

1992 Newsletter

From a fax from Pete Benjamin, of Heritage Manufacturing, the S-African builders of the Sagitta:

"My charter Sagitta Bojangles was put on the rocks at a place called Rooi Els. The charterers claim the anchor rope parted at 3am and they were awakened by horrible sounds of the boat grinding on the rocks. To cut a long story short, when the tide went out they effected emergency repairs and the Sagitta was refloated on the following high tide by crowds of people - minus a keel and a badly damaged starboard hull as well. They motorsailed to Gordon's Bay and although the modules were awash the bloody thing didn't sink!!!! It made national TV and I think that the safety aspects of the watertight compartments are not to be overlooked as is the incredible design feature that led her to being such a safe boat - Thanks folks!"

Pete also wrote to say that he competed in the Cape Town to Rio Race on board a St Francis 43 (with both its designer and builder also in the crew). He reported ""On all points of sail and under all conditions the Sagitta would have beaten the St Francis - I know that it's easy to say afterwards, but it's the truth. The Sagitta would have walked the multihull class on handicap - and all of those who raced stand by that statement!!" As with other races in S Africa the Cape to Rio Race was not open to Sagitta as the race organisers ruled that the minimum length was 10m. They seemed not to take note of the fact that many smaller multihulls than this have raced successfully in the Transatlantic races, Round Britain etc.

Jorgen Kruger of the island of Sylt, Germany reported on the launching of Mira no 19. "I launched 'Timena von Sylt' on the 26th July 1992. After 2300 hours in 8 months (single-handed). I spent approx 60000 DM (£20000) including sails, but without an engine. A small handicap was the very small workshop (just 3.5m wide). But we had an excellent summer, over two months without rain, perfect for assembling the two hulls. After the first 400 miles I can say that she is a perfect little boat. Everyone is happy with the smooth motion, even in rough weather. Normally she goes along at 8-10 knots. In a surf we measured 20 knots (In fact a little bit frightening for a monohull sailor). I think she is just the boat I want for ocean cruising. Thank you for the excellent plans. After a few problems at first I found working with the plans was no problem. But 1000 times more pleasant than working is sailing with this little cat. I will try for a South Pacific cruise in 93 so we may show up in Torpoint!

Pierre Pominville from Canada had a Merlin built professionally by Atelier Multicoque of Quebec. He writes "we really appreciate the stability, her stiffness and the feeling of safety we have sailing her. Not to mention the pride!" He goes on to ask how heavy the boat should be. Pierre's boat was cold moulded rather than strip cedar, and we have found that cedar boats tend to be lighter than ply ones. For example, Lilian and I can easily lift the Wizard shell, with bunks, daggerboard cases etc fitted. Most Merlins and Striders weigh around 800 kg in "racing trim", ie with cushions, anchor, flares etc but no cruising gear. However, the lightest Strider sailing (which we built as Woods Express) weighed 580 kg in race trim, and the heaviest we know of weighs 1100kg

We had our usual annual letter from Bob Cole, in Florida, who has been sailing his Strider for a number of years with his wife and two children. "The Strider is still doing great. We're planning our third Keys trip for June/July. We don't go sailing as much as I'd hoped (we know what he means!). But our big trip each year is a month long. So if the boat is lived on for 1/12th of the year we're doing better than most boat owners round here. I sometimes think that with the kids and all the stress of every-day life, our Strider trips are our last link with sanity and that's worth a lot!"

You will recall seeing the photo of Alan Nixon's Windsong in the last newsletter. We have just had a card from him, postmarked in Barbados saying "Arrived here in Barbados a week ago. Broke no records with a 26 day passage from Tenerife. Picked up the trade winds about 100 miles N of Cape Verde Isles after 10 days, due to calms and contrary winds. Had a novice crew so couldn't leave him with much sail up at night. Saw Charles on Cockleshell Hero (our old boat) at Palma, from where

he left for The Gambia. Heard another Windsong had crossed, red hulls, maybe French/Dutch or German? Next stop Martinique. Cheers for now. Alan. "

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Christophe Grillet, owner of the first wood Sagitta has been writing to us regularly as he cruises in his Sagitta. In 1991 he sailed to the Baltic, and was past Helsinki, en-route for Leningrad/St Petersburg when he heard about the coup attempt in the USSR. Understandably, he decided to give the Soviet Union a miss that year! Since then he has sailed to the Med and has been cruising around, although he had problems when his anchor cable was deliberately cut while the boat was in the Balearics and he was in the UK. Once repaired he sailed east and reported : "12 1/2 knots with ghooster and full main. It lasted most of the day, my compliments. 22 knots of wind just as your prediction. Arbalete is now at Porto Carrao, Sithonia peninsula, SE of Thessaloniki, Greece. I had a wonderful time and think she is a wonderful boat. Thank you. I am now nearly as far east as I got in the Baltic. So we have nearly circumnavigated Europe. Whether single handed or with 6 aboard all has gone very well indeed."

