



The Potter Yachter

Newsletter of the Longest Lasting West Wight Potter Club in the World

April 2025

Potters Attend PICYA Conference

By Sharon Soule



A small contingent of the Potter Yachter leadership team attended the annual PICYA Leadership Conference at the Encinal Yacht Club in Alameda on March 29th. The conference was well attended with about 70 PICYA members representing multiple yacht clubs. This year’s theme was “Hands Across the Water,” emphasizing community efforts to promote yachting. Our Commodore, Eric Zilbert, gave a talk at the conference about who the Potter Yachters are. This was followed up by a small, on the water boat show, intended to introduce some of the PICYA leaders to the idea of trailer sailing. (Continued on page 4)

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The Commodore's Corner



By Eric Zilbert

As many of you are aware we had an impromptu get together on the weekend of March 29-30. This unscheduled event came about because of our participation in the Pacific Inter Club Yacht Association, or PICYA. Most of you know that we joined PICYA (at a cost of \$3 per member) primarily to take advantage of reciprocity benefits at other member clubs (most yacht clubs in Northern California participate).

It turned out that the 29th was the PICYA Leadership Conference. Our invaluable Vice Commodore, George Wehrfritz, said he thought it was a big deal and that Scott Johnson, a former Potter builder, was on the agenda. I made further enquiries and George was correct, this was a conference open to the leadership of the member yacht clubs. I also wound up agreeing to present with Scott.

Now George is a very astute PR man and has been tasked with developing a recruitment plan for our club. His ability combined with the importance of his task led him to suggest that we do a boat show, and he recruited 9 boats to do just that. *Riptide* was of course one of them. And here is where I wish to begin the real message of this column.

I was ready to go. As you may recall, I made a big effort after the February sail to address a dozen issues that needed tending to on my boat. I packed everything Thursday evening. Friday I went out and hitched up the boat to take it to Oakland. After traveling about 1 block I looked in the rearview and saw the boat was listing to starboard. I also saw smoke pouring out from under the fender.

"A bearing?" I thought, coming to a stop. But how could that be? I'd only gone a block. I touched the hub, cool as can be. I touched the fender and got burned. The fender was riding on the tire, because one of the leaf springs had broken.

Luckily, a few years back Dick Herman did a seminar on preparing for and arranging long trips, like those he led to the Pacific Northwest. He came in with two 4x4 blocks of wood, with a hole in the center of each with a stout line going through it.

"Know what these are?" None of us did. Turned out they were blocks fabricated for the purpose of attaching an axle to a trailer frame when a leaf spring breaks. I remembered this, and with my neighbor Bob, whose house I was in front of, quickly fabricated a block (he's a carpenter) and attached it to the frame with a trucker's strap.

It rode well this way, and I decided to take it to Rio Vista and put it in a slip there while the trailer is being repaired. This is a rural road where you can easily pull over if necessary. I did not have the guts to go to Oakland with it.

There is much more to this story. However, the main point is that you should 1) Inspect your axle and leaf springs now and then, 2) Figure out the thickness of a block you will need to fit your trailer and build one, and 3) Be sure your jack can lift the trailer by the frame. I needed to get another 4x4 so the car jack could do this. Another thing that was pointed out to me is that adding trailer towing insurance to your boat policy is not very expensive. If I had been further away, I would have needed a tow for sure.



So watch those leaf springs! Fair winds, Commodore Z



Club Events on the Horizon		potter-yachters.org/calendar
April 5-6	Rio Vista Anchor Out	Eric Zilbert
<i>Sail north from Rio Vista to Prospect Slough where you will anchor out overnight. No services will be available, so plan on being "self contained." This will be a good opportunity to see what camp cruising is like with the safety net of the group if needed.</i>		
April 26-27	Richmond to OYC	Eric Zilbert
<i>Depending on wind and tides, this can be an intermediate to experienced sail—we will be crossing the "Slot" where you should be prepared to shorten sail. Launch in Richmond and sail to Alameda. Overnight in Alameda. Return to Richmond Sunday.</i>		
April 27	Opening Day on the Bay	PICYA event
<i>Sponsor! Donate! Ride on the official committee boat! Decorate your boat and join the Parade of Boats! Follow links for information.</i>		
May 3-4	Moss Landing (Elkhorn YC)	Bud Kerner
Sail Cancelled!! Sail Cancelled!!		
May 17-18	Benicia to Napa Cruise	Goose Gossman
<i>Depending on wind and tides, this can be an intermediate sail. Launch in Benicia and sail to Napa. Stay overnight at the Napa Valley Marina followed by a sail back to Benicia on Sunday.</i>		



