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The rewards make it all worthwhile

Otherwise rational sailors gild their Lily, a Ranger 28

by Karen Larson



OWNING A SAILBOAT IS “FAR MORE REWARDING THAN YOU HAVE ANY right to expect,” says Walt Hodge. His co-captain and companion, Janet Perkins, agrees wholeheartedly. Together they have invested a great deal of love, a bunch of energy, and more than a few dollars into a Ranger 28, now known as *Gilded Lily*, which they sail on Gunterville Lake in northeastern Alabama.

Lily was neglected, perhaps forlorn, when Walt and Janet found her. But, they’re quick to point out, she was not abused. She called to them, as only a boat can, and they bowed to the inevitable. The threesome formed a lasting bond. “We’re still as delighted with her today as we were nine years ago,” Janet says.

There was a hint of exhaustion mingled in the triumphant exhilaration when Janet wrote to the publishers of a then very new *Good Old Boat* magazine in September 1998: “A friend loaned us a copy of your publication and we are hooked. What a welcome concept for those of us who nurture and enjoy the ‘oldies but goodies.’ We are currently restoring to health a 1977 Ranger 28. *Gilded Lily* will be back in the water in a few weeks, looking like a debutante, behaving like a fast woman, and making our sore backs and flattened wallet seem a small price to pay!”

The words in that letter are among the most frequently quoted in *Good Old Boat* slide presentations and brochures. The letter hangs on a wall in the *Good Old Boat* office. Janet summarizes beautifully what so many sailors are experiencing with their own good old boats. So after all these years, my husband, Jerry, and I simply had to meet Walt, Janet, and *Gilded Lily*. We were not to be disappointed.

Rational sailors?

Walt and Janet tell us that they went looking for a boat with a checklist and some cash, as any rational sailors would do. (*Rational sailors?* Please ignore the obvious contradiction in terms.) “But when we stepped on *Lily* the checklist went right into the trash,” Janet recalls.

Before finding *Lily* the twosome first had to kiss a lot of toads. In fact, the Ranger 28 was not in the plan of a broker who took them to the same marina but purposely ignored her. But she looked fetching from the aft view from across the docks. “Wait a minute,” Walt told Janet. “I think we missed one.” *Lily* had called to him, and the rest was preordained. “There was a real connection there,” Walt says. “I said, ‘This is the right boat. *This* is the thing to do.’”

The surveyor they hired had other ideas, however. His thoughtful and well-intended advice might have been right for the non-afflicted. But it didn’t dissuade Walt and Janet from what had already become the boat of their dreams. To be fair, the surveyor made some valid points: the bulkhead had bowed, the gelcoat was chalky, bottom blisters were in evidence, the tanks were worn out, the engine had died, the wiring was a mess, the keel bolts leaked, the interior was worn. But what’s *fair* got to do with it? We’re talking about *love*.

The engine, an Atomic 4, was barely running when Walt and the former owner delivered the boat to the Travelift for the survey haulout. “The engine was missing,” Walt recalls. “We were near a shoal. I wanted to bend a headsail on as a backup in case the engine didn’t make it all the way.” As it turns out, the boat coasted into the Travelift slip just after the engine gave it up. As they look back on that circumstance now, Walt and Janet say that *Lily* was doing her all to trade in her former owner for a new set of sailors. “She got just as far as she thought she had to get,” Walt says.

“The surveyor told us, ‘You should *run* from this one,’” Walt recalls. But, as is true with any story with a good ending, love won out. So the refit began.

Among the many tasks were adding stiffeners to the bulkhead. While he was at it, Walt built a nifty dish-storage rack behind the bulkhead-mounted table. The boat (her new name had not as yet been determined, but Walt and Janet agreed that it would *not* be *Hey Babe!*, which was already emblazoned on the transom) was chalky above the waterline and wet below it. She spent from March to August in the blazing southern sun drying out. When the moisture meter said she was ready, Walt and Janet took her to the professionals for topsides and deck painting along with barrier coating and bottom painting.

Therein lies a story. *All* the literature says that the Ranger 28 has a 4½-foot draft. The shallow draft was an essential on Walt and Janet’s boat-shopping list, since their sailing grounds have many shoal areas. *Gilded Lily* had just spent six months out of the water drying her bottom out. But who’d think to measure the draft? The literature tells you everything you need to know, doesn’t it?