We wrote about the Mira "Timena of Sylt" in the last newsletter. Jurgen and girlfriend Ines visited us in the summer, enroute for the sun. It is a beautifully built boat, built in an amazingly short time (8 months singlehanded) . Whenever we go on a Mira we are always amazed at the amount of room and the load carrying ability. Even with 2 dinghies, surfboards, bikes etc, Timena still floated above its marks. We sailed out to the Eddystone in the Wizard to see them off, and later heard that they had arrived in the Canaries, in fact Jorgen wrote "when we left Plymouth we had two days variable head winds, followed by 2 days calm. But from Cape Finnisterre to Porto Santo we found real tradewinds, up to F7. The boat was often too fast even with the 3rd reef and no headsail" (In a postcard they reported sailing nearly 300 miles in 24 hours, not bad for a home built cruiser!)

"After 9 days at sea we reached Porto Santo which is a very nice small island; which is not overcrowded with tourists'. After 8 days there we sailed on to Maderia. On this trip our Autohelm broke after 1990 miles and 2 months. We sent the junk back to Hamburg. It was then 45 hours/280 miles to Fuerteventura, mostly in tradewinds. Nice. Now a holiday and painting the boat and of course some sailing between the islands with friends. I don't have to tell you that everyone is amazed about the nice motion on this boat. The cockpit is perfect here in the sun" and there we must leave them basking in the warm sunshine.

Peter Kinch and son Ralph once again competed in the Round Britain race in their Banshee Dasher. It was a very rough trip, and there were numerous retirements. However they battled on and were fourth multihull to finish and third on corrected time. Well done!

V Manu from Belgium writes "I have now finished Pixie 134 which is a great success~ Easy to handle, fast and a lot of fun to sail. Congratulations on your good plans! I have ordered the study plans for Merlin from my local dealer. I hope to get them soon because my hands are tickling to start building again "

Meanwhile in Malta Peter Williams is sailing his Quattro 16: "I found the building of the Ouattro very easy and the performance of the boat is outstanding. Both Joey and I entered our Quattros in the National championships and we were placed 1st and 2nd in the handicap event ~ Joey winning 5 out of 6 races, (I won the other one). The skegs are excellent - tacking is so easy; I hope that more people become interested now that we have a 1 - 2 in the National races. I found that a beltsander was invaluable to me as a very inexperienced woodworker. I could handle this tool far better than a planer. The hulls have a superb finish, most people don't believe me when I tell them I made it out of wood "

"I have now enjoyed a couple of seasons sailing my homebuilt Strider (No 37) and I have not regretted choosing your design for a moment. " So says John Furneaux from Rhyl, N Wales. "The

Strider is everything I required; an excellent daysailer with an exciting turn of speed and enough deck space for a couple of families. It has taken us (my wife, two large teenage children and myself) on weekly cruises around the Welsh coast and taken me further afield across the Irish Sea. There are times when having a cabin would be nice, but generally speaking having such a large deck space is safer and more enjoyable"

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Chris Pearson writes "I am the owner of Shadow no 6 which I built in Tanzania, launching her in December 1990. I have shipped "Catanga" back with me to the UK. As you can imagine, there is a world of difference between sailing in East Africa and sailing off the Cumbrian coast! I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the design of "Catanga" which has given us a very great deal of pleasure. According to my log I have now sailed the boat 3500 miles with absolutely no problems, which is as good a recommendation as you can get!"

L. Gregory, building a wood Mira in Cheltenham writes "The other day the WEST System rep came to see me and seemed to think all was going well, but I think building is slow, but then falling off a trestle and breaking two ribs didn't help". A local boatbuilder broke his arm very badly when he fell off a trestle and was off work for 3 months in considerable pain - so please be careful!

