

The Bold Blazer

Twin trapezes and toe-straps for the remaining two crew, stripped out accommodation, planing hull and racing rig — they make up the Blazer. Obviously, it's not for family frolics or novices but for the racing fraternity.

By RIK DOVEY

THE BLAZER 23 IS A VERY BOLD attempt to market a trailer-sailer for racing — and it appears to have worked. A number of local designers have tried to come up with a popular trailer-sailer that is primarily an out-and-out racer while still able to provide overnight accommodation, but they've never really been successful.

The seven-metre Blazer isn't a boat for the inexperienced — it's for those who know what they're doing. Just as a private Cessna pilot wouldn't take up an F111 jet fighter, nor should the Sunday social sailer take out the Blazer in anything of a strong breeze.

The Blazer is the work of American designer Doug Peterson and Australian Tom Stephenson, a former *Modern Boating* Yachtsman of the Year and World Half-Ton Yachting Champion. Peterson is best known in the United States for his International Offshore Racing (IOR) designs but, according to Stephenson, for some time he has been playing around with the concept of a racing trailer sailer.

Stephenson had previously succeeded in introducing another Peterson design to Australia — the Seaway — and he wanted to try the smaller Blazer as well.

The result is a seven-metre trailer-sailer that sleeps four and races with a crew of three or four, with two on a trapeze. It's light, sails fast and is priced at just under \$16,000, complete with fullsail wardrobe and trailer.

The Blazer is built throughout in handlaid glass-fibre with Coremat in the hull and balsa core in the deck. The displacement is 770 kg, of which 159 kg is lead ballast in the bottom of the dagger centreboard.

Layout

Below in the cabin, there is accommodation for four people to sleep, two on either side of the centreline. The narrow beam of 2.41 metres means there isn't a lot of space below, but there is room for four to sit and sleep in comfort. There are

no facilities such as stove, ice-box or toilet. The boat is an overnigher and those wishing to do some longer cruising would have to equip themselves with portable facilities.

Positive buoyancy is provided by foam under most bunks. There are stowage lockers beneath two bunks, either side of the centreboard case, and more plywood stowage bins inside the hull deck-joints. For added safety, a watertight bulkhead could be incorporated at the aft edge of the quarter-berths.

The rig is identical to that of a Soling. This, Stephenson says, was partly deliberate, partly coincidental, and it's a good move, as buyers will be able to order standard sails and spars.

The deck layout is designed around a huge cockpit that is marvellous for sailing. Those not trapezing have wide side-decks with full-length toe-straps. The layout is clean and easy to handle, also being strictly controlled under one-design racing rules. There is good non-skid everywhere it's needed, and foot braces along the centreline of the cockpit sole are sensible.

Controls for the fractional rig are simple, in keeping with the clean layout. The rig consists of mainsail with jiffy reefing, single headsail and two spinakers. The mast has single spreaders backed up by intermediate shrouds.

The mainsail and genoa halyard winches are mounted on the mast and all other controls, including the headsail tracks, are located on the cabin top. The mainsheet is 5:1 purchase, the backstay 3:1 and the jib sheets 2:1 and endless without requiring winches. Ratchet blocks accommodate the spinnaker sheets/braces.

Flarings are 'in' on the Blazer — the gunwales are flared to keep spray down and there is a small planing board around the transom.

Both centreboard and rudder on the Blazer are dagger-type. The centreboard is raked aft and on later boats operated by a worm winch. Stephenson says early versions had problems with their centreboard-lifting systems be-

cause of the twisting caused by the ballast low in the board. He says he's now solved the problems with the use of a low-speed worm winch mounted on the cabin top.

The new system involves winding the centreboard both up and down, which is good for safety, and then there is an additional locking pin. The centreboard should be locked down when under way.

The rudder on the test boat had a fixed blade; for an extra \$100 or so, a vertical lifting blade system can be added.

Handling

There is no doubt that the Blazer is fast. In its first few months, it recorded fastest times in a number of trailer-sailer events, including the first two heats of the Kinnears series in Victoria and events at Port Stephens and Pittwater in New South Wales.

We tested the Blazer on Sydney Harbour in perfect testing conditions with a breeze strength gusting to 25 knots and a good seaway. We found it fast and a lot of fun, although it took some getting used to in order to sail it correctly.

The test boat, provided by J&S Sailboats, of Sydney, was lacking in tune, which kept the skipper's hands full when off the wind. Downwind, it had excessive lee or weather helm depending on the angles of heel and it was quite hairy at times for the crew. The design's fine entry and flat bottom called for direct steering — loss of concentration allowed the boat to quickly go its own way.

Upwind, the Blazer was very easy to handle. At first, we were somewhat over-canvassed, even with two on the trapeze. That called for a lot of spilling of the mainsail, even with the traveller right down to leeward. While the boat was a little tender, it surprised us because it didn't really want to round up — at all times the helmsman was in control.

Overpressed, the boat would simply heel and slow. Quickly, we put a reef into

BLAZER 23

LONG FLAT RUN AFT IS OBVIOUS WITH THE BLAZER OUT OF THE WATER.



the mainsail and that made all the difference, it just wanted to sail fast.

The Blazer was comfortable to sail. Full-length toe straps in the cockpit mean the two not on the trapeze could move their weight around easily for the best trim. Trapezing was also easy and all remained quite dry.

Standard is a tri-radial spinnaker and there is an optional smaller reaching spinnaker which we used in the blustery conditions of the day. It was easily handled and really kicked the Blazer along.

Auxiliary power is provided by a 5hp outboard which can be mounted on a bracket on either side off the transom. It provides ample power with the advantage of having an inbuilt fuel tank. When

racing, it comes off the transom and is stowed in the cabin.

Summary

The Blazer is aimed at any yachtsmen wanting a trailable yacht for racing which can also offer overnight accommodation. It's well designed, well built and — for those who know what they are doing — a lot of exciting fun. It's easy to launch and retrieve, it can be sailed up on to a beach, it motors well with just a small outboard, and it's fast when sailed well.

On the debit side, we thought the interior finish of the test boat was disappointing after checking out the excellent external finish. Unsightly bare glass-fibre is alright when lightness is a

criteria for performance, but things like shoddy finishing of timberwork and failure to finish bolts at the nuts did nothing for us.

The timber slides on the cabin roof, for the smoked plastic companionway hatch, are vulnerable to being lifted off by flailing sheets — in fact, that did happen on the test boat.

Another gripe was the rudder-head arrangement. The hinged tiller and rudder connection on the test boat was very sloppy. What had happened was that the glass-fibre rudder head was being worn away by the tiller's metal hinge. It should be deeper to give greater wear-absorbing area.

However, these problems are easily remedied and the Blazer should establish itself as a force to be reckoned with in Australian trailer-sailer rallies. Δ

FAST AND FUN — THAT'S THE STORY BEHIND THE BLAZER. ONE IMPROVEMENT COULD BE A LINE FROM EACH STERN QUARTER TO KEEP THE AFT TRAPEZE-HAND FROM BEING THROWN FORWARD



BELOW: CLEAN DECK LAYOUT ADDS TO EASE OF HANDLING. RATCHET BLOCKS AID SPINNAKER SHEETS AND BRACES, BAGS TAKE SHEET TAILS, ONE STORM BOARD IS FITTED AND HATCH HELD IN PLACE BY SHOCKCORD.

BOTTOM: RUDDER HEAD ON TEST BOAT SHOWED EXCESSIVE WEAR AND TEAR. DESIGN COULD BE EASILY MODIFIED TO IMPROVE.