Hard aground

But just 10 days after the big launch following repainting, Walt and Janet went hard aground in an area that should have been navigable. They laugh at themselves in retrospect: “Our previous boat, the Catalina 22, drew 5 feet. We thought we had a boat with a 4½-foot draft. *Gilded Lily* immediately turned into an island for three days!” Walt had to get to work. Janet stayed aboard



***Gilded Lily*, a much-loved Ranger 28, above and on facing page, upstages the big causeway at Guntersville Lake, a wide spot on the Tennessee River in Guntersville, Alabama. Her owners, Walt Hodge and Janet Perkins, escape to Alabama from Atlanta, Georgia, whenever they get the chance. When they do, Janet’s on the tiller and Walt mans the sails, below.**





The interior of *Gilded Lily* has benefited from Walt and Janet's attention. The dish-storage rack, top photo, exposed only when the bulkhead-mounted table is open, is an example of Walt's ingenuity. He had to stiffen the bulkhead, and the rack was added as an afterthought. Janet recovered the cushions and Walt moved the electrical control panel from below the galley sink to the nearby settee back, center photos. The galley, bottom photo, is generally in original condition.

their baby until she was freed from the sandy shoal. She "commuted" to the grocery store and showers from some distance (not exactly like being nearby in the mooring field) by rowing the dinghy. While the Ranger 28 *does* have a 4½-foot draft, this particular Ranger 28 tall rig version — built at the end of the production run as the company was running out of money and stamina — has a 5½-foot draft. *Lily* may very well be wearing a keel left over from a

the fuel, holding, and water tanks and put each in new locations. They decided that one sink on a 28-foot boat was quite enough and removed the sink in the head, replacing that with a shelf. There were the new generator, batteries, and more. All new wiring (there was burned-out wiring at the shorepower connection). Bilge pumps. A drain in the chain locker ("Why did the manufacturer think *that* was unnecessary?" they wonder). "Of course we couldn't have done all this if Walt didn't have the skills and a metalworking shop in the basement," Janet notes with more than a touch of pride.

Janet recovered the cushions in the cabin and sewed other bits and pieces for use on deck, such as a mooring cover at the companionway, sailbags, mainsail cover, and tiller cover. Walt created a unique tiller stop collar. He replaced worn-out teak at the companionway and the hatchboards with a plastic wood that looks great and requires no maintenance. The portlights are the next thing on the list to be tackled.

“I don't think we could have bought a boat that suits us as well as this in the new-boat market.”

Ranger 33. At least that's how Walt and Janet figure it happened. The keel bolts all match from boat to boat. It would be easy to do at the plant.

They scrapped her aluminum deck fittings for new stainless hardware. "There was a lot of lightweight original equipment bought by people who are used to having parties in the cockpit," Walt says with a touch of sarcasm. "The previous owner didn't own any winch handles!" Janet adds, "Walt believes in going *sailing*." The new deck hardware came from Garhauer. They sing particular praises for the Garhauer quality and customer support when it comes to the traveler, which was installed forward on the bridge deck on a slight curve. Walt added strong ¼-inch backing plates under the traveler fasteners.

They replaced the running rigging. "The blocks and ropes were tired from being in the sun," they explain. They bought a new mainsail. Walt replaced

Keel-bolt saga

Then there is the saga of the keel bolts. This 1977 fiberglass boat may have had one of the original "swing keels," Walt notes with a grin. He knew the bolts were loose. But *that* loose? With the boat on stands and in slings, he removed the nuts (some with no effort), and the keel dropped from the boat a few inches. "Gravity did it," Walt says. "There was no effort at all."

The loose keel was repaired by cleaning its top and the mating surface on the hull. Inside the bilge, the keel-bolt washers were replaced with aluminum plates drilled to match the bolt pattern. The gap between the hull and keel was filled with 3M 5200, and the keel was pulled back into place with the keel bolts. Then *Lily* was lowered to place her full weight on the keel. The bolts were retightened, left overnight, and tightened a final time. No more swing keel.

The Atomic 4 that had died at the final moment of purchase was brought back to life with the help of parts from Moyer Marine, which with the addition of a new propeller from Indigo Electronics made the propulsion system efficient.

"The engine has had perhaps 150 hours of operation since we've owned it," Walt says. "I'd be stunned if it has a total of 500 hours on it. The paint still looks good."

The foregoing list of improvements, modifications, and replacements doesn't amaze any good old boater, but it does beg the question of cost vs. resale value. Walt and Janet asked themselves whether this boat was a wise investment. (Oops! There's another of those contradictory terms!)

