

Hispania and her sisters

The relaunch of Hispania continues the revival of the once seemingly defunct 15-Metre class. By *William Collier*





Twenty years ago the 15-Metre class had been all but totally forgotten and it seemed inconceivable that it would sail again. The first glimmer of hope for the class was when Albert Obrist bought *Tuiga* in 1989.

At that year's Nioulargue I was invited aboard Mr Obrist's schooner *Altair* and met him for the first time.

Although we had not met previously I had an unbounded admiration for what he had achieved with the restoration of *Altair*, which had struck a richly different tone in the then young world of yacht restoration. It was by far the most authentic restoration so far, and with it came all the excitement of discovering a yacht as her original designer had intended.

In *Altair's* saloon Mr Obrist explained that he was now embarking on the restoration of *Tuiga*, the 1909 Fife-designed 15-Metre. He had heard I knew the whereabouts of many classics and wanted to know if indeed *Tuiga* was the last of the 15-Metres to survive. I immediately told him of *The Lady Anne* and *Hispania*. Though neither of us mentioned it then, there was the unspoken realisation that it might be possible to recreate the 15-Metre class. It has taken 22 years, but finally, at Monaco Classic Week this September, that vision was

achieved when four 15-Metre yachts raced boat for boat for the first time since the rule that brought them into being lapsed some 91 years ago.

Tuiga was the first project undertaken by Fairlie Restorations. Duncan Walker had found her and despite her poor condition had successfully sailed her back from Cyprus to the UK. Indeed, poor weather on that trip delayed the meeting that Mr Obrist had instigated to explore the possibility of securing one, or more, of the other survivors.

The Lady Anne became the prime target but her owner was initially unwilling to sell, and it was not until the summer of 1990 that Duncan and I made our way to Barcelona to take delivery of what was then a stemhead ketch complete with pilot-house. With a significant engine-room fire and responding to a distress rocket, the passage to Palma was more eventful than we or the frail yacht were prepared for. But, patched up, *The Lady Anne* arrived safely at Fairlie Restorations.

It may have been that the euphoria of having saved two 15-Metres went to our heads: we rapidly set our sights on securing *Mariquita*, the last surviving 19-Metre, and in the summer of 1991 she was refloated from her mud berth, loaded on a barge and also taken to Fairlie

HISPANIA

DESIGNED

Wm Fife III

BUILT

1909 Fairlie

LOA

63ft 5in (19.3m)

LWL

49ft 2in (14.9m)

BEAM

12ft (3.6m)

DRAUGHT

8ft 4in (2.5m)

SAIL AREA

4,300 sqft
(399.5m²)(390m²)

Previous pages:
15-Metres at the
2011 Voiles de
Saint-Tropez
- *Hispania* is on
the far left
Above: *Hispania*
Above right:
Mariska
Right: This Beken
photo is entitled
'*Hispania* and
15-Metre group,
1911'

NICO MARTINEZ

NICO MARTINEZ

BEKEN OF COWES



ALENGHI

Above and
opposite: Mariska

Restorations for eventual restoration. Certainly we expected that all these yachts would be restored, but many of our actions were informed by a desire simply to save them and thus secure the possibility of future restorations. It is also true that Fairlie Restorations was, and remains, a relatively small yard and there was never any thought of seeking to restore all these, as well as the other yachts we bought, in short order.

Tuiga sailed again in the summer of 1993. The Conde de Barcelona regatta was the first time she raced, and aboard her we discovered just what a great yacht she was and learned our first lessons in racing her. Fred Dovaston, an immensely experienced sailor and then skipper of the three-master *Aquarius*, joined us as helmsman. As we went into our first gybe in rather more breeze than we would have chosen I heard him mutter: "Anyone who is not scared now is a bloody idiot." He was right but reasonable levels of fear and ability gave us a successful week and sowed the seeds for the eventual 11th-hour rescue of her sister ship *Hispania*.

After a glorious first season in 1993, *Tuiga's* future was assured when she passed into the ownership of the Yacht Club de Monaco. Many yacht clubs have had club boats, but until then none had taken on a challenge quite

as significant as a 15-Metre. Encouraged by HSH Prince Albert of Monaco, the undoubtedly steep learning curve was tackled with tremendous enthusiasm by the club, and for 18 years now *Tuiga* has been successfully campaigned throughout the Mediterranean. In 1998 she first ventured further afield, attending the celebrations for the 100th anniversary of *Pen Duick* in Benodet in what was a highly fitting homage to Eric Tabarly, who was among *Tuiga's* greatest fans. Since then she has made regular visits to Cowes, most recently in 2010.

