

# SHELL GAME

For fitness or for fun, rowing is becoming the sport of the '80s.

By POLLY WHITTELL

**L**ong considered almost as elite as 12-Meter racing, rowing has now gone recreational. For those who love the water—from Boston's Charles River to San Francisco Bay—sculling in a rapidly-growing fleet of

seaworthy fiberglass shells is fast becoming the new way to have fun while keeping physically fit.

Not that it isn't still pretty elite. "Rowing will be the chic exercise for the smart set in the '80s," predicts Dr. Ralph E. Graham, an Orange County, Calif. surgeon who turned to building shells because he's so sold on the sport. "When the yacht set joins the sweat set, they don't run with the crowd—they row," goes his slogan. Indeed, peppered with names like Rockefeller and du Pont, the roster of Alden owners (the first of the revolutionary kayak-like, sliding-seat single rowing shells to hit the market a dozen years ago) reads like a compendium of *Who's Who in America* and the *Social Register's* list of yachtsmen.

The 300-member Alden Ocean Shell Association, made up primarily of recreational rowers who enjoy occasional competition, now represents the largest contingent of the 10,000-member U.S. Rowing Association, says Alden designer Arthur Martin, father of the movement. In fact this fall, a record 55 Aldens turned out for the Head of the Charles Regatta, the world's largest single-day rowing event.

## Rower's "High"

Dealers around the U.S. report that sales of recreational shells have increased more than 30 percent a year in each of the past few years. And while many of the new enthusiasts are former competitive oarsmen or converts from the ranks of the "running wounded," more than half are yachtsmen—a large percentage of whom have never rowed before. "I think it's because the yachtsman is already attuned to the water and generally has easy access to it," says Gordon Nash, head of Rowing

Crafters in Sausalito, Calif. In response, more and more yacht clubs (including *Liberty* skipper Dennis Conner's San Diego Y.C.), are installing shell racks.

There is even a growing overlap between rowing and 12-Meter racing. John Marshall, *Liberty's* mainsail trimmer, is a former runner who turned to rowing to keep in shape during last summer's Cup races, finding it "preferable as a total body and aerobic workout." So is John Wright, *Liberty's* starboard tailer, who adds, "being alone with nature out on the water really gives you peace of mind." The *Defender/Courageous* crews worked out both in shells and on rowing machines, while in the winner's camp, Olympic oarsmen were selected over sailors as grinders for *Australia II*. "In addition to the upper body and overall strength required for the job," explains grinder Brian Richardson, "rowing gave us the stamina to work hard for long hours."

Offshore sailor Peter Zandt, who rows his Alden year-round in Bay Shore, Long Island, says he does so for exercise, "because sailing doesn't provide the sustained exertion that you need to develop the fitness and strength for pulling in sails." Arthur Martin, for his part, never takes his 48-foot motorsailer anywhere without his shell aboard, because he feels that rowing is "a yachtsman's way of having his cake and eating it too." When you anchor, you can use the shell for exploring harbors or creeks, plus it can be rowed almost anytime—even when it's too cold, foggy or windless for sailing or there's not enough fuel for powering. A bonus for some rowers, on the other hand, is a "high," often likened (by former New York Mayor John Lindsay, for one) to that of a long-distance runner.

## Living Longer

About 60 percent of those who row for fitness are doctors. Dr. Benjamin Spock, for example, owns an Alden. So does the President's Council on Physical Fitness.

"Rowing," says Dr. Graham, "perhaps more than any other sport, can aid dramatically in lowering body weight and blood pressure," as well as lowering the resting pulse rate and improving the entire cardiovascular system. For starters, studies show that rowing burns up twice the amount of calories that swimming or jogging do. And as an aerobic exercise, as little as 20 to 30 minutes of sculling three times a week can significantly improve the body's oxygen-processing capacity and the heart's efficiency within a few weeks. More major muscle groups—including the legs, back, shoulders, arms, chest, thorax and abdomen—are called into action and given toning in rowing than in most other sports, in "a natural motion that is relatively injury-free," says Dr. Graham.

The fact that rowing may actually increase longevity was demonstrated in a

recent study which (although not absolutely conclusive) showed that Harvard and Yale crew members from the class of 1914 who had kept up rowing outlived their classmates by an average of more than six years. Among the many living testimonials to Dr. Graham's motto that "rowing is a sport for anyone nine to 90" are New York Athletic Club member Bill Sanford, 75, and Alden Shell Association Secretary-Treasurer Ernestine Bayer, 74, both of whom row daily all year long.

Most people pick up the four basic phases or motions of rowing in just three to four hours on the water: 1) The "catch"—inserting the oars into the water while sitting forward (meaning aft—the direction you're facing) on the sliding seat, with knees bent; 2) the "drive"—extending the legs and thrusting your back side backward into the bow, pulling the oars toward you in the "stroke"; 3) the "finish"—removing the oars from the water and "feathering" the blades (turning them horizontally), and 4) the "recovery"—moving hands away from the body and rolling forward on the sliding seat.

## Getting Hooked

When Arthur Martin (whose Martin Marine in Kittery Point, Maine, markets the Alden Ocean Shell and two other models nationally) first developed the Alden in 1971, he was looking for "a happy medium between a river racing shell and an oceangoing kayak or dory." Whereas racing shells, often made of wood, are very long, narrow and lightweight (about 26 feet by 10 inches, weighing 30 pounds) for maximum speed, they are extremely fragile and unstable, requiring almost flat water. The versatile new fiberglass recreational shells, because they are shorter, wider, more heavily constructed and partially covered over (e.g., the Alden is 16 feet by 25 inches and weighs 63 pounds), are stable, seaworthy, and durable enough to be rowed in the open ocean and stored outdoors—all for about half the price of a racing shell. The sliding seats, footrests and 9-foot, 9-inch oars, which pivot on outriggers, are similar to those in racing shells.

So far, there are a dozen or so recreational shells on the market, ranging from about 16 to 19 feet and costing roughly \$1,200 to \$1,500. Among the most popular, besides the Alden, are the Warning from Small Craft in Baltic, Conn.; the Seashell from Little River in Gainesville, Fla.; the Laser from newly reorganized Laser West in Costa Mesa, Calif., and the Trimline from R.E. Graham Boats in Orange, Calif. Double and racier models are also offered by most builders.

Whichever shell you choose, there's one thing that's almost certain, oarsmen say: Once you try rowing, you'll be hooked. ‡