



Kite Just Flies!

With clients' needs taking priority, it took a while before Andrew Wolstenholme and Colin Henwood's shared pocket cruiser was on the water. But making her debut at the English Raid, she proved the long wait was worthwhile, writes Kathy Mansfield.

With photographs by the author.

Sometimes there's a Eureka moment, when you realise something has really worked. For me, it was at the end of July in the Solent, when I was waiting near Newtown Creek for boats of the first English Raid boats to arrive. I suspect that what I saw was the result of good tactics but I was expecting the longer waterline boats to arrive early on and at first couldn't identify the boat that was pounding down towards us, flying along, pushing the spray outwards. It sparkled. I wanted one.

Then I realized it had to be *Kite*, the boat I'd sailed the day before in mainly light winds. An elegant little day cruiser, she'd proved comfortable and easy to handle and I liked her very much. But I hadn't expected her so soon or looking quite so jaunty. I should have known. It was to be expected, knowing her designer and her boatbuilder. Behind her were Quarter Tonners pounding down the Solent, it was Cowes Week, a different world. Yet this little plywood day cruiser, just 18'10" (5.7m) on the waterline, was clocking up 7 knots!

She had been on the drawing board and then in build for about eight years; it's what happens when a busy designer, Andrew Wolstenholme and a busy boatbuilder, Colin Henwood

of Henwood & Dean, decide to build a boat for themselves and their families. Such projects tend to fall to the bottom of the list. Andrew had started by thinking about a pocket cruiser, cat ketch rigged, in which they could enjoy family outings and also participate in Raids but as he considered the options and the compromises that would have to be made, he ended up with a different set of parameters which seemed to work better for what they had in mind.

GOOD SAILING; GOOD TRAILING

The basic concept was a daysailer with a small cabin for occasional nights aboard, able to be towed by an ordinary family 1.8 litre car. Andrew had participated in a seminar in Scotland some years ago before the Great Glen Raid, now Sail Caledonia, where the idea of pushing small boat design forward had been a core topic and he had been impressed with the wide variety of boats assembled for the sail and oar raid. The idea of a simple, flat bottomed sharpie was discussed. And Andrew and Colin had visited the Festival of the Sea where they discussed a joint boat for their growing families. All these were in the background as the boat design evolved. The boat





needed to be attractive, with good sailing performance, easily trailed and cost effective to build.

A single chine sharpie would be well suited as a one-off boat and had possibilities as a development as a CNC cut self-jigging build, reducing build time and costs. The topsides were given flare to avoid the boxy look sometimes associated with single chine hulls and also to ensure that the stability does not fall off suddenly as the weather chine is lifted. Simplicity would be a key factor, both in aesthetics and practicality, which meant continually rationalising the design and shape.

Weight was another key factor. Some auxiliary propulsion was wanted but an inboard diesel is heavy and adds draft. A 5hp, 4-stroke outboard that was no heavier than a 2-stroke and could be lifted out of an aft well and into a side locker to keep draft low and improve sailing performance. One of the new Torqeedo electric outboards and batteries would have sufficient power but not over a long enough time for their possible needs.

LARGE COCKPIT; COSY CABIN

There were compromises to be made to these main factors, to increase performance and aesthetics. As the design evolved, the flat bottom of a sharpie was rejected in favour of a simple V-bottom to the single chine hull. The hull is built of 3/8" (9mm) plywood throughout, sheathed with glass cloth and epoxy. Ballast of 150 lbs (68kg) lead is carefully positioned on the tip of the NACA aerofoiled centreplate, along with 220 lbs (100 kg) of internal ballast down low in the hull where it is needed. The centreplate is carefully positioned so that it does not intrude too much into either the cabin or the cockpit and is raised by a simple wheel and axle winch. At the cabin end, the case makes a useful seat when sailing. Also helping to keep the weight low down, the cockpit seating is run through to the transom with no aft deck. The outboard sits in a well built into the aft seating.

The cabin is no longer than is needed to include full size berths and a galley area, with the cabin top no higher than necessary for full sitting headroom. This attention to proportion and detail adds immeasurably to her looks. She rates as RCD Category C with the centreplate locked down

or else Category D, suitable for coastal estuaries and inland waters. Since Colin's Henwood Et Dean Boatbuilders specialises in one-off builds and restorations of classic Thames river craft, Andrew would like to see the Kite design developed as a production boat, most likely in moulded GRP but she might also be offered as a CNC-cut plywood kit, subject to the level of interest in her and finding a suitable builder.

