

SPIDER 28 REVIEWS

By Bob Ross from "Australian Sailing", September 1989

GUNTER HEUCHMER, after establishing a fine reputation as a boatbuilder with a Sydney-Hobart race winner *Indian Pacific* to his record among many other successful yachts, turned full-time designer and is gaining new recognition for the fast little Spider series of yachts in trailable events.

In his new concentration of effort on design, Gunter has had his head deeply into the computer, using the Macsurf software that helped the *Kookaburras'* design program, to produce firstly the Spider 22, then the spider 28.

Both the 22 and the 28 have proven fast on the race course and have achieved ready popularity with 18 22's having been built and 14 28s. The Spider 28 is currently the highest-rated on the NSW Trailable Yacht Association's handicap yardstick list at 825 compared to the Young 7.8 on 795, Ross 780 (785). The Spider 22 is next on 778 ahead of the South Coast Magnum (770) and Masrm 720 (755).

The 28's underwater shape was designed to carry more accommodation and more weight aft and so was fuller in the stern sections than the 22. The 22 had a cutaway stern to keep weight out of the end.

All do have relatively short masts, long booms and big-roached mainsails. "They are quite safe, carry sail area very well and are quite quick," said Heuchmer.

He says the 28 has a very low drag coefficient, with the smallest possible board for the size of hull and also a small rudder for the size of sail plan.

Heuchmer describes the hull as semi light displacement, with very low (270mm) centre mid depths for a hull its length. All the buttock lines run out fairly straight to the stern and the waterline beam is quite narrow. The waterlines do not change much when the hull is heeled and so it stays in balance at quite high angles of heel.

A small hollow under the stern amounting to 6mm over 1m, similar to the one Ben Lexcen designed into the stern of the 18ft skiff *Tia Maria*, was introduced to reduce drag and increase speed when sailing offwind. "The boat just keeps accelerating," says Heuchmer. "There are no stern waves at all."

This was certainly apparent on the day I sailed the boat, in a 20 knot southerly with puffs of up to 25 knots on Pittwater. The boat jumped onto the plane quickly and to increases in wind pressure just kept going faster without any increased difficulties of control. Heuchmer says that at its designed weight of 1220kg, the 28 should exceed its hull speed when the wind speed is more than 13 knots true.

We had two quite sensational runs and so Heuchmer did not stretch belief when he later told me that the boat had been up to 22 knots in the windy Marlay Point races of last year. He says he had also been surprised by its upwind speed. "It is going faster than it should be," he says, "6.1s and 6.15s in 12 to 15 knots of breeze when I would have expected 5.7s and 5.8s".

There was no speedo operating aboard the boat I sailed but she did seem high and fast; certainly well balanced and easy to steer with one reef in the big mainsail. She was, as Heuchmer said, very well balanced no matter how far she was heeled, with the tendency to drive asserting quickly as gusts hit. We did have a hand constantly playing the mainsheet traveller in response to the gusts.

Heuchmer says that the high roach on the mainsail, supported by three full length battens in the top of the sail, is of no advantage upwind but gives tremendous benefit reaching and certainly helps running. It also seems to be a sail that it is hard to shape well - on the day we had too much fullness near the mast and could not get rid of it.

The centreboard comprises a stainless steel ladder with a fibreglass-encased lead bulb on the bottom weighing 410kg. Combined with the relative low rig, it gives the 28 a similar righting moment to the Far 1104, says Heuchmer. It would be eligible to race offshore with the board locked down.

An hydraulic system, by Fleet-Hydrol raises the board. The rudder comprises a dagger blade, of wood on this boat, to be fibreglass on future boats, that slides into a substantial alloy box that also incorporates the tiller assembly. This is fixed, so the helmsman has a bit of climbing or bobbing and weaving to do when he tacks the boat.

But the Spider 28 is certainly easy to sail without too many people being involved. The 28s mostly race with crews of five or six. Kerli Corlett of Sydney Sailboat Centre who supplied the boat we sailed, had been racing it successfully with three adults and two children.

The mast (spars were by Yachtmasts) is rigged with aft-set caps and lowers over heavily swept-back spreaders and with no backstay or runners to worry about. The headsail is short-footed and leads, via adjustable blocks running on tracks along the cabin top, to a pair of winches on the cabin top at the forward end of the cockpit. The set up lends itself to cross sheeting, which Kerli used on the day we sailed.

The mainsheet is six-part with Harken hexratchet block - as a former Hobie 16 sailor, Kerli would not have anything else -with two-part tackles controlling traveller car position cleating off in Harken camcleats on a specially-fabricated plate attached to the car. A Harken magic box is fitted to the jib halyard to allow ready variation to luff tension. The vang is a simple but very powerful combination of wire and rope purchases.

The cockpit, divided by the mainsheet traveller, opens through the transom for ready access to the rudder assembly and the outboard, on this boat a Mariner 9.9hp mounted on a very efficient stainless-steel lifting bracket. There's a compartment for the fuel tank under the starboard cockpit seat and a similar locker for bits and pieces under the port seat.

