

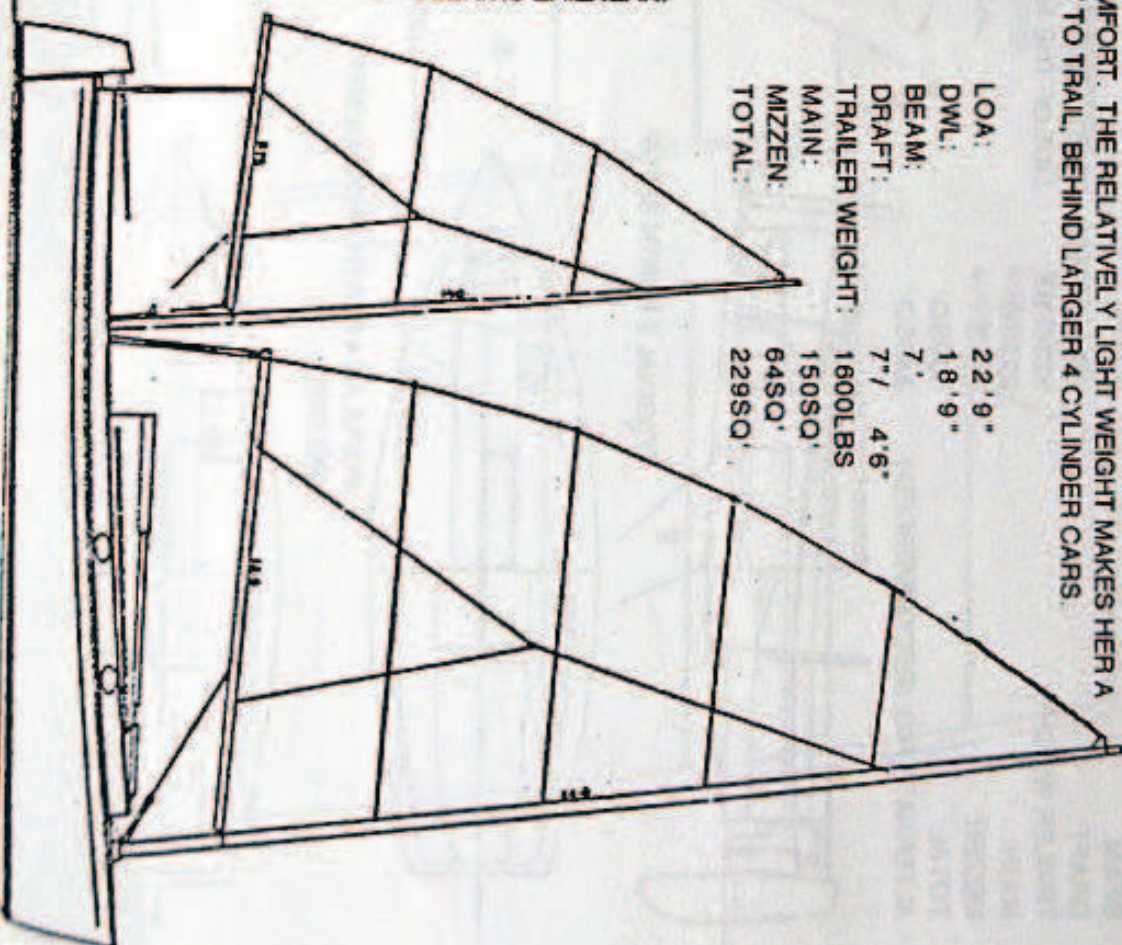
N.I.S. SHARPIE... 23'ER

Sourced, stored & provided, courtesy of John Crawford Marine. "QLD's Used Boat Specialists Since 1964"

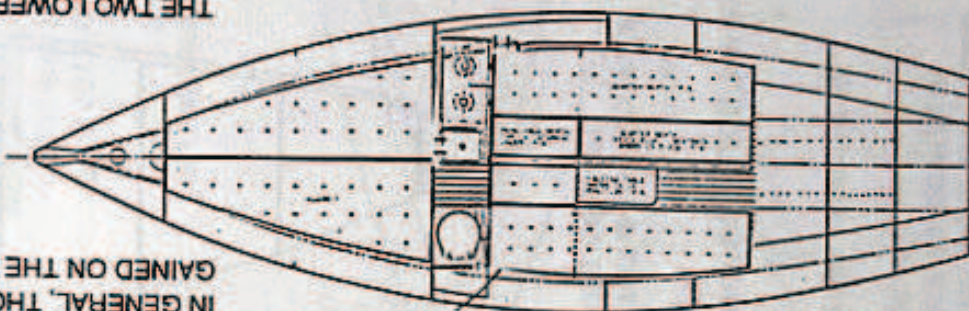
THE 23 WAS ORIGINALLY CONCEIVED AS A DAY SAILER. WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN PRACTICE IS THAT THE BOAT HAS PROVEN HERSELF TO BE A FINE SMALL CRUISER/RACER. IT IS STRESSED THAT THIS BOAT WAS NOT DESIGNED FOR SERIOUS OFFSHORE OR NIGHT SAILING. MANY HAVE BEEN SET UP AND USED SUCCESSFULLY, FOR THIS PURPOSE BY EXPERIENCED SAILORS. WITH COMPETENT HANDLING, HER GENEROUS SHEER, BULKHEADED CONSTRUCTION AND CORRECTLY INSTALLED BALLAST, SHE HAS PROVEN HERSELF ABLE TO RIDE OUT QUITE A STRONG BLOW.

