

*It is said that boats are a hole in water you pour money into.*



Photo courtesy Barbara Booth

Once sea water gets in your blood, you live for moments like these on the Monterey Bay.

# Sailing Into History

## Santa Cruz Yacht Club celebrates 75th anniversary

By **STACEY VREEKEN**  
FEATURES EDITOR

**T**he sea gleams cobalt blue as the sun sinks into the water in an orange haze. Brightly colored sails reflect the light as they ride the waves in a cluster like the sheerwaters who dip and swoop along the surface of the water.

The boats tack and jibe. Crews shout greetings and a few playful taunts across the water. Occasionally the boats veer excitingly close.

It's a weeknight on the Monterey Bay and one of the best reasons to live in Santa Cruz — the Santa Cruz Yacht Club's Wednesday night races — is being played out before our eyes.

Stories about heading to the docks to hitch a ride as crew are legendary (single ladies take note). It's known to be one of the best nights to take in the view over dinner at the Crow's Nest and the Chardonnay sailing charter takes sightseers right into the heart of the race.

Following the "rabbit," most likely Matt Lezin's *Animals*, which sets the course and starts the race, the sailboats zip around the bay, perhaps up to the Municipal Wharf or down to the Capitola pier.

But it's a just-for-fun race — the

biggest boat usually wins — and there's plenty of other more serious sailing going on, led by the Yacht Club, which celebrates its 75th anniversary this year.

A regatta to mark the event is planned for Sept. 27. "We're inviting clubs from up and down the coast to participate in this special race," says Commodore Ron Merrall.

This is the Yacht Club which has gone from rowing out to boats moored near the Wharf to one responsible for giving ultralight sailboats their sea legs.

### Santa Cruz past

Back in 1928, when the Yacht Club was formed, a house in Santa Cruz sold for \$3,000, rum runners were getting rich unloading Prohibition liquor on the beaches and you could join the Santa Cruz Yacht Club for \$6. So says club historian Ernie Rideout, who is still winning races at 85.

"Boating was an adventure back then," he says. "There was no harbor and no berths, so there was no such thing as a quick cruise. You had to take a skiff out to the boat and have an adventure before even boarding the boat. You had to love to sail."



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

See **YACHT** on **PAGE B6**

The Wednesday night race fleet heads out of the harbor.



# Yacht

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The Santa Cruz organization came out of the San Francisco Yacht Club. A tradition of racing between the two bays had persevered, off and on, since 1874 and some members who lived in Santa Cruz wanted to keep it going, says Rideout. In 1938, the Windjammer Club of Bay Area sailors formed, which still sponsors the race each Labor Day weekend, finishing off the Municipal Wharf.

Among the milestones the club will commemorate is the birth of the ultralight sailboat. It was a boat to change racing forever, making Santa Cruz a hotbed for ultralights in the late '60s.

"It was a revolution," says Rideout, who has taught sailing for Jack O'Neill for 30 years, ever since his retirement from teaching and being a principal in the Bay Area.

"Young men in tennis shoes and jeans with holes in them were creating boats that would ride the waves like surfboards. They were only interested in going fast."

Club member Bill Lee designed and built the ultralight Merlin, which won the Transpac race to Hawaii in 1977, a record time not beaten for 20 years. The boats are still considered a design standard.

"Today, club members own power boats and sailboats of all sizes. The original reason to join was to have a place to hang out," according to Rideout, "and it's probably still the most compelling one." The club has close to 500 memberships representing almost a 1,000 people.

Sailing, and the Yacht Club, represent old Santa Cruz. Names like Sam Leask, Matt and Norm Lezin, Jim Ritchey, or Rick Linkemyer. Rick and his mom Lucile sail the bay on *Outrageous*, a 40-foot Olson, along with Barbara Booth, who started sailing in 1978.

This year, Booth is rear commodore, or commodore as she likes to call herself, in line for leadership of the club.

"It's a way for locals to get reacquainted," she said.

Booth is third-generation local. Her grandmother was born on a ranch between Santa Cruz and Watsonville, and her parents met at Santa Cruz High. She is tan, fit and accomplished at sailing — a true Santa Cruzan.

She serves as a fine example for the next generation rising through the ranks. The junior program of the Yacht Club has the largest membership in Northern California, ensuring that the boats will sail on the Monterey Bay for many years to come.

