

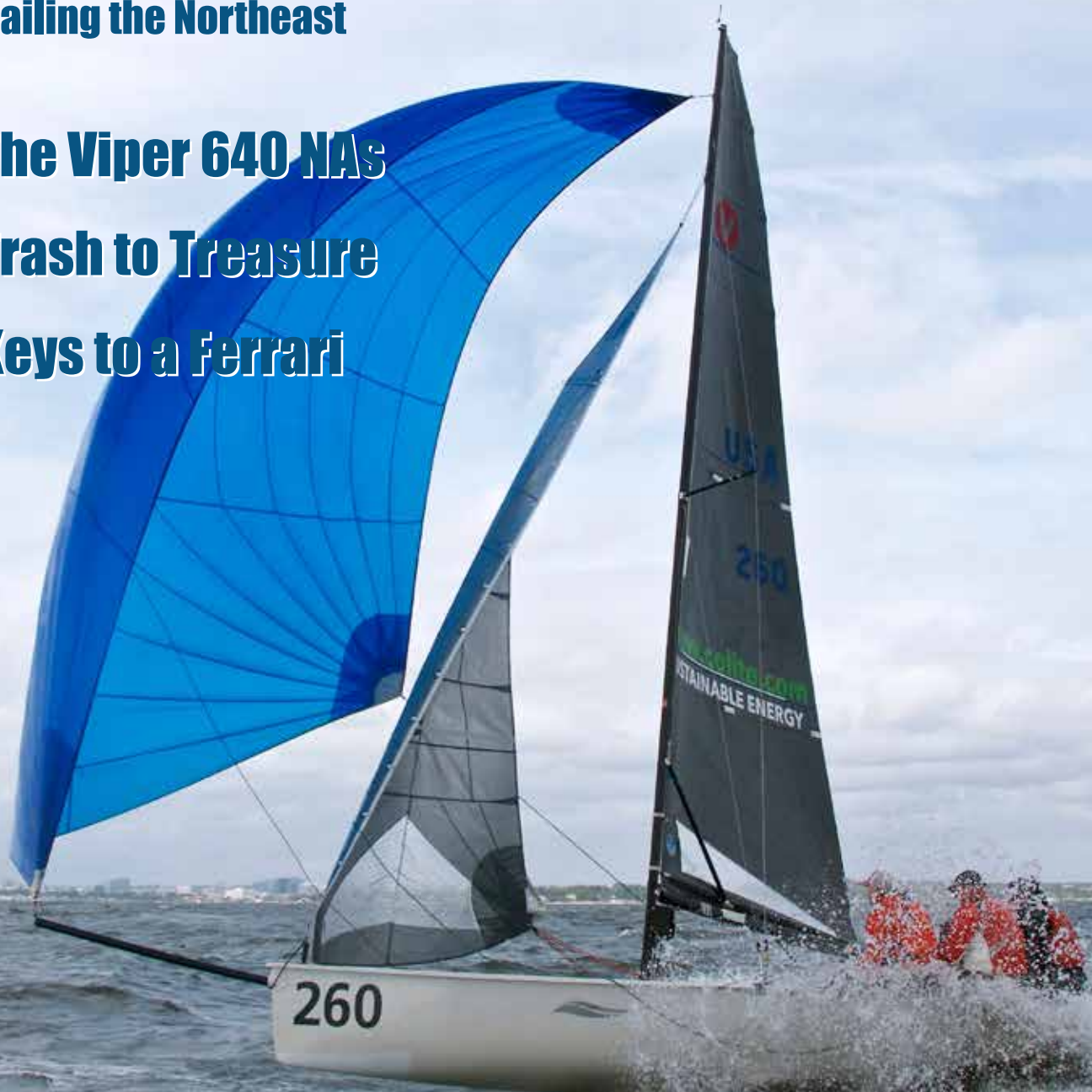
WindCheck

Sailing the Northeast

The Viper 640 NAs

Trash to Treasure

Keys to a Ferrari



Mike Acebo

The former General Manager of Brewer Greenport Marinas in Greenport, New York, Mike Acebo has worked as a backcountry ski guide, a mountaineering instructor, a white water and sea kayaking instructor, an Outward Bound director, and an emergency medical technician. An ardent sailor, iceboater and boatbuilder, he's showing no sign of no slowing down.

