



First sail on launch day and Irakli (inset).

by IRAKLI KUTSIA
IN THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

The sea, sailing, ships, and navigation has always inspired me. It seemed to me like a job for real men and women, strong spirits and adventurous characters. From my early childhood when reading Stephenson's *Treasure Island* or Jules Verne's *The Children of Captain Grant*, I aspired to be able to go on an endless sea adventure and putting myself in the hands of forces of nature, trusting only in one's own will, stamina and knowledge.

my SAILING JOURNEY

part one

How was I to fulfill this dream of mine, when there was no sailing community, infrastructure, let alone sailboats in Georgia? Even though Georgia is a sea nation (having 320km of coastal line and two major ports on the Black Sea), seamanship is not really developed here. And especially sailing. No one, or a very insignificant amount of people, really know what it is or appreciate it. So I started thinking about making my own boat and learning sailing that way, until moving on to bigger, more seaworthy boats.

I searched the internet endlessly reading various articles and comparing various designs. Then I stumbled on the wonderful website of Firebug. That site struck me and caught my attention right from the beginning. It looked simple, very amateur-friendly and possible. So I started exploring it. I wrote emails to Peter at Firebug Yachts and ordered plans.

Then started the toughest part: the search for materials. Those materials are simply just not available here in Georgia. The closest you can find them is abroad, either in Turkey or Ukraine. I searched through all the vendors in Tbilisi, went and enquired in the port city of Batumi. Asked my friends to enquire around in the other port city of Poti. But no! Marine grade plywood just is NOT imported to Georgia, because there is no need for it. And normal quality exterior plywood is also very



left from top:
Framed up, ready for plywood.
Applying the epoxy.
Lifting off the jig.
It's a boat!



difficult to find. Marine epoxy glue and resin are also something totally out of this world. So although I was ready to pursue the project right away and start building if I had materials, I was forced to wait ... and I did not know until when.

I decided to build a model first, to still keep myself occupied with the project and to better understand how all the pieces were supposed to go together, because a sailboat was really something totally foreign to me at the time. And I must say that this was a very good decision and proved very helpful when I later started building the actual boat in its original size.

I was so determined to carry out this project and was planning my trip to Turkey to find the materials I needed when finally everything started to align itself. I found a spot that sold acceptable quality exterior plywood. Then I found epoxy glue dealer, putty ... and started to build in the spring of 2007. A neighbour of mine when seeing my labours in the garage and hearing about my need for more epoxy, offered to give me his epoxy that he had stored from old Soviet times. I accepted.

Progress was pretty good. I was emailing Peter almost daily with questions, because I really had no idea how the sailboat was supposed to work. For example, I could not understand how was the dagger board trunk supposed to function – what would stop water from coming into the deck? All the lines and the sheets supporting sail and mast ... all of that was a total mystery to me. But Peter gave me a good advice: do not jump ahead and stress yourself with the final tasks; think of the immediate task ahead, and when you complete it then the next task will be presented to you as very simple, doable and logical step. That was an excellent advice and I followed it.

After more than months of building, the boat was finally ready. Peter had been very kind to

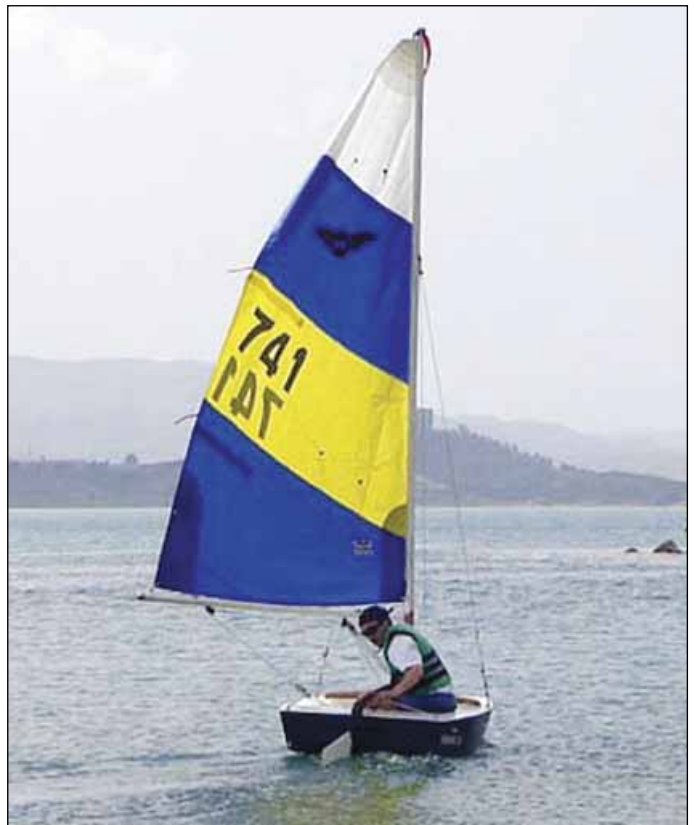
feature me almost in every issue of the Firebug Newsletter. People got so excited and compassionate about my project and one of the readers, Geoff Entrican from Auckland, a seasoned sailor himself, expressed his willingness to donate the new sail to me if I would finish the hull. That was a way to encourage me probably, although the least what I lacked was enthusiasm and motivation to finish the project. I was very glad to receive this offer and happily accepted. By the time I finished *Allegra* the sail was still numerous shipping days away from my country. And I was already so impatient to launch *Allegra* in August, that I decided to sew a sail myself out of two layers of umbrella nylon before the real one would arrive so that I could try her out. This would also make my Firebug totally handmade, because I also made my own mast and boom from wood.

When I'm talking about 'me' making something I should never omit my father, who was helping me all along the project. Without his active participation I do not think I'd be able to make it. The sail sewing was totally his project, so he deserves the credit for that.

We launched the Firebug in front of family and friends. Everything turned out very well. The real sail arrived a month later. Thanks so much Mr. Entrican again for your support!

My *Allegra* is a beautiful little boat that everyone admires and she's a real pleasure to sail.

Next issue: Learning to sail and my racing career takes off!



right from top:
Hand trailer on launch day.
Flapping canvas at last!
Bubbly christening.
First use of the sail from New Zealand.