



Sweet Seventeen?

WENDY FITZPATRICK ON SKIPPER'S TRAILER-SAILER

IN THE WORLD of trailer-sailers, there's an area of overlap between the ballasted dayboat and the mini-cruiser. A grey area, which encompasses a surprising variety of boats.

The Skipper 17 owes her heritage more to the dayboat category. Designed by Peter Milne in the 'Sixties, she was marketed then as a rather basic dayboat with a cuddy. Of necessity the "lid" had to be high if it were to offer a useful degree of protection from the elements. On a 17ft hull (only a little longer than the Wayfarer dinghy, remember) this little 'comfort item' was noticeable, if not intrusive.

The 1985 version of the Skipper 17 is a rather different animal. The cuddy has given way to *bona fide*, if a touch "bijou" weekend accommodation for a family of four.

Careful hatch, window and graphics design work on the new-look 17 has succeeded in disguising the relative height of the

coachroof and has resulted in an attractive weekender.

The new Skipper Boats company has taken a basically good product and commercialised it in a sympathetic way. Today's 17 has an efficient modern rig with optional spinnaker which realises the full potential of the Milne hull. The company has on its hands quite a slippery little dayboat which offers basic overnight accommodation for a couple or small family.

Sailing performance is good and

will not disappoint the dinghy sailor who is turning to family day-sailing. This tester's memory of the original 17 is hazy but the impression remains of a very acceptable turn of speed in light airs. Our latest encounter was in rather more wind than the Skipper 17 owner would normally choose to sail in. A good Force 5 followed us down the creek and by the time we reached the open waters of the estuary there was a suggestion of spindrift off the crest of the choppy waves. We took one reef in the main and sailed with the jib partly furled and the boat responded well and made good time on the beat back home against the ebb.

In her initial hint of tenderness she has the feel of a big dinghy but she quickly demonstrated a degree of stiffness at an angle of heel. We wondered whether we should have taken in another slab and idly considered that a little more ballast might not come amiss. But here we were, sailing quite happily

SKIPPER 17

LOA	17ft.
LWL	15ft.
Beam	7ft.
Draft	1ft. 3in./4ft.
Ballast	250lb.
Displacement	1000lb.
Mainsail	85sq. ft.
Jib	50sq. ft.

SKIPPER

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Power & Sail

in the strongest wind which the average family weekender would ever wish to be caught out in . . .

She carries a 4hp Mariner outboard engine which gives her a handy performance under power, but her sailing performance is such that its use will largely be by preference, not of necessity.

The accommodation below decks may be snug by cruising standards but the *al fresco* seating most certainly is not. The Skipper 17 has a cockpit which would not disgrace a 25-footer. At 8ft long there's room here for four adults to remain on speaking terms while the boat is sailed hard. And it's self-draining.

Her cockpit seats are comfortable and vinyl cushions are standard: relaxing with the feet planted on the leeward seat, steering with the large wooden tiller, the impression is of a far larger boat than 17ft. For my taste the tiller is too high. It's cranked to allow legroom underneath and on our test boat was fitted with a tiller extension, which I did like. But the tail of the mainsheet lay uneasily along the tiller and in the gusty conditions I had no wish to use the cleat which is fitted to the lower mainsheet block.

Visibility over the coachroof is surprisingly good. Being short, I find that I am craning my neck to

see ahead in most boats and this was no exception. But in view of the able way in which a quart has been squeezed aesthetically into a pint pot I feel that it would be churlish to criticise the coachroof height. High, yes, but not *too* high!

Given a tiller extension and a strong wind, my instinct was to sail the boat dinghy style, sitting on the cockpit coaming. I was prevented from doing so by the guardrails which run continuously between pulpit and aft pulpit — a sensible precaution on a family boat. The sidedecks are narrow but access to the foredeck is quite good and the boat is tolerant of a crew member clumping around on deck. Not that it's necessary, however. All the control lines — halyards, sail and centreboard controls — are led aft to obviate the need for deck work, yet none intrudes on cockpit space.

The 17 carries 135sq. ft. of plain sail and has a 100sq. ft. 'cruising chute' spinnaker as an option. The mainsail is slab reefed and roller reefing is standard on the jib. The aerofoil section black anodised mast is stepped in a tabernacle and is fitted with swept back spreaders, main and lower shrouds. Ballast is in the form of 100lb in the central keel plus 150lb in twin $\frac{3}{8}$ in galvanised centreboards which are easy to raise and lower.

The centreboard housings form the inboard edges of the two full-length berths in the cabin. These berths extend beneath the cockpit seats, dictating the size of the stowage bins on either side of the cockpit. There's open stowage aft for the outboard.

Her forepeak is cushioned and would sleep two children. If they are heavy sleepers, this is where the loo is intended to be sited, too. If not, well, there's always the "sleep-out" under the cockpit tent, which extends the under-cover area to full length of the boat.

The saloon table merges with the headlining when not in use and a slide-away galley unit is available which disappears under the cockpit sole out of hours.

A 15lb anchor, warps and fenders are supplied as standard, the anchor lives in its own well. Deck fittings are well sited and of good quality throughout.

Construction of the Skipper 17 appears to be rugged: a 7oz laminate is used for the hull with local reinforcing; 6oz for deck and cockpit and balsa core 5oz laminate for the interior hull liner. Efficient non-slip areas are moulded in.

Here then, is a trailer-sailer which is no trouble either to trail or to sail. Naturally there are compromises to be made if this is your style of sailing but, for my money, the concept makes sense. ●