Upcoming Event: Benicia to Napa Sail

May 17-18

Sail Host: Goose Gossman

The annual cruise to Napa begins by launching at Benicia Marina’s 5th Street ramp on Friday 5/16, getting guest slips overnight, dinner out, and leaving for Napa by 10-11 am Saturday morning to ride the flood tide up the Napa River. Boats can also launch at the 9th Street ramp and meet us on the water. This year we are staying at Napa yacht club, in the heart of downtown. Make reservations at dockwa.com. The cost is \$50. We’ll find a good restaurant in Napa for dinner, but you can also eat aboard if you wish. Sunday we’ll cast off from Napa after breakfast and make it back to Benicia by early afternoon. Tides and currents are always interesting on this sail, and it usually takes 4-6 hours in each direction. Carry extra fuel, water, and food, as this is a “real” cruising adventure through beautiful wine country.

Goose —

Directions to 9th street ramp, Benicia
From I-80:
 Exit onto I-780 East towards Benicia
 Exit at Military West
 Take an immediate right on K street along the water
 Proceed 2 stops and turn right at 9th Street Park Launch
From I-680:
 Exit onto I-780 West towards Benicia
 Exit at Southhampton and turn left on 7th street.
 Proceed down the hill past the jog at Taco Bell
 Turn right on K, Left at 9th

Directions to 5th street ramp at the Benicia Marina
To Marina Ramp:
 Exit 5th St, go south to the end, turn right into the lot

(PICYA Conference continued from page 1)

The conference started about 9:30 Saturday morning with a continental breakfast, then got right into greetings and opening remarks. Thoraya Halhoul, director of the Oakland Yacht Club, gave the first presentation all about Oakland and Encinal Yacht Clubs' annual [lighted yacht parade](#). This event takes place the first weekend in December and this year will be the 49th year. This is not merely a fun chance to decorate your boat but includes a charity fundraising component that benefits the Oakland Fire Department's Toys for Kids program and the Alameda food bank. Last year's event included 37 boats, collected a truckload of toys, and raised \$10600. Attendees discussed ways to expand and promote the event in the future. The Potters present discussed the possibility of entering a boat in this year's parade.



Next, Dan Garrett of the [Elkhorn Yacht Club](#) in Moss Landing gave a presentation on that club's process for developing their strategic objects. Every 5 years, they conduct a survey of the membership to determine how they are doing and what member priorities are. They hold an event called "Discover Sailing Opportunities at EYC" where they entice members to attend by offering free food and a tight agenda. Members can indicate areas of interest which allows the club to do a better job of matching members to roles within the club as well as matching up skippers and crew for sailing and racing opportunities. After this year's successful event, their

racing committee doubled in size, the fleet captain purchased a new RS Quest sailing dinghy, and several boats found new owners among their members.

We next heard about the Alameda Yacht Club Community—[Island Wide Open House](#) from Melissa Sopata, Rear Commodore of both OYC and PICYA. The open house is a once a year event that takes place May 3rd this year and is intended to showcase the multiple yacht clubs—both physical and on paper—that call Alameda their home. The thinking behind this event is to allow visitors to learn about the many opportunities that are available, and hopefully, find an experience that fits with their specific needs and sailing aspirations. The Open House allows the clubs to pool their marketing resources to reach a larger audience than one club might on their own. Their goals are to increase the attendance at the open house and new member signups for all clubs. George Wehrfritz, Potter Vice-Commodore, is exploring whether this would be a good opportunity for the Potters to set up a booth or table to help advertise our unique sailing community as well.

