

STORM MARINE PARTNERS WITH ESSEX YACHT CLUB OF EASTERN CONNECTICUT

A Fleet of versatile new Storm 18s will be Essex's new club fleet in 2026

ESSEX, CT, UNITED STATES, December 9, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Storm Marine Group (SMG) has formed a new partnership with the Essex Yacht Club (EYC), which will soon result in a fleet of eight new Storm 18s sailing off the waters of Essex, CT. The fleet will make its debut this spring.

"Three years ago, our club began a search for a boat to replace our aging fleet of Ideal 18s," says Bill Jones, a member of the club's Sailing Committee who oversees club racing and led the replacement effort. "The Ideals served us really well over the years, but since they aren't produced anymore and even getting parts for repair can be an adventure, it was time for us to move on."

The Storm 18 was built specifically with the needs of organizations like EYC in mind because no one else in the industry is really doing it at present. Institutional boats – or "club boats" – are typically acquired as fleets by larger organizations such as yacht clubs, schools or public sailing centers for use by their members, students and the public. Most institutional boats are built to accommodate 2-5 sailors. Many of the most historically popular classes are either no longer built at all, hard to replace and find parts for, or manufactured overseas at too high an expense for most US-based sailing organizations.

"We spent several months starting last fall field testing our prototypes all over the country," says Crane, the former Chairman of LaserPerformance Group. "Our development and design team engaged in a longer and more exhaustive process to support the goal of building the best and most versatile club boat ever produced."



Essex Yacht Club members Bill Jones and Renny Schoonmaker test sailing the Storm 18 earlier this year on the Connecticut River.

Organizations and clubs like EYC need a community use boat that is durable enough to limit constant maintenance costs, easy to store low to the ground on trailers, easy to rig and unrig, user-friendly and versatile enough to support junior sailing, learn-to-sail programs for women and men and still be a fun boat that can be used for intermediate to advance team and match racing, and fleet racing.

“At first the idea of a new boat seemed a little radical to some of our members,” says Jim Biggart, EYC’s sailing committee chair. “We were particularly concerned with our women members since they represent over half of our sailors. In the end, the boat sold itself. Once our membership had the chance to sail it, they became converts.” Biggart noted that the club unanimously approved the purchase of eight 18s at the EYC annual meeting this past Saturday.



Essex members enjoyed the versatility of the Storm 18, which is capable of sailing comfortably with two, three or more adults.

The process with Essex started almost a year ago, and Crane says the key was having enough prototypes built so that boats could be loaned to the club for a few weeks this summer for as many trials sails as possible.

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“I think the key for us is that the boat is specifically designed for use as a club fleet that integrates numerous features tailored to meet the demands of many different sailors,” says EYC Commodore Bill Gunther. “Young and older, women and men, special needs, seasoned and novice, spinnaker and non-spinnaker – you name the group and it works for them.”

The Storm 18 is also easy to store and move from place to place, sitting very low on trailers and features symmetrical and asymmetrical rigging capable of sailing comfortably with two, three or more adults, an aluminum deck stepped mast, robust construction that can withstand use by many different members, and a stable teaching platform

good for juniors and other age groups.

“The first thing people noticed is how stable and comfortable she is,” says Jones. “The boat is easy to handle tracks and is a joy sail: quick in the light stuff so we can beat the river current, and yet super easy in the big blow when it’s wise to be safe.”

Crane and partner Karl Ziegler enlisted a group of influential marine industry experts and professionals to form the Storm Marine Group

(www.stormmarinegroup.com) last

year with the specific goal of taking institutional boat building to the next level, and the Storm 18 is their first major product. The team included David Clark from Fulcrum Speedworks legendary sailor and sailmaker Robbie Doyle, as well as naval architects Bob Ames and Casey Brown, a team Crane describes as an “marine industry all-star team” all committed to helping create a next level on water experience



The Storm design and development team is a virtual all star team of industry talent. Pictured here are three members working this summer at Essex Yacht Cub on some of the adjustments made during the process: Robbie Doyle, Chris Crane and Will Hundahl.

They both spent years sailing the Ideal 18 as their club boat, one of the most popular small watercrafts ever built, and wanted to create a new design that built on the overall success of the Ideal while addressing all the flaws they knew too well. They toured the first prototypes down the Atlantic Coast through Louisiana and Texas before finishing their “test tour” at US Sailing’s Sailing Leadership Forum (<https://sailingleadership.org>) in Coronado, California, in February.

During the national tour, dozens of sailors from many different backgrounds sailed the 18 and gave feedback on all aspects of the experience, and Crane and his team have made extensive adjustments and changes based on that feedback: raising the boom six inches, adjusting the size of the mainsail, redesigning spinnaker bags and sail covers, and moved essential controls away from the center console to reduce the “spaghetti factory” of extensive lines and instruments that can be perplexing especially for new sailors.

Ziegler emphasized that increased demand with the space for a more versatile, affordable and adaptable watercraft in this general size category drove every decision. “We want this boat to appeal to women and persons with disabilities in terms of being able to move easily around the boat,” he says.

Crane and Ziegler both see the Storm 18 as an evolution of the Ideal that is modern, ergonomic,

durable, and easy to maintain that helps clubs and sailing centers meet the growing post-COVID demand from people who want to join organizations that provide a fleet of boats rather than starting off by buying their own. The MSRP price of each boat is \$53,000.

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