

TAKE THE FAMILY CRUISING

Rob had to buy a big Ford station wagon to tow Apache II and some of the stories about customers buying special tow vehicles are worth repeating here. One southern RL28 buyer turned up with a new Rolls Royce to tow his new boat! Another sent the full deposit without even seeing the boat — and then asked what sort of car to buy to tow it with.

At writing, Rob Legg is booked out on RL28s for months ahead. The response has been astounding. The first RL28 went to Darwin where it won its first race by the proverbial 1.6 kilometres. As a matter of interest, Rob's partner in Rob Legg Yachts Pty Ltd, Don Stead, towed the first RL28 to Darwin in four days. Not a bad effort

considering Australia's outback roads. He was assisted by a particularly dry winter... and no hogs.

The RL24 is probably Australia's fastest TS — so it follows a longer RL should be even faster. From my observations, this is not so. I think the RL28 is about as fast as the RL24 upwind and downwind, but slower reaching.

The bigger RL handles more like a yacht and doesn't have the dinghy feel of its smaller sister. Just the same, it has the convenience of swing centreboard (hydraulically controlled) and shallow draft. Yachts that sail The Broadwater must have centreboards. Fixed keel and drop keel yachts can become embarrassing if their crews make

navigational errors in the shoal areas. If you hit bottom (as we did!) in a centreboarder, you simply raise the board and push her off.

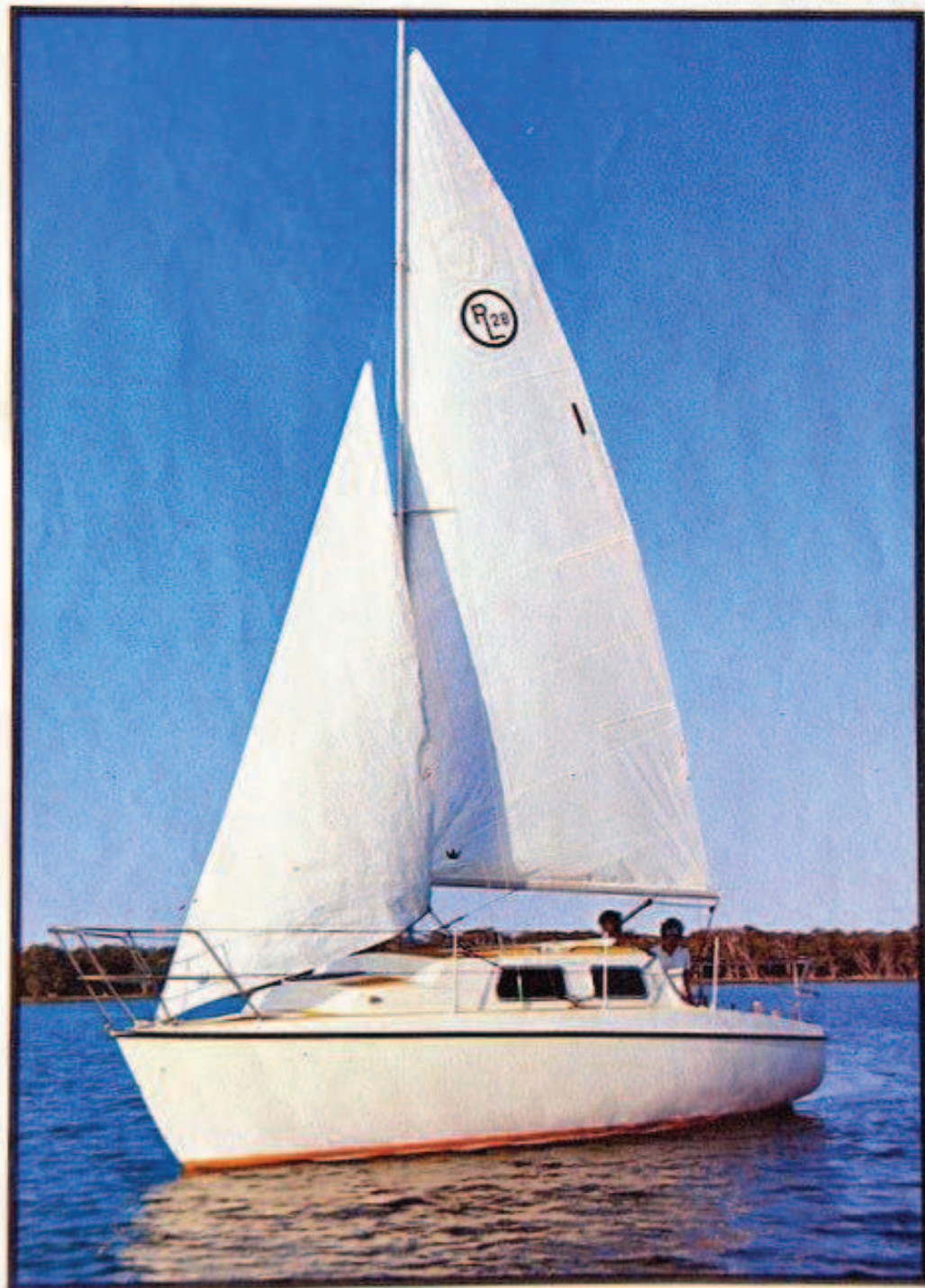
Before describing our two days afloat in the RL28, an outline of the boat is in order.

