

Pint sized



# Low water Drifter

This neatly designed trailer-sailer's traditional looks and easy handling impressed **Sam Fortescue**

**D**rascombes have had something of a split personality since the licence to use the name parted company from the original moulds.

These last are owned by Honnor Marine, which produces its Devon Originals line of luggers, while Churchouse Boats in Hampshire owns a later set of moulds (which it claims are better) and the Drascombe name.

The very first Drascombe was a 19ft (5.7m) lugger designed by John Watkinson in 1968 and built in ply. He took the boat to the London Boat Show, where it sold 12 times over, and he began producing glassfibre versions the following year. More designs were launched, including the 21ft 6in (6.6m) Drifter in 1987.

A few decades later and over 5,000 examples of Watkinson's designs have been built. Churchouse has expanded the Drascombe range with several new boats, including the Drifter 22. She was drawn in 2006 by naval architect Paul Fisher, who was asked to create a boat that fitted into the range, but larger and with basic accommodation.

"In reality, Paul started with a blank sheet of paper, but we wanted people to look at it and say 'that's a Drascombe,'" explained ex-director Stewart Brown, who recently handed the business to a stepson.

There's nothing fancy about these little yawls. They have a pleasing

classic look to them – hard chines in the hull, wooden spars, tan sails and a bowsprit and bumkin. She has a gentle sheer with a nice iroko toerail and rubbing strake. Her relatively high cabin top and cockpit coaming give her a sturdy look.

In fact Stewart says she'll heel to 72° before water laps over the side. We couldn't test this in the gentle 8-10 knots on offer in Chichester Harbour, but she should self-drain into the outboard well, as the cockpit sole is above the water. Another nice touch is the fold-up washboard, which battens down to the sole when not in use, but hinges up to help keep water out of the cabin on a splashy day.

## Simple interior

Below, she is designed to a budget, but well thought through and Churchouse will fit her out to any specification. There is generous sitting headroom throughout: Stewart is a tall man.

A wooden infill at the forward end of the cabin turns the twin seats into a decent 6ft 6in (2m)-long V-berth, and there's stowage beneath. On the port side, there's a galley, with a sink fed by hand pump from two jerrycans stored in a cockpit locker. There's also room for a simple gas hob – Stewart prefers the one-ring aerosol-powered ones.

To starboard is another cabinet with two top-opening lockers beneath. One contains a little fridge, the other acts

The Drifter 22 is a modern rework of the original John Watkinson-designed Drifter that brings her into the trailer-sailer age

ALL PICTURES: GUY FORD

as a larder, but could be used for anything. The top provides a flat space to unroll a chart and get to work with the dividers.

Certainly, you could do some interesting navigation in this boat. Her gunter rig means she's never going to break any upwind records, but she's sturdy and easy to handle alone. Several of the Drifter 22s built so far have been sold to Dutch sailors, while many have made long coastal passages and crossed the Channel.

My only niggles were related to the running rigging. The main halyard and peak halyard are led back to the cabintop, but they are still hard work. And though the lone single-speed winch (on its binnacle in the middle of the cockpit, itself an option) makes a good turning block for the jib sheets, it is still quite a palaver to stop them off into their cam cleats.

For the uninitiated, the mizzen can be another source of difficulty in a blow. When the bow drops off a big wave, shielding the headsail, the mizzen has the tendency to make the boat broach. "If you've got the tiller

*'She'll never break any upwind records, but she's easy to handle'*

in your teeth and she's still rounding up, let the mizzen fly," Stewart says.

But these are small matters. She tacked and gybed well during our test, even after we ran her aground on one of Chichester's many shallows. She has twin drop keels, acting like



**Above:** With one hand on the helm, it's still simple to raise or lower the drop keels, while the rudder plate is on a light line

**Below:** Her simple interior can be endlessly customised, but should do fine for weekending



in it. He also says a 6-8hp outboard provides plenty of power, mounted in her inboard well, although she could take a 9.9hp electric starter as well.

### Fully trailable

The boat goes from trailer to rigged in about half an hour. You'll need a big family car or a 4x4, though, as her towing weight is just shy of 1,800kg. Churchouse sells a swinging cradle trailer, which allows recovery of the boat without wetting the bearings.

The mast is tabernacle mounted, folding down fairly easily using a telescopic pole in an A-frame rig. As Stewart says, all this matters because the boat is designed in part to appeal to older sailors. The other key market seems to be sailors with young families, keen to get afloat. ✦

leeboards in a barge, and will happily pivot around one if you do dig in to the bottom. Each keel weighs 75kg and is raised and lowered by a simple but clever ratchet mechanism.

Acrylic sight boxes inside the for'ard lockers allow you to quickly see how far up or down each keel is.

With keels and rudder up she draws 1ft 4in (40cm), and Stewart reckons she will happily dry out horizontal if the mud has any give



### DRASCOMBE DRIFTER 22

**LOA:** 22ft (6.7m)

**LWL:** 19ft 3in (5.9m)

**Beam:** 7ft 3in (2.3m)

**Draught:** 1ft 4in/3ft 5in (40cm/1.1m)

**Upwind sail area:** 234sqft (21.8m<sup>2</sup>)

**Towing weight:** 1,800kg (3,970lb)

**Price:** £30,000 inc VAT (basic ex trailer)

**Builder:** Churchouse Boats

**Contact:** www.drascombe.org.uk

### VERDICT

**An elegant and fun boat to sail,** she would make a slightly spartan weekender for the basic package price. A better option might be a cockpit tent. But for a few small niggles, the rig has been well thought out and she feels exceedingly safe and sturdy.

**PERFORMANCE:** ★★★★★

**ACCOMMODATION:** ★★★★★

**LOOKS:** ★★★★★