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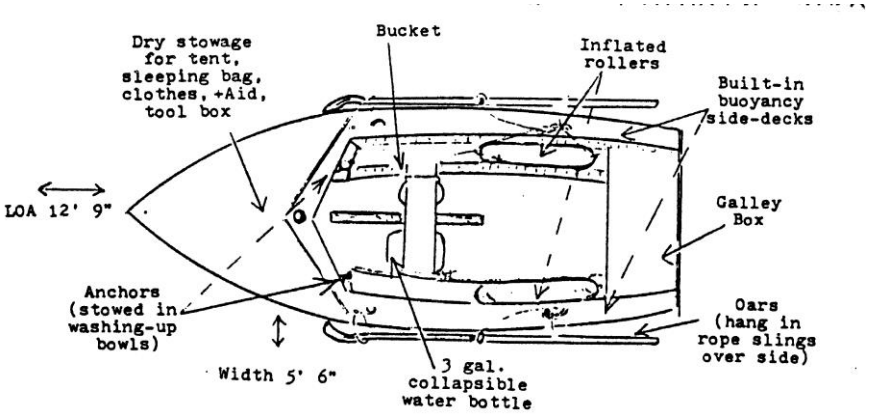
Cruising in a 'Mayfly'

by **Elizabeth Baker**

LOA	12' 9"
LWL	12' 0"
Beam	5' 6"
Mast height	19' 6"
Draft	6"
- C/bd down	3' 0"
Weight	210 lbs.
Sail area	90 sq. ft.
Construction	Marine Ply
Designer	J V Kelley



(This boat will be shown at the London Dinghy Exhibition, 1985.)

PERFORMANCE

Over the last 7 years I have cruised many miles in 'Black Swan'. "One man's meat is another's poison", but for me she is the ideal cruising dinghy and I have never wanted to change her for another. As I often sail alone, she needs to be light enough to launch and recover single-handed if help is not available, stable yet reasonably fast, particularly in light airs, and easy to row because I have neither the space nor the wish for the additional encumbrance of a motor.

On the debit side there are occasions when she will not lie head to wind, even when at anchor (unless the tent is up), which can make hoisting or lowering sail rather awkward. Also, her very full bows make her impossible to row against a very strong wind. And although very stable, the 'Mayfly' seems to have a reputation for turning 'turtle' when capsized and thus being hard to right. Happily, although my father turned her over twice years ago when racing, I have never done so while cruising, and hope I never will. If in doubt I reef, or don't go, but I have occasionally been caught out in quite rough conditions and 'BS' has always coped splendidly.

RIG

She is Bermudian rigged, with 90 sq. ft. of sail, 60 sq. ft. in the Main and 30 sq. ft. in the jib. She also occasionally sports a spinnaker which is 90 sq. ft.

The Mains'l has roller reefing, which has the advantage that I can take in as much or as little sail as I want, but I usually stop just before the 1st batten, thus avoiding the need to remove it, and so it is a simple job to shake the reef out again. The sail usually has to come right down to reef, but unless battens need to be replaced, I can shake it out by simply letting out a foot of halyard, removing boom from gooseneck, unrolling, and then hoisting to full height. One day, though, I'll put in a slab reef.

Having once had to clamber onto the foredeck to take in the jib in a nasty sea, I never wanted to repeat the experience, so bought and fitted a jib furling drum and swivel. The first was an R.W.O. type recommended for dinghies, worked by a continuous line. This was not entirely satisfactory because a continuous line has to be joined somewhere, and the join always snagged in the fairlead. So I replaced it with a larger Barton drum worked by a single line. This was better, but the jib still tended to wrap itself round the forestay in strong winds, and once furled the wind got into the head and flogged so much I had to lower it. Even so, because to furl the jib it is necessary to set if flying, I can now lower it straight into the cockpit without having to scramble forward to unhank.

Several DCA members have asked why I don't get a rod type of furling gear, whereby the rod goes over the forestay. There are several reasons, the main one being that I can't find anybody local who sells them for dinghies; secondly I suspect they are expensive; and thirdly I think it might complicate speedy raising and lowering of the jib.

Last Summer the jib was becoming increasingly hard to furl; the luff wire seemed to be twisting up without rolling the jib, which finished up furled at the foot, but not at the head; then, when I unwound the foot, the head twisted up and I had to lower the whole thing and sort out the mess. The answer to this was obvious - but I failed to see it ... the bearings had seized up on the swivel! My friend John Quantrell took it apart for me one sunny afternoon on Fowley Island in Chichester Harbour, cleaned it all up and re-greased the bearings (using "Flora" because that was the only grease I had on board), and after that it worked perfectly again.

