

## OHLSON 36 "The Racing Machine"

**Designer: Einar Ohlson**

### The boat that built the international reputation

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lDWgzj5B0I&ab\\_channel=ChristinaStenberg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lDWgzj5B0I&ab_channel=ChristinaStenberg)

The first drawings for the boat that are found are dated in 1956/57. The boat was designed with versatility i.e. yawl and sloop rig available. A lot of little modifications were made for each individual boat built, often according to special requests by the owner.

The initial name was "Portuguese Bend Yawl" (Portuguese Bend is a coastal area in the Los Angeles area which was used as a place to land-in booze during the prohibition). The name did not prevail as Einar Ohlson had been advised by an Coca-Cola director to name his designs after his name instead of using a marketing name.

TOP The Ohlson Project team has reason to believe that the Ohlson 36 is an extended version of the Ohlson 35, modified to fit into the rules of the Bermuda race.

The Ohlson 36 was built entirely in wood. Carvel planked mahogany on oak-frames laminated or steam bent. Riveted copper nail, waterproof glue with hardener in the seams. Mast and rig built with American pine.

More than 140 boats were built at three different yards on Orust during the period of 1955 to 1966, nearly all of them have been exported to the United States.

The boats were initially imported by the well-known yacht designer and gold medallist in the 5.5 M class in 1960 George O'Day. O'Day's Ohlson 36 *Rival*, 1962, was yawl rigged with aluminium masts, design #60 hull #60 according to the Campbell & Sheehan plaque. (In 1960 George O'Day ordered by Einar Ohlson *Wistful*, a 5,5 M (US24, Ohlson design S / Y59) which he wanted to race for the US in the 1960 Olympics in Naples, Italy but had to swap as she was damaged severely in a race before).

Later the Ohlson 36s were imported by the yachtbrokers Campbell & Sheehan of Larchmont N.Y. in particular by their Managing Director Richard (Dick) Sheehan.

In 1964/65 an upgrade was developed "Mark 2" with a little bit more beam. The boat is referred to this in the US repeatedly though.

L.O.A.	36'3"
Waterline	25'6"
Beam	9'8"
Draft	5'0"
Sail Area Sq.Ft.	576
Displacement Lbs.	12,850
Mast	18 m in wood
CCA Rating	28.4'

## **Yards:**

- Svinevikens Båtvarv, Arvidsson & Karlsson, Svineviken, Orust, Sweden. Approximately 70 boats built.
- Bröderna Gustavssons Båtvarv AB, Brattås, Orust, Sweden. Approximately 60 boats built.
- Bröderna Martinssons Varv, Svineviken, Orust, Sweden. Approximately 15 boats built.

## **Purchase agreement**

Ohlson 36 MK II, *Regina* (former *SISU*)

Agreement signed by Einar Ohlson on April 4, 1966 to buyer, Director Egon Olsson, Olshammarsvägen 64, Johanneshov. Slooped rigged. Price 76.700 Swedish Kronor ex VAT. Sails from Ratsey and Laphorn, England and mattresses are excluded in the price. Date of delivery: June 15, 1966 at Svineviken, Orust.

## **John Gustavsson, boat builder and an Ohlson 36 expert**

John started to build boats at the age of 14. He learned the profession from his father, Gustav Johansson (born 1887) in 1941. In the beginning they did not have any electric power, all the sawing was done by hand. Designer Einar Ohlson was John's cousin.

Gustav and Einar's grandfather, Martin Johansson (born 1832) built boats "by the eye" without any drawings. Martin was an excellent smith, nicknamed "Kongsvigen" and a master with his well-knowned "kongsvige-axes". The family roots in boat building date back to the 1600th century. John Gustavsson and his two brothers, Gunnar and Erik, built the Ohlson 36s from 1958 to 1966 with the help of drawings and special photos. Changes were made to customize each boat. The three brothers together with seven employees were the workforce. They made five to six boats per year. Three boats were under production in the workshop at the same time. The American clients wanted the boats painted in black, green, white or blue. All boats were shipped to the United States except three which stayed in Sweden.

From 1966 the GRP period took over and the wooden boat era ended.

## **Material available**

Drawings and photos in the private collection. Sparse footage and photos by owners, some communication with individual current owners over the years. Recent footage of interviews with boat builder John Gustavsson (August 2019). Two boats known to be in Europe, *Regina* (former *SISU*) in Finland and *Karanna* in France.

