



# Classy Pocket Cruiser

**S**ailing tides, vast mud flats, narrow swatchways—England's low lying East Coast has bred classic pocket cruisers for generations. This is the cruising ground of Maurice Griffiths, one of the places where cruising on a small budget was born and still flourishes.

And it is here, too, that a few British boatyards still build small jewels of cruising boats that are exquisite examples of the shipwright's craft, yet touch as nails, capable of lying to a mooring year-round and drying out on remote mudflats if you miscalculate your tides.

I first spotted the Norfolk Gypsy on North Norfolk Boatbuilding's stand at the Southampton Boat Show a couple of years ago. Her tan

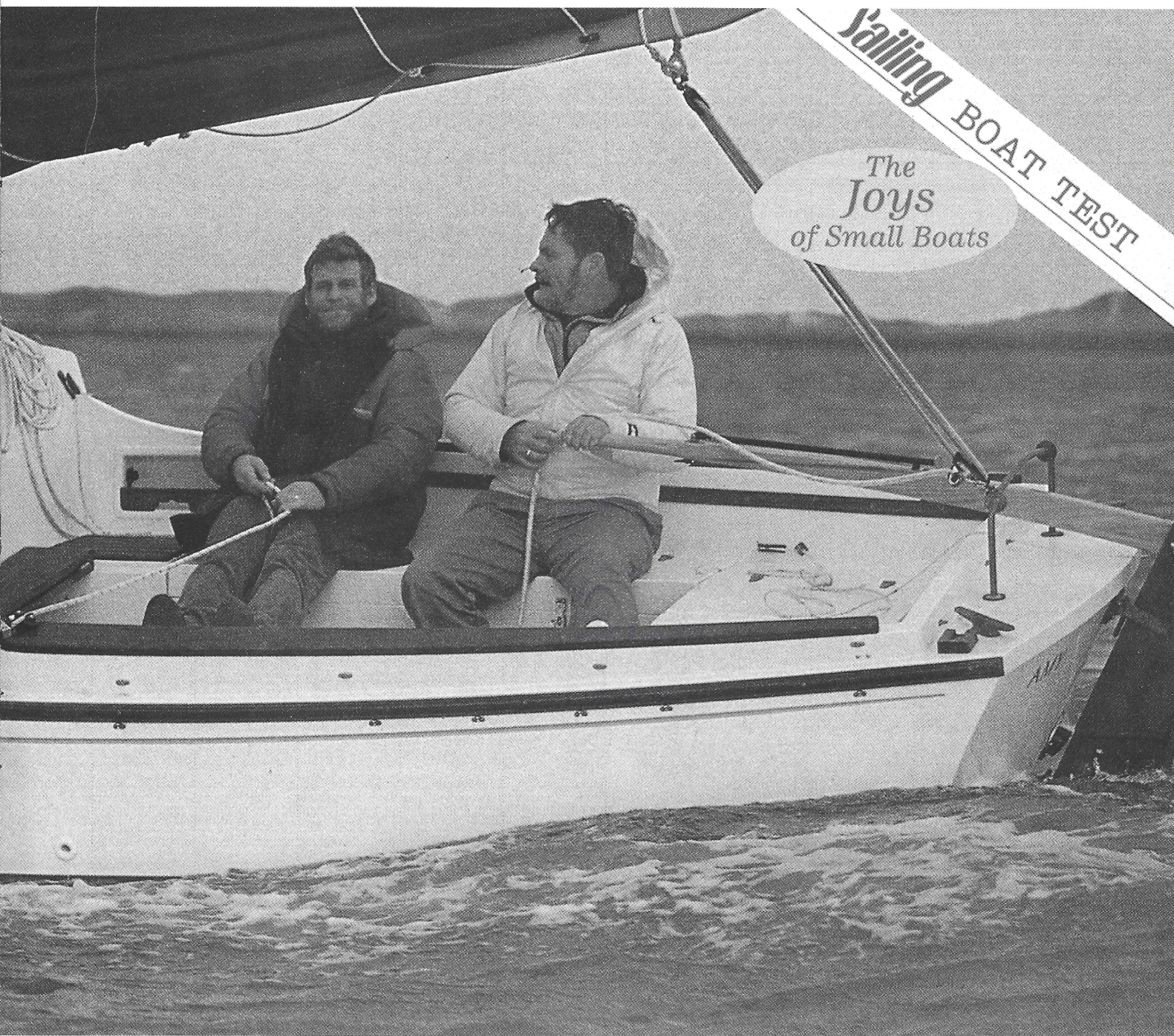
sails and gunter rig stood out among platoons of lesser small craft. After a couple of hours looking at mass-produced yachts, here was something special, a small cruising yacht built to the highest standards, with an unerring eye for quality for an exacting, experienced clientele. I was delighted when North Norfolk's Charlie Ward encouraged me to visit him at Blakeney and sail her.

