



The Skipper's thoughts about an outstanding boat and how it all began...

*“I have been observing her for nearly six years; I can sit down and spend hours admiring her immaculate lines, to the point where it probably looks like I'm meditating – slim, elegant, classy...she looks bored, tied up to her pontoon, and I almost feel as if she were winking at me while asking: “Hey, want to go sailing with me? Come...!” And so the years passed, until the day I took my friend Gert with me to see her. We often look at boats together, talk shop, and day-dream. On this day, it was the “Ballerina” we were admiring.*

*The way she stands there in dry dock, the lines of her hull both tight and gentle at once. In my mind's eye, I already have my hands on the wheel, making arabesque patterns on the sea with her wake, between the whitecaps and the stars. On her deck, everything exudes the untamed power and exalted calm of a ship made by seafarers for seafarers. Her slender mast, her rigging, her winches – it is all of exceptional quality and cleverly placed, with everything squared away just where it belongs. The interior is incredible, almost exclusively fitted out with teak – the cabins, the “Library”, salon and kitchen, which almost transition into one another as a sort of kitchen-cum-diner. Everything is marine: there's salt in the air and the open sea feels very close by – it smells of adventure.*

*Gert and I don't speak a word. Our eyes meet, and it's like everything has already been said. “When are we going sailing?”, he enquires with his eyes, and already seems to have read the answer in mine. Hildegard climbs aboard, and it's a long way up. A hell of a long way; the “Dancer” is carefully docked on her splendid keel, which measures almost three metres in length and conveys tremendous stability. Hildegard also doesn't speak much.*



*The silence lingers with us for a moment or two after our visit, and our rendezvous for a test sail seems to have almost arranged itself. Et voilà! Never take a Baltic out for a test sail, just for fun, because she will haunt your dreams. Don't say I didn't warn you! 25 knots outside, with 2-metre-high waves. The mainsail is reefed, with a Genoa on the second reef. "Ballerina" spans her white 'wings' and glides silently through the swell. The beauty of the boat in motion is breath-taking.*

*Hildegard leisurely observes the beautiful spectacle from the cockpit, and Gert seems almost glued to the wheel. Or is it the wheel that has taken hold of him? All the while, I breathe in the ship, the "Ballerina" – her movements, the way she glides on the water, and feel like a kindred spirit with her in her kinship with the Atlantic. This ship is incredible: stability, comfort, speed and elegance. She glides gently through the waves and flows with the wind as if she were flying above the ocean – are we still sailing? I don't know; I have totally forgotten that air is fluid, too. And no, it isn't just a tame little breeze – we have winds of force 6 or 7, an ideal day for testing a sailing ship. But it is a sailing ship like no other, a bird of the open seas, with white, wide-spread wings, her streamlined hull pure perfection. Not a single wrong note in this symphony. It's fantastic!*

*With my throat slightly coated in salt, I take stock once more of the emotions experienced this day: in my mind's eye, I see the sparkling whitecaps dance as they envelop the ship's flanks in Atlantic intimacy. What a ship! With our love of sailing, none of us can escape her charm. Resistance is futile, and I don't think this will change any time soon.*

*Eight months have passed since then: she has accepted us and is finally riding once more across the long swell of the Atlantic! To her great enjoyment, or so it sometimes seems to me. And to our greatest pleasure, of course – a pleasure which we hope we can soon share with you."*

*- Patrick N. Bertrand -*