



# The Shields: A Classic One-Design

Chris Hufstader reports on the 1987 Shields National Championship.

Photos by J.H. Peterson

If Cornelius Shields could have watched the last race of the 1987 Shields Nationals, he would have enjoyed what he saw. Entering the race, there were five boats within three points of each other, each with a shot at winning. As the race came to a conclusion, the title still hung in the balance.

Former champion Chris Withers had sprinted around the course ahead of the fleet and taken the gun, but Mike Deland had him on points, slipping across the line behind him. Still, Texan Al Merrill was coming in from the favored left side of the course and would beat them both for the title if he finished third. Deland had been struggling all race to put a boat between

himself and Merrill, and now he watched, fingers tight on the tiller, as hometown sailor Bill Weeks—who had dug in even farther left than Merrill—came in on the Texan's hip. Merrill was close and getting closer, but Weeks was gaining all the time. Finally Merrill tacked to starboard for the line. Too late. . . Weeks crossed the line on port to finish third, giving Deland the regatta.

Deland's victory by a matter of inches was not unusual for the Shields Class at the national level. A significant boatspeed advantage amongst the top boats is very rare, and the races are characterized by close tactical skirmishes all around the course, punctuated by the need for precise

boathandling. This was exactly the kind of racing envisioned by the founders of the Shields Class when they created this stately, full-keeled 30-footer.

The 1987 Nationals in Edgartown, Mass., was a good test for Shields sailors. The conditions ranged from a shifty southerly on the first day to a classic 25-knot southwester on the second. On the third day the wind veered around to the north and died, then filled from the southeast. It was a shifty series, but Shields are well-suited to such conditions. They can tack cleanly without slowing down, and point high, especially in flat water, which is exactly what the fleet found on the first day.

N.Y., hit the mark and decided to simply tie his boat up to it, take down his sails and go swimming. The time limit ran out when most of the boats were on the second beat of the Olympic course, and the Big Wait was on.

In the summer, after a northerly dies out a southerly will typically fill in through a low cut across Chappaquiddick, and then slowly shift to the right during the afternoon. Today, however, a slight southeaster started to blow, and then slowly built up to around eight knots. The Race Committee seized the opportunity to run a very short sixth and final race, which decided the series for Deland.

**C**ornelius Shields was a very tough competitor in his day, but he was also well known as an excellent sportsman. He would have liked that last race at the nationals because it was so exciting, but also because the close competition was in the finest spirit. Shields was known as a sailor's philanthropist—he started the Shields Class in memory of his brother, and set up a tax-deductible fund to pay for the construction of the first boats and the design work, performed by Olin Stephens. After a season racing on the 12-Meter *Columbia* in her second and unsuccessful bid to win the America's Cup trials, Shields approached Stephens with the idea of creating a one-design loosely based on the lines of *Columbia*. Shields also applied the policies of the International One-Design—another class he founded—the most notable of which was the restriction on sail purchases. Shields sailors can only buy one sail per year, or a new set every three years. This makes it possible for a fleet to band together and make a fleet order with their sailmaker, thereby saving money and insuring that everyone is sailing with equal sails.

Shields and his brother's memorial fund paid for the mold and the first 18 or so boats. The first 12 went to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point and to the academy at Fort Schuyler, just across Long Island Sound. He later donated more boats to the U.S. Naval Academy and the Coast Guard Academy. One of the first boats that went to Kings Point, No. 9, was sailed by Rick Tears at the 1987 Nationals and finished fourth, less than five points out of the lead. The boat was built in 1962.

Shields are heavy boats (4600 lbs. displacement), and as such are very good family boats because of their stability. They're a great boat for daysailing, and the deep cockpit is a secure place to put small kids. In light and moderate air Shields perform very well, although the



Out of the blocks: crowded start at the committee boat end in the last race.



Chris Withers (163) leading the last race ahead of Joe Tomlinson (233) and Mike Deland (141).

heavy weight demands perfect boathandling during maneuvers—slowing down during a mark rounding can be costly in a race, so the skipper must use the rudder on the trailing edge of the keel carefully. In a big breeze it's a demanding boat, especially downwind, when the loads build up on the sails, the speed peaks, and the boat starts to roll. Keeping the boat under the mast is like balancing a broomstick on your finger. When things really get out of control, a jibing broach is a dramatic and not uncommon outcome.

It's also a boat that can be sailed by a wide variety of ages, and almost nobody is physically excluded from Shields racing. The case in point is the 1987 National Champion Mike Deland. Deland, the regional administrator in New England for the Environmental Protection Agency, has been racing Shields for over 20 years. While it hasn't always been

so, Deland now gets about best in a wheelchair on land, and in a Shields on the water. From the cockpit seats he's the equal of any skipper sitting outboard, and he proved it again in this regatta.

After the regatta Deland sat on the dock at the Edgartown YC. His sleeves were rolled up, showing his muscular arms, and he squinted in a ray of sun peeking out from behind a cloud: "I don't like to talk about this stuff, but this week proves that handicapped people can sail, and they can sail competitively!" Certainly, all of Deland's competitors were in agreement. •

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*For final results see the "Scoreboard."*



The aft end of the Shields cockpit, with wide seats, traveler control lines led forward below the deck, and mid-boom "headknocker" mainsheet cleat.



Shields No. 9: 25 years old, fourth at the 1987 Nationals.

