



**THE EDUCATION  
OF HAP FAUTH  
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BY SEAN MCNEILL

**STROLLING THE DOCKS** In St. Tropez in June 2005, John "Hap" Fauth paused at the 66-foot *Sotto Voce*, a two-year-old custom Judel/Vrolijk design. It wasn't anything like his 116-foot cruising yacht *Whisper* or his Little Harbor 58 *Black Tie*. But Fauth was itching to get back into racing, which he'd done as a child. He couldn't refuse himself the guilty pleasure of owning a sleek racing yacht. He envisioned something in the 60-to-70-foot range, something more substantial than a stripped-down 40-footer, and after weighing the pros and cons of the purchase, Fauth eventually presented *Sotto Voce*'s Dutch owner an offer he couldn't refuse. Only some seven months later, after a remarkably windy Key West Race Week, did Fauth realize the magnitude of the step he'd taken into grand-prix racing. He thought he was ready to jump in and create new memories built on those from his teenage days in the 1960s, racing big boats on Long Island Sound. But 21st Century racing sloops pack a lot more power, especially in Key West's biting 20-knot winds and short, sharp chop. He never anticipated, says his longtime sailmaker, Tom McLaughlin, how quickly things happen aboard a big boat on a short course.

As he's climbed a steep grand-prix learning curve, Hap Fauth, 69, has invested heavily in his *Bella Mente* program, empowering the design and sailing teams to take calculated risks with new builds and technology.

Photo: Rolex/Daniel Forster

**FAUTH REALIZED HE HAD TO GET A PROFESSIONAL CREW TO MAKE THE PROGRAM SUCCEED, AND HAS SINCE SURROUNDED HIMSELF WITH ABUNDANT, ALBEIT WELL-COMPENSATED TALENT.**

"Race after race, they'd come around the top mark, and by the time they'd get the spinnaker set and the headsail down they'd be past the layline to the leeward mark," says McLaughlin, a confidant to Fauth for the past 12 years. "So they'd put a jibe in and come into the leeward mark all overstood, on two wheels, having to hoist the jib and then turn downwind to get the spinnaker down. Every single run it was the same scenario."

That week was Fauth's proverbial jump into the deep end, says McLaughlin. "He realized two things: the boat goes a lot faster than anticipated, and he had to get a crew that's more cohesive and stronger than the sum of its parts."

"That was my crossover boat," says Fauth. "It had training wheels—owner training wheels."

**FROM BUSINESS**

Fauth grew up on Long Island, in Babylon, N.Y., the son of an aerospace engineer father and schoolteacher mother, and learned to sail at the age of seven on Great South Bay. At 15 he began racing on big boats, which were active on Long Island Sound at the time, crewing on the Ziegler family's *Gem* as an apprentice sailmaker. He also worked summers and after school with sailmakers Owen Torrey and Skip Shaw at their loft in Oyster Bay, New York.

His life path led him to Georgetown University, which he attended at the behest of his mother, who "was a big fan of the Jesuits." Fauth was a three-sport athlete at Georgetown, representing the Hoyas in football, ice hockey, and sailing, and serving as captain of the football and sailing teams. But sports would eventually take a back seat as his business education took root. He and his wife, Geren, were also busy raising three children.

Fauth graduated in 1967 with a degree in business. He credits his experiences at Georgetown with shaping the person he is today—part entrepreneur, part risk taker, part consensus builder, part philanthropist. He is Chairman Emeritus of the Board of Advisors, Georgetown University McDonough School of Business, and a Director of Georgetown University. He also was a prime benefactor and fundraiser for the new business school. After graduation he joined Citicorp and, in 1982, he founded his own enterprise, The Churchill Companies, a privately held investment firm with a diversified portfolio.

"We're about nurturing companies," says Fauth. "A core belief of mine is that any business we get involved with should be a business where I can create value. Ultimately, unless this business will be better served with us as owners, we don't acquire it."

Fauth also founded and subsequently sold Churchill Equity, which managed more than \$1.2 billion in top-performing subordinated debt and equity investment funds—making investments in more than 100 companies for recapitalizations, acquisitions, buyouts, and growth.

A bulldog at heart, Fauth is a history buff and holds Winston Churchill, the "British Bulldog," in great admiration. His companies are named after the steadfast Prime Minister of Great Britain during World War II. Fauth greatly regards Churchill's ability to make unflinching decisions. He also sees human failings between the two, in their love of cigars and an occasional glass of scotch, and that they also tend to put their tongue before their mind.

