

Angliã Afloat

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TESTED – The Norfolk Smuggler

A very versatile boat capable of creek crawling and long distance passage making



■ Traditional stylish looks

■ Quality build and design



Three perpetually grinning blokes – Charlie Ward, Pierre Caston and Garth Cooper – head out of Blakeney Harbour aboard Norfolk Smuggler Blackbird. Picture by Noel Hinton and courtesy of Neil Thompson Boats.

A compact cruising yacht

There's a short video on the Anglia Afloat website of our sailing boat tester Garth Cooper hard at work trying out an iconic Norfolk Smuggler at Blakeney

Yep, just to prove I really do go out and sail the boats I write about, the Norfolk Smuggler's builder Neil Thompson chased me around Blakeney Harbour on a bright and breezy morning recently in a RIB with a video-cam. The result was that three grown men, the boat's original builder Charlie Ward and blue water sailor Pierre Caston, and I, never stopped grinning.

I recently test sailed a Norfolk Gypsy and was impressed by her handling and the quality of her build. The Smuggler is her bigger sister, developed by designer Andrew Wolstenholme to meet similar handling criteria but to give larger accommodation and be capable of offshore sailing.

At 25ft (30ft with bowsprit) the Smuggler is a roomy yet compact cruising yacht. Her well-rounded hull form gives her high

stability and good internal volume yet she demonstrates an ability to go quite fast in the right conditions. This is because she has a fine entry, rather after the style of East Coast smacks and carries her full bilge well aft.

The full bilge means that when you step aboard she hardly moves and she has an easy and comfortable motion at sea. She heels comfortably and without fuss to the wind and flows over rather than slams into oncoming waves.

Her rig is generous yet easily handled, with a well-cut gaff main and staysail and jib forward carried on Columbian Spruce spars. She handles easily with little weather helm, crosses the eye of the wind with no fuss and very little loss of forward momentum, and is quick to accelerate away from the change of tack. She's remarkably close-hauled but best likes it if she's sailed a little full. On the run

she's a pussycat.

As with the Gypsy, Andrew Wolstenholme has given her a large, deep, roomy cockpit on the premise that the crew will spend more time up top than down below. Not that he's skimped below either, there's four good-sized berths, a sensible galley and a good-sized heads complete with one of the best wet hanging lockers I've seen in a small boat.

The Smuggler is pretty. She exudes all the charm we expect from a traditional gaff cutter but she's as modern as anything being built today. The standard of build and finish ranks with the best.

Our test boat, called Blackbird, is owned by Norfolk businessman Mike Goff and he keeps her in immaculate condition. We trolled out to her mooring on Neil's RIB along with photographer Noel Hinton and his sister Sophie, and one of the yard →



The Norfolk Smuggler is a modern boat but with all the charm of a traditional gaff cutter. Picture by Noel Hinton and courtesy of Neil Thompson Boats.

→ team, Tim Allen.

Blackbird's builder, Charlie Ward, who had been pottering on his barge-yacht Juno on a nearby mooring, joined us. In fact you can't move very far in Blakeney Harbour without seeing boats built by Charlie and Neil.

As the wind was blowing a steady F4,

provides ample power for handling the boat, which weighs in at 4.5 tonnes loaded.

Setting the sails is all done from the cockpit; peak and throat halyards run through coachroof-mounted jammers to port while the topping lift is to starboard. The externally mounted single line reefing is

The Norfolk Smuggler's a comfortable, four-berth, long-legged cruising boat capable of some serious passage making yet she's also ideal for creek crawling

straight up the harbour, we elected to leave the mooring under motor and clear the moorings before raising the sails. The power plant is a two-cylinder Yanmar diesel pumping out around 15hp and swinging a 12-inch diameter fixed three-bladed prop. It

simplicity itself; there are three reefs in the main.

Both the inner staysail and the outer jib are mounted on furlers, the staysail control line to port and the jib to starboard. The cutter rig offers a wide variety of combinations to



Our support crew, from left: Neil Thompson, Tim Allen at the wheel, Noel Hinton and his sister Sophie.



The mast is mounted in a tall tabernacle. The boom is attached to the tabernacle rather than the mast, to make lowering the mast easier.



The high peaked gaff's leather-clad jaws swivel round the mast on a strong leather collar.

suit the conditions. It does mean two sets of foresail sheets have to be handled.

