

Roberts 25 Gives DIY Value

In this age of buying boats off the shelf there are only a few manufacturers still turning out craft that buyers can complete themselves from various stages. One trailer sailer to this DIY formula that is proving successful is the Roberts 25. Paul Hopkins checked its Queensland origins and then test sailed a fully fitted boat on Port Phillip Bay.



WHEN Don McLean saw the Roberts 25 at Marine Park in Brisbane he immediately decided he'd spotted potential and bought three.

A printer by trade and a yachtsman by choice, he believed the concept of offering hull and deck only for a trailer sailer had great merit and he soon had his Dry Deck Marine established and pushing Roberts Adventure 25s to Victorians.

Today, hull and deck mouldings of the 25 cost from \$5,490 and are available in centreboarder, shoal draft, deep keel and motor sailer versions.

Andy Slorach, manager of Marine Park, had great faith in the concept and the market aims of the basic "boat-only" policy when the first 25s were built and his faith has been rewarded with good sales of plans and hulls. Don McLean

has shared his faith and the three boats he bought initially multiplied with 17 Roberts Adventure 25s sailing Victorian waters.

His own 25, Skyebird races with Hobson Bay Yacht Club 2nd Division against 30-footers and bigger.

"We should be in third division," he said. "We got one second in the Winter series, and that thrilled us, but we should be down with the RL24s in third division."

He made it quite clear that the RL24s were faster, but he felt bad Port Phillip Bay weather gave the Roberts 25 an advantage.

Skyebird is a standard deep keel 25 finished by her owner to Victoria's offshore racing standards. The purpose of our test sail was to see what could be achieved with minimum outlay.



McLean's boat is quite outstanding, has full headroom, sails well, handles well, is strongly built and can best be described as an excellent compromise. She cost \$15,000 complete with three racing headsails, spinnaker, all safety gear and full family cruising fit-out.

Construction

Hulls, decks and furniture components are built in Marine Park's Gumdale factory and shipped out to buyers. The factory is clean and functional with efficient full-swivel moulds which allow the builders to reach into the moulds without having to clamber all over its waxed surface.

Hulls are all fibreglass, the laminate in excess of designer's specifications. Keel and skeg are integrally moulded and two bulkheads are included in the

hull. As well there are a steel cradle and full-size plan-patterns to complete.

The deck mouldings are balsa sandwich fibreglass with moulded-in non-skid in all working areas. Hatch mouldings came with the decks and windows are marked but not cut out. Gunwale rubber is included.

Bunk mouldings of two forward bunks and two quarter berths are all GRP. Partitions are included.

Finish on boats we have inspected at Marine Park and on Skyebird is good. Construction — so far as stiffness and quality control are concerned — would be close to the best in Australia. Twelve months unconditional warranty accompanies the R25 hull and deck mouldings.

Layout

We met Skyebird at St Kilda marina as the north wind increased to 25 knots. Boarding over the pulpit, we walked aft to the cockpit without tripping over our feet — then, with shoes removed, we explored the deck layout.

Why did Skyebird appear to have more deck space? Simple, her stanchions are mounted on the topsides, outboard, giving about 100 mm more legroom each side. A clever departure from normal.

The pushpit folds out to form a swing ladder — another McLean innovation with merit. Safety lines to ocean racing rules encircle Skyebird from pulpit to pushpit yet don't impede the crew's progress thanks to the outboard stanchions. Full marks.

Wheel steering gives Skyebird a good feel — although I like tiller steering on craft this size. Steering position felt secure and comfortable at all angles of heel. Steering was sensitive and not sloppy — despite its hydraulic system.

"It must be rigged properly," Don McLean said when I told him about a Compass 33 hydraulic steering system we tried which was pretty terrible. "This one's a Vetus — I'm the Victorian agent — and we had trouble until we reduced the tiller arm from about six inches to 1 1/4 inches. We had to beef up the hydraulic lines too, but ended up with beautifully sensitive steering."

The stepped cockpit (the step being at the companionway) is deep, not too long, not too wide, comfortable and self-draining. Engine controls and bilge pump are alongside the wheel within reach of the helmsman.

All halyards lead to the cockpit via

mast-exit directional fairleads. When the wind increased to the stage of reefing we were able to do so quickly. Twin horns at the gooseneck accepted the reef cringles in the luff as the halyard was released in the cockpit. The mast-positioned crew then adjusted jiffy reefing which pulled clew into place as cockpit hand tensioned the mainsail luff.

Two "huge" — for a 7.9 m yacht — self-tailer headsail winches enable Mrs Jessie McLean to handle the sheets. She has a spinal injury yet still loves to sail — hence the two 25s to make her work easy.

One can walk forward along the sidedecks or over the cabin top. Both journeys are quite safe and uncluttered until one reaches the mast. It's a bit of a scramble from mast to pulpit with the yacht well heeled. Not a good place for the inexperienced. I'd like to see a central foothold along the foredeck to keep the less sure-footed on board.

Self-draining anchor well right forward is large and reasonably accessible. It stows two anchors, two buckets, a three man rubber dinghy and all the scrubbing gear for Skyebird.