The RL28 "Maxi" trailerable yacht is unique in that it offers full headroom accommodation for six people, large galley, full hanging space, 225-litre freshwater storage, shower, toilet and wash basin, chart table, dining table, coastal family cruising ability, shallow water ability and hydraulic swing keel.

Displacement is about 1150 kg plus trailer and extra gear. You are looking at (perhaps) 3500lb minimum but this does not apply in other states where brakes are considered more important.

Some years ago I owned a couple of trucks. They weighed much more than 3500lb but had terrible brakes. If the servo unit played up, they had no brakes! The point is that brakes are more important than vehicle weight. In my opinion vacuum brakes on a trailer are more efficient than good tow vehicle brakes.

Jack-knife isn't a new parlor game and those who have jack-knifed a rig know all about it. If the trailer brakes are good enough, they can restrain the tow vehicle as well and thus prevent jack-knifing.



Cabin top is almost big enough to install solar heating.

Coming or going, the RL28 is attractive.

Another point NSW authorities may have overlooked: *towing power*. For safety the tow vehicle *must* have the power to extract trailer from steep ramps and dangerous highway situations. A big automatic V8 is the answer. The bigger the better. Gas-guzzlers they may bem giving two to three km/l, yet necessary evils if you want to tow really big boats.

I wouldn't like to tow the RL28 long distances. Rob and June Legg towed Apache II from Southport to Adelaide for the 1977 Tripolis and didn't complain. But I'm not quite as adventurous. They say it doesn't worry them at all as they don't speed and don't take risks.

The first time they towed the RL28 with their old Valiant they didn't have vacuum brakes on the trailer. Stopping was a problem. Now, with big Ford and vacuum brakes behind they go and stop as they wish.

The message from all this is don't

overload your tow vehicle and make sure the trailer has sufficient brakes.

VITAL STATISTICS

LOA 8.54 metres (28ft). LWL 7.2 m. Beam 2.41 m. Weight about 1150 kg. Working sail area 25 m². Ballast ratio 40 percent. Rig is 13/16th with backstay and fixed (non-swivelling) mast. Auxiliary power 10 hp outboard. Inboard engine can be fitted.

Accommodation for six; two berths for'ard, double and single in main cabin plus one quarter-berth. Galley to starboard inside companionway.

RL28 retains popular RL24 foredeck well where big and little kids can sit and watch the world drift by.

Motor well is inboard. Centreboard is controlled by a hydraulic system mounted in cockpit. "Pump up" lever and "drop down" twist valve.

HOW SHE PERFORMED

Glorious sunshine blessed our two

days afloat in the RL28. The first day we cruised up to Jacobs Well, a couple of hours' sail along the inland route to Brisbane and the second day we had a picnic on South Stradbroke Island and played sailing races with Geronimo, the Legg's RL24 which had just been sold to the Davenports of Wyong, NSW.

During our time afloat we welcomed at least a dozen interested sailors on board. We would anchor and someone would ask for a peek. Invariably they were amazed by the 28's accommodation.

We had never sailed to Jacobs Well. In fact, we had only motored to Moreton Bay once or twice before and steered Apache II with one eye on the area chart (which is required reading if you explore the waterways between Southport and Brisbane).

