

The Ness Yawl

Alan Glanville

Dinghy description - Length 19'2" (5.84m); beam 5'3" (1.60m); weight 260lbs (111kg.); draught 8" (0.2m) to 3'9" (1.14m); sail area 108 sq. ft. (10 sq. m). (See colour photo on p62).

The Ness Yawl is long, slim and light, enabling her to slip through the water easily. Designed by Iain Oughtred and based upon the traditional Ness Yoies of the Shetland Islands, she is a direct descendant of the double-ended, open-hulled Viking boats of Scandinavia. Her most outstanding feature in my eyes is beauty; aesthetically the boat is a delight. This is in no small measure due to her suitability as a sailing and rowing boat: she is fun to sail and easy to row.

My own Ness Yawl, *Lowly Worm III*, is rigged with a standing lug mainsail and a Bermudan mizzen. Other sail configurations are possible. The masts are unstayed which makes launching and recovery easy and low bridges negotiable without difficulty. There is a lot of sail high on a long light hull so she is fast off the wind. Performance into the wind varies. It is good for a traditional sail in light airs, but poor when triple-reefed, as the leading edge all but disappears at a time when the boat is heading into the waves. Sail is reduced by hauling on a line which runs through both luff and leech cringles. The sail is then gathered by traditional reefing ties. The 18 sq. ft. mizzen has two main functions. One is as a safe choice to run before a strong wind without the main, the other is when hove to. By hauling in tight on the mizzen and letting the mainsheet fly the Ness Yawl will lie comfortably to the wind. When dinghy cruising, especially solo, there are a number of occasions, other than shortening sail, when the ability to hold the boat safely head to wind is a strong asset.

The boat is lively in a breeze. I sit up on the gunwale in a force 4 and above if I want to keep all sail on. There are no side decks so it is obvious when the boat is over-pressed as water gushes over the lee gunwale. The gunwales are narrow, so prolonged sitting out results in a *derrière* like a hot cross bun. The sea-keeping qualities are good however. With plenty of flare and buoyancy at the bow she has the qualities of a good beach boat both going into waves and in surfing down them. Before the wind, catching a ride is exhilarating. I have caught rides of 100-200 metres at times.



The design includes a box in the stern section for an out-board engine. Preferring to row, I omitted this and built a camping box for food and equipment in its place. With long light oars the boat rows well. If there is a slight breeze sail can be hoisted, so it is only in near-calm conditions that rowing is called for, plus occasional manoeuvring in harbour or off the beach. On some hot summer days I might be hoisting and lowering sail and shipping and unshipping oars fairly frequently. However I have rowed most of the way across the Solent on several occasions and to Gweek from the mouth of the Helford.

I use 90lbs of lead ballast alongside the centreboard. The boat is far too quick and unstable as a camping cruiser with one-up and no ballast. It might be omitted with a crew of two or more on a day sail where capsizing is acceptable. I am currently contemplating switching my wooden centreboard and lead ballast for a steel plate. This might coincidentally improve performance but that is not the reason. I am planning this in tandem with replacing the trolley-trailer combo with a break-back trailer. The idea is to reduce time and effort at launch/recovery. Living well inland (Oxford) entails

a long drive at either end of a sail, so ways of reducing this time are worthwhile for me. This would be less important if there was a crew to aid at launch/recovery.

A design feature which seemed odd to me upon first acquaintance is the tiller. This is a long laminated loop passing either side of the mizzen mast, 38 inches in diameter at its widest. With an extension at the end the helmsman is able to sit well forward. It works well in practice.

The boat is long for a dinghy. The benefits of this on the water might be outweighed for some by problems on the land. Storage is an obvious consideration. Further, whilst the Ness Yawl is very light for the length, I do heave, haul and struggle the hull around on shore single-handed. That wouldn't be acceptable for some, though with two people that is not a problem; the Ness Yawl is much lighter than many shorter boats, e.g. a Wayfarer is about three times the weight. Trailing is easy. I use a 1400 cc Honda Civic as the tug but previously had no more problem with an 1100 cc Peugeot 205. Maintenance is minimal. I keep the boat covered with a fitted cover. The hull is epoxy ply and this was given the requisite eight coats of clear resin before painting. I used good quality marine deck paint inside and two-pot International marine epoxy on the outside. Spars, thwarts and gunwales are finished in *Deks Olje*. Given that the boat is used regularly the paint finish has remained smart and gives excellent protection.

The designer Iain Oughtred sells the plans and a building manual. Both are excellent, very detailed and provide guidance all the way. It took me 10 months part-time to build the hull, upside down on a frame in the back garden. I had no problems to speak of and made the oars and masts too. I bought in the trailer, sails and boat cover. Eight years ago the boat cost me about £3000 to build which included about £1,500 for the trailer, sails, cover, anchors etc. To have it built would have cost £7000 - £8,000 in 1996 and that would have been without the trailer and cruising gear. Whilst I had built a boat before, Iain's plans and advice were so good that an amateur who is reasonable with DIY tools would be able to tackle this as a first project. Care and patience are well-rewarded as the creative experience is high on such a beautiful hull. Iain Oughtred does talk about the boat carrying 3, 4 and occasionally 6 people. Personally I cannot see it. Sailing two-up is OK and three-up on a day sail. Camping aboard, two up is the absolute limit though. As it is, sleeping is tight. I lie on a Thermarest on the bottom boards to one side of the centre plate. A second person occasionally accompanies me and sleeps on the other side. However this would not be possible for a big person. I am 5' 8" tall and fairly slim (this would occasion a first-ever letter to the editor from my wife if she were to read this). In sleep my thighs are beneath the thwart, which is low to the bilge. A bigger person would not be able to lie on his/her side. Len Wingfield and I once sailed together down the Thames from Richmond to the Woolwich Barrier and back. Len slumbered in the upright position all night looking like Chief Sitting Bull on night watch.

I sling a rope between the two masts to form the ridge of my tent. The tent sides have Velcro straps which are fastened around lines beneath the gunwales. The tent itself is in two sections, the forward V section runs from the bow to the mainmast and is used on its own as a windbreak when at anchor for lunch. With the tent fully erected the rear part of the cockpit remains open for sitting outside and for cooking. As the boat is undecked, all storage apart from the camping box is within waterproof bags, strapped in the bow and stern and along the sides of the centreboard case and hull. Another version of the design has decks at bow and stern, though these are well below the sheer to maintain the boat's flexibility. These would best be used as built-in buoyancy in my view to keep the weight of cruising and camping gear in the middle of the boat. I use buoyancy bags in the event of capsize, two large reinforced ones doubling as rollers on which to move the boat on the beach if necessary.

This is a fun boat and good for cruising, but in experienced hands. For the inexperienced I would recommend a long and careful look at an existing boat before buying or building. Serious thought should also be given to the sleeping space. However, the Ness Yawl is from a fine stable of Iain Oughtred designs. There are beamier boats and shorter boats and boats with more freeboard. All of them are characterised by a distinctive elegance. **AG**

*(Note by Keith Muscott, with Alan's permission: Coincidentally, I have just finished reading Iain Oughtred's *Clinker Plywood Boatbuilding Manual*, and I hope to be able to review it in the next Bulletin. I picked it up after tea and put it down, read, at 2.30 am. Lovely book, lovely boats, lovely ideas. I had to wait for my copy, as it is now published by WoodenBoat Books, Maine, USA [www.woodenboat.com], and I ordered it through Amazon. You may have better luck contacting the man himself, if you're interested: Iain Oughtred, Struan Cottage, Bernisdale, Isle of Skye, Scotland. IV51 9NS, Tel. 01470 532732)*