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A Diamond in the Rough Shields Refit

March 20, 2002

By John Burnham [More articles by this author](#)

The Goal:

Have fun together racing a boat competitive enough that we can't blame the boat when we do poorly.

The Plan:

- Fall 2000: Buy a used boat; recruit regular Wednesday night crewmembers.
- Winter 2001: Bring hull, deck, sails, and rigging to competitive standard.
- Spring 2001: Launch in April, refine systems, tune and practice for first race May 2.
- Summer 2001: Finish in top 10 on a regular basis and top 5 for the season.
- September 2001: Finish top 10 at Nationals.



John Burnham

This 1963 Shields is in rough shape as the grinders go at it. The owners were planning on a reglassed hull-deck joint, but soon learned that other deck and topsides glass repairs were also in order.

Buying a 30-foot Shields one-design and bringing it up to a competitive standard began with a casual comment from my college teammate Reed: "Hey, let's race next year on our own boat." Our motivation had nothing to do with undertaking a boat project—we wanted to play the game as well as we could in Newport's 30-boat Wednesday night fleet and to simultaneously rekindle our friendship.

Even though it wouldn't have been much more expensive, I'm glad we didn't buy a new boat. The process of restoring the 1963 Chris-Craft-built No. 107 meant spending time together and learning our boat from the inside out. For others considering such a venture, I encourage you to be clear about your fundamental goals first. (See box for "The Goal, The Plan.") It certainly made our decision-making easier and helped us work past the

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inevitable surprises.

Fall 2000—We bought our boat in September 2000 and quickly realized the first priority was logistics, not hull and gear. No. 107 was sitting on a borrowed trailer in somebody else's driveway, and the boatshop couldn't get to it until February. We ordered a trailer from Triad that wouldn't be ready until November, so we booked space at Casey's boatyard for a few months.

For insurance we contacted Hinckley, which covers most of the local fleet, and insured the boat for the purchase price, \$8,500. Come spring, we increased the coverage (although figuring what the boat was worth then was an interesting discussion).

We asked Hall Spars & Rigging to pick up our mast—no toothpick—and check the tube, fittings, and rigging. At their suggestion, we replaced the worn masthead sheave and a bent spinnaker pole track, and installed an above-deck spin halyard exit and cam cleat.

Another fall decision was to order three new sails. In the Shields class, you can buy one sail per season or earn a credit. The boat came with a tired chute, ripped main, and three sail credits. In keeping with our goal (see box), we cashed in our credits and ordered sails from North, one of the fleet's two local sailmakers.

On the crew-development front, Reed assigned himself the mainsheet and a boatspeed focus, and told me I'd steer and call tactics until he was ready to look around. We recruited Peter, a friend who'd handled the foredeck on a Shields I'd crewed aboard earlier. (Our fourth, my wife Rachel, would commit a few months later.)

Winter 2001—Reed and I didn't know much about refurbishing a hull and deck at the time we went to MMR Associates, in Middletown, R.I., and told them our priorities: a fast bottom, a stiffer hull, a functional layout, and a good-looking topsides job. They gave us some estimates and we gave them a deposit, with work to begin in February.

The full story of the three-month's work at MMR would detail the exposure of unanticipated structural damage, a variety of delays, and a bill that crept steadily higher—in short, the typical story of any rehabilitation of a 38-year-old boat. The guys at MMR were always pleasant, patient in our moments of frustration, and produced work ranging from competent to excellent. With their help, we got the fast, good-looking boat we wanted. Here's what we did together:

By mid-March, MMR had removed all the deck hardware and done the initial grinding of hull and deck (photo). They then removed the toerails and ground down a deteriorated hull-deck joint, glassed it, and re-faired it. They faired the topsides slightly where the main bulkhead created a bump, repaired a small crack in the topsides and a big one across the stern deck, and sprayed the hull and deck with an undercoat and then AwlGrip.

In the meantime, their carpenter built new coamings, toerails, and winch pads. Stringers were also installed under the stern deck to reinforce the repaired area. All the work had to be done with careful attention to what was allowed by the "blue book"—the class rulebook.

We ran into a gray area when fairing the bottom. The class rules allow long-boarding to fill hollows and eliminate high spots, but the designed shape should remain unaltered. The class doesn't use templates, in part perhaps because the hull molds aren't symmetrical. Over time a number of boats have had the hollow area near the top of the starboard side of the keel filled and the high spot below it eliminated. We found our best guide was boats that had been faired before. This was a difficult eyeball exercise conducted by us and MMR, and reviewed by the class measurer.

Spring 2001—As the bottom fairing project neared its conclusion and the VC Offshore bottom paint was readied for spraying during April, Reed and I realized that our tuning and practice sessions (see box) were going by the boards. We'd be lucky to launch and rig by May 1, nine days before our first race. Our tapered spin sheets and our jib sheets had arrived from Aramid Rigging, our sails were ready and measured, and we had a cool carbon tiller extension from Ronstan. But the installation of the new Lewmar single-speed winches lagged as we customized the fit of the new teak winch pads and cleat locations. Also, one of the through-deck spindles (for under-deck winch handles) was backordered in England. The Harken traveler we'd ordered was too short, the double-ended backstay controls needed refinement, and I belatedly settled on cross-led 3-to-1 traveler controls (which by July would be 6-to-1).

Then on April 18, Geoff at MMR called me and said, "I've got a rudder here you ought to look at." It was split down the leading edge and was soon in two pieces. We made an emergency call to Cape Cod Shipbuilding, the current builder, and thanks to Gordon Goodwin's heroic efforts there, a new rudder was built on our old rudder post within 10 days. Pick-up directions were no problem because Reed had already visited Cape Cod to buy a cockpit cover and replace the worn gooseneck fitting.

Buying a new rudder at the last minute was one of many surprises last winter, but they weren't all annoying or expensive. We were having trouble naming the boat until Sophie, my 8-year-old daughter, announced that its name should be Grace. There were so many people to thank by this time that Reed and I had no trouble agreeing to go with Grace.



Cheryl Kerr

Rechristened Grace, the dark blue No. 107 comes to life. This starting-line photo was taken in early September at the 2001 Shields Nationals off Newport, R.I.

We stepped the mast while the first race was underway, launched that weekend, and raced for the first time on May 9th. During the season, we refined the backstay controls and traveler, replaced a few winch pawls, repaired a torn sail, fixed a mis-mounted cleat, and fussed with a quirky pump. We didn't finish in the top 10 every night, but we mostly improved, and after adding Matt as a regular fifth, we ended up third in

the season series. At the Nationals we nailed several mid-line starts, sailed reasonably fast, and stayed largely out of trouble, exceeding our expectations to finish third.

Grace must have been the right name. Maybe by next season we'll even get around to painting it on the hull.

