

The Tideway

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First impressions count for a lot. I vividly remember my first sail in a Tideway on a wet and blustery day in Blakeney Harbour on the North Norfolk coast. I felt a mixture of admiration for the boat's qualities in testing conditions and relief that at last I'd found a boat I could manage single-handed with some ease on and off the water. I'd had a GP14 before, which is a fine boat, but in force 4 and above is a lot to handle on your own. In my search for the ideal boat I had sailed all manner of other dinghies and found them too big or too small or too light or too heavy etc etc. The Tideway seemed spot on. No doubt it's partly a question of temperament. Boats fit like clothes, and choice of clothes is a highly subjective matter.

Enough of impressions. What about the facts? The Tideway is a traditional 12ft clinker dinghy dating from the late 1950s and now also produced in GRP. It is thought that around 500 Tideways have been built. The class association has existed since 1963 and membership currently stands at just under 200. Over the years there have been some changes to the build and the boat has always been offered in a variety of fit-outs, ranging from the 'super' which has a foredeck, side-decks and a stern locker to the 'popular' which has none of the above. The Tideway cannot therefore be classed as a one-design. The main dimensions are as follows:

Length:	12'	(3.66m)
Beam:	4' 10"	(1.5m)
Weight:	275lb	(125kg) (ex. gear)
Rig:	sliding gunter, though Bermudan is also permitted	
Sail area:	81 sq ft	(7.525 sq m)

Some members fly a genoa (see photo of Tideway at Rutland Water) but it is not allowed for racing.

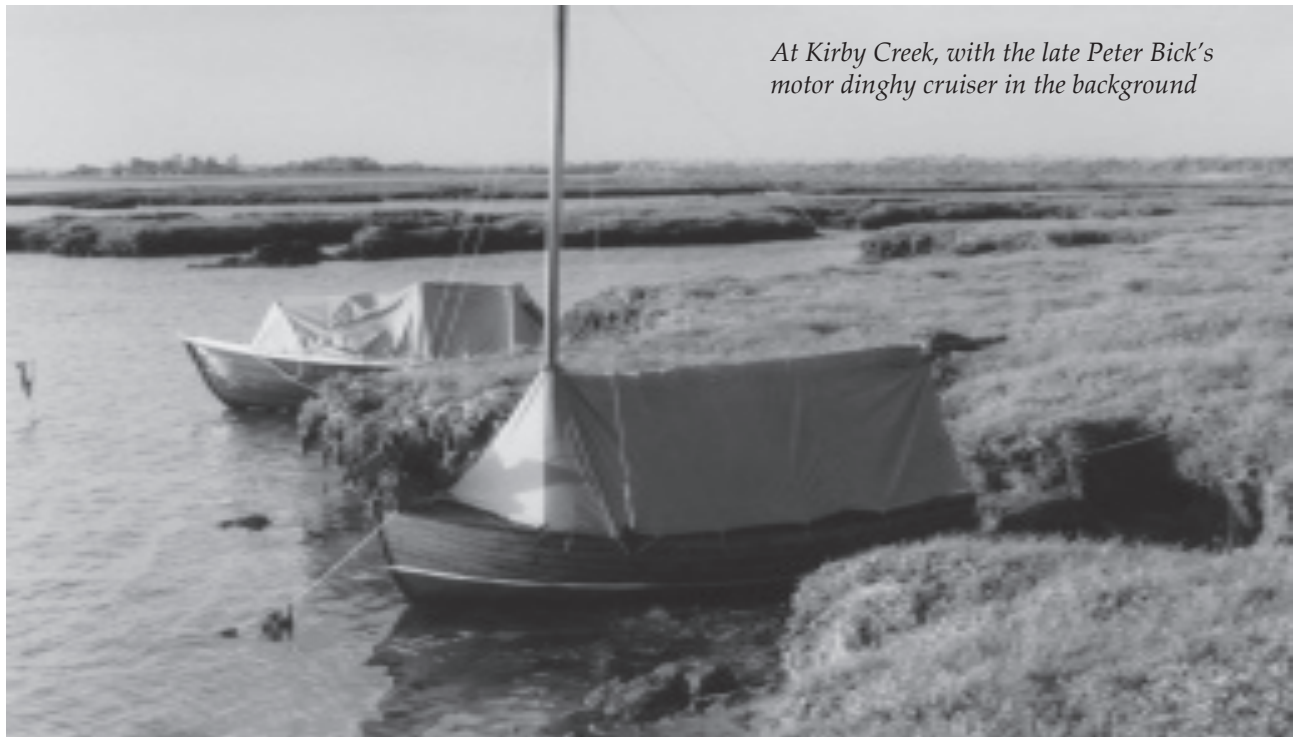
Needless to say Tideway owners (especially those who are DCA members) make all manner of individual modifications to suit their own needs and tastes. Many have fitted slab reefing systems which might seem surprising in light of the modest sail area. However, as all dinghy cruisers know, especially single-handers, the capacity to reduce sail is an important safety feature. Other modifications I have found useful include re-locating the jib sheet fairleads and jamming cleats to make them more convenient for the single-hander, fitting belaying pins instead of cleats for the halyards (they hold the rope better), a rowlock chock on the transom for sculling and emergency steering, a topping lift, a tackle on the forestay to make lowering the mast easier, and a jib downhaul. As for launching and retrieval, the Tideway is not a light-weight for the single-hander and it is wise to use the car to pull her out of the water wherever possible rather than rely on heroics. On the other hand, I have always been able to manage when conditions were not suitable for using the car.

