

Follow the Sinn Fein Resurrection: A Documentary Blog!

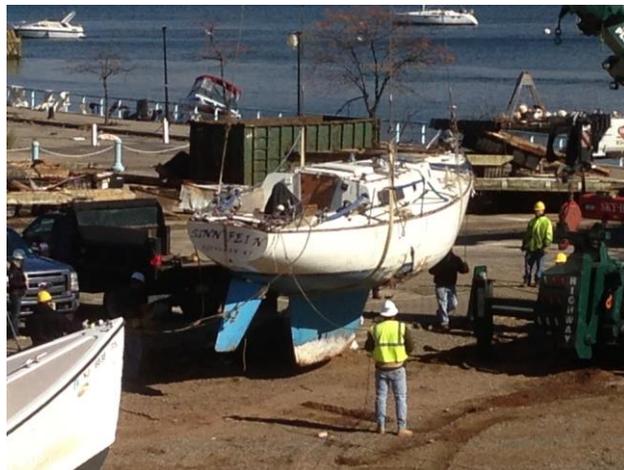
By Kelly Robinson and Carol Pierini

When Hurricane Sandy devastated the Raritan Yacht Club boat yard October 29, 2012, the storm left the Cal 40, *Sinn Fein*, lying on her side with a huge hole where she landed on a jack stand, the mast snapped, and a dock laying on top of the boat.



As a result of the damage, *Sinn Fein* was declared a material total loss by the insurance company. This did not stop the Rebovich family from pursuing their plan to compete in the 2014 Newport to Bermuda Race. They decided to buy the boat back and try to repair it in time to compete. In this documentary blog, we will follow the progress of the Rebovich family and the *Sinn Fein* crew along with other RYC members, as they work to bring *Sinn Fein* back to competitive form. We

will briefly summarize the history of *Sinn Fein*, then describe the nature of the damage inflicted on her and the challenges the Rebovich family faces as they repair and restore her.



We will update progress periodically at the Raritan Yacht Club web site: www.ryc.org.

The History of *Sinn Fein*

Why is the Cal 40, *Sinn Fein* so important to yacht racing?

Nearly 16,000 boats were built under the Cal brand name. There were many different models, but, without question, the most famous is the Cal 40. The forerunner of today's ultra-light, production ocean racers, the Cal 40 was inspired by ocean racing legend, George Griffin, of the Los Angeles Yacht Club, and was purportedly first sketched by him in 1962 on the back of a cocktail napkin. Following Griffin's inspiration, the Cal 40 was designed by the prolific and ground-breaking naval architect, C. William "Bill" Lapworth and was lofted by Willis Boyd. A major undertaking for its time and radically different from other production racing sailboats with its fin keel separated from a spade rudder mounted well aft, the Cal 40 continues to rack up an impressive string of ocean racing victories more than four decades after its initial launch.



PC Peter Rebovich bought *Sinn Fein* in 1973, initially using it for local racing and cruising with his family. In the late 1970s, Pete got the offshore racing bug, competing in several Around Long Island races. He completed his first Marion to Bermuda Race in 1981. After winning the family trophy in that race in 1995, he moved from the cruising race to the Newport to Bermuda Race in 1997.

Overall, *Sinn Fein* has been to Bermuda and back 16 times. She won her class in 2002 and 2004. Then, in 2006, she won the St, David’s Lighthouse (amateur) Division of the centennial anniversary race—beating the largest fleet ever to compete in the “thrash to the onion patch.” In 2007, *Sinn Fein* became the first winner of the newly created Olin Stephens award for the boat with the best combined finishes in consecutive Newport to Bermuda and Marblehead to Halifax races. *Sinn Fein* repeated her Bermuda Race victory in 2008, becoming only the second boat to win back-to-back races. She also won the inaugural North Rock Trophy for the overall winner of the combined amateur and professional divisions. Overall, she has won her class four times and the Stephens trophy a similar number of times. In 2010 and 2012, she was second in class (to another Cal 40, *Belle Aurore*). In both these races, she was in the top eight boats overall in fleets of more than 100 boats. The boat has also competed very successfully in a large number of coastal races such as Annapolis to Newport, the Vineyard Race, and the Block Island Race.



The boat has always been sailed by an all-amateur crew. No one on the crew receives paid travel or lodging. All of the crew are local sailors from Raritan Bay. The owner, PC Peter Rebovich is a retired school teacher from Metuchen, New Jersey. Now in his 70s, Pete suffers from a degenerative muscle disease in his legs that severely reduces his mobility. The boat has an especially supportive band of wives, girlfriends, former crew and sailing buddies who routinely travel to meet the boat, party, and help with deliveries to and from races. It is not hard to see why *Sinn Fein* has become a favorite with weekend sailors everywhere.



Raritan Yacht Club is immensely proud of *Sinn Fein* and the importance of this particular boat in maritime history is especially meaningful to all of us.