These presentations were followed up by discussion of various upcoming PICYA events around the bay such as opening day, the Lipton Cup and the Wheelchair Regatta. Member clubs were also encouraged to hold fund raising events for the PICYA scholarship fund.

The next presentation was by Erich Schoenwisner, PICYA Staff Commodore, who spoke about [RBOC](#). RBOC is the Recreational Boaters of California—formed as a joint undertaking by PICYA and the Southern California Yachting Association in 1968—which advocates for recreational boating and functions as the lobbying arm of those two organizations in Sacramento. Some current issues that RBOC is following are regulations dealing with copper based antifouling paint, marine flares, and the threat of E15 gasoline to boat engines. We discussed ideas for fund raisers to help this valuable organization continue to do their work.

After a nice lunch of Caesar salad wraps, we heard from Eric Jones, founder of [Sea Valor](#), "a nonprofit dedicated to ocean-based therapy and education." Eric described his experiences as a first responder on 911 and how he struggled with PTSD in the following years. He founded Sea Valor to help veterans, first responders, and underprivileged youth by giving them access to sailing and other "ocean themed programs." If you'd like to become involved in the Sea Valor program, they welcome volunteers as well as donations. (Continued next page)



Eric Zilbert and Scott and Cindy Johnson

the online activity helped to build connections between Potters around the world and led to greater participation in local sailing events. In turn, participants would tell their stories on the forums and website creating even more engagement.

To illustrate his points, Johnson then told his audience the story of the first Cruiser Challenge that took place in the Estuary in 1999. Potters who have been around a few years are familiar with the origin story, but we now have a few more details. It turns out that there was someone on the Potter forums who kept insulting the Potter boats, saying that they were slow and couldn't go upwind and that they couldn't win a race against other "better" boats.

Johnson was willing to take up the challenge. He knew that Jerry Barrilleaux was an experienced racing skipper who would be willing to take on other boats in his Potter 19, *Sunshine*, and was very likely to beat them. Jerry volunteered as did Judy Blumhorst. They suggested combining the event with an upcoming club sail and the Cruiser Challenge was born. International Marine agreed to sponsor the event and provide prizes. In addition, Johnson and Glenn Perkins put together a new P19 with all of the bells and whistles and brought it up from Inglewood, not to race, but to give participants something to drool over and aspire to.

Josh Colvin of Small Craft Advisor covered the [event](#) in a blog post from 2008 if you are interested in reading all the details. The bottom line is that Jerry won the "big boat" category in *Sunshine*. A Capri 16 actually won the overall race, but that was a boat that was built for racing with a much lower PHRF than any Potter.

Johnson concluded his talk by making three points that apply to sailors today as we attempt to combat the decline of small boat sailing. In order to expand our audience:

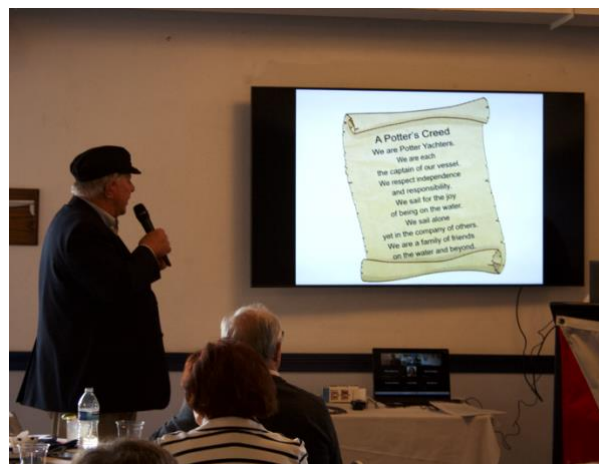
- (1) We need to be open to change and new opportunities.
- (2) We must work to reach new demographics by changing our culture and embracing innovation.

And finally, (3) We should seek to strike a balance between tradition and new ways of doing things.

