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William Eastman "Bill" Buchan



May 9, 1935

Birthplace: Seattle, Washington

“Why should I quit Star sailing? I wouldn’t have my friends.”

Having an Edge

This is Bill Buchan’s 54th year racing Star boats. With three Star World Championships to his credit, he is just two points below Lowell North if one adds up firsts, seconds, and thirds accumulated in that esteemed annual regatta. In 1984, he won an Olympic gold medal in the class. (His son, Carl, won gold that same year in a Flying Dutchman, crewing for Jonathan McKee). Buchan has been afloat since he was a baby. Racing began as a grass roots, trial and error exercise.

His family had immigrated to Seattle, Washington from Scotland in the early 1920s to pursue the fishing business. His father built small boats in his spare time. And houses. “Dad’s theory,” Buchan says, “was if we couldn’t build it, we couldn’t have it.” At age 13, Bill took one look at the Stars gathering in Seattle for the North Americans and his life changed. Skippers like North, Bill Ficker, and Gerry Driscoll became his heroes. His father built a Star and crewed for his son in the Puget Sound fleet, finishing way down in the pack. By the time they’d built a third boat, Bill was deep into the subtleties of class measurement tolerances, and they were fast.

Buchan was so focused on racing he has never picked up a golf club or a tennis racket. He attributes his success to always having an edge. “I always had boat speed. I wasn’t scientific, but I had a good eye for things. I faired the keels, took the sails home and sewed on them. That gave me confidence. Seattle gave me an edge too. With its varied conditions, it is a wonderful training ground.”

In construction, he started building fiberglass Stars in the 70s, when the housing market slumped. “I took them to the measurement limits,” Buchan says, “no holding back even an eighth of an inch. They were hand painted, didn’t look great, but the keels were on straight. My boats were custom hot rods, light in the ends. I pushed that part of the rule.” He sold more than 50 “BUC” Stars. Buyers included Lowell North, Dennis Conner, and Tom Blackaller.

Buchan jumped into a Soling and won the World Championship in 1975. “The trailing edge of the keel had a half inch radius. I got out the sandpaper.” He also built a mainsail out of stretchy cloth to satisfy shaping the sail for different wind strengths. “The next year everyone had one.

“In the old days,” Buchan ruminates, “ten Stars would break free at the line and accelerate away. I’d finish third or fourth – out of 80 or 100 boats – and wonder what I was doing wrong. There’s no edge today. All the boats are beautiful, all the same speed.”

- Roger Vaughan

Links of Interest:

[Sailing World article on Bill Buchan](#)

[Bill Buchan honored by Star Class](#)

[Buchan Boats - from a conversation with Bill Buchan](#)

[VIDEO: Bill Buchan talks to 2009 Moth Worlds Mach 2 on getting kids hooked on sailing \(Sailing Anarchy\)](#)

[Wikipedia page for Bill Buchan](#)

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