

# WYC J/24 Fleet #1 History

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Once upon a time in a land far away, stuck in the middle of the North American continent, began the great epic of J/24 one-design racing. For a class with unequalled development and achievement, it is difficult for sailors to comprehend that the J/24, born in the hotbed of East coast yachting, could find it's one-design beginnings on an inland lake, Lake Minnetonka (often mispronounced American Indian term meaning "room at the mark".)

Fellow sailors from around the country are full of quips about the inhospitable winter Minnesota climate. Some of them assume that on a bad year the ice never leaves while others proclaim that the popular scow boats have flat bottoms to pass over water or ice.

In this vein, we have been known to explain that the J/24 was really our own design and an evolutionary form of the scow boats. The "J" name was a democratic selection because four of the five original owners were named John. How simple.

The true story began in the fall of 1976 with some members of the local MORC International Championship. For whatever reason, the non-sailing season competition was as great as it was on the water the past summer. In early December, Dale Anderson, who worked for a yacht sales firm, called me to come view literature that he just received on a new boat. I was not in the mood, but after some persuasion, I wanted to see what caught Dale's curiosity.

The crudely written information had a most unusual "tell it like it is" style of describing the performance of the prototype J/24 Ragtime. Most boat manufacturers claim various victories, but astute sailors recognize that virtually every boat has won something somewhere. For those who did not have the opportunity to view this historic piece, the information contained the elapsed times win-lose record of Ragtime against a large fleet for a five race series. It just seemed too credible. Of course, I did not know that this was Rod Johnston's first design and a garage effort at that.

Dale was attempting to satisfy his own intrigue by soliciting prospects for a boat that had not yet been produced. Both Dale and I placed fact-finding phone calls to Rod Johnstone about everything imaginable including proposed changes from the prototype to production boats. Rod said there would be none. I liked the answer, but he did not like any boat designer/manufacturer that I ever knew.

Dale was suggesting names from the Wayzata Yacht Club directory when he came upon Rolf Turnquist, a typical Swede by name but atypical by character. Dale did not know Rolf well but he was a casual acquaintance of mine who I would see on the dock occasionally and sailed with once. I do not believe we ever had a phone conversation.

With the urging of Dale, I made a most eventful call to Rolf thinking that he was ready to upgrade in boats. I began to describe the J/24 to him and suggested a meeting. Based on his excitement from our conversation, I knew he was interested. He questioned my interest, but I explained that my financial position precluded ownership. His solution was simple – form a partnership. By early January 1977 our boat was ordered though the first boat was still two plus months from completion. This was the start of the special relationship that Rolf and I have enjoyed ever since. Call it intuition, karma, or blind luck, interest in the mystical form of the J/24 was amazing. Soon John Goodwyne and John Law were committed, and before March, John Savage and Chuck Sautter were in the fold. That is five of the first twenty-five boats produced – no wonder Rod was scratching his head.

The Midwest sailors have a strong one-design mentality. Perhaps it's just a dislike for math, but they just prefer boat for boat style racing. This preference is inbred in "scow country" and very significant to our extraordinary early one-design organization.

The first formal meeting to outline a one-design program and the organization was held in March 13, 1977 prior to the completion of the first boat. All present were committed to the one-design principles and to the expectations for a successful national class.

This meeting was truly something special. We shared a premonition that the J/24 was destined for greatness and not to be thought of as another handicap boat. We wanted a strong one-design fleet on Lake Minnetonka and we wanted to cast a future for a national class.

John Savage, senior member of our fleet and long-time E-Scow sailor, was our strongest advocate of one-design ideals. John was a college classmate of Johnstone's parent's and had the distinction of owning J/24 #24. We needed him and his wife Dee in the fleet to maintain parental control in the event the boat was a flop.

Finally in early April, Rolf, Dale, and myself drove east to pick up our boat at the factory in Fall River, Ma. There we met Jack Worley at the factory who left the following day for Key West with the first consumer J/24. The following day we left for Minneapolis after a brief visit in Newport. We pulled into my hometown of Lake City, Minnesota late on Easter Sunday in order to maintain my perfect record for consecutive years hunting Easter eggs – sad perhaps, but true.

A week later our one-design proposal went before the board of the Wayzata Yacht Club. The discussion was interesting, needless to say, because we had only one J/24 in the area for a brief time. Some board members knew virtually nothing about the boat. Discussing the one-design merits of the J/24 was our purpose, but describing the name, appearance, and features was almost more basic than UI could handle. In the end provisional status was granted to our new fleet and thus began one of the most significant chapters in one-design yachting history.

Sailors should note that at the time our fleet was seeking one-design status, few people had ever seen a production boat and no other club had five owners or even three for that matter. Lake Minnetonka was fleet #1 by several months though the deliveries of the second through the sixth boats occurred during the sailing season of 1977.

Naming our boat was the most difficult task. Rolf wanted to name our J/24 Wind Shadow after his old boat. Of course, I thought it was stupid. I preferred the name "WAWA", a name Rolf was certain was a carryover from my very youthful days. We wanted a short name for ease of speech and graphical purposes. Rolf finally came up with "OZ" to which I finally gave approval as long as it had nothing to do with the "wizard of."

The J/24 Fleet #1 brought to Lake Minnetonka a new level of performance in one design keel boat racing – a boat that possessed "creature comforts" and exciting to sail. This was particularly significant to an area accustomed to the high performance of scows.

Suddenly, a number of scow sailors joined the fleet and numerous others sought positions on the boats. The cheap talk still denounced keelboats but the J/24 was considered different. The fleet developed an upbeat reputation for fun, hard racing, and clean sailing.

In addition to being #1, the Lake Minnetonka fleet is well known for the famous "Flying Wedge", without a doubt the most awesome no air maneuver of any sailing fleet ever recorded. The 'Flying Wedge', for those who do not know, is an armada of up to twenty-four J's perhaps twelve abreast towed by a Navy whaleboat while in postponement. In 1981 we were asked to perform with the Blue Angels for the presidential inaugural, but our fruit sail failed to generate the necessary funds.

Fleet #1 is still prospering well. On behalf of the fleet, we thank Dale Anderson for his founding work, and John and Dee Dee Savage for hosting the early meetings. We also thank the families of John Goodwin, John Law, and Chuck Sauter for taking the big step "sight unseen". From all of the fleet, most importantly, we are proud to carry the distinction of being #1.

This summer Lake Minnetonka J/24 Fleet #1 and the Wayzata Yacht Club will host the Great Lakes Championship August 22-24, 1987. Come join us for fun and good racing. Help us celebrate our tenth season of J/24 racing.

**Editorial note:** This article first appeared in J/24 International Magazine in 1987.