With the sails setting nicely, we tacked off down harbour and rounded Blakeney point, covered as always with seals basking in the fine autumn sunlight. Easing away, Blackbird picked up her skirts, settled into that satisfying groove that well-balanced boats do and flew on out over the bar. The sea was large enough to bring the occasional splash of water over the bow, yet she thrived and we enjoyed.

I was pleasantly surprised at how quick she was, and how responsive the helm, with only slight weather helm. We were doing an estimated six knots on a broad reach and even on a dead run with the staysail tucked away she bustled along happily.

It was great day and a great boat in which to enjoy the conditions.



The interior of the Smuggler. The forward berth is raised to provide underneath storage and trotter boxes for the saloon berths. The table is in its stowed position.



The galley on Blackbird is fitted with a full cooker.



The Smuggler has a sea-kindly hull form. Her shallow draught makes her ideal for creeping up quiet creeks, while the centreplate allows her to go seriously to sea.

What Andrew Wolstenholme has packed into this hull is remarkable. Starting at the bow there's a decent-sized chain locker (the anchor is carried on deck in chocks), which is entered via a hatch in the forward bulkhead.

There's a good-sized raised double berth (three small children could be packed in here), under the forward end of which are four sealed under-bunk lockers, ideal for stowing bedding. The two full-length saloon settee/berths tuck their feet into trotter boxes under the aft end of the raised forward bunk.

Both bunks have storage bins under them. The mast support strut makes a handy grab when climbing in and out of the forward berth, and also carries the four-seater saloon table. This ingeniously slides in under the aft end of the forward bunk when not in use.

The galley to starboard is well laid out, with a two burner plus grill as standard (with



Charlie Ward, pictured, developed the Norfolk range with designer Andrew Wolstenholme.

a drawer and a cupboard under) or you can have a full sea-going oven cooker in gimbals and lose the drawer. There's a deep dry goods locker (which would easily convert to a fridge), a sink with locker stowage under and at the back a crockery rack. There's a fold-down worktop extension over the head of the starboard saloon berth.

To port is probably the most generously proportioned heads unit of any 25 footer. There's a small corner sink, a sea loo and behind it a large hanging wet locker and boot rack. Behind the bulkhead, between the heads and the port cockpit locker, is the black tank.

There's 5ft 10ins standing headroom for the full length of the saloon. This is achieved by housing the bulk of the centreplate in the full-length external ballast keel. The only section that protrudes into the boat →



The standard galley with gimballed two burner and grill unit.



The engine is buried in its soundproof compartment. The forward panel on the right gives access from the starboard locker. The steel drum is the centreplate lifting and lowering mechanism.

→ is the peak, which forms the base for the companionway steps. The keel is made of galvanised mild steel and is raised and lowered with a Dyneema cord rather than a wire.

A rope tail into the cockpit is fed round a large drum inside the engine box driving a through bulkhead shaft with a smaller drum in the keel trunk box, which gives a four times reduction.

The keel cord is locked off with a jammer mounted on the top of the engine box.

The lid to the engine box is underneath a hinged, wide-slatted bridge deck from the cockpit to the companionway. The engine is accessible from above and from the side through a large panel in the starboard cockpit locker. There's a smaller access hatch alongside the companionway steps, which gives access to the engine water pump.



The rudder skeg is made in two sections bolted together. Unbolting the aft end of the skeg without having to remove it completely from the hull makes dropping the rudder easy.

Behind the engine under the cockpit sole is the 30-gallon water tank, while the fuel tank will give 40 hours running at cruising speed, and right aft is stowage for a liferaft or inflatable dinghy. There's a gas bottle locker built into the transom.

There's a watertight hatch in the cockpit sole that gives access directly to the stern gland.

The Norfolk Smuggler is robustly built and finished to a high standard. She's a comfortable four-berth, long-legged cruising boat capable of some serious passage making yet she's also ideal for creek crawling and with her easily dropped rig she's suitable for using on rivers and canals. Her biggest drawback is her price but, having said that, real quality doesn't come cheap.

■ Visit www.angliaafloat.co.uk to see the video of the Norfolk Smuggler boat test



The heads. The space behind the loo is the wet locker and boot rack. Note the grab rail alongside the toilet.



The table slides in and out on hardwood runners.

Specifications

Length overall: 25ft (7.96m) plus retractable bowsprit

Beam: 8ft 9ins (2.69m)

Draught: 2ft 9ins/4ft 11ins (0.85m/1.51m)

Water: 30 galls (136 l)

Fuel: 14 galls (65 l)

Engine: Yanmar 2YM diesel

Sail area: 404 sq ft (38.3 sq m)

Price: £95,000 plus VAT

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