

# Minigaffers



I suppose there was an element of rediscovering our roots about the organisation of this event, which proved to be one of the most enjoyable exercises we have undertaken on YM for years.

For our resident Ransomaniac here, in the Walton Backwaters, was the real Secret Waters; Mastodon Island, Amazon Creek, Flint Island, the Red Sea, Swallow Island and Arthur Ransom's own, real-life favourite anchorage, Kirby Creek (Goblin Creek in *Secret Waters*), where we anchored for lunch.

Those of us who day-sailed dinghies years ago, recaptured the immediacy and responsiveness of small boat sailing and the self-containment of a launch-sail-recover-drive-home lifestyle. We all felt nostalgic, not just for the pretty gaff



*Above: the Coaster, lightest and simplest of the fleet, excels as a day sailer and picnic boat. Right: in contrast, the Gypsy was built and equipped to a very high standard, which was reflected in the price*





How do you brighten the hearts of yachting writers with the verdigris of winter on their souls? Giving them four pretty little character yachts, an idyllic cruising ground with literary antecedents and a generous dose of sunshine is a pretty good start. Our reporting team of Andrew Bray, James Jermain, Peter Nielsen and Paul Gelder assess the Cornish Shrimper, Drascombe Coaster, Norfolk Gypsy and Winkle Brig



*Above: the Shrimper already has a considerable reputation and is the benchmark design for this sort of sailing. Right: however, even the Winkle Brig, by far the smallest boat, boasted more headroom below decks*



rigs and traditional hull lines but for an easier and cheaper form of boating without huge marina fees or complex electronic, electrical and mechanical systems to maintain. For these boats a metre of water is enough to sail in, a river estuary a cruising ground. But we are all cruising men at heart, so the fact that each of the boats offered a couple of proper bunks, cooking facilities of sorts, a loo and some stowage suggested we could really have our cake and eat it.

We had brought together four small yachts whose greatest attribute was their individualism the Cornish Shrimper, Winkle Brig, Drascombe Coaster and Norfolk Gypsy.

Our host for the event was the delightful Titchmarsh Marina, run by John Titchmarsh, tucked away in



Twizzle Creek in the Walton Backwaters.

Although we got the four together in one place at one time, this was not a competitive event nor, indeed, an attempt to find out if one was better than another. Each was quite different and had merits of its own. Rather, we were looking for a lifestyle, a reason why this type of sailing has shown an increase in popularity while cruising in larger yachts has taken a bit of a knock.

The answer is really quite simple. They are good to look at, fun to sail, and practical, if compact, weekend cruisers. But perhaps above all, they are an antidote to the high pressure, high mooring fee, crowded environment which sailing has become in many parts. Park the boat at home or on a cheap, drying mooring, explore parts other boats cannot reach, and change cruising ground almost at will.

The four boats all showed up well within their own design brief. The smallest, the Winkle Brig, was just 16ft long yet had longer and wider berths than any of the others. Her more traditional gaff rig was at a disadvantage to windward, even with the topsail set, but she was great fun off the wind. The Drascombe Coaster is developed from their Longboat, and is still more of a dayboat-with-a-cuddy than the others. However, she has a huge cockpit, is simple and light, can be towed behind smaller cars than the 2-litre plus size needed for the others, and she is launched and rigged easily.

The Cornish Shrimper and Norfolk Gypsy shared many attributes, not surprising since the builder of the Gypsy is a former Shrimper owner. The Shrimper proved the handier in performance terms and had a more tweakable rig. The Gypsy is slightly larger, has a bigger cabin and is built and equipped to more substantial specifications.

By the end of the rally, the YM team were running round with big grins like schoolboys in a chocolate factory and conversation was all about changing lifestyles and rediscovering the simple life. The yachts, the weather and the tranquillity of the Backwaters had woven their magic.

### Drascombe Coaster

The simplest and lightest of the group, this development of the company's Longboat day-sailer has a hull reminiscent of a rowing skiff. Long, lean and low, she looks easily driven (on the road as well as on the water), as indeed she needs to be given the low aspect, rather small and unsophisticated rig. The cuddy looks high in comparison to the topsides but is discreetly rounded and not unattractive.