After Johnson spoke about his Potter experiences, our Commodore, Eric Zilbert, stepped up to talk about the Potter Yachters. (Continued next page)

The final presentation of the day was about Potters and the Potter Yachters. First, Scott Johnson, former general manager of International Marine, which produced the West Wight Potters from 1971 to 2017, spoke about his time there. When Johnson first arrived at International Marine in 1997, the company had been in a slump. Management had been cutting corners in the quality of the boats and their reputation had suffered. Johnson was charged by the new owner, Larry Hart, to "rebuild the brand through community." In order to foster trust in the company, International Marine contacted many of the current owners to discuss their needs and opinions. Their premise was that they were creating a community, not just selling boats.

This was the early days of the internet, and the leadership team at International Marine recognized that they could develop an online presence by creating a website and forums which would fuel not only online engagement but cultivate offline participation in Potter sailing. Johnson explained that



He told us how he first purchased *Riptide* in 1998 because it would fit in his yard and how he joined the Potters in 1999 (he raced in the first Cruiser Challenge, by the way). He then gave an overview of the Potter Yachters from our founding in 1978 to our present activities as a club. He extolled the virtues of trailer sailing with the Potters: low cost, flexibility, big adventure, safety in numbers, and comradery. Zilbert told several stories to illustrate the mindset of the Potter community including the story of why his boat couldn't be there at the conference. (See the [Commodore's Corner](#)). To continue the story, when Zilbert arrived in Rio Vista, he ran into Bud Kerner who not only knew of someone who could fix Eric's trailer but took him over there and helped him set up the repair. Zilbert's point was that the Potter Yachter community was what enabled him to know what to do about the broken leaf spring and helped him get it repaired. He finished up his talk by reading the Potter's Creed. If you've never read it, it appears at the end of each newsletter and really sums up what Pottering is all about.



After the conference concluded, we invited the participants to come down to the EYC docks to look at some of the trailerable sailboats belonging to club members. George worked hard to put this little boat show together. Originally, he had 9 boats lined up. Unfortunately, due to illness and trailer problems, only 4 of us were able to make it. Ironically, none of the actual Potters made it. We had *Betty Sparrow*, *Kestrel*, *Half Fool* and *Parson's Ghost*—a good spectrum of the different types of boats in the club. As we walked down to the docks, a P19 that none of us recognized sailed past the EYC docks. We got a pretty good laugh out of that.

Conclusions after attending the conference:

Everybody in the sailing community is struggling with the same issues and questions no matter what level they are sailing at:

How do we increase membership?

How do we attract younger people to our sport?

What sorts of activities should our club engage in to promote the sport of sailing?

How do we contribute to the promotion and expansion of the sport of sailing overall?

It seems to me that our PICYA membership is one way that we are hoping to answer these questions. We discussed having the Potter Yachters try to join some of the events we heard about such as the Alameda Around the Island Event on New Year's Day, the Island Wide Open house, and the lighted boat parade. In addition, George is working with the Oakland Yacht Club to put together some sort of fun racing event in the Estuary. —



PICYA Boat Show Participants:

- George Wehrfritz – *Betty Sparrow*, Sparrow 16
- David and Sharon Soule – *Kestrel*, S2 6.9
- Mark Sabin – *Half Fool*, Com-Pac Sun Cat 16
- Steven Hartman and Stefan Jaquet – *Parson's Ghost*, Marshall Sanderling 18

Sail report: PICYA Boat Show

By Sharon Soule



It was a happy coincidence when George Wehrfritz emailed us and asked if we would take part in the impromptu boat show he was planning in conjunction with PICYA's leadership conference on March 29th. We had already been planning to sail out of Richmond that weekend, so now we had an excuse to take Friday off and sail over to Alameda then back after the boat show. We chose to launch from Richmond because we wanted to really test the boat by sailing across the slot and we were leery of setting up this new-to-us boat in an unfamiliar launch area. Parking in Alameda is also a concern. This was one of the issues that we discussed in our group over the weekend.



Friday morning at Marina Bay. Looks like good sailing!

