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Warren Brown takes *War Baby* where no one has gone before

BY B. CANDACE RAY

Heavy weather sloop, 61-foot War Baby is a soldier. Its warrior title came about because the original -- a Bermuda Dinghy designed by Sir Eldon

Trimingham -- was launched during World War I.

"We own that boat today, that original boat," said owner-skipper Warren Brown. "And we have another War Baby, an I.O.D. (International One-Design) in Soncy Bay (Pembroke)."

The latest -- sixth in the line of War Babies -- continues to be called simply, War Baby. But love, not war appears to have played a part; for at least six marriages came off the six boats, according to Mr. Brown.

Exploration

Mr. Brown has no plans to exchange his current, 27-year-old boat. He bought it in 1982 and just put it in to Bermuda after an absence of nine years. With its owner at the helm 95 per cent of the time, War Baby had logged some 400 to 500 ports in 80 countries and islands.

Why does he do what he does?

"Because I like to go where people don't go... I'm an explorer. I like to explore uncharted territories," the skipper said.

"Our boat's either been up in the Arctic or the Antarctic, or Croatia or South America, or the South Seas," he noted.

First time first

Though War Babies have participated in several hundred races all over the world, the present one has entered only one other Marion Bermuda Cruising Yacht Race. She finished first 10 years ago with what would have been some of the same crew, according to Mr. Brown.

"My crew is scattered all over the place," the skipper said, but he provided a list.

War Baby's 11 others include: Mr. Brown's tomato cultivator son Warren Jr., navigator Atlantic Marine's Scott King, California-based yacht broker and cruising consultant Jill Baty, accountant John Wadson, the Department of Health's Roger Mello, Horsfield Tree Services' Kevin Horsfield, lawyer-sailor Vieri Mannucci, helicopter pilot Beez Bohner, Eric Wiberg from Nassau, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute's Darrell Herbert, and Bob Abraham, also of Atlantic Marine.

Mr. King will navigate by the stars, for as Mr. Brown said of this once all sight-taking race: "I personally think it should be celestial, because people are getting away from it; and if [they] want to look after themselves, they should know how to use a sextant."

He said a minimum of four of his crew members can navigate.

Affiliations

The boat's beam, at 15-1/2 feet, complements her 61-foot length. She draws 10 feet, with her single mast rising over a light-gray painted deck and white hull. She sails under BER 1 from home port, the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club.

Her skipper's other affiliations have included, in Bermuda, his honorary membership in the Bermuda Offshore Cruising Association and the now-defunct Bermuda Sailboat Club of which he is a former commodore; in the U.S., New York Yacht Club, and Cruising Club of America for which he is a former Bermuda Station Captain; England's Royal Ocean Racing Club; Royal Cruising Club and Ocean Cruising Club, for which he is a former Roving Rear Commodore; Ireland's Royal Cork (the oldest Royal Yacht Club in the world) and perhaps five other clubs.

Said the skipper: "I'm a member of these clubs because I actively take part in their racing and cruising... I sail all over the world."

Preparedness

"She's always prepared to go to sea," said Mr. Brown.

But that doesn't mean a lack of concerns, for War Baby had a mechanical problem coming into St. George's.

"It was fixed," said Mr. Brown. "But I wouldn't worry about that. It happens all the time. When you're sailing, something always breaks down."

That particular break-down resulted in a 36-hour delay in reaching Hamilton Harbour.

Records and wins

Mr. Brown noted that the Marion-Bermuda course records differ according to the finish line. In 1989, that compass bearing off St. David's Lighthouse gave War Baby the fastest time, or long-course record.

"At a later date, the course was shortened to finish where the lights changed their [hooded or] coloured sectors," Mr. Brown said, noting that some four years ago the change gave Kirk Cooper's Alphida the faster time, or short-course record by some 23 seconds.

He wouldn't be drawn, however, on the boat's chances for a win in this race. He hadn't seen the entries, he said and wasn't aware of what competition they'd have. He did say: "Basically, it depends on the weather. We're a heavy boat. We like some windward work."

Crew member cum -- according to herself -- "general dog's body," Ms. Baty noted that War Baby does incredibly well for its age. In the recent Antigua Race Week, the boat took third overall.

And this eight-year veteran of the Royal Ocean Racing Club Circuit added: "It'll be beautiful and interesting and lovely for Warren Brown to be doing it again, and I hope that the boat will do well for Warren's sake."

Prestige

The lawyer from Florence, Italy, Mr. Mannucci is just pleased to be included among the crew.

"The first thing that I like in being on War Baby," he said, "is that it's such a prestigious yacht."

He's aboard for the experience and will stay according to the plans made for the boat.

He admitted: "I try to write articles for sailing magazines... to do it from here to have a specific knowledge and use of the boat. You know, it's such a different experience for the readers to read."

So, while Mr. Brown hopes to tack upwind and Mr. Mannucci to write about it, perhaps War Baby will again go where no one has gone before.