If patience is a virtue, there were a lot of saints in the making on Day 1. It was a light-air day under gray skies, and it seemed to take the big, long shifts forever to come in fully, then shift slowly back again. You had to keep biting in on the headed tack to get the full effect of the shift, instead of tacking and sailing the long circle route to the mark—when anybody to windward would roll right past you. The Shields had to be nursed along, with crews sitting to leeward, and steering and sail adjustments made very slowly.

This was the kind of day where experience can be your best friend, keeping frustration from getting the upper hand. There were big holes everywhere, and a good angle wasn't always accom-

panied by the velocity to move you towards the mark. Veterans seemed to fare the best. Mike Deland obviously remembered a thing or two about Edgartown days like this from his win at the 1980 Nationals, the last time the regatta was held there. He started off the series with a 1-4-7, but found his scores eclipsed by another veteran, Al Merrill, who punched out a 2-1-5.

The 20- to 25-knot southwester on Day 2 wasn't as shifty, but it was just as challenging as the fleet fought for lanes of clear air on the way out to the right side of the course, where the leaders took advantage of a very slow, persistent veer. Before the start the 30-boat fleet churned up the water along the starting line with their wakes, making the

already rough water chaotic. This was a day for hiking out, dropping down the traveler and moving the jib leads out-board. Try not to break anything, spit the salt water out, and pump the boat out on the reaches.

The younger generation seized the upper hand in the breeze. Joe Tomlinson and his crew were without a doubt the fastest of the day as they won the fourth and fifth races by big margins, mercilessly leading from start to finish. After only four years in the class, Tomlinson gave everybody a little lesson on heavy-air boatspeed, applying the practice he had gained in his home fleet on the windy and choppy Buzzards Bay. As soon as they got off the line with any clear air at all, they were off and ahead—both races.

After the race Tomlinson talked about why he sails a Shields. "The boats are real even, and it's very difficult to get faster than everybody else—we've had some success in doing that in heavy air, but it's very difficult in light air. Any boat, as long as it's been taken care of, is a fast boat in the Shields class. It's a good one-design."

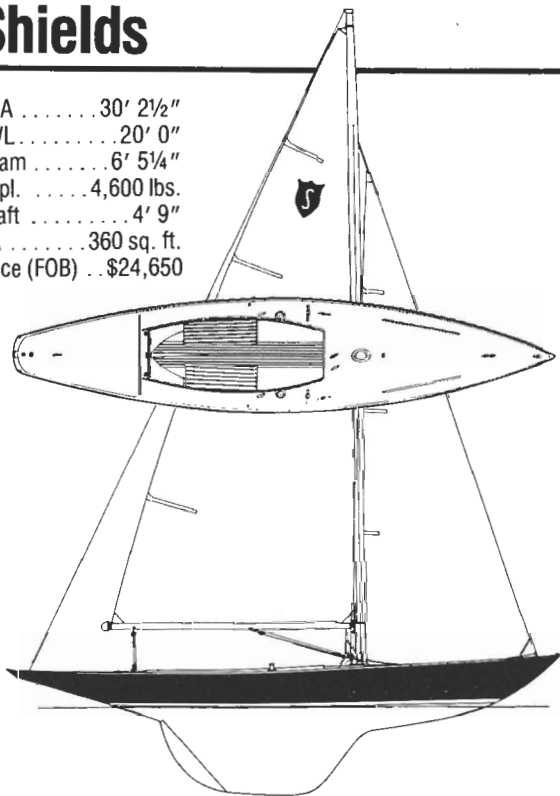
Tomlinson is a college student, and most of his crew were around his age. During this discussion, a few of them kept running over to Tomlinson, beers in hand, to give an excited description of the action on the video tape everybody was watching. "You should see one of our sets! You gotta come watch this!" Then they'd give Tomlinson a sound thump on the back or a sharp punch to the bicep and run back to watch some more.

Before long the entire fleet was in the Edgartown YC bar, soaking wet, having at least as much fun viewing the video tape as they'd had out on the water. Tomlinson's crewwork *was* good, and when his boat rounded the windward mark and snapped their spinnaker full, he and his crew hoisted their glasses and hollered, shuffling and squishing in their wet deck shoes.

That night the wind continued veering around to the north, and the racers sailed out to the racing area the next morning as the breeze died slowly, and the sixth race was started in almost no wind. Most of the fleet, led by Deland and Merrill, strung itself out to the left corner as the wind turned off, while about 10 boats tacked off the line and went north, into the current in Vineyard Sound. Chris Withers went the farthest, tacked towards the mark and rounded first, but a majority of the boats lost momentum and steerage, and couldn't get around the mark until much later. One or two boats actually got close enough to hit the mark, and then took the better part of an hour to get back around. Michael Carr of Larchmont,

# Shields

LOA ..... 30' 2½"  
 LWL ..... 20' 0"  
 Beam ..... 6' 5¼"  
 Dspl. .... 4,600 lbs.  
 Draft ..... 4' 9"  
 SA ..... 360 sq. ft.  
 Price (FOB) . . \$24,650



**D**escribed by many discerning sailors as "probably the handsomest one-design yacht on the water," the beauty of the Shields is matched by its outstanding performance, durability, ease of handling, and lasting resale value. In only a few decades, the yacht has attained "classic" status, attracting some of the world's top sailors, starting with the legendary "Gray Fox of Long Island Sound", Cornelius Shields (after whom the class was named). With superior double-hull construction, the Shields has effectively shown no signs of aging: the earliest boats built remain totally competitive with the latest units made (confirmed by current championship season standings). The Shields is raced with main, working jib, and spinnaker (one new sail permitted per year). Strict one-design rules are maintained by a strong National Class Association.



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