Skylight hatch in the for'ard cabin is used to stow sails quickly and gives interior access to the foredeck.

Below decks

Companionway hatch has very short travel — just enough to allow easy entry. Down below Skyebird seems to grow, she's a big yacht for her size.

The timber engine box doubles as a companionway step — the top pulls off to reveal a snug 8 hp Yanmar diesel on direct drive through a McLean-made fibreglass stern tube.

Interior woodwork is unusual; vertical copper-nailed western red cedar adorns all timber-possible surfaces (except the meranti engine box step). The clear-finished western red gives a very shippy atmosphere — it reduces the fibreglass feel most tupperware yachts never lose.

Layout is to the alternate plan with dinette to port and galley to starboard. Fully enclosed toilet is to port sharing a common bulkhead with the dinette's aft-facing seat. Two big quarter berths (7 ft 3 in. overall) and adult-sized Vee berths forward complete the sleeping arrangements.

Skyebird is the first trailable yacht I have seen with tiled galley and tiled WC/shower. The bone-coloured tiles

RIGHT: The Roberts has plenty of interior space and the finish on the test boat was impressive. Picture taken from companionway.

BELOW: All rig controls lead to cockpit under raised traveller. Lifeline stanchions are fitted outside the gunwhales which gives more room on the sidedecks, often too narrow on this size TS.



don't really match the western red cedar yet still added atmosphere.

Rubber backed nylon carpet on the main cabin ceiling, throughout the for'ard cabin and up the quarter berth walls looked good and reduced condensation to zero.

"It hides our electrical wiring too," Don said.

An alloy plate above the three burner metho stove, three bilge pumps, Vetus bilge blower and radio emphasise the concentration on safety aboard Skyebird.

Home comforts include fresh and seawater to the sink and hot and cold shower. Sink drains to a holding tank which is pumped overboard above the water line — "To stop gurgling sounds."

"Air conditioning" is available via the front hatch, cabintop vents and convection ventilators in the quarter berths.

The hot shower water comes courtesy of the metho stove: the stove heats the water which is poured into a small holding tank, and an electric pump directs the hot water into the shower. Shower drains to the bilge.

There's an electric refrigerator under the dinette seats and powered by dual 12 volt batteries of 80 amps/hour.

Water tanks are in the keel — 42 gallons. The 97 litre S/S fuel tank is under the cockpit floor — behind the engine.

Rig

Above decks the R25 is masthead with uppers, lowers and backstay ... sail plan all inboard with a high boom that didn't threaten decapitation each time we tacked.

We had no difficulty adjusting traveller, mainsheet or jib sheets. Our reefing exercise proved that here was a well rigged and carefully thought out family racing-cruising yacht which shouldn't drive her crew to golf.

Handling

The 25 knot northerly gave Skyebird a bit of a dusting under full mainsail — she heeled quickly yet firmed up just as quickly. Once reefed she handled herself like a lady, showing only a little of her bottom to the passing parade.

The wheel steering was light, positive and direct — very agreeable. Tacking was sure and easy ... under full sail. She didn't like mainsail-only manoeuvres. The R25 has to be moving before she'll respond to helm when under mainsail only. A fin keel would no doubt improve close-quarter manoeuvring yet it would ruin her quiet disposition out in the rough stuff. You can't have both.

Under engine, she was faithful when going ahead but not so faithful astern. We had to berth stern-first into a wind-battered pen at Williamstown and the two-bladed sailing prop didn't have the grip or torque to pull her in. A line to the wharf was the only way on that day.

Summary

Skyebird represents an adventure into a new facet of the boating world which has discovered a previously untapped market. Starting at \$5,490 for hull and deck, the handyman can build an exceptionally rugged yacht that can be trailed for between \$10,000 and \$15,000, depending on the degree of finish.

Our test boat cost \$15,000 complete and was fitted-out for ocean racing and family cruising. It took her owner four months to finish her. She had everything and was the most complete trailable yacht I have sailed.

Shoal draft and centreboarder versions would suit other areas while the 1.07 m deep keel draft of Skyebird is good for Port Phillip Bay.

There are better finished boats available yet few would be better built. The R25 represents excellent value and makes a fine family weekender. Speed isn't her forté, although she sails well.

Skyebird has No. 246 stamped into her hull; the number means 246 plans of the Roberts 25 have been sold — at least half of them included with hulls and decks built in Brisbane by Marine Park. Specifications

LOA.....	7.9 m (26 ft)
LWL.....	6.36 m (20'9")
Beam.....	2.40 m (7'10")
Draft.....	1.07 m (3'6")
Draft (shoal draft).....	0.76 m (2'6")
Draft (centreboarder).....	0.61 m (2 ft)
Displacement.....	2114 kg (4,660 lb)
Ballast.....	893 kg (2,000 lb)
Hull and deck from.....	\$5,490
Bunk mouldings.....	\$285
Test boat complete.....	\$15,000
Test boat from Dry Dock Marine, 2 Marquis, Moorabbin, Victoria.	