THE COCKPIT IS 9' LONG, MAKING FOR DAY SAIL COMFORT. THE RELATIVELY LIGHT WEIGHT MAKES HER A JOY TO TRAIL, BEHIND LARGER 4 CYLINDER CARS.

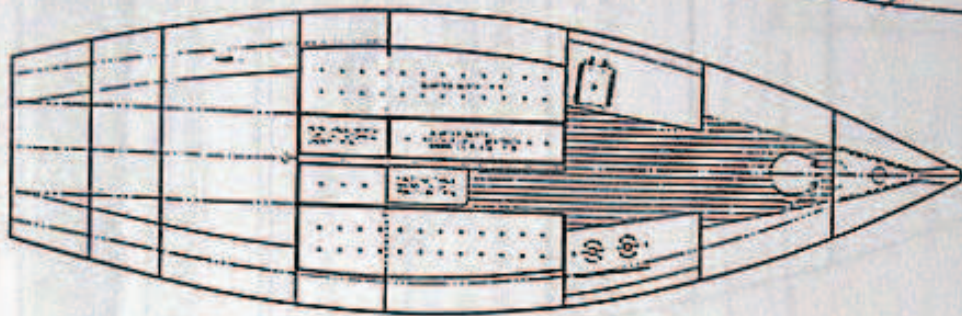
LOA:	22'9"
DWL:	18'9"
BEAM:	7'
DRAFT:	7" / 4'6"
TRAILER WEIGHT:	1600 LBS
MAIN:	150 SQ'
MIZZEN:	64 SQ'
TOTAL:	229 SQ'



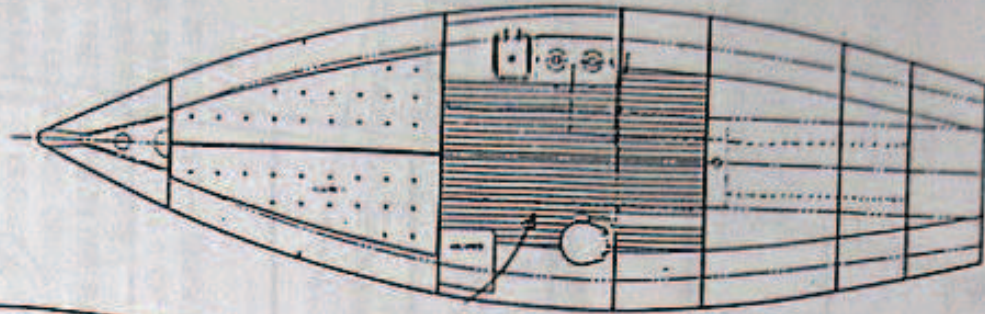
INVENTIVE OWNERS ARE CUSTOMISING THE INTERIOR LAYOUTS OF ALL OF THESE BOATS. IN GENERAL, THOUGH, IT SEEMS MOST IS TO BE GAINED ON THE 18 AND THE 23.



THE TWO LOWER LAYOUTS ARE THE ORIGINALS.



MANY BUILDERS ARE NOW ALLOWING OF THE 23, NARROWING THE COCKPIT. TRUE QUARTER BEATHS TO BE FITTED AFT. LESS COCKPIT TO FILL UP, TOO!





Charlie Fisher is just as keen to sail.

Simply Sharp

Modern design and construction revive a traditional work boat for recreational use, by Bob Ross

When the boat designer Bob Kirby introduced the three Kirby designed series of Norwalk Island Sharpies to Australia nearly 35 years ago with the 25-footer *Charlie Fisher* named after the father-to-be boat builder and friend, the sharpie boats built at Kirby's Dock Flat Wooden Boats were thought to be a thing of the past. Kirby's Dock Flat Wooden Boats or plans it has sold to amateur and other professional boat builders there are more than 30 Sharpies sailing throughout Australia, in all sizes of the range: 18ft, 20ft, 26ft, 29ft and 31ft. All except the 25-footer, which is of cold moulded wooden construction, are built closer in shape and built in powered plywood. And all except the 31 which carries a conventional mast rig, are cut figured with winged aluminium masts (what the world

you expect from Laser class designer and Canadian film class champion Kirby?). The 18 is now rigid and the others are cut benches. Kirby says more than 500 of them are sailing worldwide. Kirby established Dock Flat Wooden Boats in 1985, evolving from an owner-builder wooden boat program he ran privately in the Adelaide Hills.