As it turned out, it was child's play; keeping black to port and red to starboard toward the port of Brisbane and vice versa on the way back. But the chart was way out in depths. The passage into Jacobs Well had changed completely. We went where the chart showed deep water and ran aground. A few pumps on the centreboard handle and we were floating free — and bucking a savage ebb tide.

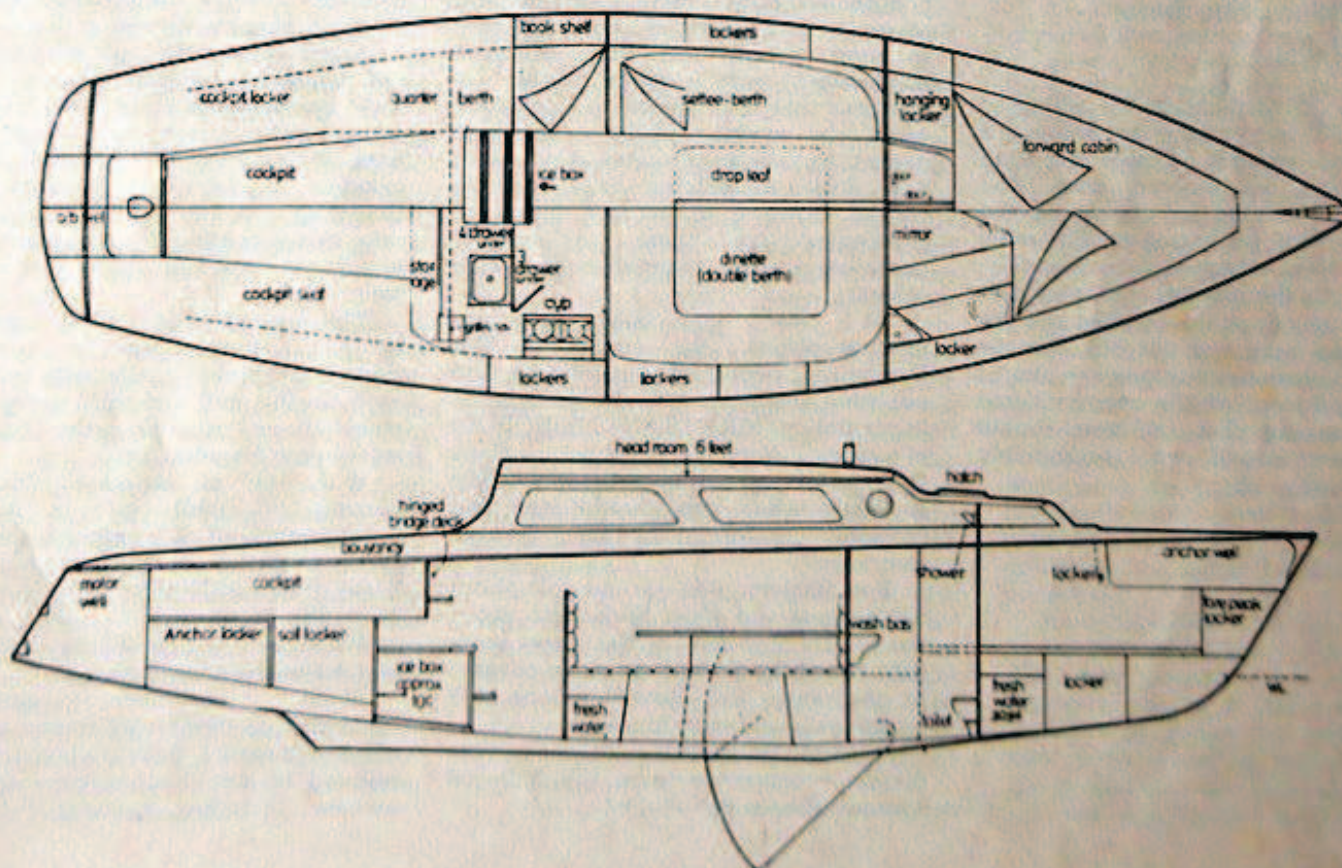
The eye is the best navigational aid in this area. The water is so clear that one can pick the depths by water color. A reliable auxiliary motor is essential as the currents run fast.

