

Nearly 20 years later the Ultimate 20 is still turning heads as Fleet #7 GYA forms



It seems like every few months a new 20 something Sporty hits the market vying for attention in a crowded field. Yet behind the scenes, one of the original sport boats, the Ultimate 20 is quietly growing in both numbers and fleets.

Launched in 1994 in Santa Cruz, California the Ultimate 20 has had 6 active fleets racing in the North West, Northern and Southern California, West, Mid West, and the East Coast. Most recently, WD Schock has ramped up production on new boats and the newest fleet, #7 GYA has just formed on the Northern Gulf Coast.

Fleet #7 consists of boats located at several clubs within the jurisdiction of the Gulf Yachting Association. The idea of the GYA fleet is to provide cohesion between the clubs and to provide significant numbers of boats that only have to drive an hour or two to compete for a championship.

Jim "Chappie" Chapman is the presiding fleet captain and one of the original owners an Ultimate 20 at Fairhope Yacht Club on Mobile Bay. During the past two years Chappie has watched his fleet grow from two when Billy Ellis brought in hull #99 to five a year later with the addition of #'s 12, 139, and 182. In addition GYA has two boats sailing part time out of Pensacola Yacht Club and one boat sailing out of the Birmingham Sailing Club.

The sailors of Fleet #7 are very excited about the Ultimate 20 because it fills a niche in which they can relate. Most are retired but some have small children. All have significant others who enjoy sailing but enjoy comfort even more. The cabin provides a nice place to keep gear dry and the added privacy is a real bonus. While the Ultimate 20 is capable of downwind speeds in excess of 16 Knots it is an extremely stable and comfortable boat that appeals to sailors of all ages and genders; not just the adrenalin junkies. The North American Championship regatta last year in Pensacola was a testament to that fact. The youngest co-skippers were a pair of young ladies who were seniors in high school, and the oldest was in his seventies.

Erik Schmitz used the u20's attributes to his advantage when he was looking to move on from the aging Rhodes 19 fleet. Erik took his wife out on Ellis' boat on a beautiful summer evening. Leigh Ann drove while Billy hoisted the Spinnaker and Erik trimmed. The boat quickly jumped up on a plane and was tracking along at 12 knots. Erik looked back at Leigh Ann and she was all grins and the sale was complete.

Dan Herzog and Fred Chadsey are also testaments to the Ultimate 20's wide appeal.

Dan, who had been racing his J24 for years, was looking for a little more exhilaration and a little more comfort. After taking #12 for a test sail he was so impressed that afterward he went up to the club to have a beer and said he would think about it and make a decision by the next week. After a beer he decided that he didn't need to wait until next week and closed the deal on the spot. And then there is

Fred. Fred should be everybody's hero. Fred went out on Chappie's boat a few times and decided he wanted to buy one. Under most circumstances this would not be a big deal but under these circumstances it is a really big deal. Fred is 82. All those years of experience have paid off because Fred, and his partner Ben Batchelder, have quickly gotten 182 up to speed .

Ultimate 20's affordability has also contributed to the development of Fleet 7. With WD Schock building new boats and a steady supply of used boats available an Ultimate 20 can found to fit any budget. The sail plan is simple so maintaining a complete competitive inventory cost about the same the replacement cost of a new mainsail for a J 30. With most boats sailing 3 up finding crew and keeping them well fed and "refreshed" does not cost an arm and a leg.

Fleet 7 has a number of events planned for the coming summer and fall. In addition to racing every Sunday afternoon beer can style there will be a monthly scheduled regatta for more serious racing. These will take place at varying clubs in the area. All of this will cumulate in a Fleet championship in the fall. With the interest we are seeing around the FYC and at other nearby clubs Fleet 7 has great expectations for future growth throughout the GYA network.