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Hobart "Hobie" Alter

October 31, 1933 - March 29, 2014
Birthplace: Ontario, California

"I didn't know anything about sailing so I wasn't confused by any past ideas. And the fact (catam

The beaches of Southern California have always been a breeding ground for new water toys, and for entrepreneurs in Hawaiian shirts and flip-flops who knew how to make their visions into reality. The undisputed king of that enviable, sun-drenched subculture is Hobie Alter, who started shaping wooden surfboards in his father's garage in Laguna Beach in 1950. A few years later he was producing lighter, foam-core fiberglass boards that became the standard. He opened his first surf board shop in 1958, establishing Hobie as a brand that is still a household word for surfers, and sailors.

Alter and his contemporaries were driven by the quest for new ways to have fun in the sun, ways that would keep them out of suits and office jobs. When Alter decided to design and build a catamaran in the late 1960s, his mission was accomplished. The first drawing was done in the sand. The Hobie 14 was easy to drag down the beach and through the surf, and fun to sail. The term “beach cat” was born. At $1000, the boat was an instant hit. The 14 was followed by the 16, then the 18. With its double trapeze and outboard racks or wings, the 18 is an active racing class. Today, there are 14 different Hobie Cat models sailing, more than 100,000 boats in all.

For Hobie Alter, sailing ranked with surfing, skiing, and motorcycle riding as a past time. Just to prove he wasn’t just a beach cat, in 1980 Alter spearheaded the design of the Hobie 33, a trailerable mono hull with a scant 8-foot beam (to make it road legal). It turned out to be a rocket. Between 1982 and 1986, 187 of the 33s were built.

Alter skied, and sailed the 60-foot catamaran he built, into his 70s.

- Roger Vaughan

Links of Interest:

Video: Hobie - A History (click on the image above)

"Hobie Alter: Founding father of the surfboard industry" - Story in Fortune Magazine, January 16, 2014

"Fun in the Son: Shaping Hobie Alter" - Cover Story on Hobie Alter from Composites Fabrication Magazine, May, 2001 (PDF)

"Hobie Alter. He started out shaping surfboards. He ended up shaping a culture." From Hobie.com

Surfline.com - Hobie Alter Biography and Photos

Article in August 26, 1987 Los Angeles Times: "TOP CAT: Hobie Alter Created His Own Style of Sailing, but He's Still Trying to Build a Better Boat"

Wikipedia Page - Hobie Alter

USA Today obituary - Hobie Alter (March 31, 2014)

LA Times obituary - Hobie Alter (March 30, 2014)

Surfer Magazine tribute to Hobie Alter

Video Tribute to Hobie Alter - Encyclopedia of Surfing Videos (click on image above)

Tribute to Hobie Alter on Hobie.com

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