

# Olson 30: Ahead of its Time

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**George Olson, part of California's Fast is Fun ULDB crowd, drew and built the Olson 30**, a boat that was so far ahead of its time that time only recently caught up. Beginning in 1978, Pacific Yachts produced more than 225 30s before modifying the boat to become the Olson 29 in 1984.

Irony surrounds the O30. Doubters questioned whether a 3,600-pound boat with an outboard would be seaworthy enough for offshore work. Olsons have beaten a far more regular path to Hawaii than other 30-footers, picking up a load of shorthanded silver along the way. Longevity of the lightweight boat was brought into question, yet properly maintained, hard-raced, 20-year-old O30s abound. Would there be a market for a 30-footer with minimal accommodations and an outboard? The latest trend in interior-less lightweight is but an echo of the Olson 30's initial blast.

The key to the O30 is performance. It's fast in every wind condition and it's thrilling downwind in a blow, under control yet accelerating to every puff. This is all done without canting keels, water ballast, sprits, or carbon. The masthead rig spreads ample, but not overwhelming, sail area. Like most ULDBs, it's extremely responsive when everything's done right—or for that matter, wrong. The helm is light and well-balanced, making the Olson a true driver's boat.

Over the years a few variations have appeared in the fleet. Double spreader rigs started appearing. A conversion kit is available to switch from single to double spreaders, but it should be noted many skippers feel the single spreader rig can be just as fast. Elliptical rudders are allowed as an alternative, though it's not clear if they offer significant advantage. The basic construction is solid, though many boats have installed what is fondly called a "beam of destiny" athwartships at the mast below deck to keep the hull and chainplates from migrating inward under load.

ULDBs usually don't encounter loading problems, but when skippers started stacking their rail with 1,300 pounds, forces multiplied. This year the class weight limit has been lowered to 1,100 pounds, which will take pressure off the hull and pressure off the skipper to find the crew.

Active O30 one-design fleets still dot the West Coast, and the national championship moves around from year to year. Most boats are drysailed, keeping that ever-important weight to a minimum. Boats are frequently trailered long distances, though a vehicle with some serious towing capacity is required and stepping the keel-stepped mast is not easy.

The Olson also makes a fine giant killer in PHRF. Rating around 100, it's usually dwarfed by the boats in its class. If clean air is to be found, the Olson might well leave the big boats in its wake. Prices on O30s range from around \$10,000 to nearly \$20,000 with good ones going around \$14,000-\$18,000. Good sails, cut for a region's normal conditions, are critical. A main, No. 1, and spinnaker total about \$6,000, and a No. 3 is a must as well.

## Specs

LOA: 30'

Draft: 5'1"

Crew: max weight; 1,100lbs

PHRF Range: 89-111



Shannon Tumino