Tides are peculiar, too. With two entrances to the sea — Southport Bar

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FACT BOX

RL 28, maxi-trailer sailer designed and built by Robb Legg, PO Box 24, Runaway Bay, Qld, 4216. GRP construction. LOA 8.54 m. LWL 7.2 m. Beam 2.41 m. Weight about 1150 kg. Ballast ratio 40 percent. Sail area — working 25 m². Spinnaker 21 m². Rig 13/16th with adjustable backstay. Full headroom (6ft) and accommodation for six adults. Freshwater tanks 225l. Shower and hanging lockers. Draft 0.6 m to 1.3 m. Auxiliary — 10 hp outboard in well near transom. Boat to lock-up stage — \$8874. Kit to complete to sail-away stage \$2950 (hydraulic plate raising equipment, standard deck and rigging fittings, mast, boom, stainless steel rigging and cordage, pulpit, sealant, fastenings, mainsail, battens, two headsails, teak faced ply for hanging locker and louvre cabin doors. Sail-away stage \$13,796. De luxe, fully fitted, about \$17,500 (firm price on application). Tandem trailer with vacuum disc brakes \$1453.



test **RL28**

RL 28 features high topsides and a reverse sheerline which gives standing head room through most of the cabin area.



Over the last decade and a half the trailer sailer scene has seen well over a hundred different production models try their luck on the market with only a handful gaining any real long-term success. In what appears to be a commercial variation on Darwin's survival of the fittest theory, the designs which do make it seem to have what it takes to turn buyers on.

There is no doubt that one of the great survivors in the cut and thrust of the trailer sailer market has been the Gold Coast-built RL range of trailer yachts. The initials RL stands for Rob Legg, the builder and designer of the range, but in fact to the market the RL stands for both Rob and his wife June.

While it was Rob's sailing and boat-building/designing talents which established the RL concept in the first place, it

24 seemed very daring at the time with a length of 7.3 metres. As funny as it sounds now there were many who thought it was too long to tow!

The RL 24 became a success story because it not only could accommodate a family of four overnight but it was also a fun, fast boat to sail for those who were coming out of dinghies and cats and seeking something with a bit of get up and go. More importantly perhaps, the RL was also pretty inexpensive.

Rob and June built their first RL while living in Victoria but they were visionary people who not only saw the growth potential in the trailer sailer scene, but also the direction in which this market would grow. The Leggs moved to the Gold Coast and set up a modern factory to build the RLs. From there, they travelled the length and breadth of the



Long-legged maxi

It's heading for its tenth birthday but with a few improvements here and there the RL 28 still has a leg on the opposition when it comes to sheer room and size for value. Report by JAMES HILL.

was the dynamic drive and personality of Rob and June together which sold the RL story to Australian sailors. Story is the operative word for the RL range of trailer sailers were more than just sailing boats, the RLs encompassed not just economical boating but a whole new lifestyle for families interested in getting into boating.

The key behind the success of the RL was Rob's strong belief that for trailer sailers to be successful as family craft, they needed to be both light in weight and less expensive than yachts. Rob had a strong grounding in the Olympic Flying Dutchman class and it was this classic lightweight racing dinghy which convinced him that light displacement was the only way to go for trailer sailers.

When Rob and June Legg unveiled their first RL at the Melbourne Boat Show early in the 1970s, many in the yachting industry were amazed. The first RL was a long, lean cabin yacht with hull lines not unlike that of a Flying Dutchman but the boat had much more hull depth and freeboard height than any racing dinghy.

At the time the first RL 24 came out most trailer yachts so far seen where no bigger than six metres. Although it was not a big volume boat for its size, the RL

country promoting their boat, sailing in every regatta they could find and personally giving potential clients demo sails.

The Leggs were one of the first to realise the marketing potential of creating a strong owner's racing-cum-cruising association around a design and set the first RL 24 up as a semi-one-design class.