Charlie Ward has been sailing on the Norfolk coast since he was eight and building boats since he was a young man. He has built everything from heavy displacement yachts to lifeboats. Charlie is also a traditionalist, who believes that sound cruising designs combine excellent sailing performance with spacious interiors and immensely strong construction. These were the uncompromising criteria when Andrew Wolstenholme drew the lines of the 24-foot Gypsy. The result is a very good looking centerboard yacht that evokes a bygone era, yet uses the very latest in fiberglass technology. Construction is

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By Brian Fagan with photography by Neil A. Foster





## The 24-foot Norfolk Gypsy is a nice way to just go sailing

*The 24-foot, gunter rigged Norfolk Gypsy sprinted through the rolling green, SAILING's boat test writer Brian Fagan was at the tiller.*

massive: the hand laid hull is stiffened with half bulkheads and other moldings, while there are sealed buoyancy compartments in the bow, under the forward end of the bunks and aft under the cockpit.

Charlie's home port is Blakeney, a remote, tidal harbor on the north Norfolk coast so our boat test on a blustery day in late October was dictated by an early morning high tide. As the tide floated us off the mud, I had a chance to explore the Gypsy.

I was struck at once by the size of the cockpit, which takes up over half the length of the boat. This makes sense for a boat that is normally used for day or weekend sailing and is an ideal arrangement for warm summer days. There's more than enough space to sleep on the side benches and a cockpit tent is available. I was also impressed by the enormous lazarette lockers and by the ample stowage under the seats. The seat backs are set at the correct angle, and the benches themselves can be finished with neat teak slats.

A wide bridgedeck with the centerboard hoist hinges back to reveal a compact 10-hp Yanmar diesel auxiliary, ease of access yet surprisingly quiet under way. There's enough power to move the Gypsy along at 6.5 knots in calm water and to help with motorsailing in narrow channels. If you prefer an outboard, you gain a deep locker where the inboard goes. The fuel tank and outboard well replace the lazarette lockers and the engine itself stows under the port cockpit bench. Most owners go for the inboard, a wise choice in my judgment.

Below, you step down into the cabin via a non-skid covered platform that allows you to stand in the companionway and control the sails from the wider-than-average hatchway. A white cabin liner and judicious use of teak give a pleasing, airy effect to the cabin, which seems much larger than it actually is. The centerboard case bisects

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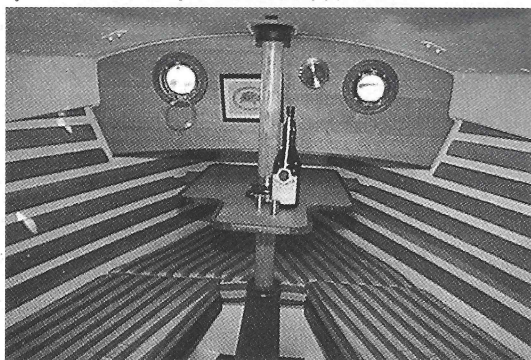


the cabin but is not particularly obtrusive. It serves as a convenient bench when cooking or navigating, or as a place to put down a coffee mug (in harbor), provided you keep your feet under control. There's a small chart table with a chemical toilet underneath to starboard, a two-burner alcohol stove to port with cutlery and plate stowage behind the stove and a spacious provisions locker below.

I was impressed by the ingenious wet stowage for boots and foul weather gear: a bin aft of the chart table drains into the bilge and keeps wet garments well out of the way. Many owners have surely blessed this feature on wet days.