"Why put a ton of money into an older 28-foot boat?" Walt asks. Then he answers himself. "She's our cabin at the lake and we love the way she sails. I don't think we could have bought a boat that suits us as well as this in the new-boat market."

"The pleasure that Janet and I both have gotten from this boat and her refit is immense," Walt continues. "We've shared it. It hasn't been all me or all Janet. It has been a mutual endeavor. We have both been very rewarded by the results of this effort. We have made many friends as a part of our sailing, in particular, John and Dianne Breyfogle and Doug and Ann Cameron. Also the folks who do the fiberglass and paint work, Custom Fiberglass in Buford, Georgia, have been part of an important network, another very valuable relationship."

Lily has rewarded them for their efforts by being a good sailer also. "She is nimble. She comes about well. She has a seakindly motion. She has good manners at anchor." Walt ticks off her finer points on his fingers. He reminds others that the Ranger 28 held the Newport to Bermuda Race record in her class for many years. No small honor.

She was designed by Gary Mull (see *Good Old Boat*, November 2002). She was built by Bangor Punta of Costa Mesa, California, which had bought Jensen Marine and Ranger Yachts in its heyday in 1973 only to stumble and fall with so many others in the mid-1980s. The 28 was the seventh of nine boats designed for Ranger Yachts by Gary Mull. They were: Ranger 26 (1969),

Following a resuscitation, the venerable Atomic 4 has served *Lily* well, top. Although it came with the boat when she was delivered in 1977, it probably has fewer than 500 hours on it. Several years ago Walt replaced *Lily's* companionway trim teak with a plastic and sawdust wood substitute that allows for more sailing and less varnishing, below. He's been happy with the substitution.

Ranger 33 (1970), Ranger 29 (1970), Ranger 23 (1971), Ranger 37 (1972), Ranger 32 (1973), Ranger 28 (1974), Ranger 22 (1978), and Ranger 26 (no date appears for this last boat, an ultra-light-displacement model produced just before the final act of Gary Mull's rancorous career with Bangor Punta). Keep in mind that the dates given here vary from reference to reference (based, no doubt, on when the design was started or completed, when production began, when the first boat was launched, and so on).

Gilded Lily was not Walt and Janet's first boat, so they had some ideas of what would work for them before falling in love with this beamy beauty that has a whole lot more space below and on deck than any 28-footer has the right to have.

Water people

Walt was always fascinated by water, and Janet is a gung-ho outdoors person. "Walt and I were a good match," Janet says. Walt began boating with apple boxes and large mortar mixing trays. He paddled across the Ohio River and back in an apple box. "If my parents had only known about what I had done ..." he says, remembering. That led to a passion for racing canoes, which grew throughout his adulthood. A give-no-quarter fierce competitor, Walt raced in whitewater, wilderness marathon, slalom, and other events. He went to nationals frequently. "I put 40,000 miles on the van in one year going to events," he says.

Doug Cameron, a canoeing friend, had a 16-foot O'Day Daysailer and introduced him to sailing, Walt says. "We went to Gunter'sville Lake. At some point, Doug gave me the tiller and dozed," Walt says. "I went wing-and-wing that first time and then found out

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Resources

Ranger Sailboat Owners Association

<<http://www.rangeryachts.org>>

SailNet forum

<<http://list.sailnet.net/read/?forum=ranger>>

Ranger 28 resources

David and Janet Dickinson
dld_law@frontier.net

Ranger, O'Day, and Cal Owners of the Chesapeake

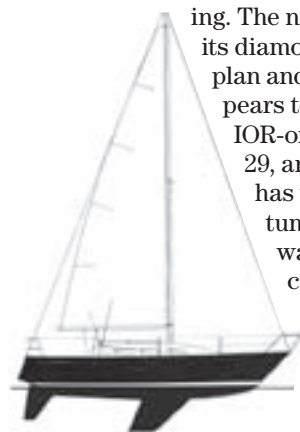
Roy and Louann Meisinger
rrmeisin@erols.com

The Ranger 28

Ferrari or Maserati of the water

by Ted Brewer

BECAUSE THE RANGER 28 FOLLOWED closely on the heels of Gary Mull's very successful Ranger 29 design, it seems obvious that Ranger Yachts told the designer to come up with a more competitive yacht for International Offshore Rule (IOR) racing.



