

Rodger Witt meets a 17 foot, centreplate dayboat

JUST SKIPPING ALONG



ON THE face of it, Richmond Marine's Skipper 17 dayboat has a lot going for her. Minimal draft, light weight, a large self draining cockpit, and usable cuddy, appeal to those who want a small, trailerable boat with enough room for family and friends.

Aesthetically perhaps, she leaves a lot to be desired; there's nothing romantic or yachty about her but, one might argue, practicality is the name of the game, so who cares what she looks like?

She arrived on a smart, single axle Bramber trailer complete with rollers and winch, so we lost no time in taking her down to the sea. She only needs a few inches, so you can swivel her off and plonk her down without getting your knees wet. Simplicity itself.

Rigging her was easy too. You only

have five bits of wire to worry about — there's no backstay — and proper bottlescrews allow fine adjustment with the minimum of fuss.

Closer examination revealed several less practical details, the first of which is the lack of a decent step up from cockpit to foredeck. Side benches stop short of the cuddy — possibly to allow the plywood doors to hinge open. A high price to pay. Full length seats could also have been used as quarter berths. As it is, accommodation space beneath the foredeck is cramped.

An alternative to doors which cost £70 extra anyway, is the standard roll-down tonneau. But, of course, as Richmond point out, lockable doors are much safer if you leave anything of value on board.

At the other end of the ship, mooring cleats are also an extra. Our

boat had none, which made mooring alongside difficult. But full marks for the pulpit, stanchions and lifelines, even if they do add £105 to the cost.

Then again, the mainsheet needs a jammer to save aching muscles in a blow. I also found the tiller a shade high, and would insist on some kind of bracing on the sole to stop you sliding to leeward. It's such a wide cockpit!

The after locker is very useful, but does restrict access to the engine. I used a Seagull Century Longshaft which fitted neatly in the trough provided, though pop rivets in the

SKIPPER 17

LOA	17ft
LWL	15ft 9in
Beam	7ft
Draft	¼ft
Displacement	700lb
Ballast	150lb
Price (basic)	£1,850
Price (trailer)	£290
Designer	Peter Milne
Builders	Richmond Marine, The Green, Twickenham, Middlesex 01-898 2771.

moulding prevented a flush fit between bracket and transom.

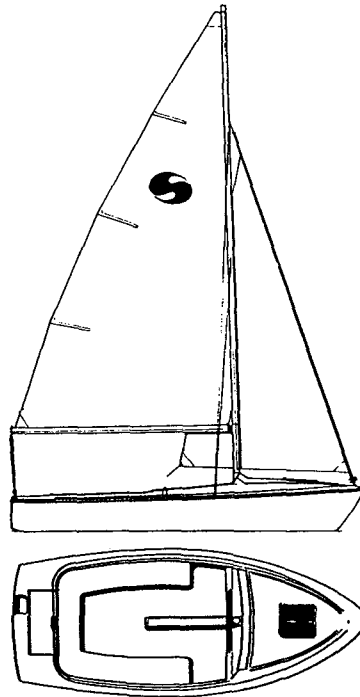
Saddened to see that no topping lift was fitted (extra) I lashed up a spare jib halyard instead. Scarcely ideal since it emanated from three quarters of the way up the stick and bisected the sail. But it just about worked. I liked the excellent Holt Allen jib reefing spar which performed admirably; even so a solid restraining stop would better prevent

With her light displacement the Skipper 17 tows well and can be launched and recovered easily.



Stepping the mast calls for four pairs of hands — or else lots of agility. Rigging is uncomplicated.





twist than the piece of string provided.

On a more serious note, nasty cracking noises whenever you stepped on the deck, revealed a lack of adequate stiffening beneath. Richmond Marine mentioned something about a deck defect before I took delivery, but I thought that had all been straightened out.

The bow hatch provides ventilation and, say the builders, is a useful feature for elderly sailors since you can handle anchor or mooring lines here, without going on deck. In practice, this operation calls for fairly supple limbs.

Performance to windward is lacking . . .

But how does she handle? Well, after trying her in various conditions, I can describe her as a stable, well balanced boat, even if her windward ability is less than impressive. She has a rather imprecise feel due, I suspect, to a low aspect rig and lack of grip. A flatter staysail, or better sheet leads would help but, either way, she needs 'tuning up'.

If I were Richmond, I would leave her with a clued-up, go-fast dinghy fanatic for a few days, and take his suggestions seriously. After all, good performance is just as important to the short handed cruising skipper as anyone else. If the engine dies, it's a positive safety factor to have a boat which points high and can be wriggled back to her moorings. As it is, Skipper needs plenty of wind to get her going, and soon begins to wallow in light to medium airs. I like the concept, but it needs developing.