

SONATA 6.3

Trailer sailers, once the bastion of lower price family cruising and racing, have suffered more than most other areas in the boating marketplace of late, with many recognised names no longer available and others struggling for sales. Many reasons have been put forward for this but one of the most consistent is that, in the quest for more bunks, more facilities and more luxury, trailer sailers weighed themselves out of reach of the average family car.

The Sonata 6.3, most recent in a long line of trailer sailers to bear that name, is a genuine attempt to return to some of the values that started the whole trailer sailer movement: in short, it is a lightweight, fairly basic vessel designed to be within the legal towing limits of the average car. Designer Jim Voyzey made, as one of his design parameters, that the all-up weight of the boat and its trailer should not exceed one tonne. He has achieved this but only partly. Jim's one tonne package does not take into account the outboard motor, water, fuel and all the other stuff that even a moderately equipped boat needs but, it is a step in the right direction and Shoreline Yachts deserve congratulations for bringing out a new boat in a demonstrably depressed sector of the market.

Design

The well-known US designer, Gary Mull, is responsible for the Sonata 6.7 and Sonata 8 — the two Sonata yachts that have given the marque its excellent reputation and builder Jim Voyzey has obviously studied the Mull technique when configuring the new 6.3. But where the Mull-designed are very beamy, the 6.3 is decidedly narrow for a trailer yacht and it is this, more than anything, that gives the craft its low hull weight (640 kg) and speedy performance. What is sacrificed is below decks room but this is in order.

The craft has a cheeky look to it. It has a Mull type stern ending in a square transom, moderate sheer, high bow with considerable overhang, rounded underwater sections forward and a flat run aft. Instead of a swing keel there is a ballasted dagger board controlled by a 10:1 pulley and tackle

which slots right through the cabin, varying draft from flush (150 mm) to 1.5 m. The daggerboard is an aerofoil with the lead ballast of 182 kg glassed in. The rudder hangs off two sturdy pintles and has positive buoyancy, so when you undo the locking rope, it floats.

On deck, the Sonata 6.3 has a yacht-sized alloy toe rail around the gunwales, a large cabin sloping into the foredeck, big cockpit and tapered forehatch (Canpa) is set into the slope of the cabin. The mast step, hatch surrounds and track mounts are picked out in clear surface around a general non-skid covering. The cockpit is over two metres long and has lift-up locker lids for the motor, fuel tank, etc.

Fully sealed lockers are optional. The mainsheet can be sited either across the bridge deck, where it will interfere with access below, or across the back of the cockpit, which precludes the cockpit seats as casual sleeping berths. The cabin has a standard pop top which has been tried and tested over many Sonata yachts and is a two-movement affair to slot into position and replace.

Below decks

Consistent with its role as a casual sailer, as opposed to a mini yacht, the Sonata is small below. Nevertheless it has berths for four in a double and two

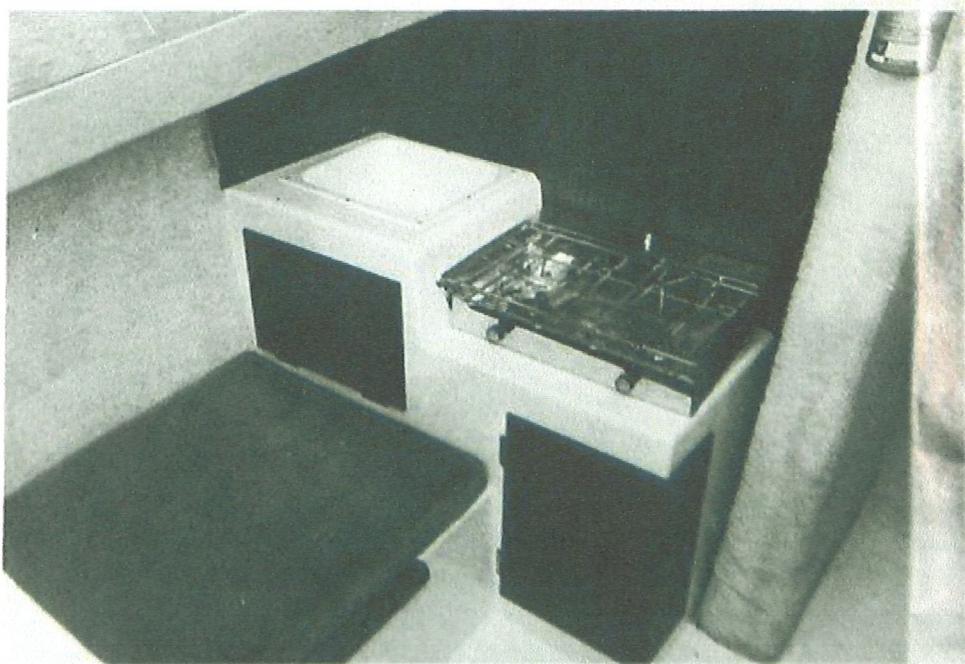
singles, a galley moulding and best of all, a concealed toilet compartment — hind and to port of the full length dagger case. There is comfortable sitting room for three but more than that would be a pinch, especially if the weather was bad.

Rig

A simple three-quarter rig provides two alternative sail plans — a conventional set up which includes an overlapping headsail and cockpit sheet winches, or a self tacker on its own track. In either case the halyards are led aft on both sides of the pop top with winches to put that final bit of grunt into sail sets. The starboard cockpit winch can also be used to raise the centreboard, though the big tackle should be adequate most of the time. Raising and lowering the mast can be done single-handed with practice.

Performance

Because of its narrow beam, the little 6.3 is tippier at rest than other Sonatas but, the depth of the daggerboard and the low placement of the ballast gives it reasonable stability under sail. Our test conditions were light and the most noticeable thing about the boat was its speed: given the small sail plan and the light breeze, the speed was uncanny. I found no noticeable





weather helm but stress again that the conditions were such that its behaviour in heavy air could not be determined.

On the basis of similar boats I have tested and the comments of the designer, I think it reasonable to assume the boat would need a deft hand on the mainsheet in a blow, as the ability to depower the rig would be important. Voyzey says when overpressed, the boat skids sideways but does not round up and this makes sense to me on the basis of the feel of the craft in light air. Manoeuvrability is excellent because of the deep rudder and general sail handling, sheet trimming, etc., were easy. I prefer the mainsheet across the cockpit as the helmsman then can alter that sail while steering.

Finish

The test boat was the first out of the mould and the quality of the finish was OK rather than good. There are a few rough edges here and there and though the pop top works well mechanically, it is a pretty ugly arrangement. Attention to detail in the fit out is not over exciting.

Conclusion

A simple, fast and neat little boat, the Sonata 6.3 impressed with its concept and speed. I have few doubts that, handled by a gun crew, this will turn out to be a fast racer. It has enough room below and the concealed head is a real boon, especially for women.

Specifications

LOA	6.3 m
LWL	5.03 m
Beam	2.15 m
Draft (up)	0.15 m
(down)	1.52 m
Displacement	640 kg
Ballast	182 kg
Price	\$10,300

► Test boat courtesy Shoreline Yachts, 1 By-the-Sea Road, Mona Vale, NSW, 2103. Phone (02) 997-5281.