The light spars and simple rigging allow the boat to be set up quickly and easily. David West, representing Cornish Drascombe, which kindly supplied the boat and which operates a fleet of charter Drascombes, did the lot in slightly less than 25 minutes, including

shipping the 6hp Suzuki outboard.

The spars stow partly inside the cuddy. Stepping the mast involves locating the foot in the tabernacle and sliding a pin through. Stays are hooked to chainplates, then the mast is lifted up and forestay shackled to the stemhead.

The 6hp outboard, which lives in a well aft of the rudder and mizzen, is almost enough to make the Coaster plane. The hull is virtually a skiff, and the very shallow vee bottom draws just 12in with the board up, a bit under 4ft with it down. The board is raised using a



The rest of the procedure involves securing the gunter yard to the mast by tying the jaws on, fitting the halyard to the yard, and tying the luff of the sail to the mast. The sail, having no boom, is stowed by brailing it against the mast and tying it loosely. The bumpkin is just slotted through the transom and held in place by the mizzen sheet. The mizzen sail is rolled around its mast, which is plucked out of its mount, and rotated to furl/unfurl the sail. Mainsail reefing is accomplished by freeing the halyard and letting the yard slide down the mast; there is a single row of reef points. Being boomless, the main is very easy to handle and can be just bundled up and shoved down the companionway if you want it out of the way temporarily. The heavy, galvanised rudder is slotted through the deck and does not need to be clamped in place.

rope drum controlled from the cockpit.

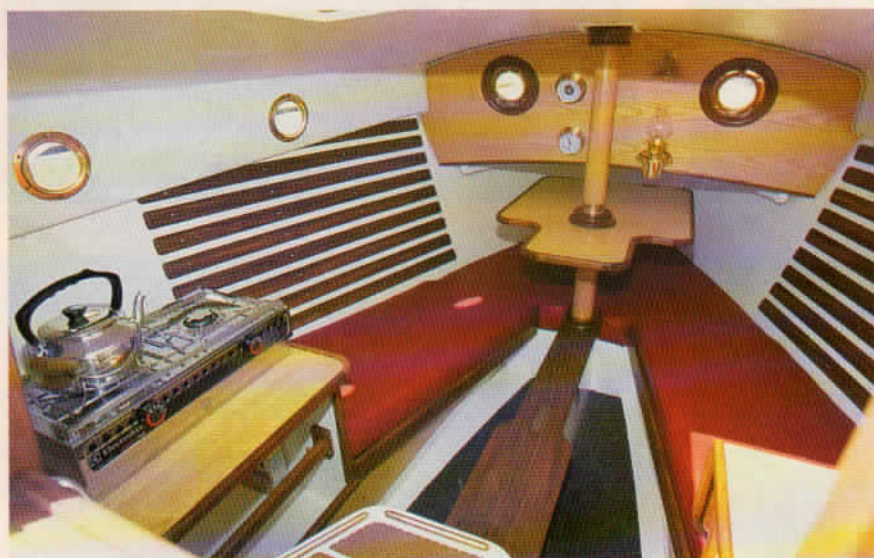
With all sail set, she has a good turn of speed off the wind and felt quite responsive, although she needed help from a backed jib during a couple of light airs tacks. Pointing ability was restricted by the mainsail, which is hard to trim flat, and a saggy forestay. The headsail sheet leads are at the point of maximum beam, which does not help. Downwind, the main balloons because of the lack of boom.

One good thing about the loose mainsail foot is that no one will get clonked on the head by a swinging boom, although I did receive a hefty clout on the ear from the clew block on one occasion during a gybe. The mainsheet runs on a horse, and its tail is led along the tiller to a jam cleat which none of our reviewers liked.

We tried heaving to under headsail



*Clockwise from below left: functional and sparse, the interior of the Coaster. The Gypsy was almost opulent below, some thought cluttered. The Winkle Brig was the only three-berth boat and impressively roomy. Good stowage and all the necessities on the Shrimper*



Photographs by Patrick Roach

my back involved jamming an arm into the open locker outboard. The centre-board case makes life difficult in terms of moving around and getting changed in the cuddy, but acts as a room divider when you are asleep so you can't see the person in the opposite bunk.