Two 6-foot 5-inch berths line either side of the cabin, while a clever swinging table folds forward out of the way at sea or at night. Comfortable, slatted cabin sides make for easy lounging at night. One could almost imagine Maurice Griffiths and his pipe-smoking friends lounging at anchor by kerosene light—there are only kerosene lamps in the cabin. Everything below shows meticulous attention to detail. There is even a molded space for a plastic wash basin by the companionway, and you reach for the keel sump in the buoy-

*While plain and small, the interior of the Norfolk Gypsy has cozy cabin flavor. The small round ports, little table for evenings with a friend and touches of wood are all nifty features.*

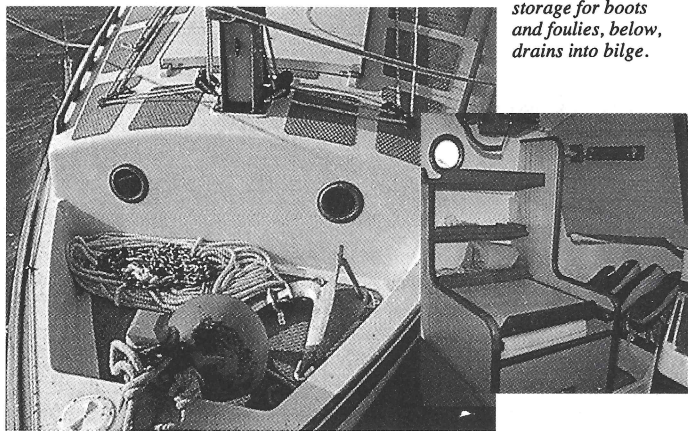


ancy chamber through a hatch under the forward berth cushion. Everything is laid out for convenience and simplicity.

On deck, I was pleased by the clever use of non-skid that enabled one to handle sails from the cabintop with confidence, even in wet conditions. The foredeck forms a deep well with large drains, where you can stand comfortably to pick up moorings or handle anchors, yet lash a CQR in place under way.

With a small foretriangle, the rig is basically low-tech so no winches are required. This makes for easy handling, even when singlehanded, an important consideration for a pocket cruiser. The mast

*For knocking about in thin and thick waters, the Norfolk Gypsy features a handy sunken foredeck with large drains—a great place for tossing ground tackle. Wet storage for boots and foulies, below, drains into bilge.*



is set in a stout tabernacle, and the gooseneck is mounted on it so that you can lower the mast with a forestay tackle that is left aft to the cockpit. The entire rig rests on the sheet horse aft and the mast projects only about 10 inches so you do not have to remove it from the tabernacle, a major plus when trailering. Charlie says that you can sail up to a slip, recover the boat, lower the rig, tie down on the trailer and drive away in 15 minutes, even when singlehanded. I am sure



*The Norfolk Gypsy with rig on tabernacle rode her lines with the outboard rudder on a pivoting rudder plate biting hard and the cockpit crew all dry and comfortable. Add the salty flavor of tanbark sails and her gaff and you have a small boat that loves to not only look the part of a capable sailboat, but really is.*

he is right. You can also lower the mast under way. I longed to find a convenient bridge, so that we could shoot it under sail, as the old Thames Barges used to.

Under way, the Gypsy was exceptionally easy to handle. She tracked well, pointing surprisingly high and responding instantly to the constant gusts that blew over the shallow waters of the Blakeney Pit. All halyards are led aft so that you can raise and lower the main from the cockpit, as well, of course, as roller-reefing the jib. The centerboard can be raised or lowered with one hand, using a highly geared drum winch. With the pivoting rudder plate lowered, an ingenious and unusual feature, the boat was exceptionally responsive, heeling quickly, then becoming as stiff as a board due to her firm turned bilge form. Her motion was easy in the nasty little wind-against-tide chop in the pit and visibility was excellent.

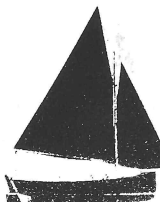
The Gypsy points remarkably close to the wind, an essential quality in these tidal waters and a real boon to those who despise motoring. I was struck by the ease with which

one person could handle the yacht—getting her under way, coming about, even reefing with the convenient and well-designed jiffy reefing system.

A lot of this ease comes from clever design, but most of it from a passion for detail, indeed perfection. As always, this shows in the small details: the brass strips that protect the edges of non-skid surfaces, the easy access to everything from centerboard pins to engine dip sticks. Even the cabin portholes are at eye level.

Clearly, Charlie listens to his owners and incorporates their suggestions into the boats. His attention to detail extends even to a completely updated, waterproofed owner's manual, which goes out to a client directly after he or she puts down a deposit.

Such perfection does not come cheap, but it is worth it to discerning buyers, many of them very experienced sailors who are trading down from larger yachts as they grow older. I don't think you can do much better. □



**Specs**  
 LOA 23'8"  
 LWL 17'9"  
 Beam 7'6"  
 Draft 1'8"-3'11"  
 Displacement  
 2,607 lbs. (outboard)  
 2,860 lbs. (inboard)  
 Sail Area 212 sq. ft.

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