HOUSEBOAT IN THE MUD

For many years *Tuiga* was a lone standard bearer for the 15-Metre class. The restoration of *The Lady Anne* had not begun and *Hispania* still lay in the mud of West Mersea, where I called on her owners from time to time. Suddenly in 1996 it seemed she was at real risk of being lost. For years her owners had done all they could to keep her patched up – she was after all their home – but they were losing in what was an unequal struggle.

Now I found them close to giving up. They had bought a new boat to convert into a houseboat, but the local council would not accept any increase in the number of yachts occupying mud berths. *Hispania* was

"The rebirth of the fleet has not been without controversy"



NIGEL PERT

NIGEL PERT

NIGEL PERT

NIGEL PERT

to be broken up to make way for her replacement. This was not an acceptable option for a rare 15-Metre that had the distinction of being the last survivor of the great pre-World War I royal racing yachts.

My friend Jonathan Syrett, who still runs Camper & Nicholsons in Palma and who had so admired *Tuiga* in 1993, was sensitive to the situation and acted decisively to form a syndicate of key personalities involved in the Conde de Barcelona regatta. If buying *Hispania* was the most important step, it was in retrospect also the easiest. The summer of 1997 saw me, Harry Spencer and a team from Fairlies refloat the broken-backed *Hispania* and load her onto a barge. It was touch and go at times and by far the filthiest job I have ever done.

Once *Hispania* was safe it would take many years for the Fundación Hispania, into whose custody she passed, to raise the funds for her restoration. Eventually the hull was restored at Fairlie Restorations, completing in 2006, with further work carried out at Astilleros de Mallorca.

More immediately exciting was a new custodian for *The Lady Anne*. Restoration work started in earnest in 1997 and she was relaunched in summer 1999. One of the most interesting aspects of *The Lady Anne's* history is that she, like the legendary Nicholson-designed



NIGEL PERT

MARISKA

DESIGNED
Wm Fife III

BUILT
1908 Fairlie

LENGTH OVER SPARS
92ft (27.36m)

LWL
48ft 7in (14.85m)

BEAM
13ft 7in (4.18m)

DRAUGHT
8ft 9in (2.73m)

SAIL AREA
4,439sqft
(412.4m²)

The above are original specs



Tuiga became the club boat of the Yacht Club de Monaco

NIGEL PERT

15-Metre *Istria*, was commissioned to regain the Commodores' International Challenge Cup. Thanks in large part to her ground-breaking Marconi rig, *Istria* succeeded in that task and became the dominant yacht in the class. To counter this, *The Lady Anne's* owner had her converted to Marconi rig in 1913, and it was to this configuration that she was restored, recreating a rig type that had not been seen in living memory.

Amidst the excitement of salvaging *Hispania* and starting the restoration of *The Lady Anne*, a small advert appeared in the back pages of *Classic Boat* for *Mariska*, the 1908 Fife-designed 15-Metre. Like all the pundits I was taken aback. Had she really survived? From the photos it was not immediately apparent that this was indeed *Mariska*, but a long slog in a hire car from Amsterdam airport to Delfzijl on the Dutch-German border revealed that she was the real thing. It would take two changes of ownership before the major works were started, but in 2009 *Mariska* was re-commissioned.

The gradual rebirth of the 15-Metre fleet has not been without controversy. Much more is known now about how the yachts were built than when work was started on *Tuiga* back in 1989. There is also a substantial debate as to how they should be restored, the materials that can

or should be used and the requirement to respect the original design. These are not small issues and become all the more important in the recreation of what was once the largest and most actively raced class of large racing yachts. At times this debate has stood in the way of the existing 15-Metres racing together again as a class.

It took the return of *Hispania* to the class to start what may be a sea change in 15-Metre racing. Now on a 10-year lease to Fundación Isla Ebustana she has brought the class up to four boats, and this gave the impetus for the owners to start exploring the possibility of class racing. At this year's Monaco Classic Week the owners of all four yachts agreed to race boat for boat and the results were surprisingly close.

All the yachts vary somewhat from their original designs or have been optimised to perform best under the CIM rating. Now there is the possibility of their also being measured to the 15-Metre rule again and forming a class association that will allow them to continue enjoying the close and spectacular racing that we saw in Monaco. If that happens, this class will offer by far the most attractive racing on the classic circuit and there is every reason to expect that others will join it, rebuilding some of the lost 15-metres such as the legendary *Istria*.

TUIGA

DESIGNED
Wm Fife III

BUILT
1909

LOA
92ft (27.36m)

LWL
47ft 11in (15.7m)

BEAM
14ft 1in (4.15m)

DRAUGHT
9ft 10in (2.9m)

SAIL AREA (ORIGINAL)
4,460sqft
(414.3m²)