"I was born in Denver and called Colorado home for thirty years," says Mike, who lives in East Marion, New York on Long Island's North Fork with his wife Pamela. "My father was a World War II veteran, 10th Mountain Division member, and ski instructor. He joined the 10th because of his love of skiing and mountaineering. He was a Boston native who skied Mount Washington and throughout the East before the war. After combat missions in the Pacific and Europe and war's end, he moved to Colorado with my mother. He was my ski and mountaineering instructor as a young man. I started working for Colorado Outward Bound School the day after graduating from high school in 1967. I began as a Sherpa and through the years rose to the position of Course Director for both Colorado and Southwest Outward Bound."

Subsequent years saw Mike embarking on a two-month rafting adventure in the Grand Canyon, kayaking the entire east coast of Baja California, and completing a transatlantic voyage. "While in Mexico I received a letter from a college friend and adventure mate asking if I wanted to sail across the Atlantic on his 40-foot Mariner wooden ketch," he recalls. "Sounded fine, so I said I would go. He told me to grab his motorcycle in Los Angeles and ride it to Naples, Florida where the boat was taking shape for the trip. We prepped the boat, sailed to Ft. Lauderdale for bottom work, launched and took off in late June hoping to get to Bermuda to see the Tall Ships leaving for the Bicentennial celebration in New York. We were a day or so late, but did sail into Bermuda just behind *Running Tide* as she won the '76 Bermuda Race. After couple of weeks in Bermuda we were off to the Azores, Lisbon, and then on to the Med."

"I received a letter from another close friend, Chris George, who had purchased a mining claim high in the Colorado Rockies and was building a backcountry ski lodge out of the 1880s mineshaft building. Chris asked if I would help, so I left Europe and arrived in Silverton that fall. The lodge was operational that winter with dorm-style sleeping, hearty family-style meals, and some of the best backcountry skiing to be found. I met my wife Pam at the lodge and she lived and worked with us our second winter, when we were married. The ski season ended and it was a time for a change. We packed our belongings and drove to Maine, where I became an apprentice at The Apprenticeshop in Bath. All aspects of boatbuilding were taught, and I was able to build several boats ranging from a free-form Norwegian pram to a custom wooden Stone Horse cutter. Any skills I may have



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had and those I learned were honed by Master Boatbuilder Dave Foster."

"When I felt ready to move, on I noticed a note sent to the shop from Rives Potts at Brewer Pilots Point Marina in Westbrook, Connecticut. He was asking for interested graduate apprentices to contact him about working in with his team. I answered the letter and Pam and I visited the yard and had lunch with Rives. I was hired and we were off on another adventure."

"I knew nothing of boatyard work but had to learn quickly, as I was assigned a 20-ton lift with a list of boats to haul and block for winter storage. I survived that fall with no major incidents while watching and learning. I was allowed to do some carpentry work and caught the eye of Hans Zimmer, the second Master Boatbuilder to enter my life. Hans could do everything, and I mean everything. I was soon given more projects under Hans' domain and was able to meet his demands for quality work. I became a keel builder, hull and keel fairing expert, and learned paintwork."

"*Running Tide* appeared in my life again when she came into Pilots Point for a major refit. I worked with Hans and the team opening up the cockpit for a larger wheel, a new deck layout, and a complete interior modification with electrical, refrigeration and all other systems redone. I was in charge of a new 20,000-pound keel fabrication and installation, along with other aspects the job. Numerous yacht modifications followed, along with some construction. I was involved from start to finish on the construction of a Frers 40-footer for Dennis Conner,

a SORC contender. I also worked with the entire Pilots Point Marina crew in the construction of the 1982 Johan Valentijn-designed 12 Metre *Magic*, #38. I believe she was the lightest 12 built to rule.”

“When Jack Brewer bought the Greenport yard mid-winter, he was in need of finding a manager who would transfer to Long Island. I accepted the job and went to Greenport to watch one of the worst winter freezes pull all of the pilings out with the ice... my new job began. One of Jack’s largest construction projects to date was in the works and working with Dan Natchez, marina designer, we came up with a plan to increase the slip acreage and create a workable hauling, storage and work environment. I spent the next thirty-five years developing the yard and the customer base. Jack added Stirling Harbor Marina to his portfolio, which fell into my GM wheelhouse. I managed the two yards for two years after the ownership changed to Safe Harbor Marinas, finally retiring at 70.”