Shortly before this enlightenment, however, I had consulted several books on this subject and they all advocated the use of 1 x 19 luff wire. My luff wire was very thin and I felt would benefit by being replaced with something stiffer, but I didn't know what 1 x 19 was. The answer came to light in Colin Jarman's "Sailing and Boating - The Complete Equipment Guide", basically an encyclopedia of sailing equipment, which had just been given to the Library. Apparently rigging wire consists of a number of individual strands twisted together in various combinations to give different degrees of flexibility, the most common being 7 x 7 or 7 x 19. So I bought a length of 4mm 1 x 19. How to splice it? Talurits are not recommended for 1 x 19, and I found it much too stiff to hand-splice - I couldn't even bend it round the eye. There must be an answer; so I consulted "Colin Jarman" again and discovered "Sta-Lok" swageless terminals which can be fitted at home using an ordinary spanner. I bought a couple of appropriate size, with "eye" ends, and fitted them the same day using the maker's clear instructions. Very neat they look too. I have only used the jib once since, when we discovered the seized-up swivel, but that transpired to be the last sail of the season, so I still don't know whether there will be a dramatic improvement.

For rowing I carry two 8' oars (46 years old) which my father used in a boat he built before the War. These are a nuisance inside the boat when sailing, so I carry them in rope slings over the side, hung high up under the gunwales. They rarely give trouble there, except in very rough conditions when I sometimes have to bring them inboard.

MODIFICATIONS AND STOWAGE

I started cruising in 'Black Swan' just as she was, sleeping on the floor on a lilo to lift me out of the bilge water, and using a flysheet from a small ridge tent for shelter, hung over the boom and laced to the oars, the latter being hung over the gunwale. It wasn't quite long enough for complete protection, and I used pieces of "Polytarp" to close the ends. I doubted whether it would keep much rain out, but luckily that first summer the fine weather always coincided with my weekends afloat. It seldom has since!

All my gear - clothes, sleeping bag, cooking equipment, etc. - was stowed under the foredeck, precariously balanced on 3 large buoyancy bags, or hung in a net slung beneath the deck. This net was the first item to go, because I always got hung-up on it when trying to retrieve articles just out of reach. I replaced it the following year with two smaller nets hung one each side, but a subsequent modification - more anon - meant these eventually had to go too.

The "Mayfly" has a vast stowage area under the foredeck and the high, buoyant bows enabled her to take all this extra weight forward without noticeably jeopardising her stability or sailing performance. However, I felt that some stowage aft would be advisable so after a couple of years, constructed a large plywood box to fit in the stern, filling all of the area between the side buoyancy tanks up to 1½ ft. from the transom. The lid slides under pieces of 1" x ½" wood which are glued to the walls of the buoyancy tanks on each side of the cockpit, and these hold the box firmly in place when sailing. As maths is not my strong point, I first made a mock-up box out of cardboard. When it was how I thought I wanted, I used the cardboard pieces as templates. I still had to make several bits twice, but these subsequently got used for other jobs, so were not wasted. The sides I joined "Mirror Dinghy" fashion with glass tape and resin, making the box completely watertight - so long as it is not completely submerged - even when the boat is half full of water. This now contains my "Galley", and is "pigeon-holed" to fit plates, billies, food, etc; and my paraffin lamp.

Under the thwart, to starboard, live my bucket and washing-up bowl, and to port a 3 gal. plastic water bottle, with tap, all firmly tied on. While on domestic subjects I must mention cooking and lighting. For cooking I use two ordinary small Camping Gaz stoves. The box lid inverts to form a convenient galley table. Lighting is obtained from a paraffin Hurricane Lamp which provides adequate light, and also a little welcome warmth to help dry the boat out. Usually I hang it from the boom unless moving about, when I stand it on a side bench so I don't bump my head. In addition I have a couple of ordinary electric torches for flashing into dark corners, and as navigation lights if sailing after dark.

Between the forward ends of the side buoyancy tanks and the foredeck stowage area are spaces where I stow two anchors, a "Bruce" and a "Danforth" type, complete with warp and chain, in plastic washing-up bowls. The bowls keep all tidy and easily accessible, yet out of the way, and the warp ends are made fast to the boat. However, I have yet to devise a convenient means of holding them in place when the boat is well heeled, or in a rough sea - they tend to creep out of their berths into the centre of the boat under these conditions. I have thought of bolting the bowls/boxes to the floor, but don't like the idea of drilling holes in the boat's bottom for this. Another possibility would be to glue strong pieces of wood to the floor and screw the anchor boxes to these, but there are times when it is useful to be able to move them quickly in order to lighten the boat for handling ashore.