Ranger 28

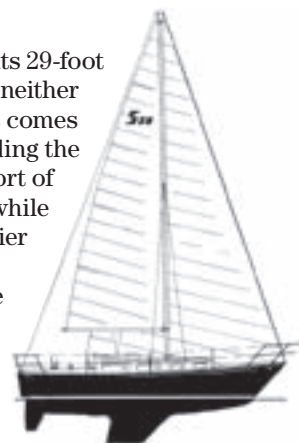
The newer design with its diamond-shaped deck plan and narrow stern appears to be much more IOR-oriented than the 29, and the 28's hull has the substantial tumblehome that was another feature common to the IOR yachts of that period. Although the draft is only an inch deeper than its earlier sister, the 28 has almost 25 percent less displacement, which makes its hull have a much shallower draft. The result is that the fin itself is considerably more than 1 inch longer from hull to tip. It is also much shorter fore and aft, with a considerably higher aspect ratio as a result. That will increase efficiency as it reduces wetted area, and performance will be substantially enhanced.

The 28's sail area/displacement ratio of 21 is unusually high, and its displacement/LWL ratio is very low compared to other yachts of its size and era. And, despite displacing 1,600 to 1,700 pounds less than the other fine yachts in this comparison, the 28 still carries a substantial 45 percent ballast ratio. If we equate these two Rangers to automobiles, I would say that the 29 is a sporty, fast convertible and the 28 is a Ferrari. In saying this, I have to advise that I've

seen a review of the 28 on the web in which an owner claims that the 28's draft was later increased to 5 feet, its displacement to 6,000 pounds, and its ballast to 2,980 pounds. If true, that would increase the displacement/LWL ratio to 263.5 and the ballast ratio to a very high 50 percent and lower the sail area/displacement ratio to a still generous 18.8. In that case, I'd have to revise my opinion of the 28 from a Ferrari to, perhaps, a Maserati!

Like a Ferrari or Maserati, the 28 has its shortcomings. Obviously, on a racing machine, creature comforts have to give way to performance, but the 28's meager 5-foot 10-inch headroom is low by even 1970s standards, and the accommodations offer considerably less space, comfort, and

stowage than its 29-foot sister. Indeed, neither of the Rangers comes close to providing the cruising comfort of the Sabre 28, while the even roomier Islander is the only one of the group that has a head that does not close off the passageway forward when in use. There is no doubt where Gary Mull set his priorities in the design of the 28. Its accent is definitely on performance.



Sabre 28

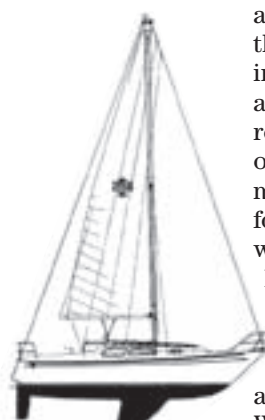
Of course, if the displacement actually is 6,000 pounds, that lowers the 28's capsize number to 2.11 and increases the comfort ratio slightly to a still corky 20.8. The capsize number remains well above the breakoff point of 2.0 though, and I could not recommend a yacht with that high a number for general ocean passagemaking. I will qualify this by saying that many less able craft have made major ocean voyages... just not with me aboard!

Gary Mull designed the 28 for racing. Buy one in good condition, and you'll have a wonderful club racer. With an experienced crew, plus the

safety net of committee boats and other competitors, it'd be a good boat for the serious distance racing skipper in Performance Handicap Racing Fleet (PHRF) or Midget Ocean Racing Club (MORC) classes. Of course, the other boats in this comparison are no slouches either. The heavier Islander and Sabre, with their lower sail area/displacement ratios, will not shine as well in light air but will come into their own when the



Ranger 29



Islander 28

	Ranger 28	Ranger 29	Islander 28	Sabre 28
LOA	28' 0"	28' 7"	27' 11"	28' 5"
LWL	21' 8"	23' 0"	23' 1"	22' 10"
Beam	9' 7"	9' 4"	9' 10"	9' 2"
Draft	4' 6"	4' 5"	5' 0"	4' 8"
Displacement	5,108 lb	6,700 lb	7,000 lb	7,800 lb
Ballast	2,300 lb	3,130 lb	3,000 lb	3,100 lb
LOA/LWL ratio	1.29	1.24	1.21	1.24
Beam/LWL ratio	0.44	0.405	0.43	0.40
Displ./LWL ratio	219	246	254	293
Bal./Displ. ratio	.45	.47	.43	.40
Sail area	389 sq ft	400 sq ft	361 sq ft	403 sq ft
SA/Displ. ratio	21.0	18.0	15.8	16.4
Capsize number	2.23	1.98	2.06	1.85
Comfort ratio	17.7	22.9	22.5	27.5
Years built	1975-78	1971-75	1975-?	1970-86
Designer	Gary Mull	Gary Mull	Robert Perry	Roger Hewson

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The rewards make it all worthwhile, Continued from Page 7

I wasn't supposed to know how to do that yet. The hook was set right there."

