



BY MICHAEL PETERS

# SIGHTLINES

## Still Cruising

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.



The 48-foot Peters-designed *Sarissa* sits at rest on a mooring. Got a comment for Michael? Give him a shout at [inbox@pmymag.com](mailto:inbox@pmymag.com).

**M**y friendship with George Griffith dates back to when his son David and I were best friends at USC. George worked for Standard Oil Company in southern California and holds an engineering degree from Cal Tech. He is also a famous sailor from the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, owning the race circuit up and down the west coast during those decades. Most notably, he was the father of the Cal 40. Introduced in 1963 with its lightweight, canoe-shaped hull, fin keel, and independent spade rudder, it was the first big sailboat that could surf. The Cal 40 has gone down in history as the breakthrough boat that has most influenced the shape of all modern sailboats.

George owned a succession of sailboats, all of which served double duty for racing and extended family cruising. Members of the Cruising Club of America since the 1950s, his family owns an LA Yacht Club mooring at Howland's Landing, on Catalina Island, about 15 miles up the coast from where my family ran a summer camp.

In August of 1983 I received a letter from George: "Millie and I are thinking of a powerboat." Life onboard open-cockpit sailboats had taken its toll apparently and they wanted more shelter and speed. But George hated powerboats. Instead, he envisioned a "sailor's powerboat," the very antithesis of a bloated dockside condominium that would embarrass him while moored alongside his racing buddies. What he had in mind was a light-displacement, narrow-beam powerboat about 45 feet overall. He didn't want a slowpoke trawler, either. This man was used to going fast, and he wanted to cruise at 20 knots. Was I interested in designing the boat for him?

Struggling to stay afloat as a yacht designer in those early years, I jumped at the opportunity. By this time George had become a real hero and mentor to me and I was more than a bit nervous designing a boat for him. I asked what he meant by light displacement. Say, maybe 20,000 pounds? Heck no, he said, we can build a 45-foot sailboat for that and half of it is lead. He wanted to shoot for 10,000 pounds! All of the early notes and sketches to follow from him had "KISS" written at the top in big letters. "Keep It Simple Stupid" became the mantra for the boat. I thought "Stupid" was directed at me.

What developed was a 48-foot by 10-foot-10-inch ultra-light displacement boat (ULDB), weighing 12,000 pounds dry.

Powered by twin 158-hp Volvo diesels with propeller pockets, *Sarissa* would run 25 knots. She was built by Dencho Marine and launched in 1987. With two cabins and two heads, she had quirky features like tiny aircraft sinks in the heads, and showers heated by boiling water poured down a pipe from the galley above. George was fanatical about weight and stood guard over every piece of equipment as he weighed it before allowing it onboard. He must have driven the builder crazy. When finished *Sarissa* ran from full stop to full speed with a perfectly straight performance curve, showed almost no wake, and boasted a fuel consumption of around 4 to 5 nautical miles per gallon. It is amazing what you can get with a narrow beam and light displacement. I have cruised with the Griffiths a few times since and the comforts you give up are an easy trade for the feeling and adventure of being aboard a real sailor's powerboat.

While George owned four or five sailboats over a 30-year period, he has owned *Sarissa* now for 25 years and counting. She is certainly the most loved and most used of any boat I have ever designed. Earlier this year George sent me a letter: "We have started a new habit counting the years of friendships gathered around the table on *Sarissa*. Most times the number exceeds 100 and on a recent weekend it topped 1,000 years of friendship around the table." A letter like that really makes it worth being a yacht designer. I am glad I count for 40 years of friendship when I am aboard.

In 2011, the LA Yacht Club honored George as the "Father of the Cal 40" and for his 90th birthday. At 91 he still cruises with Millie and a lifetime of friends and family. He stopped diving to wet-sand his props before each cruise a few years back, but he still runs the boat at full throttle wherever he goes. □