There is good stowage aft of the cockpit in two deep, long lockers on either side of the rudder case. The cockpit is not self-draining and must be pumped out with one of the two bilge pumps. The other pumps out the interior.

There is teak trim here and there, notably on gunwales, but mainly the impression is of unadorned GRP. Construction is a three-piece moulding with wood reinforcement at stress points.

Non-standard bits on this boat included the toilet, bilge pumps, oars/rowlocks, sprayhood, cooker and roller-reefing gear. List price without them is £8,846.84. The trailer is another £1,600. Including the trailer, a Coaster with all extras would cost nearly £13,500. PN

### Norfolk Gypsy

From the tight turn of her round bilge through the chunky square cabin top to the tip of her high peaked gaff, the Gypsy was clearly a yacht of top quality, and in terms of construction, finish and equipment, was a degree ahead of the other yachts in the field. Her brass ports and chainplates, and galvanised shackles (but stainless steel rigging) give her a true old-world image.

Despite being quite a heavy boat at just over 1 ton displacement and having a generous spread of canvas, she was a very easy boat to rig and launch, taking just 15 minutes for one person to prepare for the water.

The process is speeded by the fact that all rigging except the forestay can be left in place during trailing, including the boom which is attached to the tabernacle rather than the mast. When lowered, the mast overhangs the transom by a short enough distance to be left secured to the tabernacle. Once the sail covers are off, the mast can be raised straightaway. Although it looks a chunky and heavy spar, it actually goes up very easily one-handed. Once lifted to about 30 degrees, the rest of the journey to vertical is made by pulling in on the tackle which tensions the jib luff. The forestay is fitted and tensioned with a lanyard. The sail can be left laced to the spars.

The custom-designed breakback trailer coped well with the difficult, shallow-angled slip, and the boat went in while the car's wheels were just clear of the water and the trailer's immersed.

The Gypsy was a delight to sail. She had the stability of a much larger boat but the immediacy of a big dinghy. The roller-reefing jib and big main gave her a good turn of speed and she matched the sportier Shrimper almost exactly. She needed a kicking strap and clew outhaul as well as a slightly better cut main to develop her full potential, but this sort of sophistication is probably not what the boat is all about.

As it was, she tacked through 90 degrees and stood up to her canvas well even with 18 knots of wind over the deck. The massive rudder (which has to be removed for launching), with its

and mizzen, which she did quite well, and also going to windward under the same sails, which she did but in unspectacular fashion.

Given the rig's bias towards ease of handling, the Coaster performed well from a close reach through to a broad reach. Visibility forward under sail is restricted by the high cuddy, which also makes going forward a bit tricky.

One of our reviewers managed to dip the leerrail and ship 4in of water, but the bridgedeck kept it out of the cabin. The Coaster has a good reputation for survival at sea. She is self-righting and packed with foam buoyancy.

On first sight of the boat, my heart sank; was I actually expected to sleep on board? As it turned out, the accommodation was adequate, considering the concept of the boat. The two berths are long enough, but narrow; sleeping on

Trim is pretty basic as you would expect. Most of the area under the berths is occupied by foam buoyancy and the cuddy is a bit short on dedicated stowage areas. The Porta Potti is optional and stows beside the centreboard.

Cooking facilities are confined to a single Camping Gaz burner, which swings in a recess under the bridgedeck. Whilst one could use it from inside the cuddy, we found it easier to unhook it and cook on the bridgedeck. At rest, the high bulkhead to the cuddy provides an excellent backrest, and with the large sprayhood up the cockpit is well sheltered. The cockpit seats are long enough to sleep on but a bit narrow for an adult. With the optional cockpit tent rigged, the boat would be quite habitable in a bracing kind of way. David says families of up to five often charter these boats for a week!





small, drop plate, gives quite heavy steering but almost neutral helm even when well heeled. She tacks steadily and sail controls fall easily to the hand of the helmsman.

