SAILS

Cruising chute for kids

Q I recently purchased a Skipper 17, which I sail with my two children aged 12 and 10, and would like to buy a cruising chute that would be easy for them to handle.

At present I have a main and a roller-reefing genoa which are 85 and 65sq ft respectively; the mast is 20ft tall and 4/5ths rigged. As far as I am aware, the boat is standard, but according to the original list of options, a spinnaker of 160sq ft can be fitted. Another article I have quotes a cruising chute at 100sq ft.

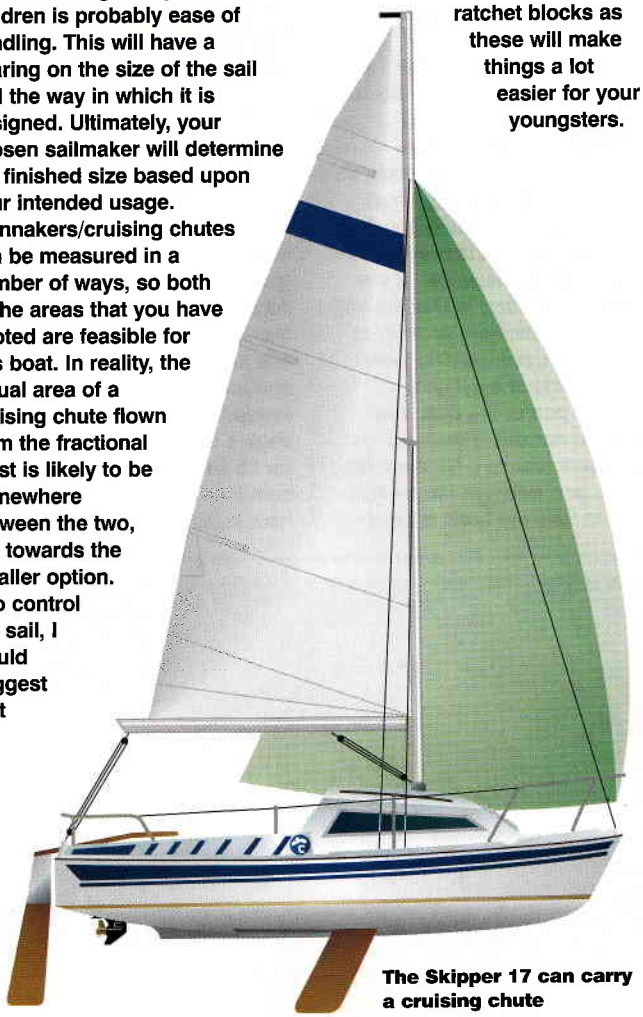
There is a bolt on top of the mast that a pulley could be attached to, but would it be safe to hoist the sail from here (there is no backstay fitted) or do I need to fit a sheave just above the forestay? Would I need to fit winches to control the sail? The cockpit coaming is only 2in wide.

Chris Breeze, by email

IAN BROWN REPLIES: you have quite rightly identified that there are several considerations that need to be made when looking to buy a spinnaker/cruising chute. First, with an unsupported topmast on a 4/5 rig, I would err towards fitting a separate sheave or block for the spinnaker halyard just above the hounds rather than flying it from the masthead. I would recommend that you take some advice from the spar manufacturer or a rigger, however, before drilling any holes.

The primary consideration if you are sailing with your children is probably ease of handling. This will have a bearing on the size of the sail and the way in which it is designed. Ultimately, your chosen sailmaker will determine the finished size based upon your intended usage. Spinnakers/cruising chutes can be measured in a number of ways, so both of the areas that you have quoted are feasible for this boat. In reality, the actual area of a cruising chute flown from the fractional hoist is likely to be somewhere between the two, but towards the smaller option.

To control the sail, I would suggest that winches are not necessary as, by the time the sail is loaded enough to warrant using them, it will be time to take it down! Having said that, you may want to consider some ratchet blocks as these will make things a lot easier for your youngsters.



The Skipper 17 can carry a cruising chute

This month's experts are...

■ Pat Manley is an RYA Yachtmaster Instructor. He also runs mobile diesel engine courses.

■ Andrew Simpson has been designing and building boats for over 30 years, specialising in fast cruising and racing yachts.

■ Nigel Warren is a naval architect, working mainly on fast ferries and small patrol boats.

■ Peter Driver has been involved with batteries for over 25 years and is Chairman of DMS Technologies.

■ Stephen Johnson is the Cruising Manager of the RYA. An ex-Royal Navy submariner, he has owned both powerboats and sailing yachts.

■ Peter Spreadborough, of Southampton Calor Gas Centre, works in marine equipment sales and has spent 15 years in the industry.

■ Ian Brown of Quantum Sails is an expert in both cruising and racing sails, and a keen dinghy and keelboat racer.

■ James Hortop is technical manager and design engineer with Merlin Equipment, which supplies marine power systems.

1993, but it seems there is no particular insulation of the engine or electrics. There is, however, a rubber coupling between engine and prop shaft.

I have so far failed to find any books or information that can shed light on this problem. The boat is wintered ashore at the moment, with the batteries disconnected.

What can cause such corrosion, what can explain these voltage readings, and what can be done to cure it?

Olivier Allain
La Tronche,
France

NIGEL WARREN REPLIES while a bronze prop on an aluminium boat is quite common, the usual worry is that the more noble bronze will attack the aluminium, not the other way round. Galvanically, (ie without an external electrical input) the aluminium cannot attack the bronze. So I would conclude that there is an electric source that is driving the galvanic cell back to front. The measurement you have taken between shaft and hull of over 0.5V strongly indicates that this is the case. It's most likely that the electric potential causing the corrosion is coming from either the boat's battery or a shore supply. You should disconnect both and measure the potential again. This will supply another clue.

There appears to be a leakage of electricity which is earthing through the shaft and prop. This could be many things, such as dirt and damp around the starter motor, or it could be through the engine instrumentation. This is why I always recommend fitting a battery switch on a battery terminal and ensuring this is turned off when the boat is left idle. As to your situation, if the leakage cannot be found, I would try a brush on the shaft. Then at least everything is grounded to a common earth.

A battery terminal switch will isolate earth leakage