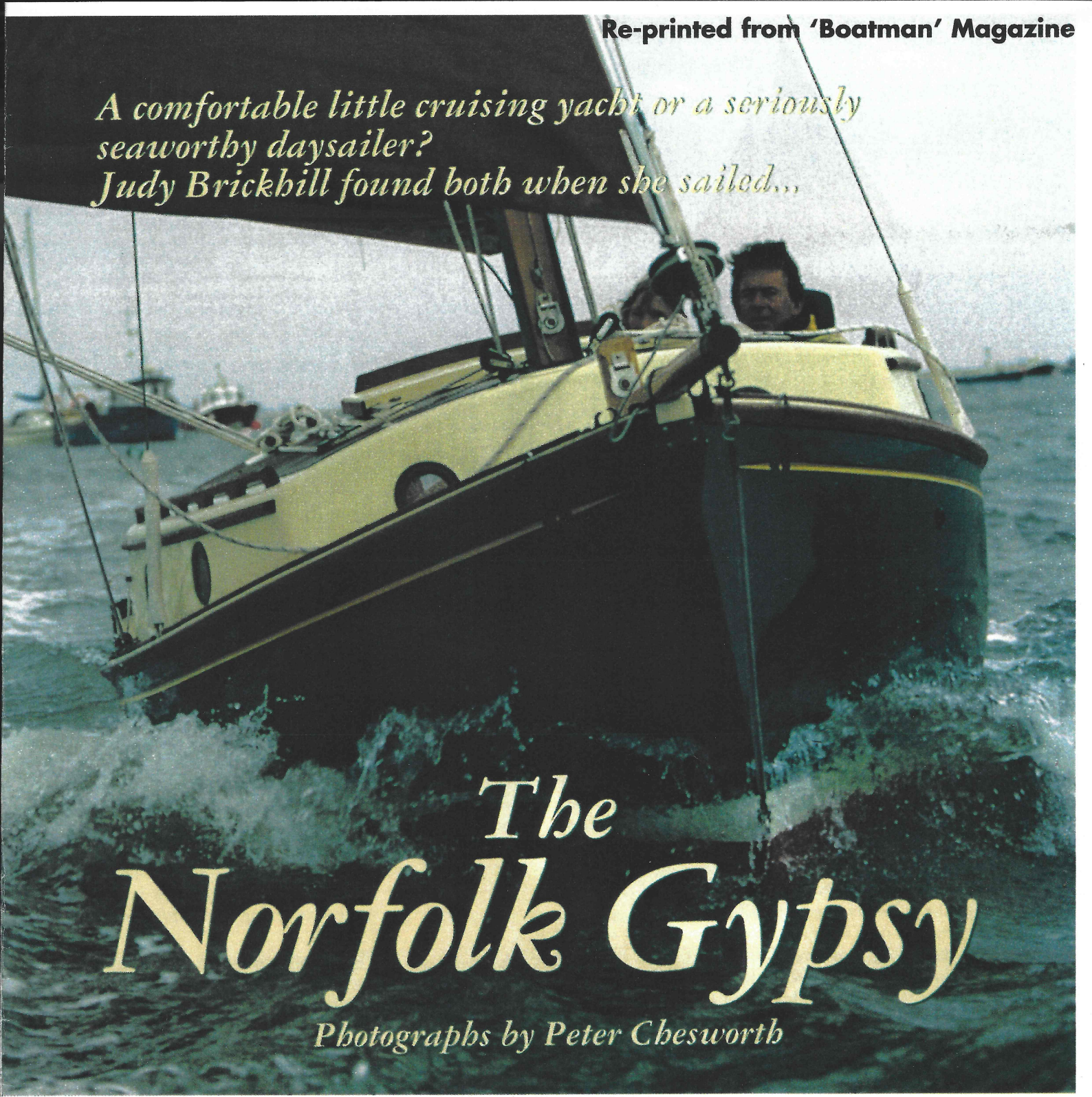


*A comfortable little cruising yacht or a seriously seaworthy daysailer?
Judy Brickhill found both when she sailed...*



