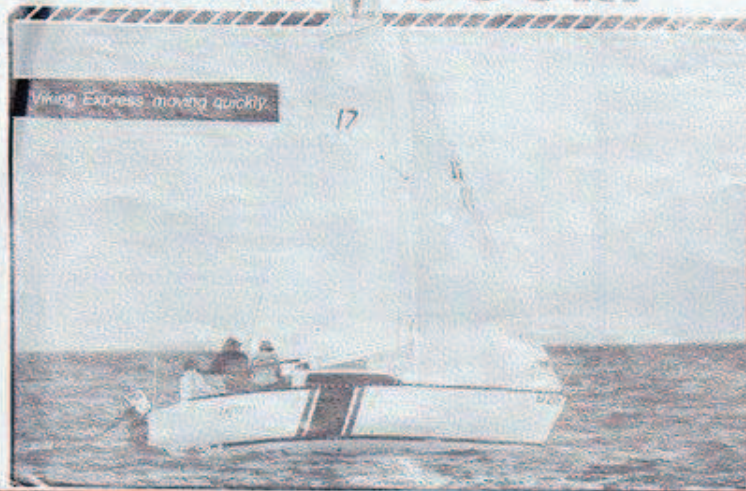


Castle 650...

Real performance at value prices

By Garth Morrison



To be seen in true perspective the Castle 650 Trailer-yacht must be regarded in terms of value for money.

In many respects it's a limited-edition yacht with builder Steve Douglas working to produce yachts to specific order and in kit-form.

It's a certain method of keeping a business solvent, but it seems more of a statement of preferred lifestyle than the road to great riches.

I have been interested in the Castle 650 concept for some years, but it wasn't until I forced myself on board and fairly recent Castle owner Ron Sweeper of Mt. Martha that I actually got aboard a Castle going racing.

In this case the event was the second heat of the Petersville Regatta series off Sorrento Sailing Club.

Ron sails his 'Strawberry Fields' regularly with

wife Jan and friends. They have cruised the boat extensively and recently towed to the Whitsundays for six weeks in tropic waters.

They like its generous interior space and the easy way it does most things. The Castle 650 is a light yacht to tow and we rolled down to the steep Aquarium ramp near Sorrento with the boat making no great impression on the Valiant Coupe which Ron has used for towing for years.

The steep Aquarium ramp has been known to humble tow-vehicles with less torque than the Valiant, but coming and later going the Castle 650 is no problem going in or coming out of the water.

With the long drop keep hauled up into the centrecase the yacht slid off the trailer and glided out into clear water. I started the 6 hp Johnson long-shaft and with Jan watching for rocks motored back into ankle deep water while Ron took the car and trailer back to the cliff-top carpark.

Ian Cook, a former Fireball man joined us and we motored to Sorrento Sailing Club with the mast up. It's one of the few sticks which can be raised easily. It pivots in a tabernacle with the spinnaker halyard hauling it up via one of the two coach-house mounted winches. A husband and wife can do it with ease.

At Sorrento we dropped a bow anchor and used our shallow draft to hang the transom just short of the beach. The anchor well is big enough.

The cockpit is roomy with the mainsheet traveller cutting it in half, it's a necessary nuisance which is essential to the control of the big mainsail.

Ron is a great enthusiast of his yacht, himself and is constantly adding and improving to his taste. As I saw the yacht he has spent about \$12,000, his cost-saving efforts include the excellent single-axle trailer which he built himself.

The fresh 15 to 20 knot southwesterly showed immediately that 'Strawberry Fields' wasn't used much to drive this at 8 knots or other. Initially trying number two we changed back to number three and put the flattening reef in the main.

The mainsheet man badly needed a foothold — Ron's working on it — and I focused the boat compromiser — we used the mainsheet to the weather cabin top winch, giving me control and putting my weight inside the safety lines where it would do most good.

With the traveller well down and the main trimmed we worked at keeping the yacht to 15 deg of heel in the gusts. The Castle 650 is a genuine performance machine and loves to be driven. Control through the big, deep laminated rudder is positive and a crew working together to keep their helmsman powered up and in the groove will get great satisfaction from racing a little yacht which can hold its own with the best.

I was surprised to find the Castle is not a great reaching yacht.

The skiff-like concept fooled me. To windward and running she's a giant killer at a price which should be a source of great satisfaction to owners. In light airs the design is exceptional.

Inside, the good beam and coach-house design which is carried well forward makes it easy living. The bunks are big and wide. With the pop-top up there are not many trailer-yachts to match her for interior space which her people can use.

Jan has a metho stove to starboard and ample storage. She and Ron say they were happy aboard during their six weeks stay in the Whitsundays. For cruising in the often strong winds of North Queensland they used the mainsail alone. Ron says the Castle is notable for its good handling under main and she will beat quite well and run with no great loss of speed while giving the crew a relaxed time.

There has been steady improvement in the yacht since its introduction and mast and keel configurations have been varied to improve the strength and performance.

Finish is good and the color is fine — provided you like white. It's not the Ritz, but then neither is the price and the performance available has to

Making good headway



At the ready



Running hard with a big spinnaker

Damn fast up and down wind



Castle 650 Specifications:



LOA: 6.5 meters
 Beam: 2.4 meters
 Draft: about 1.5 meters
 Board up: 25.4 cm.
 Weight: 766 kg.
 Main: 12 sq.m. (about 130 sq.ft.)
 No. 1: 12 sq.m.
 No. 2: 8 sq.m. (about 88 sq.ft.)
 Head Sail Sizes not as Tested.
 No. 3: 4 sq.m. (about 50 sq.ft.) New sizes for class stated.
 Spinnaker: 26 sq.m. (about 280 sq.ft.)
 Designer: Steve Douglas
 Builder: Steve Douglas, 41 Governor Road, Mordialloc, Vic. (03) 580 6328.
 Power: Johnson 6hp longshaft outboard. From 5hp up can be used.
 Trailer: owner built. Assembled \$1700.
 Cost: Owner finished, as sailed about \$12,000. Kit form.