The first and only MAJOR modification, so far, has been a new and thicker foredeck. The original was ⅛" ply which, after 20 years and including a period of neglect, was not strong enough to stand the rigours of cruising. The crunch came, literally, when I put my elbow through while hoisting the anchor! So the following Winter I bought a sheet of ¼" Marine Ply and John Q helped to remove the old deck and construct a new and stronger one - or rather - he did the work while I watched and lent a hand occasionally! The new foredeck is splendid - I can actually scramble on it when necessary, which I wouldn't have dared to do with the old one. John Q also made me some floorboards to give a level floor for cooking, and to keep my feet and sleeping bag out of the bilge water.

With the extra height obtained by the floorboards, I found I could no longer squeeze myself and lilo under the thwart, so lilo had to go; but anyway was no longer needed to keep me dry. This saved the bother of inflating it every night, but floorboards are hard, and folds of my sleeping bag still crept between the gaps in the boards and absorbed some of the water. So I obtained a couple of expanded polystyrene sleeping mats and cut them to fit. These solved both problems and are also bliss to cold, wet feet!

To make room for sleeping, my Galley Box has to be moved, but it sits quite happily on the side-bench up forward and is easily accessible if required.

A Mayfly dinghy (replacing original image of Liz's boat which was poorly reproduced)

I have tried lifting the floorboards across the side-benches for sleeping on but, although they provide a wider bed, it is a performance getting them up, and 'the First Floor' is not nearly as warm as being below gunwale level, where one is out of all draughts and insulated from most of the cold by the wooden sides of the boat.

The next modification concerned the foredeck again. I had long been trying to think of a way of constructing a shelf to stop clothes, binoculars, camera, etc. from sliding off the buoyancy bags into the bilges, and the buoyancy bags themselves were a trial as there was always the danger of puncturing them, and one at least usually needed regular inflating.

With John Q's help I bought a large lump of expanded polystyrene from the boatyard where he keeps his boat, and we carved it into 3 sections, rounded to fit the floor and flat on top. Then I bought some sheets of thick polythene which I wrapped round the blocks, sealing them in using a warm iron over a piece of cloth. To hold them in place under the foredeck I constructed a sort of canvas apron with eyelets round the edges which I laced over the blocks and down to lacing eyes screwed into stronger parts of the boat. Thus I was able to dispense with the buoyancy bags, and in addition have a large, dry shelf for stowage. Now, two years and plenty of wet sailing later, nothing stowed under there has ever got wet.

When I began cruising I considered a pump an unnecessary luxury, and thought a sponge and bucket would be adequate. How wrong I was! They do the job well enough, but the prospect of having to dip my hands into icy cold water between supper and bed, and again before breakfast, became an increasingly unwelcome and daunting prospect, and after a week of this daily chore my hands were very sore and took several days to heal. So for about £8, I bought a Whale Dinghy Pump. This does a sterling job shifting a lot of water with a minimum of fuss.

Another device which works well is aimed at keeping matches easily accessible, but dry. I bought a large box of "Cook's Matches", emptied out the contents, and John Q soaked 3 sides of the outer box in melted candle wax. The un-waxed side was glued high up under the foredeck. Inside the "drawer" I keep 3 normal sized boxes of matches. Some have been there 2 years now, through all weathers, and still work. They are out of the way, but always accessible, and ALWAYS DRY!

Finally, lashed on the side-decks are two inflatable rollers. People often ask if they get in the way, but while sailing I usually sit on them. Wooden benches feel very hard after several hours under way, and the rollers provide a more comfortable seat. When at anchor, I often throw them over the side, firmly tied on of course. In fact they perform at least four useful functions:-

1) The obvious one of rolling the boat up or down a beach; this is fairly easy with 2 people, but if single-handed I have to empty the boat first,

2) Fenders - even in a small dinghy, outsized fenders are useful at times; e.g. when alongside quay walls or jetties with large overhangs, or when rafting-up to other boats,

