

## Biography

### Henri Copponex (1907 - 1970)

#### Naval architect

Regatta competitor, Olympic bronze medal winner in Rome in 1960

Honorary member of the Société Nautique de Genève (SNG)

Henri Copponex was born in Geneva on September 25, 1907. As a teenager, he was already designing models and testing them on water. Having become a civil engineer (with a degree from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich), he was also to become an emeritus naval architect and helmsman.

At the request of the Geneva Society for the Promotion of Yachting, Copponex designed the Moucheron in 1934, then the Lacustre in 1938. He also produced plans for Swedish 30 m<sup>2</sup>, 15 m<sup>2</sup> SNS (Swiss National Series), and about thirty 5.5 m IR (international rule), including the famous *Ylliam X*, *Tam-Tam* and *Ballerina IV and V*.

Following the success of the Lacustre, he designed the Espadon, which was to be, in his view, a more successful version of the Lacustre. In 1951, he again caused surprise by designing a catamaran. But Copponex was interested not only in racing boats. He also designed dinghies for life-saving societies, including those of Nyon, Saint-Prex, Morges and Le Bouveret. In 1969 Copponex designed his last boat, the Paladin.

During his sporting career he won about twelve national titles in 6 m IR, in 15 m<sup>2</sup> SNS and in Lacustre. He took part in numerous international regattas: in 1928 at Cannes on a 6 m IR; at Genoa, where he won victory after victory in the 5.5 m IR series in 1952, 1958 and 1960. He represented Switzerland at the 1948 Olympic Games in Torquay (7<sup>th</sup> place in 6 m IR); then in 1952 at the Helsinki Olympic Games (10<sup>th</sup> place in 5.5 m IR). And it was at the Rome Olympic Games (Naples) in 1960 with the 5.5 m IR *Ballerina IV* that Henri Copponex, Manfred Metzger, the yacht's owner, and Pierre Girard won a bronze medal. It was exceptional that five of the sailing boats in the competition had been designed by Copponex !

With such a record, the "prince of the lake", as one sport newspaper used to call him, became a legend in his lifetime. With his talent and strong personality, Copponex influenced Geneva yachting from the 1930s to 1970s. He was also liked for his human qualities, his simplicity and modesty.

His premature death in 1970 deprived sailing enthusiasts of a great sportsman and a

talented naval architect. Every year the Société Nautique de Genève holds the Copponex Memorial, a regatta in tribute of the deceased great architect and sportsman.