The four-square cuddy gives full sitting headroom and the largest, best equipped cabin in the group. She has two berths which are a good length but on the narrow side. The table is fixed to the mast support pillar and swings round into the bows when not needed. A Porta Potti or seatoilet is mounted in a box astern of the starboard bunk, the lid of which forms the chart table. Astern of this again is a stowage bin for boots – useful for a trailer-sailer. The galley opposite features a two-burner alcohol stove which can be fixed or gimballed. Water is stowed in four jerry cans in a cockpit locker with a hand pump at the basin in the galley. The centreboard case divides the cabin in half, but there is still sufficient foot room on each side and two people could get ready for bed below at the same time.

The 9hp inboard Yanmar fits under the bridgedeck and is easily accessed. There is a seven gallon fuel tank. The cockpit is deep, secure and comfortable. A single bilge pump has a diverter valve to drain both the cockpit sump and bilge sump. Foam buoyancy bow and stern would keep her afloat if she was flooded.

The foredeck is an anchor well which offers reasonable security. There is a big samson post with fairleads and a bow roller, all in brass.

The hull is a conventional moulding to a high standard. The deck has a balsa core on flat surfaces. All fittings are high

*Launching, clockwise from top left: the Coaster, light and easy to manhandle. The Gypsy slipped off her breakback trailer very easily. Winkle Brig, rides high on conventional, rigid trailer. The Shrimper's, piggy-back trailer saves road wheel bearings*

quality and she is well equipped, though the rally boat had a lot of extras. The basic boat costs £20,553 with in-board engine and an extra £1,800 for the trailer, with another £1,100 being needed to bring her up to the rally specification. She is not cheap, therefore, but she is, as Andrew Bray observed, the Rolls Royce of this sort of boat. JJ

### Cornish Shrimper

It is now 12 years since the Shrimper was launched and, following the example of her forebear, the Crabber, she was an immediate success. The fact that 530 have now been built (15 per cent for export), and even in a depressed marine market demand remains high, speaks for itself.

The boat's appeal lies less in being a compact, family car trailable, weekend estuary and inshore cruiser – others on the market perform the role better and at less expense – than in being something a little bit different. Indeed, as Cornish Crabbers' Managing Director Peter Keeling points out, one of the reasons for her popularity is that she appeals to the yachtsman who is trading down in size of boat and does not want just another lookalike mass production pocket cruiser.

The immediate demand for the

inboard version, sporting a 9hp Yanmar 1GM10 diesel, appears to bear this out. She's a pretty boat and not extreme in any dimension, looking very much like a scaled down Crabber. She has virtually flush decks over the small cabin, that runs for about half her length, and a large cockpit (over 8ft long) with seats long enough to sleep on under the optional cockpit tent. The inboard diesel is boxed at the fore end of the cockpit and the four-gallon fuel tank lives in the locker created by covering in what would be the outboard well in the standard version. The cockpit is not self-draining and is therefore fitted with two bilge pumps, one for the main bilge and the other for the cockpit. There is adequate cockpit locker stowage, whilst the recessed foredeck, below which is foam buoyancy, provides a home for bitts, anchor and cable. Further foam buoyancy is provided under the berths.

Accommodation is simple. Two long berths (6ft 9in) run part way under the cockpit seats but are open enough to the cabin for easy entrance/exit and are surprisingly comfortable. At the fore end a full-width shelf houses the single burner, gimballed cooker, the 'sink', a flush mounted bucket, and the water tank, a container with pump. Ahead of this are cave lockers for food and utensil stowage.

I have to admit – and this is my only real criticism of an otherwise well designed, built and thought-out boat – that at, over 6ft 2in, I found the accommodation uncomfortably cramped. With only 33in between bunk and deckhead I was unable to sit upright



down below and found the gap between bunk front and centreboard casing too narrow for my feet.

The rig is a high peaked gaff using Collar wooden spars and the mast deck-stepped in a tabernacle. The headsail is on a Holt Allen roller-reefing luff spar. Peter Keeling reckons that, for the type of sailing for which she is intended, a storm jib is unnecessary – 'she will make ground to windward in a gale under very deep reefed main and two-thirds foresail.'

