

The design work of the naval architect Einar Ohlson (1918 – 2004) and his brother Carl-Eric Ohlson (1920 – 2015) forms an essential element of the Swedish boat building and sailing legacy.

The Ohlson Brothers were self-taught sailors from Hälleviksstrand, on the island of Orust, on the Swedish westcoast with a boat building heritage dating back to the 18th century. Einar Ohlson's excellence in yacht design and highly skilled business man combined with his brother Carl-Eric's excellence in craftsmanship and sail racing created a successful team.

Uncle Hjalmar Johansson, well reknown boat designer and builder, taught the boys from very early childhood how to build boats as well as models. At the age of nine and seven the brothers launched their first boat, a small sailing canoe. They remained apprentices to their uncle over decades.

Einar Ohlson was educated as a naval architect, took his first job as engineer at Götaverken Yard and thereafter at the State's Ship Trial Institute where Einar accomplished tank-tests in order to improve performance of boats. This experience proved to be an essential element of his later work. Einar was the owner of the design office from the start in 1951 until it closed in 1999.

At the end of the 1940ies, the Ohlson Brothers delivered boat designs for design contests but requests for design work started to flow in heavily after their International 5.5 Metre Class design *Hojwa* which won a bronze medal at the 1952 Olympics at Helsinki, Finland. This was not a success by chance but the result of two previous years of consortia work. This early success established their names internationally. As a consequence, one of their boats was sailed to an Olympic medal at each of the Olympic Games, 1952 – 1968:

#### **1952 Bronze in Helsinki, Finland.**

**Boat:** *Hojwa*, Sweden. **Designed by:** Einar and Carl-Eric Ohlson. **Yard:** Bröderna Martinssons Båtvarv, Svineviken, Orust, Sweden. **Consortium:** Eric Hanson, Carl-Eric Ohlson, Birger Jonsson and Folke Wassén. **Crew:** Folke Wassén, skipper, Magnus Wassén and Carl-Eric Ohlson. **Results:** GOLD *Complex II* USA. SILVER, *Encore*, Norway. BRONZE, *Hojwa*, Sweden

The main essence of HOJWA was a bold experiment; a stiff shaped, not too heavy hull, with above all very good heavy wind qualities. Well prepared for heavy Baltic Sea weather.



Naval architect Einar Ohlson with his brother sail racer Carl-Eric Ohlson

### 1956 Gold in Melbourne, Australia.

**Boat:** *Rush V* Sweden. **Designed by:** Einar and Carl-Eric Ohlson. **Yard:** Kungsör yard, Sweden. **Owner and skipper:** Lasse Thörn. **Crew:** Lasse Thörn, skipper and owner, Hjalmar Karlsson and Sture Stork. **Results:** Gold, *Rush V*, Sweden. Silver, *Vision*, United Kingdom. Bronze, *Buraddoo*, Australia

Kungsör Yard was run by Oscar Schelin. All of Lasse Thörn's previous boats named *Rush* were built by the founder of the Kungsör yard, Oscar Schelin.



Lasse Thörn at Oscar Schelin yard, Kungsör, Sweden.



## **GULDSEGLING OS 1956**

The 1956 Olympics crew: Hjalmar Karlsson, Sture Stork and Lasse Thörn.

### **1960 Silver in Naples, Italy.**

**Boat:** *WEB II* Denmark. **Designed by:** Einar and Carl-Eric Ohlson. **Yard:** Kungsör Yard, Sweden. **Owner and skipper:** W.E. Berntsen. **Results:** GOLD, *Minotaur*, USA. SILVER, *Web II*, Denmark. BRONZE, *Ballerina IV*, Switzerland.

Einar and Carl-Eric Ohlson designed five of the competing boats in the International 5.5 Metre Class Olympics in Naples 1960 representing Denmark, Argentina, Sweden, United Kingdom and Portugal:

- **Silver** with *WEB II*, Denmark with skipper W.E. Berntsen, Sören Hancke and Steen Christensen.
- **4th** with *Ardilla*, Argentina, skipper Roberto Sieburger, Carlos and Enrique Sieburger jr.
- **5th** with *IASHA*, Sweden, skipper Bengt Sjösten, Claes Turitz and Göran Witting.
- **6th** with *Yeoman VII*, United Kingdom, skipper Robin Aisher, George Nicholson and John Ruggles.
- **16th** with *Ciocca III*, Portugal, skipper Duarte Bello, Fernando Bello, Julio Gourinho



Carl-Eric Ohlson, Claes Turitz, Einar Ohlson



Kungsör yard, Sweden. Founder, Oscar Schelin.

**1964 Silver in Enoshima, Japan.**

**Boat:** *Rush VII*, Sweden. **Designed by:** Einar and Carl-Eric Ohlson. **Yard:** Kungsör Yard, Sweden. **Owner and skipper:** Lasse Thörn. **Crew:** Lasse Thörn, Hjalmar Karlsson, Sture Stork. **Results:** Gold, *Barranjoey*, Australia. Silver, *Rush VII*, Sweden. Bronze, *Bingo*, USA.