The weather gods have not been kind to us this year and, once again, a storm threatened our hoped-for trip over the mountains. We watched the weather reports all week and although the passes looked iffy, the sailing on the bay looked to be very good. We bought chains for the boat trailer and crossed our fingers. Thursday night—no chains required—and we were off. We did see some snow falling in Woodfords Canyon and over Luther Pass, but none of it was sticking. It rained off and on all the way to Richmond.

As soon as we began to set up the boat, it really started to rain. We put on our foulies and continued raising the mast and launching. Once we launched, it stopped. Of course it did! We realized we had forgotten our windvane and a VHF radio, and after arriving at our

berth, we found there was no card key waiting for us. We didn't have access to the marina bathrooms and one of us had to stay on the dock at all times to open the gate for the other one. We couldn't count on someone else letting us in as the dock, ramp, and parking lot, were pretty much deserted at midnight on a Thursday night. Okay, so we'd use our wag bags... And that's when we discovered we only had one bag on the boat. (Continued next page)

We really need to make a checklist to go through before we leave the house! I figured I could Uber to a store once we reached Alameda if it became necessary.

This is the second time we have launched on a Thursday night from Richmond now, and we have discovered that the little café, Café Bubbalo, that is always closed on weekends is open for breakfast on Fridays. Their breakfast is quite good. You can order and pay online and by the time you walk down there, your food is ready. I highly recommend this option if you feel inclined to sail on a Friday.

After breakfast, I walked up and procured a couple of card keys, and we prepared to sail over to Alameda. We weren't sure what kind of conditions to expect, so we had grabbed the small jib from *Nighthawk*. David spent some time rigging up a pennant so that we could use it on *Kestrel* if we needed to. The sail down the Reach was perfect—as usual. Our new depth sounder worked well and allowed us to feel safe pushing our tacks to the edges of the channel. Once on the bay, we hit the doldrums behind Angel Island. At first, we were fine. After all, we weren't in any particular hurry. But we could see the wind building out in the slot and after bobbing around for a while, we decided to start the motor and head on over to where the wind was.



We found the wind!

And it was blowing nicely—maybe around 10-15 knots. We were sailing with our 110 and full main. Everybody tells us that *Kestrel* will be a “tender” boat, and while she is certainly more tender than *Nighthawk*, I don't find her to be particularly scary when she heels. As we passed behind Alcatraz, the wind continued to build, and we decided to try reefing. This required one of us to go up to the mast, so we decided to heave to. Naturally, the moment we did, we found ourselves competing with a freighter heading to the south bay and a nearby bell buoy. Once we determined that we weren't going to

get into trouble with either of those obstacles, we reefed and continued on our way.

As we progressed towards the bridge, the wind continued to build, and we were glad we had tucked in the reef. We should really rig up single line reefing like on *Nighthawk* (since no one has to go forward) but this isn't a priority right now. We were still heeling around 15 degrees, but it was very comfortable sailing. That's when we had the surprise of our lives as a grey whale surfaced right next to the boat. We were on parallel but opposite courses with the whale headed towards Angel Island. I knew that by the time I fumbled my phone out of my life jacket to take a picture, the whale would be gone, and I was afraid I would drop the phone overboard in my excitement, so I didn't get a photo, but what a thrill! Later I googled “grey whales in SF bay” and found that they have been coming into the bay more often in the last few years.

After passing under the bay bridge, we enjoyed the long downwind run up the Estuary. If anything, the wind was still building, so we kept in our reef and soon dropped the jib for better visibility. We realized that it's been years



George tacking on *Betty Sparrow* in the Estuary

since we sailed up the Estuary and we weren't sure we could identify the Oakland Yacht Club from the water. We had been in contact with George and were expecting to see *Betty Sparrow* at any moment. Soon we spotted her distinctive blue and white sails as George tacked out towards us.

(Continued next page)

After a few minutes, we were joined by Steve and Stefan on *Parson's Ghost*. Both boats were reefed as the conditions became even more sporting. We thought we would sail with them for a bit but got in a pickle when the jib jammed as we were raising it. One of the hanks somehow got stuck on the forestay and wouldn't come free. Another surprise issue we will have to deal with. We sailed upwind with just the main, but soon, both of our companions fell off to head back towards the Oakland Yacht Club.