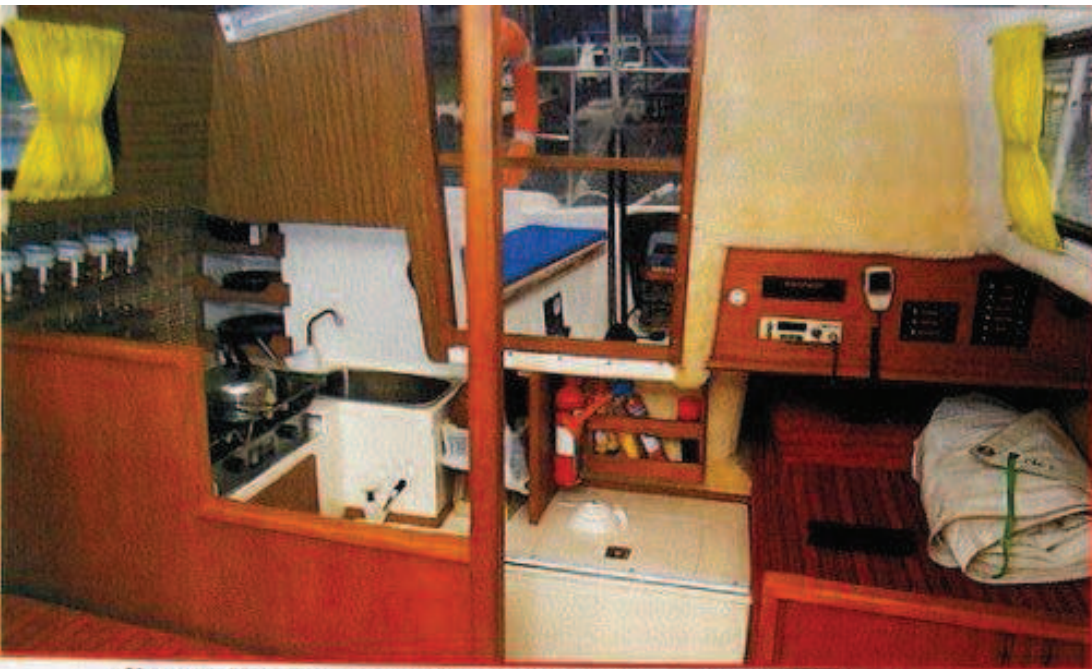
The Leggs could have done quite well by just staying with their first boat but Rob saw the potential for much bigger TSSs, especially for cruising places like the Whitsundays. The RL 28 followed and surprised the market because it was not so much a racing boat as it was a cruiser. In design terms it was still a light displacement craft and it carried many of the design features of the smaller boat, such as the shape of the cabin and in the use of a fractional sloop-rig.

It must have disappointed the racing enthusiasts that the RL 28 was not the racing machine the RL 24 was, but the design did show Legg's ability to understand the market and grow with it. The 28 proved to be just as big a success as the smaller boat because it hit the nail on the head for many buyers moving out of the smaller boat. In moving to a bigger

boat, these buyers wanted more accommodation for cruising, not performance for racing. Legg realised this vital point and gave the RL 28 a number of very attractive cruising features like full standing headroom without needing a pop-top.

Just before Christmas 1977 I tested the first RL 28 on the Gold Coast Broadwater with Rob and June and my own family. The new maxi looked a rather bulky craft both in or out of the water but it sailed remarkably well. Certainly it was





Above, cabin looking aft to companionway shows galley off to starboard and icebox under step. Below, outboard well in cockpit.

not a hot racer like the RL 24, but size for size it wasn't bad either. In the first few years the RL 28 was on the market, Rob and June scored some notable racing successes with the boat, but this point was quickly forgotten as the RL 28 became firmly entrenched as a cruising boat.

Nearly a decade later I had the chance to revisit Rob and June's latest boat. Again the boat was an RL 28 but this time it was not sitting in front of the Legg's Runaway Bay waterfront home, but instead in a marina pen as part of a charter boat fleet.

The new RL 28, Jupiter, was one of a fleet of meticulously maintained RL 28s operated by Sail-Cruise of Port Stephens.

Since I had tested the first RL 28 the range had been expanded by the addition of a semi-trailer sailer maxi of over 10 metres, the RL 34 and fixed keel versions of both the RL 24 and 28.

I had been given the opportunity to test the fixed-keel version of the 28 some years earlier and had found it to be an interesting and worthwhile development of the boat, especially for places like Sydney. I like the fixed-keeler but this latest RL 28 was something else again.

The test boat was set up as a charter boat but otherwise it was a fair representation of the new eighties-style RL 28. The main improvement to this new

boat without a doubt was the addition of a sliding hatchway for the main cabin entrance. The new hatch has made entrance to the cabin easier and it has made the cabin lighter and more airy — certainly a big plus when cruising in warmer climates such as tropical Queensland. With the addition of a sliding hatch, the mainsheet now sheets off a fixed stainless steel deadeye in the cockpit floor. While the lack of a mainsheet traveller reduces the fine control of the mainsail (particularly when sheets are sprung for a reach), this new arrangement certainly keeps the cockpit tidy.