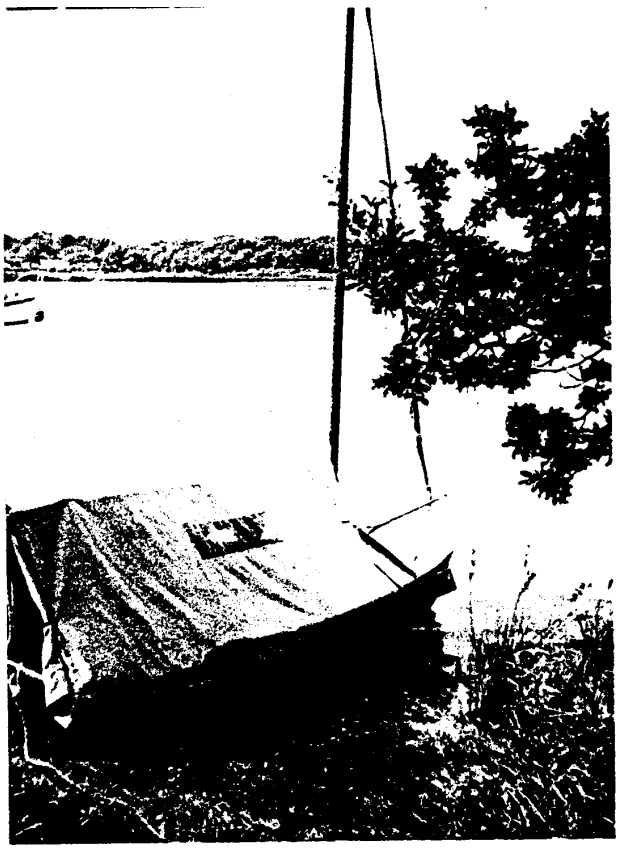
3) Chocking-up the boat when dried out on a sloping shore,

4) As a comfortable seat.

Another possibility worth consideration, in the event of a capsize where the boat is upside down and hard to right, could be to hoist a roller part-way "up" the mast, which should provide enough buoyancy to float the mast to the surface and so turn the boat onto its side.

TENT

After a season camping under a nylon flysheet, I had formed a pretty good idea of how I wanted my tent, and the No. 1 Priority was a reduction in condensation. Even minimum contact with cold, clammy nylon was enough to bring it showering down, and was a definite deterrent to early rising. I also felt that a slightly heavier fabric would flap less wildly in wind and provide a quieter night. Canvas therefore seemed preferable on both counts.



Through advertisements in the Yachting Press, I discovered Moreland Tarpaulins, of Caledonian Road, London, who make a Cotton/Terylene mixture which gave the bulk I wanted without undue extra weight. The same material is frequently used for boat covers. The colour, pale green, was just right. I find blue cold to camp under, red and orange too conspicuous, and white looks horrid when it gets dirty. It was quite expensive, but nearer what I wanted than samples from other firms to whom I had written. So I measured up and sent off my order.

The material arrived two days later. At first it seemed very stiff, but soon softened with handling. Using worn-out bed sheets I made a mock-up, and then used this as a pattern for the real thing. The final result is 99% satisfactory, and when sewing another, there are only minor modifications I would make.

It has openings fore and aft. Some dinghy cruisers advise against a forward opening, but I find it necessary in order to attend to the anchor warp, and also I like to see around when the weather is fine enough to have it open. Both openings are fastened with loops and wooden toggles, and the forward one also has Velcro for additional weatherproofing. I avoided zips because they seize-up too easily, especially in a salty environment, and although quick and easy when working well, they're worse than useless when they don't.

The tent goes over the boom in the conventional manner. Because I like to see out, I sewed "windows" on each side made of thick Polythene bought from a gardening shop. These are 10" deep and 2' long (horizontally), and here was my only mistake, as they are positioned right behind where I normally sit, and collect condensation which drips straight down my neck! Next time I'll either use the same measurements but vertically, or smaller windows and position them differently.

The lower edges of the tent have a deep hem through which I thread the oars, and lacings at 3 strategic points only. The oars keep the bottom edge of the tent from flapping in-board and letting in rain and draughts, and also saved my having to screw large numbers of lacing eyes into the buoyancy tanks. Openings are left in the hem where the panels join (2 each side) so the oars can poke out part way along if I want to fold the tent back in fine weather.

The main halyard is used as a topping lift and attached to the aft end of the boom, which is hoisted higher than the gooseneck. This makes less wind resistance forward and more headroom aft, and prevents any rain on the mast from continuing along the boom.

"Black Swan" always weathercocks nicely with the tent up; it is only with the sails hoisted that I have problems in that respect, and together we have weathered many wild nights in total comfort.

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