



Matt Newland's Tricks of the Light

Lightweight epoxy-ply construction and carbon spars combine with water ballast to create a new kind of trailer sailer. We sent trailer sailor Tony Langmead to Swallow Boats to sail the BayCruiser.

With photographs by Peter Chesworth

It was interesting to eavesdrop on the conversations at the Southampton Boat Show this year. Once I'd got my head out of the off-cuts bin at English Braids – always my first port of call – it became obvious that, as well as those who'd come to gawp at the Super Yachts, there was a nucleus of visitors who were actually looking to buy a boat. I soon found myself following the same bunch of people from stand to stand; evidently we were all interested in the same type of boat. We were the Small Boat Posse. No VIP Range Rovers would whisk us off to an executive lunch – we either did without or had a sandwich while perched on a trailer wheel – but everyone seemed quite happy and there were plenty of trailer sailers to look at this year.

In my opinion, a good trailer sailer is easily trailed, launched and recovered – otherwise you won't be going anywhere – sails well single-handed, has accommodation and facilities for extended cruising, looks good on the water and can comfortably ride out an Atlantic storm. I have to tell you that no such boat exists but in 2006, I came close to most of these criteria when Matt Newland of Swallow Boats in Cardigan came up with the Cardigan Bay Lugger... and the *Four Sisters* and I have been happily trundling around Europe ever since. Now, 3 years later, Matt has had another look at the concept of an easily trailed cabin boat – and I, posing as an expert in such craft, was going to have a test sail.





Above: Plenty of room for two in the V-berth forward and **below left**, modern comforts include pumped fresh water to the galley sink. **Below right:** No need to hang over the aft deck to tend the outboard. **Facing:** The author at the helm gets 7 knots without really trying.



Meeting a proper expert, Peter Chesworth of Mylor Boat Hire fame in his role of photographer for *Water Craft* magazine, was ...er... sobering, you could say. He knew what he was doing – and I obviously didn't – but we both knew what the weather was doing. After weeks of a veritable Indian Summer, a cold front was coming through. Tuesday morning began wet and windy, gusting F7 with low cloud rolling over the headland from St Dogmaels, obscuring the other side of the Teifi estuary. Not good photo shoot weather. High tide was at 10am and so it was either launch here and now on an ebbing tide or leave it until tomorrow. The forecast didn't look any better for Wednesday and neither Chessy nor I relished the thought of a second full English breakfast at the local hotel, so it was on with the foulies and off to the slipway.

Matt took a whole 15 minutes – slow by his standards – to raise the mast and get the BayCruiser into the water but the tide was ebbing fast and it took the two of us to wrestle her off the mud at the bottom of the slip and into water deep enough to get some board down. Life would have been

a lot easier if the outboard had not decided that Tuesday was its day off and at one point, we were both over the side in shallow water shoving the boat over a mud bank. Some photo opportunity that was! Matt nipped back on board easily enough while I scrabbled feebly over the gunwale, hampered by the deep coaming and several kilos of good Welsh mud, water and minute marine organisms in each wellie.

The Bay Cruiser didn't actually need this extra ballast as the tanks were already filling up enough to keep us stable as we short tacked – under full sail despite the wind – through the tightly packed fishing boats. Some pretty fierce gusts were still coming across the estuary and I wasn't much help to Matt as a crew member. There was a lot more string to play with on this boat compared to my lugger... and mistaking the centreboard down-haul for the up-haul tended to impair our windward progress until I got the hang of it.

Once in clear water and a reasonable distance from the moorings, we had more time to look at the GPS and found that we were doing 5 to 7 knots against the tide and over 9

Bay Cruiser 20 Specification

LOA: 20'3" (6.18m)

LWL: 18'7" (5.67m)

Beam: 7'7" (2.3m)

Draft – centreplate raised: 1' (0.3m)

centreplate down: 4' (1.2m)

Weight: 990 lbs (450kg)

Water ballast: 880 lbs (400kg)

Sail Area: 215 sq.ft (20m²)





knots at times with it... and this with your reviewer wimpishly letting the mainsheet go at every gust, until I worked out that she stood up to the wind rather better than my CBL. Not unexpectedly, the BayCruiser out-sailed the lugger on every point of sailing but I was particularly impressed with how safe the boat felt even when sudden violent gusts tried to lay us over. In that respect, she was as steady as some keelboats but when tacking or accelerating in the gusts, she was as responsive as a dinghy. I guessed that we were covering the ground about twice as fast as I would have in the lugger but I would have thought twice about taking the *Four Sisters* out in these conditions: strong tide, wind F5, dying away generally but gusting F7 at times.

With the ballast tanks full, the Bay Cruiser could take it all in her stride. She has a trailing weight of only 992 lbs (450kg) but once in the water, you can let another 882 lbs (400kg) of water into the ballast tanks. No wonder she's so stiff in a blow! Empty, she should fly in light airs and you can fill or pump out the ballast tanks as you sail, as conditions change. The only thing I did find fault with was the degree of weather helm she carried in the gusts – a trait she has in common with the lugger – but this was the first time this particular boat had touched the water and a certain amount of tinkering can be expected. Matt was of the opinion that raking the rudder forward Bay Raider style and moving the forestay from the foredeck to the stem head might well cure the problem. As it was, it was no problem to ease the mizzen a little – the lost drive was barely noticeable.

