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Sailing: Duckling for the Deep

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky.

And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by.

Today's blue-water skippers are a bit more specific than John Masefield. Their pragmatic doggerel runs: "Give me a Cal-40 and some racing luck, and I'll win Bermuda, Transpac and Mackinac." In less than three years of ocean competition, the 40-ft. fiber-glass sloops from California have become the tallest boats in U.S. racing, sailing off with virtually every major trophy.

In last year's 2,225-mile Trans-Pacific from Los Angeles to Honolulu, Cal-40s breezed in first, second and sixth overall. Last March, a Cal-40 won overall honors in the month-long Southern Ocean Racing Conference series in Florida and Bahama waters. Last month IBM President T. Vincent Learson brought in his Cal-40 Thunderbird ahead of 166 other boats* overall in the storm-tossed Newport-to-Bermuda race—with five other Cal-40s in the top 20.

Thumb to Nose. Winning, in all water and weather, is the only thing the Cal-40 was designed for. Most ocean racers are at best compromises, partly designed for speed and partly for family cruising. The Cal-40s are all business: short on finery, heavy on sail and with a light (15,500 lbs.) hull that thumbs its nose at the intricate rites of rating—the official formula that calculates waterline length against sail area to determine the boat's racing handicap. Ordinarily a designer slaves to achieve the lowest possible rating, thus the highest handicap. Designer Bill Lap-worth, 46, who had been teaming with Builder Jack Jensen, 40, for five years on smaller fiber-glass models, didn't even consider the matter.

He gave his boat four more feet of waterline than customary for a 40-footer, obeying a simple logic: a longer waterline tends to make a boat faster. He then hung an immense 700 sq. ft. of sail above, counterbalancing it with a deep three-ton fin keel, while keeping the boat's underbelly flat for speed

off the wind. Instead of streamlining the rudder into the keel, he stuck a spade-shaped rudder well aft, which gives such strong leverage that a twelve-year-old child has handled a Cal-40 in 40-knot winds. The bold tinkering gives the Cal-40 an almost prohibitively high rating of at least 31.1 for a 40-ft. boat. Theoretically she ought to be five feet longer, and she ought to lose. Thing is, she wins.

Far Cry. So far, 75 Cal-40s have popped out of Jensen's mold in Costa Mesa, Calif., and more are coming at the rate of three per month. Fully equipped, a Cal-40 goes for around \$35,000, a far cry from the \$60,000 to \$100,000 that some ocean sailors spend on their custom-built boats.

Of course, no blue-water yachtsman is completely happy unless he can find something to grouse about. "She's noisy and her fiber-glass hull sweats so that she's definitely clammy," says America's Cup Veteran Bus Mosbacher, whose Cal-40 finished a respectable eighth in the Newport-Bermuda race. Others complain that she lacks speed on a reach (sailing across the wind) and shudder at her dumpy, short-bowed, ugly-duckling looks. "Why don't you make your boats prettier?" asked a friend recently. Grinned Designer Lapworth, "They get prettier every time they win."

* Including the 58-ft. cutter Palawan, owned by his boss, IBM Board Chairman Thomas J. Watson Jr.

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