The racing in the International 5.5 Metre Class was extremely close and decided on the last leg of the final race.

The American John McNamara was leading but made an error as he tacked and tried unsuccessfully to cross Lasse Thörn. McNamara won the bronze medal, Lasse Thörn silver and the Australian Bill Northam won gold. Allegedly McNamara recalled later that he repeatedly woke up with a nightmare dream realizing that he lost the Gold medal to this manoeuvre in the last race.

One of the great traditional yacht builders of the world is Oscar Schelin, from whose unimpressive sheds in Kungsör, emerge some of the most beautifully built wooden boats to be seen anywhere in the world. Pressed for lighter and lighter hulls by competitive owners in such sophisticated classes as the International 5.5 Metre Class, Oscar Schelin and his craftsmen have pioneered in use of lighter woods and fastenings, each shaped to minimum weight consistent with strength and scantling requirements.

## 1968 Bronze in Acapulco, Mexico.

**Boat:** *Yeoman XV*, United Kingdom. **Designed by:** Einar and Carl-Eric Ohlson. **Yard:** Arvidsson & Karlsson Yard, Svineviken, Sweden. **Owner and skipper:** Robin Aisher. **Crew:** Robin Aisher, Paul Anderson, Adrian Jardine. **Results:** Gold, *Wasa IV*, Sweden. Silver, *Toucan IX*, Switzerland. Bronze, *Yeoman XV*, United Kingdom.



Arvidsson & Karlsson Båtvarv, Svineviken, Orust, Sweden.

The World Championships started in 1961 and until 1969 again the Ohlson designs had the best numbers of boats with the World Championship Trophy.

Ohlson designed 5.5s were four times winner of the Scandinavian Gold Cup.

From very early on the design office of the Ohlson Brothers understood the importance of allocating high-quality work plus cost effective building of hulls to those known to be experts in the field. The 5.5m Ohlson designed boats were built at the best yards in Sweden with a global reputation: Kungsörs yard, Bröderna Martinsson yard, Bröderna Arvidsson & Gustavsson yard at Svineviken and at Sune Carlsson yard in Stockholm.

A total of 650 classic International 5.5 Metre Class boats have been built of which we have identified 53 designed by the Ohlson Brothers, representing 8 % of the whole classic fleet.

As the International 5.5 Metre Class was considered the formula one in sail racing, among the Ohlson Brothers clients are the famous US yacht designer and sailor George O'Day, British racing legend Robin Aisher, Prince S. Aga Khan, King Constantine II of Greece and P. Chopard, to name a few.

The 5th World Championship 1966 in Copenhagen became something of a crunch, as it was burdened with heavy winds. Poul Elvström, always a tough competitor in high wind events, won the series comfortably with Willy Berentsen's *Web III*, followed by the German, *Sünnenschien*, sailed by Rudolf Harmstorf, third came Robin Aisher from the United Kingdom

with *Yeoman XII*. All three boats were Einar Ohlson's designs from 1964 and were regarded as outdated by the time of the 1966 worlds. In total 14 Ohlson-designed International 5.5 Metre Class boats among 47 contenders were participating in the race, ie. 30 %. As Stuart Walker noted in 'One design & Off-shore yachtsman' at the time: "The Ohlson designs thrived in the heavy weather and seemed remarkably well manned on the reaches". That was an important recognition as most of the more modern boats had smaller keels and with their rudders still attached to the keel were characterized as uncontrollable when reaching in the revailing conditions.

In 2019, at the World Championship in Helsinki, Finland, a third of the classic boats in the races were Ohlson-designed.

TOP, **The Ohlson Project**, is dedicated to build the story of naval architect Einar Ohlson with his brother Carl-Eric Ohlson. We, the project team, try to revive this maritime legacy by bringing the past to life. As part of this work, we have collected more than 1 600 drawings and are preparing them for digital storage. This gathering of information and data show the enormous breadth of work and experience in boat design. The project team is a joint effort of Swedish and international contributors aiming to cover and highlight different aspects of the design work. We have identified forty-five different boat models, from Koster boats, motor boats to larger Ohlson yachts, e.g. the Ohlson 35, the Ohlson 38 and the Ohlson 45 footer. In addition we have identified thirty different yards in nine countries where the boats have been built.

We are proud to present and celebrate our first introductory video, *The Ohlson Yacht Project, Rediscovering a part of the Swedish maritime heritage*. The video was launched in January 2020 on our YouTube channel. More is to come...

Christina Stenberg, daughter of the late Einar Ohlson  
TOP, The Ohlson Project team leader

Lutz von Meyerinck, TOP, The Ohlson Project initiator