I called George and confessed that we had no clue where we were going, so he pointed out the club and which dock we were to tie up to. Soon, we were tied up to a rather wobbly finger on the older section of the Yacht Club's docks. They appear to be upgrading their docks, and the newer sections look really nice and far less wobbly.

George let us know that we were invited for pre-dinner drinks on Scott and Cindy Johnson's boat. She turned out to be a gorgeous Island Packet 37 that they live on there at the marina. After drinks, we had a nice dinner at the Yacht Club and exchanged sailing stories. Scott told us tales about what it was like working for International Marine in the 90's.

Saturday, I attended the leadership conference while David scrubbed the boat. Those magic erasers turn out to be great for scrubbing oxidation off the boat, but they get a pretty torn up by the textured deck. At lunch, we moved *Kestrel* over to the Encinal Yacht Club's dock. The boat show went well. We were disappointed to hear people cancelling but certainly understand their reasons. Still, we were well received by the PICYA crowd, and they showed a lot of interest in our boats.

After the boat show, David and I headed out to sail back to Richmond. We wanted to be able to pull the boat first thing Sunday morning as the weather report was looking iffy again with snow in the forecast over the passes.



Parson's Ghost with Steve and Stefan



Motoring out of the Estuary, competing with a container ship

some, but she handled the conditions well. The wind stayed with us all the way back to the Reach and we only had to restart the motor to get into our slip. We were surprised to have made it back in the daylight and even happier to find that Ahn was still open for dinner. Sunday, the wind was absolutely howling, and we were glad to have returned Saturday evening. The icing was that we made it home Sunday without having to chain up.



The wind in the Estuary was right on the nose and we didn't want to spend too much time tacking out, so we motored out. When we originally planned this sail, we were thinking we might have to motor back to Richmond in the dark, but we needn't have worried. We left the dock about 4:00 and it was Mr. Toad's wild ride once we put the sails up off Treasure Island.

It was much gustier in the slot than Friday and we got to experience *Kestrel's* tenderness again, often finding ourselves heeling at around 30 degrees. We discussed reefing but decided this was a good test of her abilities.

There were times we had to spill the main



Heading back to Richmond

In Memoriam: Guy and Rocky Light

We first met Guy and Rocky in 2014 at the Union Valley sail. We were excited to find that we had sailing friends who lived less than an hour away in Carson City. It was fun to watch Guy and David collaborate on their many boating projects. Guy was always looking to develop the “perfect boat,” and was well known for his distinctive green and white sails. We spent many hours sailing our fleet of little boats on the lakes in and east of the Sierra. We also sailed together through three Salish 100 adventures. Sadly, Rocky was already beginning to suffer from dementia when we met them which worsened over the time that we knew her. Rocky passed away March 12th and Guy passed away March 26th.

The many boats of Guy Light:



Their original *Green Light* was a Monty 15



The new and improved *Green Light* was a Monty 16 cat boat



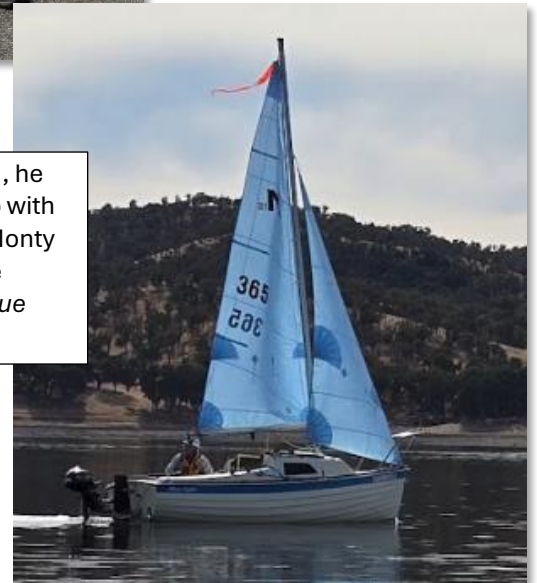
Guy was a talented boat builder. This was an 8' pram that he built. We spent many hours during the pandemic sailing our fleet of little boats on Topaz Lake.



