

A Few Words from the NBOC Historian's Desk A Nelson by Any Other Name



Example of a British built Halmatic Weymouth 34 with its Dutch owners

I am often asked whether or not various similar looking and seemingly related vessels are indeed Nelsons.

The straightforward answer is that a Nelson is one which has had its hull designed by TT Boat Designs Ltd, who are the originators and designers of the Nelson range of seagoing vessels, established in 1961. However like so many other things in life there are exceptions to the rule. For example many Nelsons also go by other names, but not all of these other names are Nelsons!

Below is a list of the main companies who have produced the huge variety of Nelson boats, and those who still do:

Weymouths, Halmatic, Tylers, Humbers, Askhams, Landguards, Aquastars, Bucklers Hard, The Bridge End Boat Company, Seaward, Dale and North-line.

Taking these twelve more commonly known alternative names above, each has its own story.

Weymouths were originally built by the Weymouth based James and Caddy firm, who fitted out mainly Nelson hulls, many with wooden superstructures as well as later ones in GRP. These were on mouldings supplied by Halmatic as well as by Tylers.

Their boats included the Nelson 32, Nelson 34, Nelson 40 and Nelson 45, plus the very successful and much loved Weymouth 32, which was designed by John Askham for James and Caddy.

Incidentally John Askham was the main naval architect who joined TT Boat Designs in 1962 and who designed the original Nelson 34, plus the legendary Nelson 40, whilst working for Commander Peter Thornycrofts' company, TT Boat Designs Ltd.

John's Weymouth 32 and later Weymouth 34 designs are very different to the somewhat low volume and narrow gutted Nelson 32 and 34's.

Halmatic eventually bought James and Caddy and used the Weymouth name to market a complete range of semi displacement vessels, which they supplied fully or partially fitted, as well as just hulls/superstructures. They also continued to sell Nelson badged boats.

This new Halmatic / Weymouth range included the Weymouth 34, which was a redevelopment of the Weymouth 32, with a completely new GRP superstructure again from the board of John Askham.

Remember also at this time, Tylers had the mould tools for the Nelson 34, so Halmatic needed a successful 34 foot semi displacement boat in their Weymouth range to compete. Later they produced the Nelson 35 (designed by Arthur Mursell), but it was never marketed as a Weymouth.

Other boats in the Halmatic Weymouth range included the Weymouth 42, which used a standard Nelson 40 hull plus a bathing platform and a super new GRP superstructure with inclusive aft cabin. This classic Nelson design has often been referred to as the 'Gentleman's Motor Yacht'.

The then new Nelson 44 pilot boat (the first Nelson pilot boat from the drawing board of Arthur Mursell) also had a new motor yacht superstructure with an aft cabin, designed for it by Arthur, in order to compete with Tylers Nelson 45. (Tylers had the mould tool for the Nelson 45 hull and ring deck but no GRP structure, although Seaward Marine did produce one later on.

Halmatic however had previously commissioned naval architects Murray Cormack Associates to design a 49 foot semi displacement vessel called the Talisman 49. This vessel, with a new Nelson-esque superstructure became the known as the new Weymouth 50, but was not a Nelson persay. Murray Cormack also designed the North Kyle 45, and its reduced length North Gael 40 along very similar lines to their Talisman 49, all of which is another story.

Tyler Mouldings were incorporated in 1961 (the same year as TT Boats Designs) in Tonbridge, Kent and was run by John Tyler. They were commercial moulders who originally produced concrete mouldings and diversified into producing GRP boat mouldings for fitting out by other companies.

They were always in fierce competition with Halmatic and produced the Nelson 34 with a MK1, MK2 and MK3 (aft cabin) superstructures, as well as the 'Squashed' Wheelhouse roof MK3 for use on HMS Ark Royal. Britannia also had MKIII 34's on board. Thames Police used an extra high, but short wheelhouse version, which enabled them to wear their tall helmets! Tylers also moulded the Nelson 45 hull and ring deck, plus the later Nelson 26/27/28/29 design from TT boats.

Humbers were built by a firm in Barnsley, Yorkshire which was run by Fred Booker and sometimes the boats were referred to as 'Bookers'.

Originally they fitted out the Halmatic Weymouth 34 and Weymouth 40/42 mouldings to a high standard and at a reasonable price.

Later, Humber moulded and produced their own wide beam Humber 35 with an integral aft cabin, which was designed by - you've guessed it - that nice Mr Askham again.

Askhams. John's 35 ft design was first moulded by Bourne Plastics for a Plymouth based builder, then by Halmatic. Fred Booker (Humber) eventually took over the mould tools for these boats after several builders had fitted them out.

John's later 'Bullet' range of vessels were moulded by Bourne Plastics in various lengths from 45 ft - 52 ft, using the same hull concept, and over 20 were built. About half of these were fitted out as commercial vessels.