## **Famous Ohlson 36s in the United States during the 60s:**

*Agile*

*Pursuit, Pursuit III*

*Peningo*

*Reveille*

*Zinagee* 1967 winner of the Fastnet Race

Rival  
Rumour

## Anecdotes and quotes

*"Your boat (Pursuit) is not a racing boat, it is a cruising boat. Only when they got to America did people think the O-36s are racing boats". Einar Ohlson, designer to the Ohlson 36 .*

*"the competition in Long Island sound at that era (1965) was of a very high caliber....the very best boats and the very best skippers/crew...." Michael Tynan, owner Pursuit*

*(FREE TRANSLATION)"Einar was always emphasizing the importance of a long transom to achieve a maximum water line ". "It was very important that we used whole planks from bow to stern". "All these boats, the 36 model, went to America from here. The unusual thing was that they were painted, instead of varnished. That was something we reacted to a lot. It is more beautiful with a varnished boat than one that is painted". "It is not the tools that create the boats. It is the knowledge, the feeling and the professional experience". " To build boats demands both practical and mathematical skills combined with an artistic approach". John Gustavsson, boat builder.*

*When discussing my Pursuit with your dad (Einar Ohlson) in his office he showed me the original letter purchase order from campbell/ sheehan Larchmont NY, I recall it being dated OCT 17 1964 and then he informed me that the boat was delivered to NY in late Dec '64. I was stunned, I asked how could that be possible...your dad looked down at me quizzically..no answer, I repeated the question a bit more specifically..how could you build this boat so fast??... he hesitated, took in my question, and stated "that is what we always did, ( ... he paused... and then completed his thought ) and finished with "you can't do that anymore...the men are gone". well you know that John is not gone...in America he would be known as ...'the last of the mohicans'. Michael Tynan, owner Pursuit #66*

*"...to respect your father's (Einar Ohlson) brilliant understanding of weights, centers and moments in yacht and ship design. During my short visit I asked him a few questions regarding his weight control standards and specifically his beautiful execution of construction details and tapering scantlings to match expected loads and stresses while keeping weight to a minimum. He clearly combined, in one person, a remarkable understanding of materials, hydrodynamics, fluid flow, and structures and that fully in concert with art and beauty. An educated, disciplined artist. What focus! All this and that he controlled his costs and made a living at it is amazing. I have to add, that in my opinion, the builders, the workmen,..JOHN for instance... were vital...absolutely vital, to the success of these boats as Einar designed them to a "T"...if the construction and inside and outside joinery..( carpentry) was not perfect these boats would have worked themselves to a short service life... but they were strong and good, and long lasting when maintained....the construction workmanship matched the design skills. Unlike work from so many others, no detail was treated differently from another...the smallest chock hidden under a water tank in the bilge was regarded as fully as the most prominent varnished mahogany companionway hatch. It is also clear that he and his production team never rested on good enough....it is very apparent the he and his builders always worked to iterate and improve upon their earlier work... constantly... and that earlier work was already leading edge.... to me an embodiment of humility, intelligence and workmanship supported by controlled pride and leadership. Michael Tynan, owner Pursuit #66*

(FREE TRANSLATION) *"When I picked up the boat (SISU) in 1966 it was as if I had won the top prize. This is a feeling I'll never forget. Einar and I had agreed upon building the boat using whole planks from bow to stern. The boat was built at a little yard named Svineviken on Orust by six old carpenters, well experienced and precise. I wanted SISU varnished being able to control if there were any hidden wooden errors under the varnish. I had SISU for 17 years and replaced her with an GRP Rassy 38. I never had the same feeling for the new boat as for SISU. I raced SISU with good results. We won Öland Runt in 1966, 4th in 1968 but 1st to cross the finish line in Åland Sea Race, 2nd in 1975 Gotland Runt and 1st in class 2 cruising 1976 Gotland Runt".* Egon Olsson, first owner SISU. Racing results:

1966	Öland Runt	1st		1968
Åland Sea Race		1st	1975	Gotland
Runt	2nd		1976	Gotland Runt
1 st in class 2 cruising				

*"Pursuit is so well balanced when I demonstrate to experienced sailors they typically go silent,... as in disbelief of what they are experiencing. The boat tracks perfectly regardless of which jib I use and you do not have to tweak the sail adjustments... just get the sails set generally right and off she goes. Most experienced sailors endlessly jiggle the helm ..thinking they are making the boat sail better but I have to smack their hand to stop this bad habit and then remove their hand from the tiller to show them that this boat sails herself better than they can. I often sail alone and I enjoy sitting on the bow pulpit watching the boat track to the puffs, charge along and in a way sail toward me as I look aft from my perch enjoying the show".* Michael Tynan, owner Pursuit.