This is a scout he built. He wanted something roomier than the 8' pram.



On the Salish, he told a girl "I like your hat!" The next thing he knew, she gave it to him and said "it looks better on you." He wore it for the rest of the trip.



In the end, he wound up with another Monty 15 that he named *Blue Light*.



The last boat he built was this CLC Jimmy Skiff II. Seen here on Spicer Reservoir.



Fair Winds Guy and Rocky. You will be missed.



Sail Report: Coyote Point

The sail was cancelled due to inclement weather. Coyote point doesn't have a stretch of protected water like Richmond or Alameda, so if the weather is bad, it's bad right outside of the marina. Mark made the decision to cancel the sail but invited anyone who wanted to join him for the dinner. A small group did attend the St. Patrick's Dinner at the Coyote Point Yacht Club. According to Mark it was a nice dinner with fun Irish dancers and great comradery.



Mark says "Danny is in the middle, I'm the tallest and Jim is the handsomest!"



Officer's Club

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Eric Zilbert
P-19, #629, *Riptide*

Vice-Commodore:
George Wehrfritz
Sparrow 16, *Betty Sparrow*

Newsletter Editor:
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S2 6.9, *Kestrel*

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Bud Kerner
P-14, *Splash*

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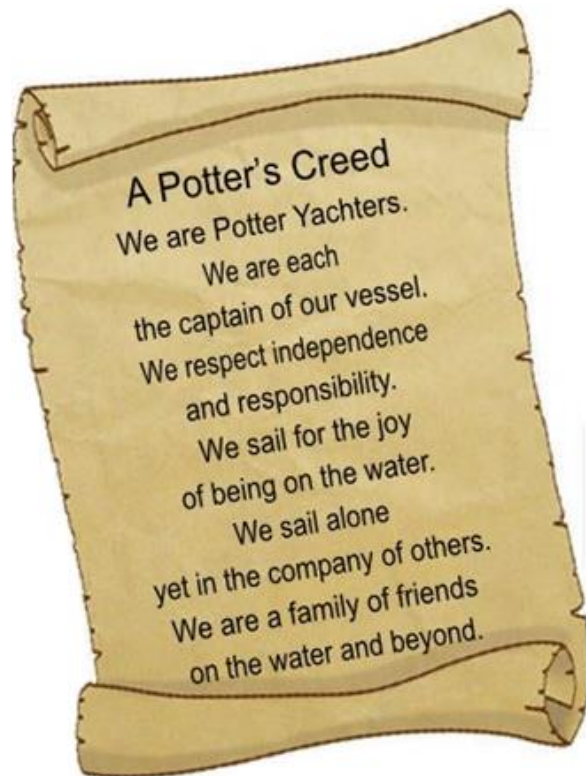
With a Grain of Salt

The **Potter Yachter** is a forum for exchange of ideas and information among West Wight Potter (and other mini-yacht) sailors. But we Potter Yachters are mostly a bunch of amateurs finding our way by trial and error and luck.

You will probably find some very helpful tips or ideas in the **Potter Yachter** that will enhance your sailing experience, but you may also find some ill-advised suggestions or ideas that just don't work for your particular boat, your sailing environment, your level of sailing experience, or your boat-working skills. So please understand that any sailing tutorials, suggested boat modifications, recommended cruises, etc., are the opinion of the author, based presumably on his or her personal experience and judgment at the time the article or letter was written.

If a Potter Yachter believes s/he has a good idea and submits it to the newsletter for publication, we will usually pass it on to the rest of you in the newsletter, but take it "with a grain of salt" and a large portion of your own good judgment, and perhaps get a second opinion before undertaking a modification or cruise or sailing technique you read about in the **Potter Yachter** (or any other publication).

- The Editor



A Potter's Creed
We are Potter Yachters.
We are each
the captain of our vessel.
We respect independence
and responsibility.
We sail for the joy
of being on the water.
We sail alone
yet in the company of others.
We are a family of friends
on the water and beyond.