"Churchill was extremely bright. He failed as much as he succeeded; he was a hero and goat in the same breath," says Fauth. "He wasn't the ultimate politician, but he was very smart. He could think down the chess board 15 moves ahead. He was very misunderstood."

**TO PLEASURE**

The calendar reads June 12 and the clock 1000 hours. Fauth has just arrived at Newport Shipyard for the day's practice sail in a few hours. His clothing leaves little doubt as to which boat he races aboard. On this grey, chilly morning he's wearing a *Bella Mente* jacket over a layer of fleece and a couple of undershirts, all emblazoned with the yacht's name and sail number, US 45, and the crossed burgees representing the New York YC and Storm Trysail Club. (Some crew's shirts even have a giant bulldog screened on the back.) His tan shorts and tan cap both bear an orange star that is the icon of the program.

Now 69, and with a flock of white hair distinguishing a man of confidence, Fauth is still spry. He needs to be. His current *Bella Mente*, a Judel/Vrolijk 72, is his second custom grand-prix racer since purchasing *Sotto Voce*. (Some might say he's purchased two and a half boats, but more on that later.) It was launched in 2012 and has an aggressive inshore and offshore racing program spanning the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, Caribbean and Mediterranean seas.

Sitting at a picnic table at the Shipyard, Fauth recounts his learning experiences over the past eight years. Although that first Key West Race Week didn't go well, he worked hard in the months following to tighten up his program.

The team in Key West was largely a pick up mob, friends of the captain at the time who were more accustomed to 30-footers, not powerful 60-footers. That was Fauth's first and perhaps most important lesson: To win he needed a competent crew. Fauth's diligence paid off with an impressive result six months after his debut event when *Bella Mente* won line honors in the Newport Bermuda Race.

It was one of the slowest Bermuda races, but they'd played their way across the Gulf Stream with aplomb, earning a silver and cedar plaque for first to finish in the 175-boat fleet, crossing the line more than two hours ahead of the 98-footer *Maximus*. "That was our first major race," says Fauth. "We were excited because we knew the boat wasn't competitive."

McLaughlin says that Fauth realized he had to get a professional crew to make the program succeed, and he has since surrounded himself with abundant, albeit well-compensated talent. Alongside McLaughlin, *Bella Mente*'s crew regularly includes the likes of John Cutler (America's Cup skipper/helmsman), Terry Hutchinson (winner of many world championships), Ian Moore (America's Cup and Volvo Ocean Race navigator), Mike Sanderson (America's Cup and Volvo Ocean Race veteran), longtime grand-prix sailors Hartwell Jordan and Grant Spanhake, and America's Cup grinders such as Craig Monk, Mark Newbrook, and Matt Welling. Fauth, more consensus builder than dictator, gives everyone a say and then picks the best thoughts to make a decision.

"Anyone that's been as successful in business as Hap has been is good at getting talented people around him and getting the most out of them," says Sanderson, the Kiwi who skippered the winning entry in the 2005-06 Volvo Ocean Race. "He's very good at using everyone for their strengths and respecting their experience in their area and using as much as he feels appropriate."



Hap Fauth, at the helm, points *Bella Mente*'s bow towards Bermuda in 2014. The team finished second to its rivals on *Shackwave* by seven minutes. Photo: Onne van der Wal

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Fauth treats his management team at Churchill much the same way. He sees himself as a coach who allows them to run on an open field, offering guidance and suggestions along the way. That sort of laissez-faire approach has been a boon for Fauth in business, but sometimes it can be a hindrance in sailing. McLaughlin is often frustrated by the lack of an organizational chart, but that's how Fauth does business.

"The dictator style doesn't work well for Hap in general," says Rob Oullette, the project manager. "He doesn't feel one person has all the answers. He likes to surround himself with guys that are great at their jobs, intelligent, and passionate."

Fauth, however, doesn't rely on them exclusively. He's a bona fide owner/driver, helming day races and taking his turn during offshore races. McLaughlin and Sanderson both describe him as a competent driver, despite his age and the physical nature required to keep *Bella Mente* on an even keel. While 69 might be the new 50, *Bella Mente* is a powerful yacht with a lot of load on the helm—the nearly 9-foot deep rudder also acts as a lifting surface. Watching the athletic Sanderson wrestle it during a power reach shows how fit Fauth is for his age.

