



# ONE SWALLOW MAKES A WINTER

In 2005, we hope to bring you more reviews of boats designed for amateur boatbuilders. Judy Brickhill sets us off on the right tack when she sails Nick Hanbury's epoxy-plywood Swallow.

With photographs by Peter Chesworth

Rather like the proverbial length of a piece of string, there are all sorts of reasons for choosing a particular length for a boat. Some are reasons of poetry: witness the ferro yawl *Heptarchy* – which means ‘rule by seven’ – with a length of 49’, beam of 14’ and draught of 7’ (15 x 4.3 x 2.1m). Some reasons are expedient, as with the fishing luggers which changed their traditional 40’ LOD to 39’6” (12.2/12m) to avoid being classed with 80’ (24.4m) craft in the safety regulations. For others, the reasons are those of plain efficiency, which is why Swallow, the dayboat designed by Andrew Wolstenholme as big sister to his 11’ (3.3m) Coot and 12’ (3.6m) Mallard, turned out to be 14’6” (4.4m) rather than 15’ (4.6m).

It wasn't the size of the garage but the size of the plywood; two standard 8’ (2.4m) sheets of plywood scarphed end to end can only accommodate planks for a maximum boat length of 14’6” (4.4m), something which occurred to Nick Hanbury when he approached Andrew about his tentative design for a bigger Mallard. Nick had already built an Iain Oughtred Whilly Boat which he entered in the Amateur Boatbuilding Awards at the 1997 Greenwich Wooden Boat Show, so he was no stranger to the demands, challenges and of course, the rewards of backyard boatbuilding. A move to Devon and the prospect of a crew of grandchildren, coupled with his enjoyment of the building process, prompted him to consider building a slightly more spacious boat for the purpose. The lines of the Swallow “seemed to offer an ideal compromise of lightness, speed and roominess”.

With her straight stem, slightly raked heart-shaped transom and epoxy-glued clinker planking, Swallow is an

ideal example of a “new ‘traditional’ design”, as Andrew puts it. She has a beam of 5’6” (1.67m), which is wide enough to provide stability while still narrow enough to allow her to be comfortably rowed. Draught is 3’9” (1.14m) with the centreboard in use, a mere 7.5” (190mm) without it, which, with her flowing underwater profile, enables her to sail efficiently in both deep and shoal waters. Her trailing weight of 400-450 lbs (180-200kg) allows her to be towed behind the family car and launched by one or two people with ease.

She was built upside down over 13 moulds on a building jig, the first material form of Nick's dream boat being her backbone, a khaya keelson with halving joints glued to the sapele transom and inner stem using Balcotan polyurethane marine adhesive. She has ten planks of ¼” (6mm) ply per side, with wide ¾” (20mm) lands. The garboards and sheerstrakes are wide, with narrower planks at the turn of the bilges, which ensures an attractive, equal plank width at the stem. Gunwales and inwales are substantial, with three laminations of sapele like the outer stem, tying the whole structure together into a strong, monocoque construction.

The interior layout is simple and comfortable, with the fore and aft decks at the same height as the side benches, which makes it relatively easy to slide from one position to another inside the boat. Buoyancy chambers are built into all these structures, with removeable hatches for ventilation, increasing the rigidity of the hull as well as complying with the good old RCD. A pair of knees at each bulkhead and at the centre thwart secure the gunwales strongly to the hull.

The centreboard case is topped by a 6” (150mm) wide plank, forming an additional perch in the middle of the boat



where there is ample space for the crew's feet on the slatted larch bottom boards. The wooden centreboard and the blade of the lifting rudder are aerofoil in cross section, ensuring maximum efficiency, with the up- and downhaul lanyards on the rudder leading through the attractive elliptical hole in the transom which houses the tiller.

The gunter rig was chosen both for its simplicity and for the relative shortness of the spars which fit easily inside the boat when trailing. There is a total sail area of 123 square feet (11.4m<sup>2</sup>) in the small jib and gunter mainsail. The main is loose-footed along the boom but there are battens to help maintain sail shape and a tack rope leads down from the boom to a turning block at the foot of the mast and aft to the centreboard casing so that the set of the sail can be tweaked from the security of the centre thwart. The mast is two pieces of quarter-sawn Canadian Douglas fir, hollowed out and epoxied together to create a strong, light and durable spar which is stepped in a tabernacle on the substantial pinrail against the forward bulkhead. The boom and yard are constructed in the same way, using spruce to make them even lighter. Rigging is minimal, just two side stays and the forestay, which comes in handy for controlling raising and lowering of the mast when launching or recovering. In fact, Nick has added several neat touches of his own to aid the manoeuvring of his Swallow, one being a little custom-built cradle which holds the top of the mast secure on the after deck when trailing, as well as doubling as a holder for the helmsman's drink when underway!

Treats are not in short supply around Christmastime but the opportunity to take Nick Hanbury's Swallow *Lucy* for a winter sail was special. Though it might not be immediately apparent, there are several advantages to test-sailing in winter. The weather has to be halfway-decent for Ches to get his pictures, the moorings are empty so you've got the water to yourself and there is a clarity about the light on the landscape that has an attraction all of its own. There was not much wind down at Mylor Yacht Harbour but neither was there much sea running and it was relatively warm and dry for a December day.

After a smooth, uncomplicated launch at the slipway, *Lucy* took Nick, his ex-Navy sailing partner xxx and I slipping gently out into Carrick Roads where I proceeded to put her through her paces. Despite the lack of wind, she showed herself to be capable of manoeuvring quickly and effortlessly, the shape of her sails a credit to their maker, Goacher of

Cumbria and worthy partners to the easily driven hull. An exceptionally roomy boat for her size, she remained responsive and light on the helm as the wind picked up a little off Feock, funnelling down Restronguet Creek and gave us no cause to sit up on the gunwales. Of course, as a newcomer to the water, she had the odd, unforeseen problem but nothing that couldn't be simply solved. The jib sheet tended to catch on the ends of the boom jaws as she came about, which, we agreed, gave Nick the nice little off-season job of shortening them and fashioning some parrell beads to string around the front of the mast.

Back at the pontoon, we lowered the sail and checked out her rowing prowess. Although many dinghies are billed as 'sail, oar and outboard', when it comes to actually rowing them, it seems that their wooden topsail is best only on paper, not in practice. *Lucy* the Swallow proved a happy exception, despite the need for substantially longer oars – another little job for Nick before the Spring? – ?? and I took it in turns to row her around the marina with 9'6" (2.9m) oars we borrowed from Ches and agreed that it would be no hardship at all to have to row her home if the wind failed.

Getting the boat ashore had its amusing moments, as the inflatable tyres kept the trolley stubbornly bobbing up to the surface. Ches could be forgiven for giving us the benefit of his trailer wisdom: make sure the trolley wheels are solid, avoid rubber rollers as they tend to stick and use pads of greased wood, preferably a naturally slippery one like holly, rather than plastic covered foam.

With *Lucy* safely nestling once more on the trailer we retired to the pub to mull over the afternoon's activities. It seems that this is a Swallow of substance not just a summer bird, though she shares other characteristics of her namesake, swooping over the waves, light yet strong, well proportioned, graceful and swift and I'm sure, capable of travelling long distances around her natural habitat of lakes and coastal estuaries.

*Plans for Swallow, which include full-size patterns for the moulds, stem and transom, are available at £95 plus £2.50 UK post or £5 overseas from:*  
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