I can best illustrate the Tideway's sailing qualities by going back to that initial experience in Blakeney Harbour. First is her ability to go to windward with the plate half up. Getting out to Blakeney Harbour (really a stretch of shallow water protected from the sea by a long shingle spit) involved on that occasion beating down the narrow and winding Morston Creek against the flood which she managed fine. The straight keel and skeg help her grip the water. Of course she's no match for a racing boat like a National 12 but the Tideway has a respectable windward performance and for me that's important. I've often heard people say that windward performance doesn't matter or that 'gentlemen don't go to windward' and such tosh. In my experience on east coast rivers – in fact all rivers – the wind usually gets funnelled and you're frequently either running or beating.

The second conclusion drawn from that first sail – which included a run down the length of the harbour to the end of the spit - was that she tracks steadily downwind in a blow without evil tendencies to broach or go into a death roll. Of course, with enough wind and a large swell any boat will reach its limits but the evidence suggested that the Tideway's limits were high. A fair beam, stiff bilges, considerable hull weight for her size and moderate sail area the Tideway make for stability and steadiness. These initial impressions have been confirmed on numerous occasions in a variety of conditions, including larger swells than are to be found in Blakeney Harbour.

As far as dinghy cruising is concerned, the Tideway's load carrying capacity is much in her favour. Mine has a fore-deck with a shelf underneath and a stern locker which can be used for lighter items. For the rest I use boxes (old drawers) shock-corded to the bottom boards by the centre-board case to hold heavy items like the anchor, cooking utensils, and food. In fact I've stolen this and many other ideas from DCA President Roger Barnes who is a highly experienced Tideway sailor. It was his article on dinghy cruising (published originally in the *Boatman* but available now at the DCA website) which led me to the Tideway.

As for sleeping on board, I am on the large side (at 6' 2") for sleeping on the Tideway and my experiences have not always been good. However, it's worth persevering because there's no denying the enormous freedom from shore which it gives you. The tent is no problem. Using the lashed-together mainsail and spars as a ridge pole, I haul them up on the throat halyard to a point about 18" above the gooseneck to give me enough height at the for'ard end; the aft end rests on a boom crutch made out of an aluminium tube topped with a rowlock. The edges of the tent are fitted by rubber loops to hooks on the sheer-strake of the hull. The front of my boom-tent is part of an old land tent, suitably cut and shaped so that the bottom edge fits round the washboard.



At Kirby Creek, with the late Peter Bick's motor dinghy cruiser in the background

The real issue is where to sleep. It's very tight under the thwart and could be wet unless you have a leak-free boat, a privilege I cannot claim. Raising the bottom boards to thwart level is commonly used but I have found them too thin and have made new ones which are one and a half times the thickness of the old ones. These are strong enough but need to be carefully secured. I'm experimenting this season with a dedicated sleeping board made of ply, hinged along the centre line and held in place on the thwarts by means of cross-struts. It will be stowed alongside the centre-board case when not in use. (This idea comes from John Glasspool, long-time Tideway sailor and author of an excellent book on Open Boat Cruising.)

My final point in the Tideway's favour is aesthetic. She looks good on the water and is obviously in her element. The Tideway has been aptly described as the Morris Minor of dinghies. There's nothing showy about her. She's understated, rather traditional, definitely purposeful, solidly reliable. Notice how easy it is to slip into giving her human qualities! Not that I'm always 100% happy with her. I've pointed out to her on occasion that she's too small ('an extra foot would be nice'), too slow, too sensible – once I even rashly said I could do without her. But then I just have to recall that she's got me out of some nasty trouble, lifted unexpectedly to a hint of breeze, got me home a bit quicker than I'd anticipated, or drawn oohs and aahs from passing craft – and I relent. Most of all, I'll remember that first sail when I hardly knew her qualities and hadn't yet begun to think of her as anything other than a fine structure of wood, metal, and canvas but knew instinctively that she was the right boat for me. She still is.



Please note that the colour photographs are not shots of Richard's boat : they replace black and white exposures in the original bulletin article that were too blurred to reproduce effectively — KM