Up forward the top of the trunk cabin now sports a glass-topped, alloy-framed Houdi hatch which is certainly an improvement on the model which used to be fitted in this area.

The other changes are far less obvious but still make for a better boat. There are, for instance, upright holders for the fuel tanks in the transom and a better quality gel coat which makes for a hull able to stand up much better to water filtration and aging processes.

In terms of deck layout and other aspects such as interior fit-out, the RL 28 is virtually the same highly successful design. While the lines are a little dated by today's standards, the 28 is an attractive boat in other ways beginning with the fact that you can buy it ex-factory for a very low sail-away price of \$29,000, less trailer and motor.

The standard boat fitted to the deluxe stage, as Rob Legg calls it, is fully fitted out below with teak trim, cushions, lights, pushpit, pulpit, liferails and safety gear. This version, which closely approximated our test boat without special NSW MSB charter modifications, costs \$35,600 ex-factory. Considering that many equivalent maxi TSs and keel yachts will cost well

over \$40,000 for the same level of fitting out, the RL 28 looks good value.

Although the RLs have suffered a slow-down like the rest of the market in the eighties, they continue to sell and keep the factory ploughing along. At present Rob Legg says the RL 28 swing-keeler is the top-seller in the range and he sees no reason to change the design, although he is building new mouldings this year. Legg says he has a new eight-metre RL racer/cruiser in the pipeline but the RL 28 will remain the same for some years to come.

Design

This is a classic light displacement style swing-keeler with higher than usual freeboard in the hull to achieve good standing headroom below. The hull is shallow in cross section and fairly narrow in waterline beam. Basically this is a fast hull with a displacement of only 1360kg on a waterline length of 7.2 metres. The hull has a high potential for fast sailing, particularly upwind and reaching, but in practice this is moderated by the height of freeboard and the relatively modest sail area in the standard rig.

Although a relatively narrow boat, the RL 28 carries quite a lot of fullness in the bow and stern sections so this gives it a lot of speed potential. To maximise the potential of the hull Legg developed a special racing edition of the RL 28 a few years ago and one of these racing models won the recent Southport annual yachting series against a cross section of designs including IOR boats. The racing edition's main difference is a masthead-size foresail and spinnaker on the same height mast. According to Legg the masthead rig works well on the boat, helping to balance the helm better in fresh upwind sailing and giving a lot more zip all round in light airs.

Those buyers who yearn for an occasional race might well consider the optional racing rig.

Performance

We test-sailed Jupiter in a light to moderate south-easter of no more than 14-15 knots. In a wind which was mostly around 10-12kts the RL 28 felt very comfortable and able to stand up to its canvas. In the upper limit of the wind we noticed how the boat heeled easily but still kept driving without really losing speed. A lot of people have told me they think the RL 28 is too tender, but one has to realise that heeling is not such a speed robber in a narrow boat as it is in a beamy type. The beamy, dish-type hull, popularised by the IOR, really digs a hole and dies in the water if it heels much more than 10 degrees but long metre boat types do not. The RL 28 is no metre boat but still behaves in much the same way



and can heel out to as much as 25 degrees and still keep trucking upwind.

On a close or beam reach the test boat really was in its element. Without having to fight the heeling forces as much, the RL 28 really moved on out when reaching. In this respect it would be a nice boat to cruise since this is the angle where most owners tend to do their pleasure sailing.

Overall we found the small headsail and large mainsail combination very easy to work. The boat could easily be sailed single-handed in the conditions we experienced.

The standard set-up on deck has no running backstays, but you do get an adjustable backstay to tweak the fractional rig. The backstay gives a 4:1 adjust with a combination rope tackle and wire bridle. The mast is supported by cap shrouds running over single set of swept-back spreaders, and a single set of lowers which anchor onto the cabintop.

As standard, the boom is set nice and high so you don't get knocked heads in a gybe, plus there is a topping lift to take the boom when the sail is dropped. The mainsail comes standard with double sets of jiffy reefing. The tails of the leech reef lines are led back to the cockpit via turning blocks led to jam cleats on the rear of the trunk cabin.

Also standard are two headsails, both with piston hanks. You can have an optional roller furler and here there is a wide choice of models to choose from. Eric Skews of the charter boat company considered the Giot roller furler the best he had so far tried on the RL 28.