The systems on the boat have been designed so that all operations, from rigging and launching to sailing and recovery can be achieved singlehanded and with little fuss, and obviously a great deal of thought has gone into getting it right. So although the Shrimper was not the quickest boat to ready for launch, it was possible for one person to complete the operation at an unhurried and unstressed pace in about 40 minutes. Keeling reckons that an hour is a sensible target.

The trial boat came with an ingenious piggyback trolley/trailer arrangement, the idea being that the trolley is rolled off and used for the launch, protecting the main trailer bearings and brakes.

One of the advantages of gaff rig is that the shorter spars mean no long overhangs when towing and ease of raising the mast – in the case of the Shrimper this is aided by a tackle at the head of the luff spar. The length of the mast means that it cannot remain in the tabernacle for towing.

As with the other boats, the shallow angle of the slip at Titchmarsh made launching difficult, as the Shrimper needs about 2ft 3in of water to float off her trolley. Recovery was very much easier and it took less than seven minutes to get her on her trolley and to the top of the slip.

The Yanmar provided more than enough push for her to reach hull speed of around 5.5 knots. The outboard alternative recommended is 4hp or 5hp. She was handy enough when manoeuvring to avoid embarrassment, though not as quick as her size and displacement might suggest. The centreboard and drop rudder make a significant difference.

Under sail, though, she really came to life. In the ideal testing conditions, between Force 3 and 4, she sparkled. A lot of attention has been given to sail controls so that everything can be handled from the cockpit, and a certain amount of tweaking is possible with main and peak halyards, main outhaul and kicker. Of all the boats in the rally, the Shrimper's rig was the best sorted in terms of sail shape and control.

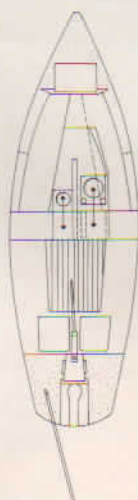
She reached 5 knots easily when cracked off a few degrees and was very responsive, much like a big dinghy. She tacked without hesitation, and the fact that she paced the potentially-faster Gypsy almost inch for inch for a couple of miles and on different points of

sailing, is evidence of her rig's efficiency. In a word, she was fun to sail.

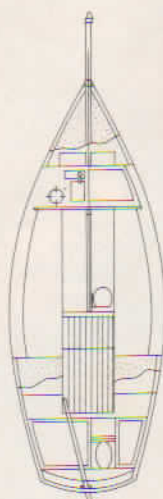
The Shrimper was one of the first of the present generation of mini gaffers and, justifiably, she remains the most popular. She's well thought-out, well built and a delight to sail. A strong

Eric designed the boat 'with a bit of Cape Cod Catboat, a bit of YM Senior and bilgeboards, like the Atalanta'. The bilgeboards are GRP with a metal insert. When retracted they act as mini keels for drying out.

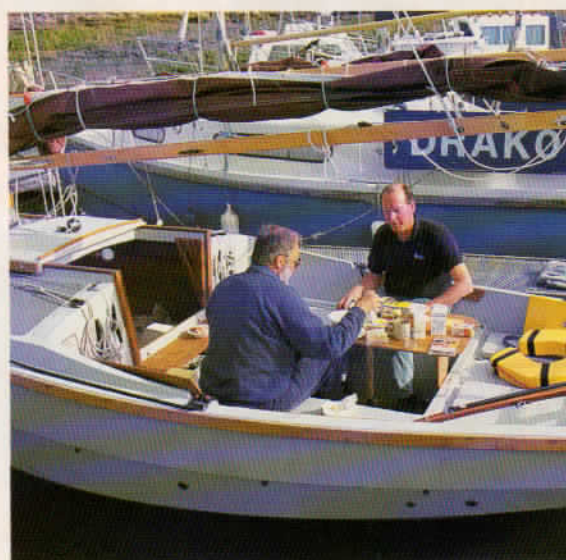
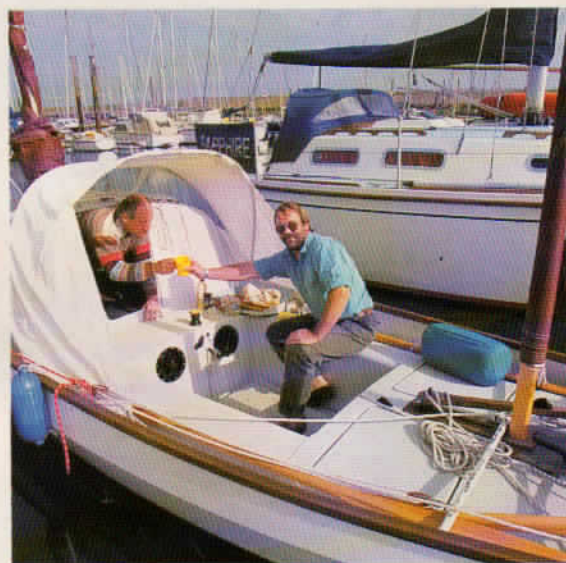
She took 30 minutes to rig, but if you