Dock Flat Wooden Boats now has a work force of 15, in a large, new factory at Mount Barker SA. It builds custom boats from a variety of designers and undertakes high quality restoration work. The premises even include a flat for owners to say while their boats are under construction.

Kirby's prototype

While's obvious love for the Norwalk Island Sharpie and especially his own *Charlie Fisher*, began when he visited Kirby at his Rowertown, Connecticut home in the USA in 1988. Kirby's home is at the end of a winding inlet off Long Island Sound. Kirby remembers seeing in the long grass at the bottom of the yard, "a rather scruffy looking Laser dinghy". This was Laser number one, now in the Mystic Seaport Museum.

"When I arrived, the tide was out and at the Kirby wharf built more than a fathom of water and a couple of muskrats roamed. Hence, as Bruce pointed out, the rationale behind the ultra shallow draft Norwalk Island Sharpies."

While went sailing with Bruce and Margo Kirby on the 26ft prototype for the range, *East 12*. The design was inspired by the sharpie scows developed over two centuries by fishermen of east coast USA.

Kirby applied the same ideas over the traditional sharpie, assisted by modern computer technology he had used for a variety of designs including the senior keelboat class and the 1982 Canadian America's Cup challenge. The computer technology also allowed Kirby to produce plans that do not require traditional building, all the components go together with a remarkable



TOP: The design features hard chine and fixed keelboats. ABOVE: Mast and construction were good in the first drawing '88.



Vee berth forward, metho stove, Porta Potti and settee berths opposing centreboard trunk.

degree of accuracy.

"Kirby developed these boats for his own use from the famed oyster boats of his area," Ayliffe says. "They were, as these are, unstayed cat-rigged ketches, skinny, with flaring sides and flat bottoms that had to run bars, loaded and empty, in all weathers, either single-handed, or man and boy."

"The Norwalk Island Sharpie was dramatically worked over by Kirby into a modern, surprisingly high performance boat with an easily handled rig," Ayliffe says. "A feature of the Kirby boat was its lightweight plywood/epoxy hull construction and clever interior design resulting in far more accommodation for a given length when compared to its ancestors."

Duck Flat Wooden Boats became the Australian agent for the Norwalk Island

Sharpie range and Ayliffe enthusiastically began building *Charlie Fisher*.

"Any lingering conservatism I might have felt was thoroughly dispelled by that experience - the high-windedness, the quiet of the hull, the wonderful agility and ease of handling and she looked so good."

Ayliffe initially sailed *Charlie Fisher* on the shallow waters of Lake Alexandrina and Coorong Lakes and then offshore, although Kirby did not design the Sharpies as blue water boats. Ayliffe was caught out in a southwest blow on the return from a cruise to Kangaroo Island with his 16-year-old stepson and young friend on board.

"We were in 65 knots for eight hours. I was terrified," he says. "When we finally reached Port Vincent, people did not believe we had been out there."

Sailing under deep reefed mainsail, the boat remained remarkably easy to handle

in the conditions.

Interest in the sharpie concept was boosted when James Frecheville skippered his self-built Norwalk Island 23 *Coot* to a line honours and division A handicap victory in the 1994 Marlay Point overnight race for trailable yachts on the Gippsland Lakes. *Coot* scorched around the course in record time while a southerly front, with rain squalls and winds of 25 to 30 knots, dismasted 16 boats, sank four and led to 60 retirements from a fleet of 320 entries.

Although Duck Flat Wooden Boats has built eight Norwalk Island Sharpies, in all the sizes, since *Charlie Fisher* Ayliffe has retained the boat, re-vitalised her with a beautiful International Brightside rolled-on polyurethane finish and optimised the rig set up.

Explaining why he had kept her, he said: "I have probably built for my own purpose seven or eight boats over the years and every one, at some point, I wanted to get rid of," he said. "But this boat continues to thrill me. I am never bored with it."

Ayliffe says part of the success of Duck Flat is due to its long term relationships it has developed with its suppliers, foremost among them, the association with Ken O'Brien Sails. "The crews at Spunspair in Mona Vale (NSW) and Randall Cooper Fabrications in Goolwa make to Duck Flat's specifications and branding free-standing spars and hardware of such quality that a significant export business has developed for their Norwalk Island Sharpie rigs in Italy, the UK and especially the United States."

"Harken Australia have been extremely helpful in refining and advising on the Duck Flat running rigs."



The masts sit in a high-tensile tabernacle post.