The Damage

When Super Storm Sandy roared ashore in October of 2012 with a storm surge in excess of 10 feet, it destroyed more than 30 boats stored in the RYC yard. *Sinn Fein* was the only boat not on a trailer to survive. But, that survival was by a thread. The boat had a large hole in its starboard side, with cracks in the hull extending several feet fore and aft. In other areas, several layers of fiberglass were abraded off the hull as the boat slid back and forth on the gravel. The rudder and mast were both destroyed, as were the engine and many of the boat's electrical systems. The interior of the boat, including navigation station and galley area, was a mess. The bottom of the keel was severely abraded. Parts of the hull-to-deck joint near the starboard quarter were badly damaged, and most of the teak toe rail was ruined. Essentially, all of the stanchions and pulpits were destroyed.



The Decision to Restore *Sinn Fein*

It took a long time for the Rebovich family to decide whether restoring *Sinn Fein* was feasible. Pete's son Mark felt from the beginning that while repairing the hole was possible, it would be a huge project. Pete also had to determine the cost and availability of getting a new rudder, engine, and mast—something complicated by the fact that the boat is 45 years old. In early 2013, Peter Jr. travelled to California to search for the key parts they needed. After finding a used rudder and engine, things looked more promising, but locating the right mast was more challenging. While in California, Peter also arranged to buy a used trailer to store the boat on during its extensive repairs. By late May, Pete Sr. determined that the rebuild was feasible. Eventually a mast was purchased from Ballenger spars in Santa Cruz, California.

Stage 1. Demolition and Cleaning

Cleaning the boat occurred during the Spring of 2013, while the search for key parts was proceeding. In addition to the direct damage, the boat was full of mud, dirt, and nearly all surfaces were covered in diesel oil that was everywhere on and in *Sinn Fein* after the storm. Cleanup of the boat was hampered by the fact that the RYC yard was so severely damaged by the storm that there was no electricity or water available until late May.

Once utilities were available, Pete, Joe Le Compte, and PC Ann Myer spent weeks power washing, scooping out muck, vacuuming the interior, and cleaning with bleach. The crew also cut out the interior bulkhead to inspect and gain access to other damaged areas. The galley and navigation station were also removed to gain access to the hole in the hull. The rudder and engine were also removed.



Stage 2. The Restoration Begins

July and August 2013:

The first job was to repair the bottom of the keel so that the boat could be put on the trailer. The keel had been badly abraded and rounded off on the bottom. Mark Rebovich ground out a large amount of material in and around the damaged area, filled in major hollows, then laid biaxial fiberglass cloth over the area.



Pete then restored the flat bottom surface of the keel by gradually building up epoxy filler. This was then barrier-coated and painted so that the boat was ready to go back on the trailer.



The second and biggest fiberglass job was to repair the large hole in the side and the cracks that extended fore and aft from the hole. This job took most of July and August, with work frequently delayed by rain. During one especially bad hot spell, it was common to see the Mark, Pete, and Ron working in 90+ degree heat. Again, this job required an enormous amount of grinding to get down to undamaged fiberglass, and to provide a large overlap area to create a strong bond. In some places, nearly one-half inch of fiberglass had to be ground away.



The initial patch was made on the inside of the hull. To provide shape to the area, the crew made a set of hull templates from the undamaged port side of the boat. They then laid sheets of flexible plastic and slats of wood on the outside of the hull to provide a shaping surface for the inside patch. These were screwed directly through the hull.



The patch itself was created using biaxial cloth and roving. This was vacuum bagged to create a strong bond and reduce excess resin in the layup. When completed, the patch was an impressive nine feet long and four feet high!



After the inside patch was completed, the wooden forms were removed and a similar patch was laid on the outside of the hull. Low spots from the grinding process were then identified and filled using fiberglass cloth.

By mid-August, 2013, the patch was nearly complete and the hull was ready for fairing.



More than Boat Repair

The project has become a rallying point for Raritan Yacht Club. Many of our members lost boats during the storm, and watching the historic racing boat, *Sinn Fein*, return to a recognizable form has been therapeutic. While many members did not know the proud history of the boat, and even fewer knew the complex details of the repairs to be undertaken, there is a nearly constant stream of visitors stopping to ask questions about the work. While it may not help the pace of repairs, Pete is glad to explain what is being done. According to director of the summer sailing school Gary Myer, kids in the program have been fascinated by the work and often chat with Pete. The *Sinn Fein* restoration continues a long tradition at Raritan Yacht Club of bouncing back from adversity with grassroots volunteerism.



Upcoming in the near future:

- Within the next few weeks, we expect the boat will be placed on its trailer and moved to a place in the yard where it is less obtrusive.
- Gary Gochal has obtained high modulus polyethylene (HMPE) and will be machining new rudder bushings.
- The fairing of the outside will continue, and the deck seam needs repair, but much of the work will shift to the interior of the boat.

Stay tuned for more updates!

Pictures by Kelly Robinson.

The checklist:

- Clean out boat ✓
- Purchase replacement mast ✓
- Purchase replacement rudder and engine ✓
- Purchase trailer ✓
- Fix bottom of Keel ✓
- Repair hole in starboard side ✓
- Place boat on trailer
- Replace and re-tab the bulkheads
- Replace interior
- Repair gunwhales (toe rails and deck seam)
- Replace pulpits and stanchions
- Repair aft deck joint
- Reinforce backstay attachment point in transom
- Replace rudder
- Replace engine
- Prep and paint boat