“Although I’ve spent lots of my life in the cold weather, I never really knew about iceboating until the Commodore of the Orient Ice Yacht Club approached me for help in building a new fleet of iceboats for and with the club members. I studied the plans and offered my help and shop space. We put together seven or eight members and ordered the non-buildable parts at bulk discount rate, purchased the wood and miscellaneous materials, and started building. We met every Friday to build hulls, while others made seatbacks, planks and springboards in home shops. We finished one boat at a time, which required a couple

years of Friday evenings. I watched them sail on local Hallocks Bay and Lake Ronkonkoma and decided I needed to build mine. I was hooked.”

“My earliest ice sailing was on Hallocks Bay with the OIYC. We had the largest fleet of Jack Jacobs-designed J14 iceboats in the U.S. We club raced with the Lake Ronkonkoma Ice Boat and Yacht Club, and it seems every other year or two we would have a couple of weeks with good ice and we could leave our boats on the ice so set up only took minutes to go for a sail. There were and are numerous vintage stern steerers in the Orient area, and if there is ice the turnout is like something from the 1800s: boats, families, skaters, dogs, hot dogs, and folks seeking iceboat rides every day. It’s very festive and community-oriented.”

Mike has built two J14s, one Pocket Skeeter, one C Skeeter bubble boat (with a fighter plane-style canopy), and one Opti Iceboat. “The Ice Opti was designed for kids to put their Optimist summer sailing rig on a small iceboat for winter sailing,” he explains. “I built one to put on the ice for kids, adults... anyone who wanted a go. Numerous folks took their first sail on ice in that boat and matured into adult-sized iceboats.”

“From Bob Reeves, Rich Crucet and others I was taught that you have to travel to the ice – it may not come to you. I started traveling to sail and race in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire and even Michigan, where I have sailed with and learned from Jack Jacobs, the designer of the J14. We have talked, shared ideas, and sailed together. Jack’s decades of

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building and sailing knowledge is reflected in the boats I build; there is some of Jack in each one. I have built to plans but modified the results using the information I have learned from Jack, Rich and others. Iceboating is a shared knowledge sport among the sailors, and the boats may look simple but the most minor aspect of the build or set up can make major sailing changes.”

“When building an iceboat, considerable thought goes into light air capabilities. I was once told, ‘You can put runners on a VW and it will sail in a strong breeze,’ and then the names of the old timers who could keep their boats going when others sat motionless were mentioned. Maybe all sailors need to think of keeping the boat going in light air to improve heavy air sailing.”

“I now sail a Cape Dory 30, which continues to teach me how to sail better. She knows how – she must think I’m a slow learner. I have two daughters who enjoy sailing and racing. They live in the New York City area and I don’t see them often enough, but we enjoy the Safe Harbor Marinas member Time Warp Races and the Peconic Bay Sailing Association’s Whitebread Race. Living on the North Fork it’s so easy to find an interesting day sail, short or long. It is always fun to test your skills with a cruise around Shelter Island. I also sail a Rhodes 19, which is great for an hour or two sail around the harbor...she’s easy to get underway and put away. I enjoy get-out-of-town trips to Pilots Point or Mystic.”

“I would like to thank all of the people who have shared so much with me. Their generosity with time and knowledge has

helped me do so much in my life. As I build a boat or complete a project of any kind, I remember a bit of advice I received in the past. Several folks I mentioned are not with us anymore to share, but thank heavens they did.”

“I don’t sail the biggest boats,” says Mike. “I prefer small boats. My choice of automobiles fits that category and my favorite car is my 1965 Porsche 356 C Coupe. I purchased *Ruby* in 1971 as a present to myself for finishing college. She has traveled extensively around the U.S.A. and Mexico. *Ruby* is now the family rally car, with my daughter Kyle as navigator telling me how to drive and where to drive. She is good...Kyle, that is. *Ruby* also.” The lovely red coupe has logged 213,000 miles and – like Mike – she’s still running strong.

“For me the best thing about sailing is boatbuilding,” Mike enthuses. “To spend hours, thinking, sketching, changing your mind, consulting with others and finally putting saw to wood or resin to fabric to create a dream. Now it’s finished and time to sail, evaluate, modify and maybe celebrate. ‘Okay, you did that. What are you going to do for the next one?’ It has to look right, feel right and do right. That is a never-ending target that a boatbuilder looks for. For a boatbuilder, every sail comes down to ‘What if?’ I will never stop thinking/dreaming about the next boat, and size doesn’t matter...it might be a towable pram.” ■

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