

America II sets sail

BY NICOLE BODE

DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

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Dabin for News

Moët & Chandon America II catches a breeze near Ellis Island. **Click image to view gallery.**

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In its prime, the America II represented New York City in an elite race against the world's swiftest vessels.

The streamlined 65-foot yacht fell short of winning the coveted America's Cup trophy in 1987. But 20 years later, the venerable boat is back in local waters, to the delight of local sailing aficionados.

"I never dreamed we'd get this boat but we did," said Commodore Michael Fortenbaugh, head of the Manhattan Sailing Club, whose members bought the boat, which was being chartered out in Hawaii, from its owners this year. "It's a sailor's dream. It's solid, it's fast, it's a pure racing



Brolin for News

Michael Fortenbaugh, Commodore of the Manhattan Sailing Club, takes visitors on a tour

around the tip of Manhattan on the newly christened Moet & Chandon America II. machine."

Fortenbaugh, 44, dreamed up the idea to bring the boat to the North Cove marina in anticipation of the club's 20th anniversary this year.

Its headquarters, which sits just west of the World Trade Center, had resuscitated a membership decimated by 9/11, and wanted a flagship to demonstrate their excitement. "Everybody loves it. Everybody wants to come on board," said co-owner Linda Kulla, 47, of Gramercy.

The America II is a piece of history - built by the New York Yacht Club in 1986 in hopes of regaining its century-long America's Cup winning streak cut short three years earlier by the Australians.

But it still sails like a hot rod. Featuring a 85-foot-tall mast, the boat has plenty more heft than a normal sailboat - meaning a faster ride.

On a recent sail, the ship handily outpaced other racing ships bobbing off the Battery Park shoreline.

"Just sitting here you can feel the extreme power of this boat," said John LaGrassa, 45, as the boat sliced through the choppy waters. "We're just moving away on them."

The public can experience it for themselves starting this summer, when the America II starts accepting charter tours around New York Harbor. The 3-hour tours cost \$5,000 and include a bottle of Moet & Chandon champagne, the America II sponsor.

As the only 12-meter-class boat docked in New York City, Fortenbaugh wanted to open up the boat to as many people as possible. The tours will also help maintain the boat's pricey upkeep.

And although it's only been back in the city for a short time, the boat is already attracting plenty of attention. "Strangers stop and stare," Kulla said. "It's great."

nbode@nydailynews.com