One person can lower the mast which stays secured at the pivot point.



Spars and sails are quickly packaged for trailing.

East again

Ayliffe towed *Charlie Fisher* east again at Easter for some promotional sailing. For the boat, with a towing weight of 1.7 tonnes, a single-axle trailer suffices and Ayliffe's Nissan Patrol was more than powerful enough to comfortably handle the 4000km round trip. Similar boats are being towed by six cylinder Commodores and Fords.

The most noticeable improvement to the boat since she first came east on promotional sails soon after launching, apart from the smart new paint job, is the method Ayliffe has devised for stepping and lowering the mast – the most daunting chore for the trailable yacht owner.

The main and mizzen masts are raised in an unconventional tabernacle arrangement. They slot into fixed channeled posts, formed from high tensile aluminium in a 500 tonne press and strong enough to withstand a full knockdown. The posts protrude 850mm above deck with the post for the mainmast fixed at the keelson and the mizzen to the cockpit floor, with the pivot pin near the top. Both spars live on the tabernacles. The pivot point is high enough to allow both to be raised by one person, by hand – no strings or sheer legs required.

The mizzen mast hinges forward and the main mast aft. With the goosenecks for both booms also attached to the tabernacle the spars, with sails left attached to the booms, are readily packaged into a rigid bundle for trailing.

Ayliffe sees the arrangement as possibly the best ever trailer-sailer rigging solution. He can rig and launch *Charlie Fisher* inside 20 minutes.

He took me and my 13-year-old grandson sailing on a light-air afternoon in Pittwater – a notoriously difficult place to sail.

The 3.5hp Tohatsu outboard pushed *Charlie Fisher* east again at Easter for some promotional sailing. For the boat, with a towing weight of 1.7 tonnes, a single-axle trailer suffices and Ayliffe's Nissan Patrol was more than powerful enough to comfortably handle the 4000km round trip. Similar boats are being towed by six cylinder Commodores and Fords.



The cockpit is 2.75m long and secure.

Charlie Fisher out of the Royal Motor Yacht Club marina; with more than adequate power for this flat-bottomed, light craft.

The grandson took the helm while Ayliffe hoisted sail. With both sails fully battened and captured in lazy jacks, this was a simple operation. Hoisting the mizzen first and sheeting on this small sail automatically pushed the boat head to wind while the mainsail was raised.

The young 'un would not get off the helm. The lack of complication in the rig, high-set booms, only two strings to pull ensure the boat is extremely easy to sail. She has only one winch, to help raise the mainsail, on the cabin top within reach of the cockpit, along with two banks of jammers for the sail controls.

Performance

The performance was a surprise to me when I finally got my hands on the tiller. The mast-sail combinations developed by Ken O'Brien Sails in South Australia and the Spunspare team in Sydney seem spot on.

With the spars bending in concert, gust response was good upwind in the breeze

of only 8-10 knots and the height to windward achieved greatly exceeded my expectations.

It pays to encourage the boat to heel by sailing bow down, in the fatter end of the steering groove, so the hard chine gets a bite on the water – contributing to side force resistance, as well as the centreboard.

With the centreboard fully swung up into its case, by a 6:1 purchase tackle operated from the cockpit, the boat will still sail to windward to some degree, with the draft only 250mm. Draft with the board down is 1.37m.

Stability is contributed by a 363kg lead shoe along the bottom of the hull and an 80kg lead tip to the centreboard, which is made of western red cedar strips and glass composite.

Downwind, who needs a spinnaker with the ability to sail with the main and mizzen set wing and wing and the boat virtually steering herself? The boat is extremely well balanced. Rob Ayliffe leaves her to self-steer with a piece of light line positioning the tiller.

Overnighter

Charlie Fisher has a large vee berth forward, settee berths port and starboard, two-burner metho stove and a Porta Potti toilet. The area aft of the companionway is devoted to stowage. She is equipped with VHF radio.

While she can be sailed single-handed, she can also take a crowd, secure in the 2.75m long cockpit with its high-coamings. Ayliffe has cruised *Charlie Fisher* around the Alexandrina and Coorong lakes carrying up to eight young adults on school excursions with their gear.

Professionally built, including trailer and everything you see on *Charlie Fisher*, the Norwalk Island 23 will set you back \$75,000 to \$80,000 dollars. Rob Ayliffe says you could build your own for \$18,000 in 18 months to two years of spare time. Duck Flat can supply not only the set of plans, for \$560, but all the materials and limitless advice.

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Specifications

Length overall	6.93m
Waterline	6.01m
Beam	2.13m
Draft (board down)	1.37m
(board up)	0.25m
Weight with trailer	1.7 tonnes
Sail areas, main	13.94sq m
mizzen	5.95sq m

Designer: Bruce Kirby, USA

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