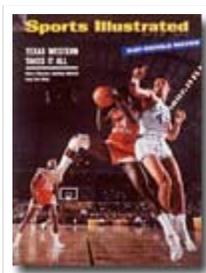


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March 28, 1966

The Meanest Vamp At Sea

The Cal-40 at left is a stock boat right off the dealer's shelf, but she beat out all the fancy custom jobs
Hugh Whall

It was almost as if someone fresh off a motor scooter had dropped in on his friendly neighborhood Buick dealer, bought a car off the showroom floor and then proceeded to win a driving championship from the best drivers and the fanciest custom cars on the racing circuit. In this case, the hypothetical Buick was a stock fiber-glass Cal-40 sailboat, the kind anyone could buy tomorrow by writing a check for \$27,500. The driver was a 27-year-old small-boat sailor from [Atlanta](#) named [Ted Turner](#), and his championship was earned against some of the top blue-water skippers of the [U.S.](#) in the annual [Southern Ocean Racing Conference](#).

"She's just an ol' stocker," says Ted of his swift Vamp X. "I gave her that name after Hardhearted Hannah, the vamp of [Savannah](#), the meanest gal in town, 'cause this ol' boat's like any hardhearted woman that'll freeze ya and kill ya." But if anyone had the right to think of Vamp X as a hardhearted woman it was less Turner than the veteran skippers of Ondine, Indigo, Doubloon, Dyna and the other grandly expensive craft he had beaten.

Of course, even though Vamp was a stocker, no boat, outside of a strictly supervised one-design class, ever stays just like another for very long. Turner had dressed his in the finest Hood sails, added bigger water tanks and beefed up her rigging so that her handicap rating worked out a 10th of a foot higher than the other Cal-40 in the race, Otseketa. There were no intricate mathematical considerations behind Turner's decision to buy Vamp. "I bought her," he says, "because I didn't know what else to get. I figured I could always unload her if she didn't do anything. Actually," Turner adds, "I don't think she's that much better than the others"—which may be his way of saying that it was the skill of skipper and crew as much as boat and rigging that won the championship.

A husky 6 feet 2, Skipper Turner drives himself as hard as anyone on board his boat. A round-the-buoys sailor who was once North American Flying Dutchman champion, he had only one year's ocean-racing experience before buying Vamp last November. That was aboard a chartered boat. Often courtly in the old tradition of the South, but sometimes as blatant as the roadside bill-boards he rents as an advertising man, Turner is not one to underplay his sudden triumph in ocean racing. "Ol' [Atlanta](#)'s a major league town," he said after the last race. "We got major league football, and maybe major league baseball, so why not major league ocean racing? There's the Chicago Yacht Club, the [Boston](#) Yacht Club, the [New York Yacht Club](#). Now there's gonna be the [Atlanta](#) Yacht Club."

Turner was taught to sail in a 12-foot Penguin by Cap'n [Jimmy Brown](#), a Negro and an old family retainer. Brown still sails with Turner in the capacity of ship's cook. "We eat better than anyone afloat," says Turner. "Cap'n Jimmy's an epicurean chef who'll turn out lobster Newburg, [Kansas City](#) strips and two kinds of salad, including Caesar, in a 35-knot gust." The rest of Vamp's crew are small-boat sailors, who work Vamp as though she were a 14-footer. No matter how unpalatable the job, there is never any hesitation about reefing or changing headsails, and Turner insists it must be done in under a minute. On less competitive boats crewmen spend the long, cool night watches huddled in the cockpit out of the wind and spray. Turner's crew stays up on the weather rail in the drenching darkness where their weight will do the most good. If hanging a man from the top of the mast with an anchor around his neck would encourage Vamp to go faster, a man would be up there—voluntarily.

Not all crewmen have successfully survived Turner's driving ambition. One man who quit Turner by mutual consent halfway through the SORC was an experienced racing skipper with many offshore races to his credit. That failed to impress Turner, who said, "I didn't care about how many races he's sailed. What I cared about was: Did he win?" For Turner and his young crew (average age about 30), the SORC itself is merely a tune-up for the more ambitious races ahead: the [Bermuda](#) race in June and next summer's 3,600-mile grind to [Denmark](#). "I always wanted to see [Europe](#)," muses Turner, "and this seems like a good way of doing it."

The single race that has come to symbolize the whole SORC, and one heavily weighted in the point system, is the 184-mile [Miami-Nassau](#). Even with wins in the St. Petersburg-Fort Lauderdale and the 30-mile [Lipton](#) Cup affair off [Miami](#), Vamp had to do well in this race if she were to win

the title.

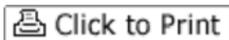
As races go, the **Miami-Nassau** was a pleasure cruise. A huge high-pressure cell lay like an umbrella over the entire course, bringing cool breezes that ranged from northwest to northeast, breezes that never got over 25 knots and allowed the fleet to stay on a single tack the whole way. Shortly after the start the milky green water that marks the **Florida** shoreline suddenly became the deep, white-flecked blue of the Gulf Stream. Flying fish fled before the plunging bows, and that night a huge moon made a perfect guide for helmsmen and sail-trimmers. It was the sort of race that lulls the lazy into simply sitting and going. But on Vamp X, on the phenomenal Class B Doubloon, which has never finished out of the **Miami-Nassau** money, and aboard a little stock **Columbia** 40 named Geechee, the temptation to relax was successfully resisted. As the fleet, led by Escapade (under charter to Robert Way), rounded the last prominent mark, Stirrup Cay, some 50 miles from the finish, the wind freed enough so that spinnakers could be set for the first time. Up they went, and for the remainder of the race the course reverberated with the sound of cloudlike spinnakers collapsing in claps of thunder, then filling again with explosive cracks. A witness aboard the boat ahead kept his eye on Vamp and said afterward that her helmsmen were so proficient that her spinnaker collapsed only one-fifth as often as those of the other boats.

Big Escapade finished first and broke the course record by nearly three minutes doing it. Doubloon won Class B and took second over-all, but Vamp's fifth-place finish was enough to keep her title safe. The other stock boat, Geechee—ironically, also from **Georgia** and skippered by **John Baker**, a friend of Turner's—was Class C and overall winner. "How about that?" said Turner. "We're just a couple of dumb Georgians who don't know nothing about this ocean-racing business, but look what we did."

A few days later Turner took Vamp out in a blustery breeze off **Nassau** and piled up enough points to win the championship 57 points ahead of the next best boat, Indigo. "Man, if we'd been around in the Civil War," said Crewman Jim Markley, "we'd have cracked that ol' blockade."

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