An important factor in keeping the centre of gravity low is the weight of the rig and Andrew has gone for carbon fibre spars, painted cream to disguise their high tech black. His early thoughts were for a cat ketch rig with unstayed spars, an innovative look but he decided that the mainmast would be tall and unwieldy, the mizzen would intrude into the cockpit, and tapered carbon spars would be expensive. He opted instead for a high peaked gaff sloop rig with a low centre of effort for sailing and shorter spars which would fit within the length of the boat for trailing. Simpler and cheaper carbon tubes can be used and though there are stays and running rigging, Andrew has devised a good system for lowering the mast easily. The mast weighs only about 15 lbs (7kg) and is mounted on a tabernacle. With two goosenecks, one on the mast and one on the tabernacle, the pin can be taken out of the mast gooseneck and put in the other while the mast itself is lowered on either the forestay or the jib halyard; an arrangement which will work quickly for trailing or for going under bridges in the Norfolk Broads where Andrew lives.

WOLSTENHOLME SIMPLICITY; HENWOOD SUBTLETY

Having seen the boat when her plywood hull was just taking shape, it was exciting to see the elegant, traditional looking cruiser that she had become. I was amazed at the very spacious cockpit, sumptuous with its generous laid teak and capable of seating a crowd. Its ample mahogany coaming gives the enclosed feeling of a much bigger boat. The low dark green hull had a subtle sheer which made it hard to believe she was a single chine boat and her cream cabin with teak detail was even thought by some to be GRP, not plywood because it was so nicely shaped and perfectly finished.

Hard too to believe that it had ample space inside for two



Facing page: *The outboard is immediately accessible in the generous full-width cockpit. Above:* Kite looks clean and bright down below; Colin suspects some owners may want a little more brightwork. *The 10:1 centreplate winch is easily accessible just inside the main hatch.*

full-length berths and a gallery area. The big hatch opens wide for light and air. I was offered a cup of tea, heated on the portable propane stove. The low coachroof gives her a stylish classic profile, set off by an oval porthole each side, with two round ones forward. The classic appearance continues with the curved oak tiller and shaped tiller extensions and there are other subtle details: a shaped piece of teak at the cockpit aft end where the outboard would be clamped on, the sweeping curve at the end of the coaming, the detailing around the fittings. She's a pleasure just to sit and admire.

Happily we were about to set sail from the Folly Inn, up the Medina River from Cowes with the 39 other boats of the English Raid. They were a wonderful assortment of hulls and rigs from around Britain and Europe, even the unmistakably American shapes of a Herreshoff 12 1/2, another elegant family boat and a New Bedford whaleboat.

Rowing was not a priority on this raid or for this boat, though we used paddles when manoeuvring a muddy creek, and the engine powered us through the busy Cowes area and into the Solent. The new cream sails, beautifully fashioned by Michael McNamara, were raised and I learned to my surprise that Kite was the same size as a much earlier Wolstenholme design, the Norfolk Gypsy, with the same sail area but only half the weight...

Andrew lifted the outboard into the starboard cockpit locker and a hinged flap folded down to seal the outboard well to reduce turbulence. Anchor and lines store in the bow well, a good secure place to stand when manoeuvring. At the stern, the boom is short enough to walk around behind.

Winds were light but we had ample sail to power us along, and slab reefing is there if needed. Jib sheets lead through the coaming and everything is to hand for single-handling if required. The boom is high enough to not be an issue - Andrew had been careful to have space for a kicking strap to tension the sails - and the centre mainsheet is near the hatch, leaving the rest of the cockpit clear. The tiller is light and very well balanced, heavier in stronger winds, not uncomfortably so, and

still balanced. The rudder, like the centreplate, is an elliptical aerofoil design.

She is a joy to sail and coped easily with the short, steep Solent chop when the winds increased. We took gusts not like a dinghy but a much heavier yacht. This was her first trial sail, other than a short sail in Norfolk, and Andrew and Colin were just as excited as I was to discover her capabilities. Andrew was disappointed that she wasn't pointing quite as high as a J24 near us - pretty near though - but fast, very fast, as she is, Kite was not created to be a bare racing machine. At the end of the four days, the only changes they had in mind were a bit more fitting out in the cabin. Her performance met their hopes in full; that's got to be a success.

CONTACTS

Wolstenholme Yacht Design, The Flint Barn, Westbourne Road, Coltishall, Norfolk NR12 7HT Tel: +44 (0)1603 737024 www.wolstenholmedesign.com

Henwood and Dean Boatbuilders, Greenlands Farm, Dairy Lane, Hambleden, Henley-on-Thames RG9 3AS

Tel: +44 (0)1491 571992 www.henwoodanddean.co.uk