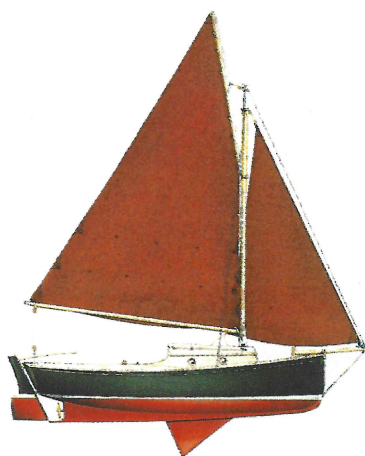
The Norfolk Gypsy

Photographs by Peter Chesworth

Charlie Ward of the Norfolk Boatyard has been sailing the North Norfolk coast since he was eight – and it shows. It shows in his choice of lifestyle and livelihood – running a sailing school from his home bordering the Morston marshes, and building sturdy, reliable boats capable of handling the tidal creeks and the more challenging open waters of Blakeney Harbour. He has been in the boatbuilding business for over 20 years, having built an impressive variety of craft from deep water cruising yachts and fishing boats, through small dinghies to lifeboats for ships and oil rigs. His company, the Norfolk Boatyard, is a small, family-run business producing a range of wholesome GRP yachts

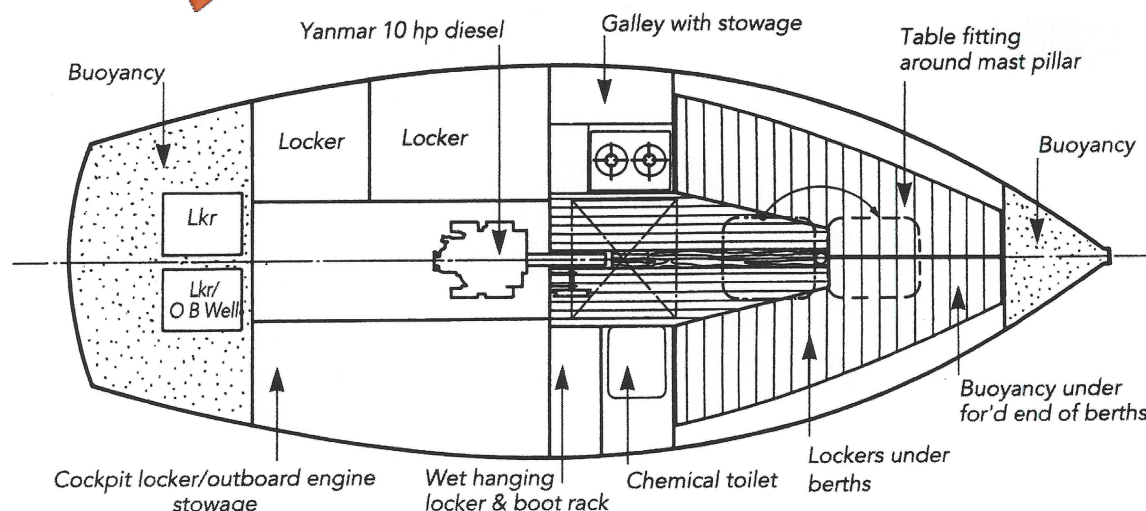
and dayboats, whose robust construction and top quality workmanship reflect Charlie's now-renowned high standards for all aspects of boating – safety, sailing performance and comfort.

In 1989 Charlie approached designer Andrew Wolstenholme, himself a seasoned Broads sailor, with a very detailed brief based on his many years of experience sailing dayboats and small yachts both singlehanded and with his wife and three daughters. What was required was the comfort associated with a cruising yacht but without compromising any aspects of sailing performance or safety, all contained within 20' (6.1m) and capable of being trailed. A tall order? No, a Norfolk Gypsy.



