

OATBUILDER David Rose knows there's infinite improvements one can make to a sailboat. For 23 years has been progressively refining the Careel 18, now tagged Mark III, and for 19 years the Careel 22, which is still in MkII phase. In an industry that has seen hundreds of contenders come and go, it's a remarkable achievement.

Rose's latest project is the Careel Sonata 26, which started life as the Sonata 8 in the late 70s. Boasting an easily-driven hull, it proved adept at both TS and JOG racing, then, in the mid-80s, the cabin top was widened and extended in a bid to attract family cruising interest. It was in this format that Rose acquired the 26-footer in 1989.

Deciding that major modifications were not warranted, he has spent the past five years upgrading the construction and engineering to a point where the boat can wear the respected Careel badge. It extends from the use of a high-quality silicon gelcoat to a patented mast-raising system.

The latter is crucial to the 26's viability as a maxi cruising TS with small-boat user-friendliness.



Realising that older couples would represent many of his customers.
Rose set out to make erecting the 10m twin-spreader spar a solo task. He called in mast-maker Kerry Bokenham and got out the old Meccano set. Together, they came up with a device that indeed allows easy lifting and lowering, even once on the water.

Simply, the foot slides along a track spanning the top of the pulpit to the mast step, a distance of roughly 3m. Supporting the spar athwartships, while acting as a fulcrum point, are a pair of alloy arms. It's then a matter of simply winching on the hauling line,

ABOVE: In mid to heavy wind, you need to plonk the crew to windward to keep boat speed up. The cabin top comes in handy.

LEFT: Big dagger maintains control of the buoyant and beamy hull.

OPPOSITE: Nice, wide aft berths.

which the wiry Rose managed easily. The process seems fool proof, though we didn't try it in a strong cross wind. Should the rigging catch on the way up, the hauling line can be cleated off. Also, there's a crutch over the companionway which, in the unlikely event of total failure, would act as a rollbar in catching the falling spar.

A secondary benefit is that the mast automatically resides in trailering position when lowered, and is still high enough to allow the poptop to be raised and the cockpit accessed; both essential when using the boat as a caravan. The only detraction, perhaps, is that the ancillary items have to be stowed aboard or on the trailer.

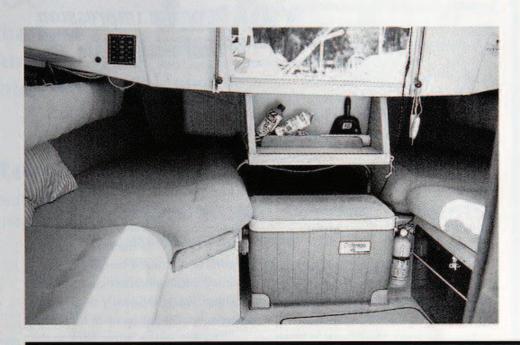
Having gone to this trouble it was logical that the 26 had be launched and retrieved single-handedly; easier said than done for a boat weighing 1800kg on trailer. With the help of trailer specialist Bob Kemp, a multiroller Tracer rig was devised which keeps the boat snug and also selfcentring - achieved by leaving two inches of keel exposed, enough to slip through the rollers either side of the centreline. Surprisingly, only a single axle is required, but heavy duty wheels and tyres are employed, along with Alko independent suspension and vacuum-boosted over-ride brakes.

Weighing 370kg, the dagger keel used to be a handful for the old block-and-tackle lift system. Rose replaced it with hydraulics, which he's been playing with since 1973. On the 26 it takes some 200 pumps to raise the keel, which means you have to approach the beach cautiously. Rose argues that if the keel strikes the bottom it only has to be raised a few inches to clear, however he is looking at beefing up the mechanics to speed it up and also offering an electric option.

Down below the changes are slight but significant. A general facelift of the furnishings lends a cool, contemporary ambience to the saloon, aided by a simple pop-top Instead of a built-in icebox, a portable
45-litre Coleman cooler is used

that affords 1.93m headroom and excellent ventilation. The package includes contoured bunk cushions and backrests along with subtle use of teak trim and front-runner carpet.

The galley has been moved from amidships to the area between the keel case and port gunwale, backed by a bulkhead. There's space for a



& CAREEL SONATA

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CAREEL 18 MK3

New Model with double berth.

CAREEL 22 Joe Adams' Brilliant Cruiser/Racer.