It was an easy move from paddle to sail. "Learning the foreign language of sheets, blocks, halyards, and so on was an easy transition," Walt says. "Much was intuitive. A number of things that are fairly useless skills seem to come together for a sailboat." He went looking for a Flying Scot and instead wound

up with a Catalina 22, which needed some help. He learned much about sailboats and fiberglass repairs courtesy of the Catalina, named *No Alibis*. His training with machine tools and his work in industrial maintenance chiefly as a millwright and industrial rigger didn't hurt either. In looking back over a varied career, Walt muses that he spent most of his working life fixing things that someone else broke. And *that*, he notes, fits right in with the demands of restoring a boat.

Janet was a horsewoman who figures she put in at least 12,000 miles on horseback and began tent camping in childhood. She loved the out-of-doors and discovered canoeing later in life, when she met Walt. "A friend invited me to a canoeing rendezvous. I had no canoe experience. But there's a buoyant feeling when you step aboard. I immediately adored it," she remembers. She was married at the time and considered Walt a friend who helped her find a couple of good canoes and visited with Janet and her husband when Walt was in town.

But Janet's husband succumbed to cancer, and Janet had a bout with breast cancer in the 1980s and a run-in with Hodgkin's disease in the 1990s. Some time after the death of her husband, Janet realized that when she talked to Walt, he was a ray of sunshine. "I realized that one of the few times I'd quit crying and laugh again instead was when Walt called," she says.

Together they took *No Alibis* deep into Everglades National Park. Walt had gotten quite hooked on this wild part of southern Florida, and Janet enjoyed the entire experience. "You won't see another human being for days. There are a million and a half acres. It was perfect for me," she recalls. She took to sailing in the same way: she is usually

the person on the tiller with *Gilded Lily*, while Walt tends to sheets and trim.

Because of her outdoor orientation, Janet says, "When we were looking for our larger sailboat, we didn't go looking for a 'Momma boat' with the comforts in the cabin built with Momma in mind. I accept that [more Spartan lifestyle] as the price of the glory our sailing place has to offer." Janet's natural way with words comes easily. Before retiring, she worked writing advertising copy. Later, she was chief financial officer for a corporation.


Gilding the lily

This leads us back around to choosing a name for *Gilded Lily*. Who better for the task than someone who writes ad copy? Still, it wasn't easy. Months went by. Walt says he was campaigning heavily for *Debtor's Prison*, for obvious reasons.

Janet picks up the thread: "We realized that when it comes to the boat one or the other of us can get manic about something. When that happens, we have to look each other in the eye and say, 'It's a boat.'" (Strong emphasis on "boat," as in it's ONLY a boat ... or it's JUST a boat, after all.)

“Choosing that name was a reminder to us that boat units ... can disappear in a hurry.”

During the early months, she says, "as the list of what we wanted to do to this boat was growing, we added one more task that seemed to be the straw that would break the camel's back. I said, 'All we're doing here is gilding the lily!'" Choosing that name was a reminder to us that boat units (\$100-chunks of money is their definition) can disappear in a hurry," Janet concludes. By the way, they named the dinghy *Lilliput*, of course.

It's a *boat*, they remind themselves. That may be so. But for Walt and Janet *Gilded Lily* is *the* boat. The end justifies the means. Jerry has said repeatedly that the value of a boat can be measured in the brightness of the crewmembers' smiles. If that is so, *Gilded Lily* is priceless. 

The Ranger 28, Continued from Page 8

breeze pipes up. The Ranger 29 appears to have the numbers to be an excellent all-round performer as well.

A friendly couple could spend a week or two aboard the 28 in reasonable comfort, but it is not the ideal yacht for family cruising. A Sabre or Islander 28 would be more suitable and might be a sanity saver. However, the person who buys a sports car instead of a station wagon would enjoy the 28 for daysailing and weekendng, even if he or she is not a serious competitor. There's nothing like the fun of sidling up to another yacht your size — and even larger — and blowing its socks off! Gary Mull's Ranger 28 is one of the few 30-year-old yachts its size that can give you that satisfaction. Try it; it really is a hoot! 

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