"He's a very good amateur driver, no one has complaints. He has tremendous concentration skills," says McLaughlin.

"The difference with Hap," says Sanderson, "is that he's got one hundred other balls in the air where some of us only have sailing on our minds. One week he's trying to win the Mini-Maxi Worlds and the next week he'll have some very big business deal going on and there's no place in his head for the rate of turn in a jibe. He's got a great understanding of what makes the whole thing tick, and that makes it more enjoyable."

Fauth and crew have had their share of fun, especially if you spell fun as "w-i-n." Victories have been scored at the Rolex Mini-Maxi World Championship (2012), Palma Vela (2013) and the Fastnet Race (2013), with line honors in the Newport Bermuda Race (2006), Transpac (2011), and Caribbean 600 (2014).

On the flip side, there've been two troubling mast failures, two keel

fin and three ballast bulb changes, a new engine, and the disastrous first custom *Bella Mente* launched in 2009, which was well wide of its intended target.

"He paid for two but got one," says McLaughlin.

The 69-footer featured hard chines in the aft 30 feet and had a myriad of problems, one of which was it couldn't point sailing upwind. The chines were the result of a misinterpretation of computer data and that left Fauth with two choices: he could donate the boat and walk away or he could rebuild the aft sections in an attempt to make it competitive. (It should be noted that a sistership design, *Alfa Romeo*, now *Shockwave*, had a new hull designed and fixed to the original deck.) Despite the expense, he chose the latter.

"Hap said if you've got lemons let's make lemonade. He was extraordinary," says McLaughlin. "In the end, the designers stepped up and helped rebuild the back end of the boat, and it came out nice. They also designed a scoop for the Transpac and we won the Barn Door."

The racing lifestyle is certainly enjoyable, but Fauth admits to still flinching when he sees a bill come across his desk. He won't share his annual budget, but with so many pieces, parts, and personnel a reasonable guess places it upwards of \$3 million. At its height, the *Bella Mente* program moves around almost 30 people (including a sailmaker, boatbuilder, chef, and support staff), three containers, the yacht's cradle and, when available, a spare mast.

Fauth's learned philosophy, however, is that you can't starve a program such as this. Without the appropriate resources, something would break every time, and if something does break, a spare better be readily available in order to race the next day.

"The reality is it's all ridiculously expensive, but if you can't dance then don't play," he says. "You have two choices: you can bitch, moan, complain, and create a lot of broken glass and maybe get a reduction on your bill, or you can just out earn it. It's the same choices as in life. Just make enough money so it's irrelevant. It's part of the sport, it costs what it costs."

A week after we met at the Shipyard, Fauth and his crew of 17 set off on the Newport Bermuda Race, eight years after his first line-honors victory. He was, of course, intent on repeating the feat. The race started well enough, with *Bella Mente* opening a comfortable lead over rivals *Shockwave* and *Caol Ila R* as the sun set on the first night. In the cover of darkness, however, *Bella Mente* sailed into a windless hole and its rivals, watching her moves from astern on radar and the AIS safety tracking system, skirted a course to the west and put *Bella Mente* in their rear view mirrors. The next day and a half was a sprint to catch up, but *Bella Mente* finished 7 minutes behind *Shockwave* in the battle for line honors, a bitter pill to say the least.

"That first night the AIS was still on and they could see we were parked," Fauth recalls. "Whatever. We put the pedal down and really ripped the rest of the race. We closed 30 miles in a day and change, which is a ton. I don't think there's much else we could've done. It was one bit of bad luck."

It was a hard loss indeed, but Fauth remains unbowed. His stated goal for the year is to win the Rolex Mini-Maxi Worlds, scheduled for Sardinia in September. He wants to dominate the regatta; he's already won it. "To dominate would mean that we've optimized the hull shape and sail plan and didn't make any mistakes on the water," he says.

For a man who has the world at his fingertips, a convincing win would be a nice kicker to close this chapter of his education. Check that, his continuing education. ▲



A few of the many "Bella Boys." Steve Wilson, of Southern Spars, Hap Fauth, and Mike Sanderson at the New York YC in 2014.

Photo: Onne van der Wal