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## NAUTOR'S SWAN: BUILDING THE BRAND

It seems ironic now, given the great cachet its name has since achieved, to recall that Nautor's first boats in North America were delivered in disguise. This occurred after Mike Kelsey, who was then managing the Wisconsin-based builder Palmer & Johnson, visited Finland in 1968 and was much impressed by a 36-foot Sparkmans & Stephens design that Pekka Koskenkyla, Nautor's founder, had just started building in fiberglass. P&J, though they had previously specialized in metal boats, struck a deal to import four Nautor models the following year and insisted they be marketed under the P&J brand. It wasn't until 1973, when P&J's import license expired, that the Swan emerged on this side of the pond under its own name.

Swans, from the beginning, were cruiser-racers rather than racer-cruisers; although they had very sleek hull profiles, they were heavily constructed. The 36, the first Swan, armed with one of the world's earliest fin-and-skeg hulls, nevertheless blazed onto the scene with a quick string of racing victories, most notably *Casse Tete II's* seven-of-seven sweep at the 1968 Cowes Week regatta. Swans remained competitive through the late '60s and early '70s and achieved a peak of racing notoriety in 1974, when a Swan 65, *Sayula II*, owned by Mexican beer magnate Ramon Carlin, won the first round-the-world Whitbread Race (currently known as the Volvo Ocean Race) hands down.

From the late '70s onward racing boats in general tended to grow much lighter, while Swans remained fairly rugged. They became renowned for their quality construction and garnered a reputation as one of the best performance-cruising boats. The Swan 65 was for almost 10 years the largest production fiberglass boat built anywhere in the world, and the Nautor yard at Pietarsaari, just 180 miles south of the Arctic Circle, became legendary for its attention

to detail and its insistence on fabricating as much of its own hardware as possible. Other particularly successful Swans include the 38, the most popular model, of which 116 examples were built between 1973 and 1979, and the 46, of



**The evergreen S&S-designed Swan 36, first imported into the U.S. by Palmer & Johnson in 1969, is still a sought-after boat**

which 109 were built between 1983 and 1995.

Though Swans for a time fell off the cutting edge of racing competitiveness, they have always done well in open-ocean events when appropriately handicapped. And, of course, those with a yen to chase each other around the cans have always found top-notch competition in the several Swan regattas held around the world annually. This unique series, open only to Swan owners, culminates in the Swan Worlds, which have been held every two years since 1980 in Porto

Cervo. Here in this super-chic, celebrity-infested Sardinian vacation community crafted from whole cloth by the Aga Khan, where the aura of wealth, privilege, and Italian fashion sense is as palpable as the gorgeous boulder-strewn coast itself, Nautor's image as perhaps the premier European builder has been burnished to a warm shine.

The Italian connection was formalized in 1998, when fashion magnate Leonardo Ferragamo, long a Swan owner, purchased Nautor and at once aggressively reoriented the business. A trend toward building lighter-displacement hulls, begun in the early '90s, has been accelerated, culminating in the introduction of the very race-oriented Swan 45. In an



**A well-kept example of the Swan 65 ketch, *Desperado*, sistership to *Sayula II*, is a regular at Porto Cervo**

effort to reprise *Sayula II*'s legendary victory, Ferragamo also launched the Nautor Challenge, a two-boat Volvo Ocean Race campaign, in 2001. Production in Finland, meanwhile, has been expanded and has focused increasingly on larger boats. Ferragamo's brief tenure has already seen the introduction of the Swan 70, 80, 100, and most recently, the Swan 112, several examples of which raced successfully at the 2002 Worlds, including the Swan 70 *Fast.net*, which was overall winner of the event.