



Classic Bronze Yacht Blocks from J.M. Reineck & Son

Review by Maynard Bray

With the revival of traditional wooden boats, especially new sailboats built to old designs, there's been a corresponding slow but steady increase in the demand for appropriate bronze hardware. By working the grapevine or making their own patterns, builders and restorers have been able to satisfy most of their hardware needs -- with the single exception of good bronze blocks. Unless one had a metal-turning lathe and was adept at using it, the machining, assembly and finishing were beyond the average boatbuilder. And because almost any sailboat requires a variety of end connections such as front and side shackles, hooks and eyes, becketts and straps, there was no practical way people whose primary occupation was building new boats, or fixing up old ones, could take the time to make their own bronze blocks.

Happily, that sad state of affairs has begun to change, thanks largely to Jim Reineck. As owner of a turn-of-the-century Herreshoff-built Buzzards Bay 15, Jim searched in vain for proper replacements for the boat's worn-out blocks, and during the quest discovered that other folks, too, were in much the same predicament. He believed he'd discovered a market, and decided he and his wife, Mary, would go into the business of producing bronze blocks to Herreshoff drawings and, just as important, to Herreshoff standards of workmanship. Based on the samples I've seen, he's succeeded in meeting and has perhaps even exceeded those standards.

You can tell at a glance how carefully these blocks have been made. The machining is precise, and they haven't been overzealously polished (a mistake which can seriously thin-down load-carrying areas). But Jim has given his blocks an important new twist: He's fitted each one with ball bearings. This has the immediate benefit of reducing friction and, in the long run, cuts down the inevitable wear that always occurs when a sheave rotates directly on a pin, bronze-to-bronze. And they'll never squeak. In fact, these blocks carry a lifetime guarantee.

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Jim will furnish a variety of end connections, built to the same configuration as the originals. There are flat and concaved flange eyes for deck and round spars; hooks to be moused in place with marline; traveler links; shackles that can be used for both front and side mountings; span hooks for peak halyard bridles; and offset straps for attaching the throat halyard block to a round mast. Since all these connections are relatively inconspicuous and because the castings themselves are quite smooth, Jim has decided not to polish them, and to pass the resulting savings on to the customers. The shell and the sheaves, however, gleam like jewelry.

For the bearings, Jim uses 36 Delrin balls running in two rows. The sheave itself serves as the outer race; the inner race and the end caps are of Delrin. Because the Delrin parts are completely hidden, they don't detract at all from the appearance of the finished blocks; they look exactly like the originals; but the sheaves spin smoothly and almost silently, and will continue spinning effortlessly for years without lubrication. If you're committed to 100% authenticity, however, the blocks can be ordered with plain bearings.

At this writing, there's a line of 7/16" blocks for 3/8" rope -- the size Jim needed for his Buzzards Bay 15 and, fortunately for me, the size of AIDA's deck-mounted mizzen sheet block. The new Buzzards Bay 15s being built by Bullhouse Boatworks (WoodenBoat 124) are being fitted with them as well, as is the first Flatfish (Joel White's centerboard version of the Herreshoff Fish class) being built by Joe Youcha of the Alexandria Seaport Foundation. Jim Reineck forecasted that by the time this magazine is printed, a line of 3/8" blocks for 5/16" rope, would be available. Next will be added blocks for 7/16" rope, and from there, who knows? As one who has long admired the designs of all things Herreshoff, I'm delighted that Jim Reineck is in the business of building appropriate reproductions of the most beautiful small blocks I have ever seen.

*Maynard Bray is a contributing editor for **WoodenBoat** magazine. J.M. Reineck & Son, 9 Willow St., Hull, MA 02045-1121; 781-925-3312; JMRandSon@aol.com. The basic 7/16" block (for 3/8"-diameter rope) is priced at \$40. To this must be added the cost of the end connection you select-- an average cost of \$15.*