



Sailing the BayRaider 17

A Tale of Time, Cat Flaps and Sauvignon Slurpers

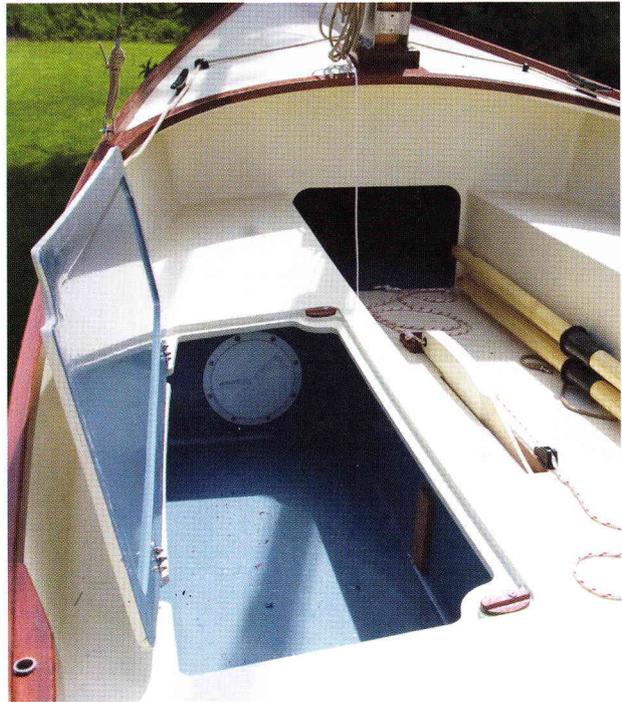
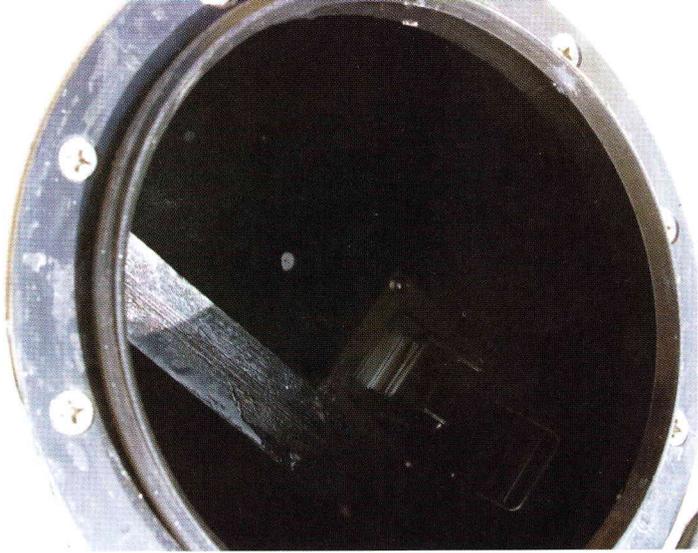
At the rate Swallow Boats keep launching new designs, we'll soon need to buy Alice Driscoll and Peter Chesworth season tickets to South Wales.

As usual time was running away from us and we were slightly late leaving to meet photographer Ches for the drive to Swallow Boats at Cardigan. So it was a trifle annoying that halfway out of the village, the cat popped her head up from behind the back seats and with a little miaow, let us know she had sneaked aboard as a car stowaway. As she was unceremoniously dumped back at the house, I pondered the benefits or otherwise of cat flaps in cars...

We still managed to arrive a little early to meet Matt Newland at Swallow Boats to sail his new BayRaider 17. Timing was critical, as the beautiful Teifi estuary only has water for around 2 hours either side of High Water, so if we were going to get any meaningful sailing in, we needed to be out on the water pretty quickly before it all gushed out into Cardigan Bay. Matt was also feeling the pressure of time, working hard in his extensive new workshop, getting a Bay Cruiser 20 completed for delivery. It was a pleasure to see him

again and to witness how the company has grown over the last few years.