The Norfolk Gypsy

LOD 19'10" (6.05m)
LOA 23'10" (7.27m) bowsprit,
Beam 7'6" (2.29m)
Draught, centreplate up, 1'8" (0.51m) or
Centreplate lowered, 3'11" (1.19m)
Sail area 212sq.ft (19.7sq.m)



Safety

The Gypsy is a straight stemmed, traditional looking pocket cruiser, 19'10" (6.05m) on deck, with a 4' (1.22m) bowsprit, 7'6" (2.29m) beam and draught of 1'8" (0.51m) or 3'11" (1.19m) with the centreplate fully lowered. Her heavy duty, hand laid, GRP hull and deck bear witness to Charlie's involvement in lifeboat building, as does his insistence on the provision of positive buoyancy, comprising the entire void area between the cabin moulding and the hull, as well as the space around the aft cockpit lockers. Added to this there are watertight rubber seals on the locker hatches and the engine lid, making the whole, deep cockpit watertight. There is a large bilge pump which can be used to drain the cockpit well or the bilge underneath.

A self-draining system for the cockpit was not incorporated to allow for a deep cockpit well. As Charlie Ward explained: "We felt that this ensured that the crew can sit 'in' rather than 'on' the boat. For us this created an important distinction between the fact that this is a little yacht rather than a large daysailer. Also bearing in mind how dry the boat is in our short steep seas on the north Norfolk coast it is unlikely that you would need to worry about having a self-draining cockpit except of course in wet weather

when living aboard. And when not on board an overall cockpit cover is provided to keep all the water out."

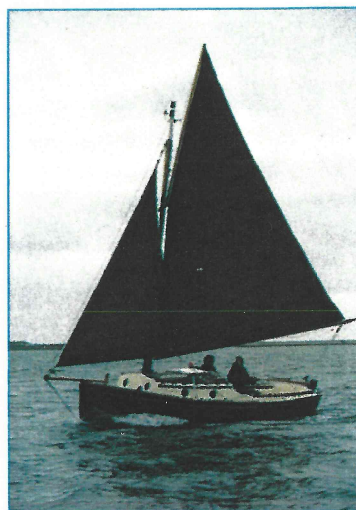
The cockpit takes up a good half of the boat, providing seating for 6 adults on comfortably cambered teak-slatted side benches, or two full length berths under a boom tent when at anchor. Large lockers below the seats are divided into bite-sized pieces for efficient stowage – there is nothing so infuriating as the clatter of badly secured gear rolling about under one while sailing.

The inboard engine, the well-proven Yanmar 10hp single cylinder diesel, is flexibly mounted under a hinged teak bridge deck. The protective box can be completely removed, allowing easy access and good light for engine maintenance. There is the option of an outboard, which would mean the modification of the lazarette locker aft into a well and a deep locker at the forward end of the cockpit in place of the inboard. In agreement with Charlie's opinions on safety, most

owners opt for the inboard.

The large transom-hung rudder provides another example of the thought that has gone into the Gypsy. There is a drop plate that can be lowered to provide additional steerage when running in short, steep seas, and hauled up when sailing in shoal waters.

On the underside of the bridge deck is the cleat for the centreboard hoist, a one-handed operation using a





Top: The chemical loo hides under the chart table with the wet locker aft of it.

Left: The simple but well planned interior is light and airy.

Below: Available space is well used but not cluttered.



very high purchase drum winch. As all sheets, halyards and control lines lead back to the cockpit, the Gypsy is well suited to singlehanded sailing and foredeck work is cut to a minimum. Safety being of paramount importance, she has a moulded foredeck well-cambered to drain outboard – in which there is space to handle and stow the 20 lb (9.07kg) CQR anchor and ground tackle.

There is a sturdy, galvanised tabernacle, with the boom gooseneck permanently mounted on it, a feature usually only found on Broads' yachts, so that the mast can be lowered quickly and easily leaving the sail lashed and the boom in place.

She carries 212sq.ft (19.7sq.m) of sail, with a high peaked gunter mainsail and genoa, which keeps the spars to a manageable length for trailing, while still providing a good windward performance for creek crawling. I consider her jiffy reefing system an excellent one, with lines from the reef cringles on luff and leech leading from either end of the boom to cleats in the centre. The genoa's roller reefing control line is also right there to hand for the helmsman.