There was a light blue hulled Askham Bullet 45 on the Hard in Elburg during our last Nelson Rally.

Landguard was run by Philip Klein. They originally fitted out Nelson 28/29 mouldings from Tyler (Seaward Marine now have the mould tooling and produce the Seaward 29).

Later, Landguard produced their own mould tooling for the new TT Boats-designed Nelson 33, aimed primarily at the pilot board market, with a short front cabin and a large wheelhouse. Subsequently, this was extended to 37 feet around 1997 and was called the Nelson 117 (11.7 metres equalling 37 feet) to distinguish it from the Nelson 38 eventually produced by Dale (another story). The Nelson 117 retained the existing short front cabin and wheelhouse, and added a walk around aft cabin, producing a relatively low beam to length vessel. Only three Nelson 117s were produced, one with a very large open cockpit in place of the aft cabin (Doris, in Holland).

Aquastar - Based in Guernsey and run by Geoff Wilson, have for many years produced semi displacement vessels of their own design.

Some of their designs were marketed as Aquastar Nelsons, but not until Aquastar purchased the mould tool for a Nelson 44 pilot boat hull, did they have a 'Nelson vessel' in their range.

Latterly, TT Boats designed for Aquastar a distinctive new superstructure for this hull; the current Cowes harbour master is the proud private owner of one of these Nelsons.

Bucklers Hard - (The Agamemnon shipyard, where some of Admiral Nelson's ships were built for use in the Battle of Trafalgar) have produced a series of excellently fitted out Nelson 40, 45, 42 Mk II and more recently two Weymouth 50 (denoted as Nelson 49's)

In 1991 they made the male tooling for the hull and superstructure of the Nelson 42 Mk II, for Halmatic who then produced the female mould tooling.

The Bridge End Boat Company, based on the River Yealm and run by Richard Checkley and his partner Julie Hammond (Sometimes referred to as Plymouth Pilot Nelsons), produced a short series run of Nelson 42 Mk II's fitted out with interesting and modern layouts between 1998 to 2002. Please see separate article on the Nelson 42 Mk II on the NBOC website.

Seaward Marine. For many years Barry Kimber and his wife have successfully run Seaward Marine, originally in Guernsey and more recently in Cowes. They fitted out many Nelson Hulls from Tylers and Halmatic, often building their own GRP superstructures (designed by TT boats) and renaming them as Seaward vessels.

They now mould and fit out the Nelson 29, 35, 40/42 and 42 Mk II as well as the Weymouth 49/50.

In addition, TT Boats designed their Seaward 23/25, surely these are Nelsons by any other name! (Except for the Nelson 29, all of the other mould tools were previously with Halmatic.)

Seaward are to be congratulated for their long standing devotion to the Nelson marque, and have produced many fine Nelson vessels.

Dale is run by Mike Reynolds in Neyland Pembrokeshire, South Wales. They produce an ever wider range of new Nelson designs called Dale Nelsons, all designed by Arthur Mursell of TT Boat Designs. Their craftsmanship and attention to detail produce an excellent range of Nelson Vessels, including with the Dale Nelson 38, (28 produced to date, and now moulded at 40 feet long), plus the Riva inspired Dale Nelson 45 with its top sides aft tumblehome and retroussé stern. They are currently working on new Nelson designs, which include a new 34, 41 and 56.

North-lines are produced in Franeker, Friesland, Holland. The company, Zeven Huizen Jacht Bouw is run by Sipko van Sluis. For many years the yard was involved with the building and fitting out of Halmatic Nelson 40's and 42 Mk2's mouldings.

In recent years Sipko has worked very hard to produce and establish a new range of Nelson vessels, which include the 34, 37, 42, 48 and 60, and like Seaward and Dale, Siepco has chosen to call his new range of Nelsons by another name, in this case North-lines. These vessels have been designed by Arthur Mursell of TT Boat designs and incorporate a number of unique features, and are beautifully fitted out.

Today the world is a different place and there are no longer companies producing Nelson GRP moulding (cascos,) for fitting out by others.

The new business model that works is for individual yards to build their own Nelson vessels, each with its own brand name. We are very lucky indeed that some of these yards still survive and prosper, so that we may continue to enjoy using these excellent boats.

I hope this somewhat concise information answers some of the 'Is it a Nelson?' questions. However as the Club's Historian I would always be happy to discuss in more depth any further questions that you may have. Also if you have any Nelson-related stories, articles or information for our website, these would be greatly appreciated.

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Enjoy your boating!

Notes to the text:

The first Nelsons were designed under the Keith Nelson & Co Ltd name formed in 1955, before TT Boat Designs was formed in 1961. These were the 18 ft., 23 ft., 26 ft. and 28-32 ft. wooden clinker built versions, plus the first 32 ft GRP boats.