Drascombe Coaster



Cornish Shrimper



owners' association with an active on and off-water programme is an added benefit. She is well priced at £15,377 complete with inboard. A normal trailer adds £1,640, and the trolley/trailer combination costs £2,277. **AB**

### Winkle Brig

The smallest and most traditional of the fleet, the Winkle Brig was described by Andrew Bray as 'a little bumblebee of a boat'.

She was designed five years ago by Eric Bergqvist, who has long made a speciality of small traditional designs (the 19ft Memory was one of his more popular designs). Almost seventy of this model have been built, including a few of the open, dayboat version. Ten or so have been sold overseas. A Mk II version, with an extra 2in of headroom, has just been launched.

subtract a problem with a tangled tops' 1 halyard (which meant taking down the mast again), 25 minutes becomes a realistic target time.

When packed up for trailing, the mast stows in an adjustable galleys at the after end and in a specially designed GRP cradle beside the tabernacle at the forward end. This keeps the spar clear of the hatch so that access to the interior remains clear should you wish to use the boat as a caravan during the road transport stage.

Eric's wife Alison designed the interior. Despite her 16ft, the Winkle Brig has as much space below as the others in the fleet. Having no centreboard case in the cabin was the big advantage, vastly increasing leg room and allowing the widest bunks of any. The cabin also contrives to offer three and a half bunks, making her more of a small family boat



*Clockwise from below left: the Coaster's big cockpit and long afterdeck provide lots of open area for picnics. The Gypsy's cockpit is deep and secure, with very good stowage. This moulding and adjustable gallows on the Winkle Brig makes for very easy mast stowing. A cockpit table turns the Shrimper's cockpit into an al fresco dining room*

than the others. The midships galley on the port side has twin gas burners and (under the quarterberth cushion), twin washing up bowls. A chemical loo slides under the companionway.

For sheer speed, the Winkle Brig was rather left behind by the others. She was

significantly shorter on the waterline and her low peaked gaff was also a disadvantage when beating. She was certainly not at her happiest when going to windward, even with the topsail set.

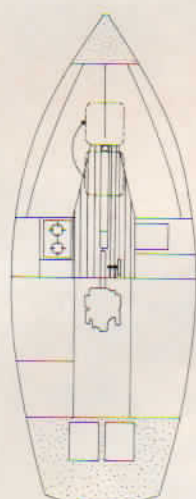
But these boats should be judged more on the fun quotient than absolute speed, and on this scale the Winkle Brig scores highly. The topsail adds complication, but playing with it is fun.

Although lighter and less stiff than the Shrimper or Gypsy, she still felt stable, even a little heavy to handle. She tacked steadily but needed to be sailed quite free to make reasonable way to windward.

