



Running Tide, which has been completely refurbished, is shown during a shakedown sail off Newport, Rhode Island. Photo by Billy Black

Restored Running Tide makes triumphant return to Annapolis-Newport Race

Running Tide remains one of the most renowned sailboats in the history of offshore racing. The custom designed Sparkman & Stephens 61-footer enjoyed incredible success under two different owners during its glory days of the 1970s

Commissioned by shipping magnate and passionate ocean racer Jakob Isbrandtsen, the aluminum vessel was one of the first stripped-out racers, specifically designed for maximum performance on the course.

Running Tide was built at Huisman Shipyard in The Netherlands then shipped to Kretzer Boat Works in City Island, New York, where Romagna personally oversaw installation of a very utilitarian deck layout.

Isbrandtsen and his top-notch crew, which included two-time America's Cup champion Victor Romagna, sailed Running Tide to victory in the 1970 Newport-to-Bermuda Race and 1971 Southern Ocean Racing Conference.

Al Van Metre, a wealthy developer from northern Virginia, bought Running Tide at auction in 1972 and continued to capture class honors in major regattas at a remarkable rate.

Van Metre berthed the boat at Arnie Gay's Yacht Yard in Annapolis and put together a talented crew consisting largely of locals. He skippered the sleek, black-hulled machine to first place finishes in SORC, St. Petersburg-to-Fort Lauderdale Race, Pineapple Cup (Miami-to-Montego Bay) and many others.

Running Tide completed the Annapolis-to-Newport Race five times during the ownership of Van Metre, who always sailed in partnership with his son Beau. They were runner-up in Class I behind the 68-foot ketch Equation (John Potter) in the 1973 edition of the offshore classic then took third in their second attempt in 1975.

After another close call in 1979, Running Tide finally broke through to capture Class I honors in the 1981 Annapolis-to-Newport Race then repeated that accomplishment in 1983 while also claiming line honors with an elapsed time of 87 hours, 20 minutes. Running Tide was also overall winner of the 1976 Newport-to-Bermuda Race.

Al and Beau Van Metre sailed the boat out of Annapolis during the spring and out of Newport in the summer then delivered her south for the winter to do all the SORC events. They would continue to own the boat until 1988 but did not do much racing because the S&S 61 was no longer competitive against newer, lighter designs.

"It truly was a remarkable race boat and really set the standard in the realm of offshore racing for about a decade," Beau Van Metre recalled. "I've got the complete history and can tell you Running Tide won more than 200 races."

That impressive record, combined with the larger-than-life personalities of the father-son owner and rock star reputations of its crew, created an aura surrounding Running Tide. Annapolis Yacht Club still displays a half-hull model of the boat in its main clubhouse.

Running Tide is one of five half-hulls that are part of a collection of the "Iconic Yachts of the 20th Century" that raced under the AYC burgee, and that are grouped together on the second deck of the main clubhouse.

More than three decades after selling Running Tide, Beau Van Metre reacquired the legendary vessel and has spent the past three years lovingly restoring her. In what could only be categorized as an incredible comeback story, Running Tide will compete in the 2021 Annapolis-to-Newport Race that begins in early June.

"It's going to be a heck of a lot of fun to sail the boat again. Doing the Annapolis-to-Newport Race aboard Running Tide will be like going back in time," said Van Metre, who succeeded his late father as chairman of the family-owned real estate company.

It's a rather amazing story how Running Tide came to be entered in the 38th biennial Annapolis-to-Newport Race. That tale starts with Beau sailing the S&S 61 from Fort Lauderdale to Antibes, France with plans to cruise the Mediterranean then take her around the world.

He envisioned one last glorious voyage aboard the boat but got stuck in France because of a lengthy construction project that closed the Suez Canal. Reluctantly, Van Metre sold Running

Tide to a French owner for \$175,000. That owner kept the boat for 15 years, doing very little to maintain it.



Running Tide has it looked when Annapolis professional sailor Larry Leonard spotted her while doing a regatta out of Saint-Tropez

Veteran Annapolis professional sailor Larry Leonard, who crewed aboard Running Tide starting as a teenager, spotted the old girl while doing a regatta in Saint-Tropez and took some photographs he sent to Van Metre.

“I tried to buy her back a few times from the first guy to whom I sold it, but he always wanted way too much money,” Van Metre said.