Comfort

And so to the cabin. The first impression is one of space, surprising considering that it is contained in less than 10' (3.01m) of hull. This is partly due to the light and view from the six brass portlights set at eye level, the forward two opening to provide ventilation. The other factor is the remarkably ingenious use of available space. There is a conventional V-berth layout forward and, working aft, the galley to port with a two-burner alcohol stove and moulded space for the wash basin. To starboard is a half-size chart table under which is the chemical toilet and aft again is what must surely be the most sensible contribution to comfort on a small yacht – a moulded wet bin for oilskins and boots, draining directly into the bilge. Even in our 40' (12.2m) lugger we are hard-pressed to accommodate all our wet weather gear, and here is a less-than-20-footer which manages it with ease.

The centreboard case has a narrow teak top, making it less of an intrusion and more of a useful bench when cooking or navigating. Mounted on the oak compression post is the table which can be rotated out of the way under the foredeck. There are lockers under the two 6'5" (1.96m) berths, a general stowage area under the galley worktop and a rack for crockery behind the cooker, as well as a shelf above the chart table, all laid out with the emphasis on convenience and simplicity.

Performance

The test conditions for the Gypsy were a taste of the real stuff – a 7am start in a good Force 5 straight off the ice



cap. But as we walked through the marshes to the creek and the dory waiting to ferry us out, shafts of sunlight broke through the cloud cover, highlighting the Brent geese. Suddenly the Arctic temperature didn't matter so much; at least there was a decent wind for a romp out to the seal colony where the big waves were. Out at the mooring Charlie and I unclipped the cockpit cover, stowed the boom cover and crutch in a handy locker and were virtually ready to roll. There was no need to leave the cockpit to set sail; it was a simple matter of hoisting throat and peak halyards, unfurling the jib and lowering the rudder plate and centreboard. The only foredeck work to be done was letting go the mooring, then I sheeted in and we were away.

As we reached fast across the harbour I noticed that she quickly found her preferred angle of heel, sitting comfortably on the firm turn of her bilge. When we reached the outer harbour, we beat over to the seal colony on the sandspit, pointing surprisingly well into some pretty hefty waves rolling in over the bar from the open sea. The slight, reassuring weather helm increased a little and she lay over a bit more, but never enough to put me up on the wide teak trim of the side coaming where Charlie perched, more to show me how comfortable it was than out of necessity. I hardly used the tiller extension and her motion through the water felt perfectly safe; more like a big boat, in fact, than a 20-footer.

We broadened off to run down right next to the beach where the seals humphed and humped their way into the water to have a good look at us. Gybing was no problem, even in the big following seas. The crash of the mainsheet cleat across the gunmetal horse aft was the most startling part of the whole manoeuvre. The broad reach back down the harbour was totally exhilarating, threading our way through the boats at a fair lick, to round up to the mooring, the jib furling in and Charlie on the foredeck to pick up the buoy as I dropped

The Gypsy proved well able to handle a good Force 5 with all sail set. Here she is on a reach but she was just as comfortable on the wind.

the main into the lazyjacks prior to setting up the boom crutch. Altogether a most enjoyable sail.

The overwhelming impression I had of the Gypsy, both inside and out, was one of meticulous attention to detail which, born out of an evident love of sailing, add up to a very fine product indeed. She doesn't come cheap. Her price tag of £21,985 before VAT puts her at the top of the range, but a buyer need have no qualms about the value he or she is getting for that money. The standard boat, complete and ready to sail, is backed up by the offer of winter servicing and storage, to say nothing of the comprehensive, waterproof (of course) Owner's Manual, which is regularly updated as Charlie incorporates suggestions from his owners with whom he is in constant contact via a twice-annual newsletter.

Not only is this an extremely well thought out and workable little cruiser, but the high quality craftsmanship and safety standards make it, in my opinion, one of the best of its kind on the market. It is hard to see how Norfolk Boatyard could improve on the Gypsy but, with Charlie's usual style, they are trying. The new Norfolk Smuggler 25 will be unveiled at Southampton Boat Show in September. I suspect this will open up a whole new section of the market, rather than entice existing Gypsy owners most of whom must surely be happy with the boat they have.

Information

Designer: Andrew Wolstenholme.

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