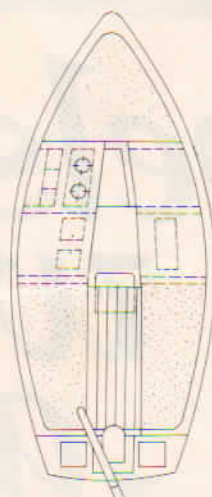
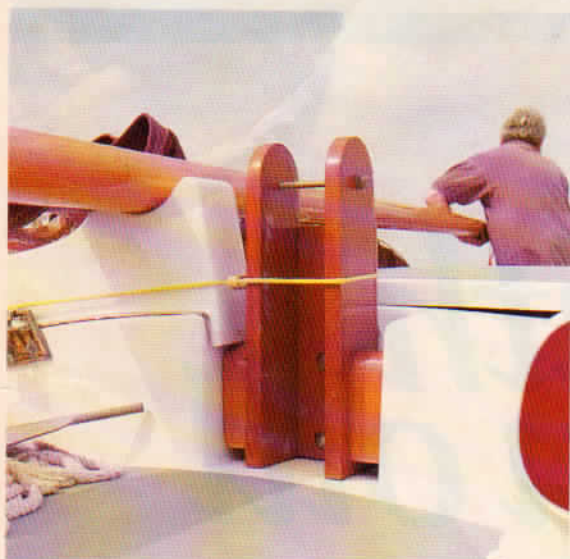
Off the wind she trundled along purposefully, but the addition of a kicking strap would keep the sail in better shape. We would also have liked a jamming cleat for the mainsheet.

The cockpit is a reasonable size and all controls come to hand nicely. The bilgeboards are raised with simple lanyards on the bridgedeck. The outboard is mounted in a well and is fixed, so propeller drag is another slowing factor.

The rally boat had seen a fair amount of service already, but had stood up to it well. The construction is solid and the finish pretty good. The basic price is £8,598.45, which makes her the cheapest of the group. A road trailer and outboard would add about £2,000, and to fit all the bits and pieces on the rally boat would add another £500 or so. PG



Norfolk Gypsy



Winkle Brig

#### Further information

**Coaster:** Honnor Marine (UK) Ltd, Dracombe Works, Dartington, Totnes, Devon TQ9 6DP (Tel: 0803 862228)

**Gypsy:** North Norfolk Boatbuilding Co, Hemstead Road, Holt, Norfolk NR25 6ES (Tel: 0263 71 1487)

**Shrimper:** Cornish Crabbers Ltd, Rock, Wadebridge, Cornwall PL27 6PH (Tel: 0208 862666)

**Winkle Brig:** Eric Bergqvist, Ferry Boatyard, Fiddlers Ferry Yacht Haven, Penketh, Cheshire (Tel: 092572 7519)

#### Specifications

	Coaster	Gypsy	Shrimper	Winkle Brig
LOD	6.63m (21ft 9in)	6.10m (19ft 10in)	5.87m (19ft 3in)	4.88m (16ft)
LWL	5.50m (18ft)	5.40m (17ft 9in)	5.33m (17ft 6in)	4.57m (15ft)
Beam	2m (6ft 7in)	2.3m (7ft 6in)	2.18m (7ft 2in)	2.03m (6ft 8in)
Draught (Min)	0.3m (1ft)	0.5m (1ft 8in)	0.46m (1ft 6in)	0.35m (1ft 2in)
(Max)	1.19m (3ft 10in)	1.2m (3ft 11in)	1.22m (4ft)	0.76m (2ft 6in)
Ballast	72kg, c/b (160 lb)	211kg (465 lb)	317kg (700 lb)	150kg (330 lb)
Displacement	480kg (1,060 lb)	1,090kg (2,399 lb)	1,065kg (2,350 lb)	650kg (1,430 lb)
Sail area	15.2m <sup>2</sup> (164sq ft)	19.7m <sup>2</sup> (212sq ft)	18.0m <sup>2</sup> (194sq ft)	15.9m <sup>2</sup> (172sq)
Headroom (Max)	1.20m (3ft 11in)	1.3m (4ft 2in)	1.12m (3ft 9in)	1.21m (4ft)
(Sitting)	0.83m (2ft 9in)	0.9m (2ft 11in)	0.84m (2ft 9in)	0.89m (2ft 11in)
Cockpit length	3.89m (12ft 9in)	2.43m (8ft)	2.57m (8ft 7in)	1.90m (6ft 3in)
Cockpit width	1.83m (6ft)	1.74m (5ft 6in)	1.89m (6ft 2in)	1.89m (6ft 2in)
Design	Honnor Marine	A Wolstenholme	R Dongray	E Bergqvist
Price (standard)	£8,847	£20,553	£15,377	£8,598

LOA 6.15m