A second Frenchman owned the boat for another 15 years and its condition deteriorated even further during that time. Things literally hit rock bottom for Running Tide when the aging owner ran her hard aground in a storm and had to be rescued off the boat.

Tom Maynard, a yacht broker working on behalf of Van Metre contacted that owner, who was 85 years old and in poor health and willing to sell. Beau and his wife Dea flew to France to inspect the boat and was stunned to find it looked almost the same as when he sold it in 1988.

“It had the same cushions, the same dodger, even the same cooler I left aboard,” he said. “All the instruments and gauges were the same except they were fogged over and not operational.”

Of greater concern was the plywood deck had been cracked by the hard grounding and other structural issues existed. While disappointed to see Running Tide in such a deplorable shape, Van Metre nonetheless bought her back in December 2018.

“I’m very attached to the boat. I have a lot of personal feelings invested with the boat,” the 74-year-old business tycoon said. “I raced that boat with three-plus generations of crew members that became my closest friends. It was quite a wonderful time in my life.”

Conrad Hunter traveled to France to take possession of the boat and deliver to Genoa, Italy, where it was loaded on a ship bound for Fort Lauderdale.

Van Metre has spent considerable energy, effort and expense to restore Running Tide to even better than its former glory. He will also race the old warhorse in the 2022 Newport-to-Bermuda Race, but for the most part plans to cruise the S&S 61 with his family.

“My kids have heard all the legendary stories about Running Tide and seen pictures of her from the heyday, but never been aboard the boat,” Van Metre said.



Beau Van Metre at the helm of the restored Running Tide. Photo by Billy Black

Van Metre has started putting together a crew list for A2N and hopes to complete the 475-nautical mile passage with many of the men that helped him and his father campaign Running Tide back in the 1970s. Leonard, who founded Quantum Sail Design Group, has signed on for the voyage.

Leonard started crewing aboard Running Tide when he was 18 years old, a young hotshot after serving as helmsman for the Annapolis High crew that captured the Sears Trophy.

Annapolis native Chris Patterson, who was the boat captain under Al Van Metre for many years, will be back aboard.

Jim Marshall, the North Sails rep, who serviced Al Van Metre for years, is returning. Two other North pros that sailed on Running Tide during the glory years, Rob Pennington and Mike Toppa, will also be back.

Jocko Allpress, who raced aboard Tide when it was owned by both Isbrandtsen and Van Metre, has committed. Carroll "Bear" Johnston, Van Metre's longtime friend, will also join the reunion.

Van Metre readily admits the rehabilitation project has cost much more than anticipated, but it's been a labor of love and tribute to his late father, who died in 2008 at the age of 82.

"I realized as soon as I saw the boat it needed to be completely gutted and basically rebuilt from the bottom up," said Van Metre, who hired renowned designer David Pedrick to oversee the restoration that was performed at New England Boatworks in Newport.

That was a rather fitting choice since Pedrick began his career with Sparkman & Stephens in 1970, the same year Running Tide was launched. It was an evolution of the 12-meter designs that dominated the America's Cup in those days.

Pedrick decided to keep the keel that was installed in 1982 but did replace the rudder with a carbon version that is 200 pounds lighter than the original. Offshore Spars built and installed a new carbon rig that is 10 feet taller and one-third the weight of the original. That added 300 square feet of sail area.

While it still looks like Running Tide circa 1974, the classic racer has been updated with all sorts of brand-new technology. Van Metre wanted hydraulic winches and roller-furling sails to make the boat easier to cruise with his family. NEB workers have also installed a comfortable, well-appointed interior that is 180 degrees different than the Spartan, uncomfortable cabin it replaced.

Bob Sharkey, yet another longtime Running Tide crew mate, has been overseeing the refit since day one. Allpress, now a craftsman with New England Boatworks, has also been heavily involved.

Running Tide will once again pass through the Spa Creek Bridge on its way to the Annapolis-to-Newport starting line. Van Metre was thrilled to be assigned the same slip at the Shipwright Street marina the boat occupied back when it was owned by Arnie Gay.

For now, Running Tide is entered in the PHRF Classic Division of A2N, but Van Metre said he might move into another performance handicap class if he feels the redesigned S&S 61 can be competitive.