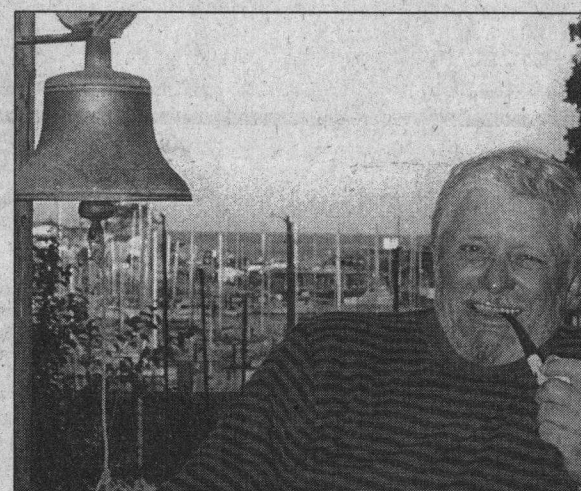
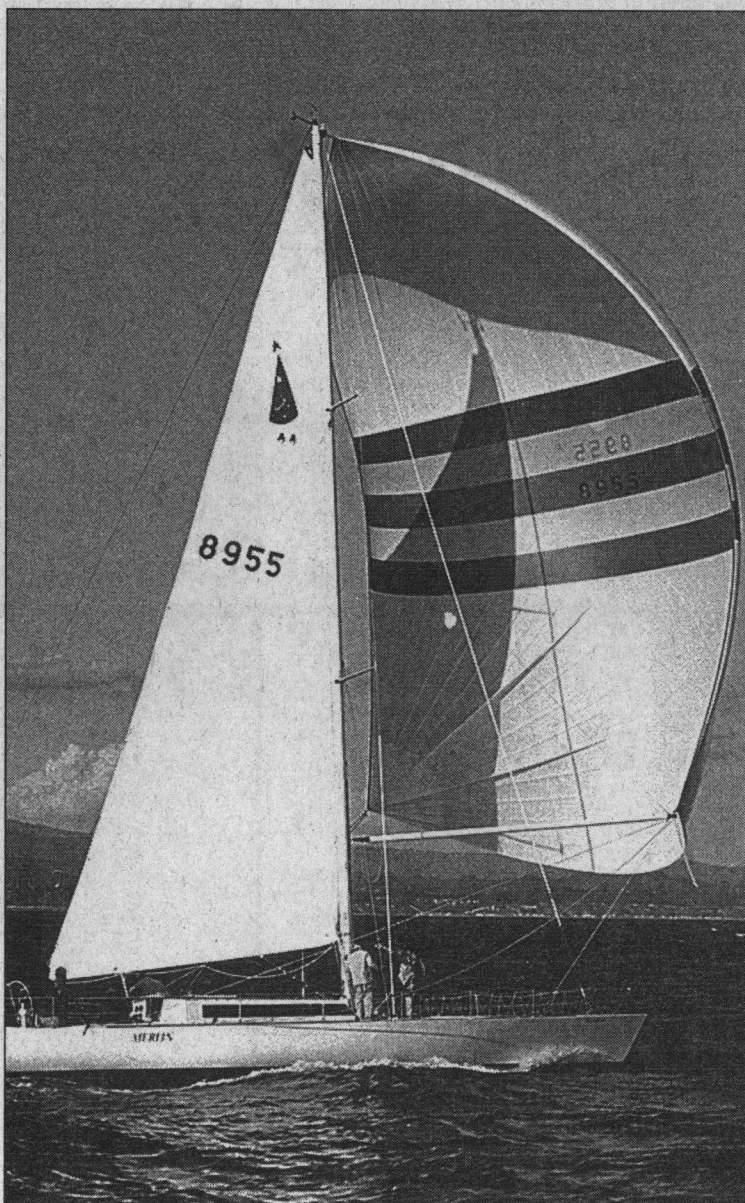
So the next time the sails unfurl on the Monterey Bay, on a Wednesday night, watch Santa Cruz sail into history.

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Old pleasure pier near Santa Cruz Wharf circa 1940. Boats had to anchor there before the harbor was built.

Contributed photos



**LEFT:** Ernie Rideout relaxes at the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor.

**FAR LEFT:** Merlin held the world's record to Hawaii for 20 years. The boat was built by Bill Lee in Santa Cruz. The prototype was created here.

## Yacht Club races regularly

SENTINEL STAFF REPORT

The Yacht Club has many races and events held throughout the year.

In addition to the very visible Wednesday night races, the Club is also responsible for the Lighted Boat Parade the first Saturday in December and for the annual Big Brother Big Sister boat race which raised \$30,000 in 2002.

The third Saturday of every month is dedicated to One-Design races, where all the boats competing are the same design (Moore 24, Santa Cruz 27, Melges 24, Santana 22, Olson 30). On the third Sunday, the Yacht Club hosts a Score Race, where all boats can enter but are handicapped according to size and ability.

After races, members gather at the club on the Aldos side of the harbor for

drinks, appetizers, or a more formal dinner. All Yacht Club members are welcome, even if they don't race.

Each October, a Champions of Champions race is held to determine the best sailors.

The junior program, the biggest in Northern California, also hosts a variety of events and races. "The kids are winning everywhere," says club historian Ernie Rideout.

If you aren't into racing, a Cruising Club division plans outings. "It's really fun, you put bikes in the bow of boat for a ride to Monterey and back," says Rear Commodore Barbara Booth.

The Santa Cruz Yacht Club has 500 memberships, representing about 1,000 people. Having an interest in boating, whether it be sailboats, kayaks or powerboats, is the main requirement.