CAREEL SONATA 26
New improved Model now
being built.

two-burner stove, single sink (with teflon cover), a good-sized cupboard and drawers, while headroom is just sufficient for the chef to stand. Cooking odours can escape through the pop-top, though a dedicated vent wouldn't go astray, and cleverly the sink drains through the keel case.

Instead of a built-in icebox, a portable 45-litre Coleman cooler is used. This locks into place beneath the companionway to form a step, with the lid being carpeted for the purpose. The dinette table is also detachable, slotting around the centrecase to accommodate four, but leaving ample space to walk around. Forward of the bulkhead, meanwhile, is a Porta Potti and compact sink unit. It's serviced by hand-pumped freshwater — as is the galley sink from a fibreglass tank under the starboard settee.

Sleeping is arranged conventionally, with single quarter berths aft, twin settees and a double vee berth forward for a total of six (make that four adults and two children). Ideally, you'd have a maximum of four aboard for any length of time. The vee berth makes a nice area for some quiet reading. perhaps a games area for the kids, with light and air flooding through a large hatch.

Up on deck, little has changed from the Sonata 8 days, though as a maintenance-saving move Rose has replaced all timber brightwork with stainless steel. Control lines lead aft to a cluster of cleats and two winches, while the mainsail is controlled by 4:1 purchase running on a traveller near the companionway.

A blade jib is standard, sheeted from a sliding track adjacent to the mast then back to the primaries there's a case for a self-tacker, though Rose feels the blade is simple enough to handle when cruising. If nothing else, it allows you to carry a full mainsail into higher wind ranges. A mylar genoa is an option that racing sailors should consider, along with a spinnaker; J24 or Etchells size as it happens.

Upwind we were doing about 4.5 knots and pointing to within 30°, reaching we peaked at 6 knots and I got the impression that with a kite we would've planed

The auxiliary is a Tohatsu 8, which pushes the hull to around six knots and is reasonably easy to raise and lower. A problem, however, is the narrowness of the stern, which results in the motor being shoehorned onto its bracket alongside the rudder. Thus, it virtually negates the access benefits of an open transom.

The design is a throw-back to the days when yachts were fine aft to improve windward tracking and settle them downwind - since then. designers have learnt how to make wide-bummed boats perform well across the spectrum, with the added benefit of greater space. Otherwise the hull shape is good, with a fine entry and flattish run aft.

SPECIFICATIONS

| LOA:8.0m |
|----------------------------|
| LWL:6.38m |
| Beam:2.50m |
| Draft:0.21m/1.55m |
| Trailable weight:1800kg |
| Ballast:370kg |
| Mast height:10.06m |
| Sail area:Main 18.86sq m |
| Jib 10.86sq m |
| Genoa 19.69sq m |
| Spinnaker 40.96sq m |
| Designer:Gary Mull |
| Price (as tested):\$48,000 |
| Builder:David Rose Yachts |
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| |

For beaching, the keel retracts fully into the hull to give a draft of just 21cm. Maxi TSs often spend time on a mooring, too, and here the silicone gelcoat comes into play, being so slippery that marine growth can be retarded for two weeks or more without antifouling.

Under sail, she's no express but nor is she the slowest around. In the 1993 Marlay Point regatta, for example, it was 5th on handicap in the big boat division and helped snare the team's trophy along with two Careel 22s. It was a light air event, tailor made for a design with low wetted surface and a goodly amount of working sail.

In the heavier airs of our test day, 15 to 20 knots, it showed an easy turn of speed and remained totally manageable. Initially tender, the stability increased progressively as the ballast came into force and there was never cause for alarm. It helped, however, to get crew weight on the windward gunwale, as she was decidedly "bogged down" with one crew to leeward and another standing in the companionway. There's limited room in the cockpit, so the extra bodies have to spread along the sidedecks.

Upwind we were doing about 4.5 knots and pointing to within 30° apparent, reaching we peaked at 6 knots and I got the impression that with a kite we could've cracked the plane. But this was to be a leisurely sail, befitting the boat's mid-life change to cruiser.

To sum up, the Careel Sonata 26 is a good, honest toiler, hard to fault because of the many improvements David Rose has made. There's no escaping the fact that old technology exists in the hull and deck, but still this 15-year-old craft has what it takes to perform in mixed company. It also enjoys a comparative price advantage, because Rose picked up the moulds at "fire sale" prices. As tested, on trailer and fitted with the deluxe interior, it's going for a song at \$48,000.