*".from my notes from meeting Einar this is the first of the O-36 Mark 2. The boat was ordered on October 14, 1964 and delivered to New York USA late December 1964....Einar checked his office records and provided these dates during my visit. I have seen a few O-36 over the years and I notice that ...although named O 36... each was slightly different in hull form, including bow profile and so on...mine must have been different enough from earlier versions to have your Dad cite it as a Mark 2. I forget the source (possibly in conversation with Einar) but I do recall mention that the O 36 Mark 2 was model tank tested....very unusual for a cruising boat. (Goteborg must have a model test tank... quite something the decision and involvement by Einar if that recollection of model test is accurate. Your Dad gave me a construction plan for the O 36 and while most of the design is generally the same, my boat to the plan it is clearly different. The bow profile, rudder shape, locations of bolts in the backbone structure and so on are clearly different. I do know that there were 4 or 6 berth options to the interior arrangement but I am talking about lines as well as weights and centers differing. My boat had a plaque, engraved stainless steel, provided by Cambell and Sheehan, Larchmont NY that included their address and stating that this particular boat was Hull #66, Design # 66. I have ..although I have to put my hand to them, a complete set of "Yachting" magazines for 1965 wherein my boat is cited, including a photo in Campbell/Sheehan advertisements. Also in the various monthly editions there are records of this boat's racing achievements, Dick Sheehan being the skipper.* Michael Tynan, owner Pursuit

*"I was varnishing the door to the Toilet Room/ forward Stateroom....as I was reinstalling the hardware AGAIN marveled at the design, materials and workmanship... the design of the door could not be simpler, the joints are still perfect and the hardware....the latch is made of 7 pieces and at first glance one would see that the pieces are uniform and could be installed in a few ways due to apparent symmetry but it is so carefully fitted that it mates to the door only ONE way, the very small butt hinges have ever so slightly tapered leaves and might even be cast. I realize these comments would be considered fanatic by almost any person but adding up the thousands of like details that make up the final assembly...the boat...have to be this well done or the assembly would not be what it*

*is. In short, if the details are even slightly rough the assembly, due to the great number of multiplying details, will be sloppy and crude. The Ohlson is precise". Michael Tynan, owner Pursuit*

*"again this boat is remarkable we quietly pass boats that according to PHRF standards are faster....but they are not....this comment is not based upon one or two occurrences but on hundreds of occurrences over many years...I have been sailing PURSUIT since 1995". Michael Tynan, owner Pursuit*

*"An architect imagines what if. A builder figures out how to. Great structures emerge only when the two work well together". Simon Sinek*

### **Yachting Magazine, October 1962, (extract from articles)**

*...."Peningo, which raced from scratch in F. The latter (Peningo) owes her victory to a race committee blunder. Three other Ohlson 36's, Pursuit, Agile and Rumour – were placed in class E where they became Shearwaters victims.*

*Peningo, rating 25.0 under the CCA measurement rule, was put at the top of Class F where she got 3 min.27 sec. from the bottom boat in E and gave 3:24 to the next boat in F. Had Peningo been in Class E where she belonged with the other Ohlsons she would have been second to Shearwater and the Class F prize would have gone to Howard Foster's 35'.. That is what happens when committees form class boundaries by ratings or population instead of making an effort to put boats which sail alike in the same group. It would have been much more fun all around to have had boat-for-boat racing among all the Ohlsons".*

#### **Vineyard race summaries:**

##### **DIVISION E**

- |                                 |           |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Shearwater,                  | Hood 36   |
| 2. Pursuit, Richard F. Sheehan, | Ohlson 36 |
| 3. Reveille, S.V-H. Waring,     | Ohlson 36 |
| 9. Rumour, William L. Crow,     | Ohlson 36 |
| 11. Agile, John P. Walsh,       | Ohlson 36 |

##### **DIVISION F**

1. Peningo, Eric W. Penistons American YC flagship, Ohlson-36

### **Yachting, September 1965, Long Island Soundings, By B. Devereux Barker III (extract from article):**

*Cruising-boat activity: Dick Sheehan's Ohlson 36 sloop Pursuit...the Div B winner. Sheehan's Pursuit continued her winning ways in a close battle with a sistership, Comm Eric Peniston's Peningo, to top II by 3 ¾ pts. Pursuit Sail #1400*

### **Yachting, December 1965**

*There was hardly an event all season in which an Ohlson 36 did not place 1st, 2nd, 3rd.*

### **New York Times 1964/12/20**

*"In races originating on Long Island Sound, the Ohlson 36, Agile, sailed by John P. Walsh of Larchmont, beat a sister sloop, Richard F. Sheehan's Pursuit, by 131/2 minutes in the 106-boat Stamford Vineyard event..."*

**TOP The Ohlson Project**

[www.OhlsonYachts.com](http://www.OhlsonYachts.com)