Set up by his father Nick, Swallow Boats has now been under Matt's steady hand for five years. It seems to be a really good working arrangement within the family. The company has applied for and been given significant EU grants, which have funded the new light and airy 75' by 45' (23 x 14m) workshop, complete with £30,000 CNC cutter. The workforce has grown to ten and the company is now firmly grasping international opportunities. Many of the GRP moulds are being produced to the company's high standards through a licensed builder in Poland. There is also sales growth in Australia and New Zealand, through a builder in Tasmania. Closer to home, the French distributor is extremely active and Matt is currently looking to expand his sales network through the rest of Europe. In the background the family connections stay strong, with Nick supporting Matt but without interfering.



Clockwise from top left: The water ballast tank under the cockpit sole.; Commodious lockers under the p & s side benches; The outboard leg swings down through the semi-rigid 'cat flaps'.

With the tidal clock ticking, we focus on the BayRaider 17, still un-rigged and on her road trailer. This is the very first of this design and has been built by Matt from epoxy ply for his own personal use. I feel rather reassured as it's always nerve-racking taking a customer's boat out for a test sail. She's been on the water a couple of times already and in some pretty strong winds, so we're feeling confident about today's weather, which is picking up to a nice Force 3-4, with the sun breaking through the clouds.

The BayRaider 17 has been designed by Matt as a smaller sister to the highly successful BayRaider 20 – see W64. Specifically, Matt had in mind a boat light enough to be launched off beaches and estuaries, with owners able to wheel the boat to the water's edge, without needing a 4x4. So she's designed to be light – and at only 500 lbs (230kg), she's certainly achieved that. But this lightweight little boat has a hidden talent in that she's designed to have water ballast. This is a design feature from Swallow Boats which has already proved very successful in the SeaRaider and BayRaider. I've never sailed a boat with water ballast, so I'm looking forward to trying it out.

The only clue is the round hatch on the cockpit sole, which when opened up, reveals the black void of the concealed tank, equipped with two self-bailers. When I was little and dinghy sailing with my Dad, he used to call these the 'Alice Slurpers', as apparently I made the same sort of noise when drinking, As I've grown up, we've renamed them in our boat the Sauvignon Slurpers... You can probably work out why. With one self-bailer facing forward and one facing aft on the BayRaider 17, it's a simple 'water in' and 'water out' mechanism, which enables the boat to fill and empty itself of approximately 500 lbs (230kg) of water ballast. Sealed air chamber buoyancy ensures the BayRaider 17 still conforms to the stringent RCD requirements

and with the water ballast tanks full, she is extremely easy to right should you capsize.

As well as being technologically clever, the BayRaider 17 is also very practical. She's extremely quick and easy to rig, with her mast bolted and hinged at the tabernacle, which simply pushes upright and bolts in place with the stays already fixed. The yard is a carbon-fibre windsurfer mast. The mizzen and jib both feature Swallow Boats' clever balanced sprit booms which make them self-tacking, ensuring the boat is a doddle to sail on your own. The rig also her very well balanced when sailing under mizzen and jib alone.

But the bit I like best is the clever engine arrangement. In order to line up the outboard with the rudder and mizzen, so the wash from the outboard is directed onto the rudder for easy manoeuvrability, Matt has designed an outboard well. The engine sits forward of the rudder, clamped to the outboard well and the propeller can be easily swung down into the water, through what I can only really describe as a cat flap. I'm not sure Matt really likes me calling it that but it is a very clever arrangement of semi-rigid flaps – the sort you would have around centreboard cases on dinghies – and the outboard prop and shaft simply slots down through them into the water. Very neat!

The rest of the hull layout is neat and clean. The sidedecks are wide and comfortable, with large lockers built-in on each side. There's an open locker forward, which is useful for storing the end of the boom and yard when the sail is taken down, keeping the sole area clear. There are two sets of oars neatly stowed and secured on the floor, as the BayRaider 17 is designed to take part in raids, where boats are sailed or rowed. Although extremely easy to sail single-handed, this is also a great boat for all the family.