Certainly one of the best features on deck from a sail-handling point of view is the large, shallow bow well which also doubles as an anchor locker. As long as the anchors are stowed to one side this self-draining well gives the for'ard hand a nice secure place to stand during a headsail takedown.

On the subjects of cockpits, the big one aft is a nice comfortable place to lounge around in while cruising. The cockpit features backrest support coamings and recessed seats with three stowage hatches under. There is a raised bridge at the for'ard end of the cockpit to keep water from getting below and to form a step into the cabin entrance. The outboard auxiliary, a Mariner 15hp long shaft, is neatly tucked away in a through-the-bottom well just under the tiller. A hatch covers the outboard but allows the throttle and other controls to be exposed enough for the helmsman to be able to easily reach them. One of the best touches in the cockpit, the one item in fact voted number one by our test crew, is the thin drip-dry foam seat cushions which made the life of a boat-tester just that much more bearable. The cushions



Cockpit features drip-dry cushions and fixed mainsheet take-off point on floor.

were covered in a special non-absorbent material called Dorlon which allows the cushions to stay out in the rain and weather without becoming water logged. In short, a great idea even if it is an optional extra.

Accommodation

The first thing you notice when you come below is that you are standing upright without benefit of a pop-top. The RL 28 has full standing headroom right through the main cabin and up ahead of the mast where there is a fully enclosed toilet/shower compartment.

The accommodation inside the RL 28 provides all the necessities for cruising. There is a nice big L-shaped galley off to your starboard side when you come below while ahead of you is a big saloon with a four-seater saloon table offset from the main walkway. There is a good sized quarter-berth on the port side as well as comfortable settee with padded backrest.

The saloon is fully closed off from the fore area by a full-sized teak-faced bulkhead. Going through an attractive louvre-panelled door, offset to port, you come into the area ahead of the mast. Here there is a big, full-length hanging locker on your port hand while to starboard is a moulded fibreglass toilet-cum-shower compartment with hand basin and teleflex type shower hose. The toilet compartment has its own vanity unit with mirror and as well a dorade air vent and shower sump with electrically operated pump which automatically clears the water out.

Up for'ard there is a large double-berth with under-bunk lockers and shelves for extra stowage. In all there is sleeping for six once the saloon dinette is converted to a double-berth.

In the deluxe sail-away the RL 28 is equipped with virtually all you need to go

cruising. There is a good sized icebox, two-burner stove and window curtains as well as carpet on the floor areas. While all the bunk units, galley and toilet compartment are built up from separate fibreglass mouldings the interior does not have that clinical fibreglass look. The teak-faced bulkheads, teak topped saloon table and carpeted headliner and hull skin liner all add up to a softer feel below. The red and beige colour scheme below made for a warm, inviting interior though I wasn't mad on the lime green curtains. Drapes aside, however, the RL 28 looked really cosy and inviting. I would really recommend any of the fleet of RL 28s run by Eric and Pam Skews for a holiday. I have seen quite a few charter boat operations now and I can honestly say that Sail-Cruise really are one of the most professional outfits around.

It is always interesting to see what gear charter operators put on boats, especially when they are yachtsmen as experienced as Eric Skews. Interestingly Eric is not so keen on roller furling gear at all, believing that in the long run simplicity of equipment is best. Eric has fitted up all his RL 28s with 27MHz two-way radios so that at all times his hirers can stay in touch with his home radio base station. Personally I think this is an excellent idea for a charter boat company and one which I would like to see more companies adopt.

Summary

The RL 28 is still one of the best value boats on the market today in terms of interior accommodation for your dollar. While the standard rig boat can no longer be considered for racing, an optional racing rig version of the boat can give this option.

In terms of trailing this is not the sort of boat you are going to pop in and out of the water for a sail of an hour or two. The boat is trailable provided you have the right size vehicle to tow 1360kg. Ideally a big four-wheel-drive would be the right sort of horse at the other end of the tow ball. It's not that the boat is so heavy but a big rig on a trailer and when combined with a double-axle trailer is going to need something substantial to STOP it as well as haul it up a steep ramp.

Specifications

Length	8.54m
LWL	7.2m
Width	2.41m
Draft	40cm-145cm
Displacement	1360kg
Ballast	544kg
Sail area	23m ²
Price, base sail-away	\$29,000
Available from Rob Legg Yachts, Runaway Bay, Qld.	