Cockpit coamings are square topped and comfortable for sitting outboard. The cabin top is squared and fairly high but there is plenty of room to move around it on the side decks which are protected forward of the cockpit by lifelines.

Below, the 28 demonstrated was basic and a bit rough in finish, especially in the timberwork (I came last in wood-working two years in a row at school and so know about these things). The exposed top sides on the boat demonstrated were lined with carpet and the floor was carpeted. The deck-head was flow-coated.

The 28 has forecabin area with vee berth 1.36m wide at the base and 1.90m long which extends unbroken to a settee berth, with backrest/shelf, in the saloon and quarter berth right aft. There is space forward to port, enclosed by the centre case and main bulkhead, for a toilet. Tucked aft of this bulkhead alongside the centre case is a galley unit comprising a cupboard, with cutlery drawer and bench top which serves as base for a Maxie two-burner stove and on this boat, also for a plastic container that could be used for washing the dishes.. Sink installation is listed as an option.

Radio/stereo equipment was fitted aft of the galley unit, over a short settee which runs into a second quarter berth. There is space between the quarter berths, which are 77cm wide, and under the cockpit right to the stern to store sails, awnings, and other items.

A pop top gives full standing headroom in the galley and saloon area.

The boat as tested, with five sails, custom-built trailer with vacuum override disc brakes and handbrake, outboard motor and full fit out costs \$50,000. A basic boat ready to sail costs \$35,668. The 28 is also available for home completion as basic hull and deck with keel installed for \$24,878.

While I have listed Sydney Sailboat Centre as the builder, in fact the work is contracted to it and I understand a new builder has taken over. It would not take much effort to eliminate the flaws of the interior finish seen in this outstanding performer.

That's the great thing about modern, fleet footed trailable yachts such as the Spider 28. You can tow them to far away places, set sail and leave the hassles of suburbia in your boiling wake. Of course, trailing and rigging the bigger boats provides their own headaches, but it's a small price to pay.

The Spider is a Daddy Long Legs in terms of length and requires a four-wheel-drive or V8 powered car to safely tow it. The mast, too, can be something of a handful for one man despite a pivoting foot system. But it rewards the owner with cruising space and a top racing performance. (TYA yardstick is .825, ahead of the Young 7.8, .795; Ross 780, 785; South Coast Magnum, .770 and Masrm 720, .755)

"There are some faster boats around but they have about one-tenth of the accommodation", the agent said. "The people who buy them have had performance dinghies in the past. They start a family and go cruising, but they need space to keep the interest up."

Down below, the Spider was tastefully finished with grey carpet, matching bunk cushions and subtle trim... The layout is open and pretty straightforward with large quarter berths, L shaped galley and bathroom to port and cushions running from quarter berth to v berth on the starboard side. There's full headroom in the main cabin once the large pop-top is raised and a reasonable amount forward. A half bulkhead and the full centreboard case provide privacy for the toilet, entered from behind the vee berth.

The hull is constructed using biaxial E glass cloths. Balsa core is used in areas where the hull is subject to trailer compression and the rest is Klegecell. It's an ideal lay-up for a trailer sailer, giving strength and rigidity to cope with the rig tension and hull pounding while keeping towing weight to a minimum....

The shape, borne from the design board of Gunter Heuchmer, has a fine, deep entry flaring gradually into a flat run and soft bilges, with the maximum beam (2.49m) carried well aft: making the boat easily driven, initially tender but progressively stiffer and a willing planer downwind.

It's self righting when the 400 kg bulb keel is fully dropped, so that the boat can be taken short distances offshore.

The full-length cockpit seats had room for five at a pinch, but most of the time we had bums on the coaming, which was well angled for comfort and security

With full sails hoisted and three crew on board, the 28 excels in 5-15 knots. It handled the hard running like an overgrown skiff, bow pointing skyward, a waterfall cascading off the gunwhales amidships and spray jet streaming from the stern. You have to steer it like a dinghy as well, bearing away as the gust hits to prevent heel, and hardening up in the lulls. The sense of speed was tremendous- I'd say we were doing 15 knots at times- but there was never a moment's worry, with the Spider remaining manoeuvrable and surefooted.

The crew weren't pressed either, the winches making light work of the spinnaker sheet, and the 6:1 mainsheet and 8:1 continuous vang system (adjusted from either side of the cockpit) keeping the full main in tow.

After quelling the kite, an easy job thanks to the whopping bag, we reefed the main in readiness for the return slog. It took only moments, the unwanted slab of sail hanging neatly beside the boom. A flattish storm jib was already hanked on.

The first bullet whistled around the point and the 28 rolled to it then accelerated, knuckling manfully through the swell as the sheethand played the sail judiciously.

Summary

The Spider 28 may be too racy for the first time trailer sailer buyer, but for more experienced sailors, it represents a nice marriage of pace and space. The home completion option which can save a considerable amount of cost and weight, will particularly suit those of a racing bent. Well built and fitted externally..."it scores top marks as an all rounder"