I'm glad she's Matt's own boat, as the shallow shoreline

BayRaider 17 Specification

LOA: 17' (5.2m)

Beam: 6' (1.8m)

Draft - c/b raised: 10" (0.25m)
c/b lowered: 4' (1.2m)

Weight: 500 lbs (230kg)

Water ballast: 500 lbs (230 kg)

Sail area: 139 sq.ft (12.1m²)



means we take a few bumps to the rudder and centreboard as get out into deeper water. The rudder has a good uphaul and downhaul arrangement, with a quick release lock that springs out with a loud click if you hit the bottom. The first time it does this I nearly have a heart attack but I quickly get used to it and in fact we end up sailing with the rudder half up for much of the time as the estuary really doesn't have much in the way of consistently deep water. The tiller has been angled to clear the outboard and just for me, Matt even screwed a tiller extension on!

With just the two of us on board, my first instinct is that she's pretty lively and a bit of a handful. As the gusts hit us, Matt is up on the gunwales and I'm finding the mainsheet quite hard work. But she's great fun and I certainly feel safe enough in her. Then Matt suggests we take on water ballast. Now, I have to say, that opening up a self-bailer and watching a black void under your feet rapidly fill with water is a very unnatural thing to do. As the water gushes in, Matt explains that you do need to ensure that you move the crew weight to the centre of the boat during filling. This is because the cockpit sole always remains above water level so the boat maintains its self-emptying ability but unless she's trimmed level in the water you can get an air pocket forward. From inside the boat, you can't really tell that you've just taken on the equivalent of three or so grown people, except perhaps by looking at the water level in the outboard well.

But wow, you do notice the difference in her handling. In a way it's quite subtle; perhaps the wind has eased off or the waves subsided a little. However, as you spend more time sailing with the water ballast under your feet, you do realise

that she's become that bit more manageable, that little less feisty in the gusts. Talking later to Ches and Nick who had watched from the shore, they said they could see when we took the water ballast onboard: we became obviously more relaxed and one of us was now sitting to leeward. Actually on board, it was around that time when we started chatting more about the development of the business, future plans for expansion, and Self Invested Pension Plans. Hmm...perhaps a feisty ballast-free boat is better for concentrating the mind!

So before we turn into pension plan bores, Matt sticks a hand into the black hole and opens up the Sauvignon Slurper to get rid of the water. It doesn't take very long to completely drain and you don't feel any negative effects as it goes out – quite unlike sailing an Enterprise after a capsize with a water-filled hull! As the ballast drains, I start to notice the hull lifting higher out of the water and the bounce coming back into the boat.

It really was fun, seeing how the ballast made a difference to handling the boat. But it's also great to have the option of a light boat, especially when you consider towing weights and manoeuvrability on shore. There's quite a bit on Swallow Boat's excellent website and forums about suitable boats for sailors who feel they have grown out of dinghies and need something a little less lively and stable. I think Matt has hit on the solution with his water ballast system. Certainly for the BayRaider 17, without the water ballast she's half the weight, light and easy to manoeuvre ashore, fun and feisty on the water; with the ballast she's stable and controllable, reassuring if you have nervous crew, if the conditions pick up a bit or if you just want a pleasant day sailing.

But time is against us, and there's really very little water left now in the estuary. We keep hitting the bottom with the rudder and centreboard, so we sail ashore and get the boat back easily on the trailer and pushed up the bank to the boat yard. To my surprise, there's no damage to the rudder and only superficial paintwork marks on the centreboard; a measure of how robust the foils are. These specially aerodynamically-shaped foils also give extra lift to the hull and Matt points out, the rudder is designed with a flat top, creating a foothold so you can climb back on board more easily. It is also neatly designed to enable it to stay fixed on board, even when the boat is being towed.

With her matt black and cream finish, my overall impression is that the BayRaider 17 is pretty straightforward with good practical fittings, which, although they might not qualify as 'boating bling', keep the price down and do the job well. But it's behind the scenes and in the clever little design features where she really scores in my book.

After only a couple of outings, Matt seems really pleased with her, saying only that he might put a bit more non-slip agent on the sidedecks. At £11,995 plus VAT for a complete boat and sails, excluding engine and optional extras which include a two-colour paint job and spray hood, it's a great price for what I feel are really two boats!

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