robert, a fast and accurate builder, made quicker progress than Des achieved with the Fulton boat. Mindful *Sparkle* would be first of the type in the water, Des visited regularly to monitor progress and as completion loomed insisted on marking the waterline. Robert recalled, 'The day he came over I'd already partially marked it and after one look said, "Well, I can't improve on that." I was pretty chuffed at the time.' For the young Des Townson, the adoption of his design by a member of the well-respected Brooke family was a source of considerable kudos.

On launching day, Robert recalled, 'I remember putting *Sparkle* on the beach for the first time and there were about half a dozen of us there when we started to rig it. By the time it went into the water there was a group of 30-40 people around it and everyone went for a sail. The feeling was that it was good, but the interest never really got to fever pitch. There were always people saying, "Gosh that's an attractive little boat." When you put it on the beach there was always a crowd around watching. *Sparkle* was bright red with an inlaid deck and she was pretty flash.'



◀ Des Townson (left) and Robert Brooke (right) launching the first completed Mistral *Sparkle* #8 at Narrow Neck Beach in November 1959.

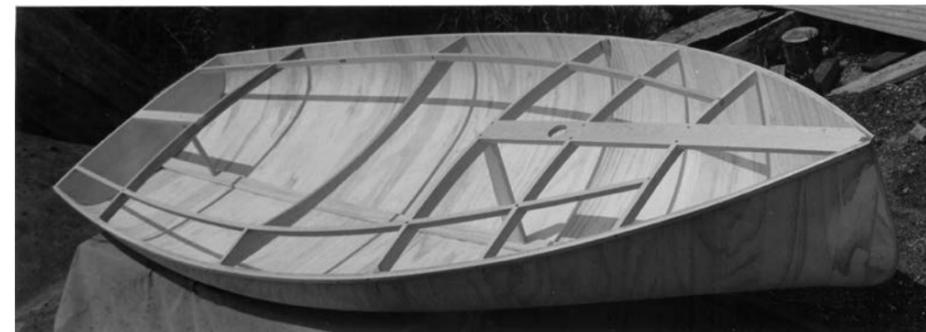
▲ Robert Brooke and Ross Duder sailing the first completed Mistral *Sparkle*, boat #8. The single-luff spinnakers originally fitted were eventually replaced in 1967 by the more modern, user-friendly, double-luff version.

PHOTOS: ROBERT BROOKE ARCHIVES

After *Sparkle*'s launch Des penned an article for the December 1959 *Sea Spray* magazine and began by apologising for starting yet another 12ft class but added that his was the first strict one-design type with the unique feature of eliminating obsolescence and devaluation from design evolution – a by-product of so many other classes in New Zealand. Des also suggested, 'The general appearance of the Mistral could be described as a modern version of the once popular Silver Fern using up-to-date building materials and methods.' Photos of *Sparkle* supported the modernisation assertion.

During the three years Robert owned *Sparkle*, a four-boat fleet developed at Wakatere Boating Club. They regularly raced there on Sundays, interspersed with cross-harbour hops to race at the Tamaki Yacht Club's Saturday races. Always harking back to the scintillating performance of *Nimble*, Robert and a few friends fitted trapezes, bow sprits and larger jibs to their Mistrals and participated in the Q-class for a season. In the end, it was the Flying Dutchman that attracted these young men away from the Townson 12-footer. The Mistral class didn't expand any further at Narrow Neck, eventually replaced at that club by the Jack Brooke-designed Sunburst.

Across harbour, the Tamaki Yacht Club embraced Mistrals with considerable vigour, sponsoring and providing a home for the class. Two years after the design was penned, the



◀ A Mistral hull ready for sale at the Townson factory. In 1959 a hull with deck beams and carlins sold for £46 (\$92).

PHOTO: TOWNSON ARCHIVES