The BayCruiser is not simply a BayRaider with a lid. The cruiser is a little beamier – though still well within the UK and EU trailing limits – and has quite a bit more freeboard which carries back to the stern as attractive tumblehome. A boat of character, this. The mainsail is a deep-roached fully-battened job using slides and a mast track, mounted on a

conventional boom with a kicker rather than the Bayraider's self vangng sprit boom. The mainsheet track is on the aft cockpit bulkhead, along with the jam cleats for the mizzen sheets so everything is handy for the helmsman. The roller furling jib was conventionally sheeted on this boat but Matt has plans for a self-tacking version – useful for single handers – in the near future. Both masts are carbon fibre and weigh next to nothing compared with spruce but they don't look out of place. After the Cardigan Bay Lugger's simple balanced lug and sprit mizzen rig, this was all impressively high tech – not that any of it would worry the average sailor – but then the BayCruiser is a much more agile and powerful animal. The new hull shape, however, was not over pressed by all this canvas and I soon felt in control of what was happening and gave more attention to the accommodation.

The self-draining cockpit is roomy and comfortable with a coaming which comes aft from the cabin side giving good back support and a secure feeling of being in the boat rather than on it. All the important bits of string are within reach of the helm but if you have a couple of crew wanting to take charge of the jib, they will not get in the way of the helmsman in the slightest – the cockpit could seat 6 easily – and will be well sheltered by the cabin bulkhead, even without a spray hood being raised.

Having the outboard motor actually in the cockpit with you, under the clever dog-legged tiller arrangement, is much more convenient than hanging it off the stern. It's sheltered, with easy access for refuelling, although a long range tank in the seat locker would be a better arrangement. There would be no problems fitting or removing the engine and it doesn't even get in the way when raised for drag-free sailing. The shutter that closes the well keeps the ocean out and stops turbulence but it would probably not be a good idea to drop your car keys down there. Best of all, the prop is in line with and ahead



Facing: *The BayCruiser makes good progress against the tide in a falling wind. Above:* *Easily beached in just a few inches of water.*

of the rudder so manoeuvrability under power is optimised. I would prefer something a bit beefier than the 2.5 hp that Matt was trying to get started, although many Bay Raider owners say it would not be necessary. Something between 4 and 6hp would suit me better and the F/N/R gear lever would be conveniently to hand, too.

Moving into the accommodation really points up the difference between the two cabin boats. Forward of the CBL's bridge deck – which has space for a chemical toilet if you really must have one – there is a foot well leading straight to the V-berth over the forward buoyancy tanks. You have shelves either side and that's it. On a mooring it's warm, it's dry if you keep the spray hood up when it's raining and there's room for two if you're friendly. What more could you need?

Well, how about a siding companionway hatch to keep the rain off, a folding table fixed over the centreboard case, a built-in sink/hob unit with water pump, a double-bed-sized V-berth forward and a quarter berth to port. To starboard there is more seating with storage under and shelving behind, room for your VHF and other electronics and space for a cassette toilet. The area between the V-berth and the cockpit can be customised to suit your particular needs so long as you don't want to get rid of the mast compression post, angled to give more room where it's most needed or the centreboard case. I would prefer to have extra seating and do without the sink/hob unit; cooking in the cockpit under a spray hood is a much better option – see W76 – but I doubt if many of the Small Boat Posse would agree. The cabin seems twice the size of the CBL's and probably is, as far as liveability is concerned. And there is enough storage space to help keep the place tidy over an extended cruise, too.

Forward of the mast tabernacle there is a beefy samson post – much more useful than mooring cleats – and separate anchor and sail lockers which both drain overboard. There is room for plenty of chain or cable and the bulwarks give a feeling of security if you need to be up there in a chop.

Apart from sailing qualities and accommodation, the other test of a good trailer sailer, and an important test at that, is how easy she is to live with on the road. The good news here

is that the tough, one piece carbon fibre mast rides on the cabin top, or more accurately on an A-frame bolted to the transom, with the heel of the mast pinned to the stem. This means you can keep the cabin clear and use it like a caravan when driving to new cruising grounds; the cabin washboards can be securely locked if you spend a night in a hotel instead. With the CBL the mast has to travel half in and half out of the cabin, which is a pain. You don't need a 4x4 to tow this boat on its unbraked Bramber trailer but being over 20' (6m) long it will be slightly more expensive on some car ferries. It may be rather more difficult to squeeze into a car park space than the little lugger and it's still possible to get out of a tight spot by unhitching and shoving her around by hand. After all, the strong but lightweight hull is constructed of 1/4" (6mm) ply sheathed with epoxy glass and extensive use is made of even lighter composite Airex/epoxy/glass construction for bulkheads and coachroof. And, of course, the absence of a load of lead ballast also keeps the weight down and could save you a small fortune in petrol costs on a long trip.

With all that accommodation, stability and performance, she's a bit bigger and heavier than the CBL but she still has an easily driven hull, which we discovered when, with the ebb tide reaching a maximum and the strong winds of the morning dying away to a light zephyr, Matt reclaimed the tiller and we ghosted downwind and up-tide back to the slipway under mizzen and main.

Leaving me to make sure she didn't get swept away by the stream, Matt went off to fetch the trailer.

"Well", said Chessy "I didn't think you'd make it back against that tide."

He looked impressed. I surely was. And I bet the Small Boat Posse would have been, too. I wondered aloud if I might borrow a Bay Cruiser next summer for more extensive testing in the Ionian. Apparently not. Shame.

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