Stan Hawkins, building his Flica 34 in S Africa complains of the problem common to all builders "Trying to work for a living and build a boat cuts out any chance of a social life! I have got someone working on it full time and have completed the hull decks and bulkheads. A carpenter is about to give me a quote for all the interior. I have used foam throughout, including bulkheads and cabin soles. The boat looks very stylish as I have put large radii on lots of corners. "

Another builder struggling to find time to build is Tony Moyes building a strip plank Sagitta "I actually prefer sailing to building and did far too much of it last summer when I should have been building. Anyway, I have completed one hull and almost completed the second and am very pleased with the result so far. I have not had any problems with the strip planking. I have also made various kits in my workshop, which is separate from the boat "tent". This was done during the winter as I will not use epoxy under 15°C and I have no efficient method of heating the tent during the winter. We are both still very excited about your design and assure you that we will do your design justice. It is looking very nice. "

Bill Richards from Auckland New Zealand, one of the first WIZARD builders, writes: "Work is progressing well on my WIZARD. I've 75% completed one hull and the other is all ready to be glassed. I'm now waiting for better weather so that I can go outside and finish it off. At the moment I am busy manufacturing everything that I can fit in my small shed. I've just about finished the beams and the cockpit and cabin pieces. So when the sun shines again everything should come together really quickly. The plans are really good and I haven't had to scratch my head too much. The pictures of the boat you built are a great help as I can compare what I've done with what it should look like."

The first Woods Design was Cockleshell Hero, built by Richard in 1979/80. He launched it after only 900 hours work and at a total cost of £1500 - but he did make everything himself, including the spars and sails. We sailed it extensively eg to Norway and the Baltic in 1981 and lived on board until 1985, when, in order to raise money to build the prototype Banshee, we sold it to Chas Bradley, who has lived on it ever since. We had heard that it had been seen several times. in the Canaries and also in W Africa, but we recently received a letter from Chas:

"The good news is that Kobo alias Cockleshell Hero is alive and well and still looking after me despite all I have inflicted upon her. We are sailing among the Azores and enjoying every minute. It is a pleasure to see clouds and watch fronts passing through. It seems that blue skies and trade winds can become tedious. Not many boats use the numerous small harbours here and the welcome

is normally warm. Sailing alone has been a new experience and of course provides plenty of time to wonder at our surroundings. Fortunately with so many good people around and nature's beauty small hassles, like zealous customs officers don't seem too bad."

In the last newsletter we wrote about the Kruger's home built plywood Mira and their voyage around the world. Timena has now sailed quite a distance from it's home port of Sylt Germany - over 10,000 miles in the last year visiting Maderia, Canaries, Caribbean and Venezuela. Then feeling a little "island sick" they wanted to see "some real civilisation" so sailed north to New York and Maine.

Reporting on his self steering Jurgen writes: "The trim tab(on the rudder) is controlled by the Autohelm 4000 and steers the boat pretty well with very little power consumption. It's far better than the expensive servo pendulum wind vane gear which we used in the Atlantic trip. And its also 30kg lighter and more elegant. After Venezuela we sailed to Grenada and met Alan Nixon on his Windsong (built in Millbrook). Then up through the islands to the Bahamas. On the way there (630 miles) we had everything from force 0 to 8 including really big waves. But, since we had visited many other multihulls in the West Indies we know that we sail on a very strong and safe boat.

We saw many production catamarans with real structural problems after only a few years sailing. We are very surprised by the Bahamas. The islands are very nice with beautiful white beaches and good coral reefs for snorkling. The sailing is marvellous, especially going north with the SE trade winds. Often we sail in only 3-6 feet of water over white sand. Going in and out through the cuts in the cays and islands is no problem with only 2'9" draft. With a multihull you always find nice places without any other boats. Sailing between the islands is exciting and good fun for shallow draft cats with experienced crew. We like the Bahamas much more than the West Indies. Well, there is a small catch. Everything is very expensive.

We reached New York on 18th June. We anchored just in front of the Statue of Liberty, free mooring and good holding! But we've had lots of "English" weather, ie fog etc. Very often visibility was only 20m. Thank God for the GPS! Navigating in the New York harbour with 100 metres visibility is very exciting. Especially with all the big ships, tugs, high speed catamaran ferries and barges. But the city of New York is marvellous! It's worth all the hassle! But these cities are very expensive, so we sailed further north..."

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1995 newsletter

Alan Bettencamp wrote from Portugal "After 7 months your 29th Janus was ready. I launched in July and sailed all summer. It was great to see at the end what someone can achieve, she was fast, really fast. I noticed several occasions when only 10 - 12m monohulls could keep up. Once some friends ashore commented "He's going very fast, he must have a good engine" Engine! There is no engine, only sails! Anyway, I built it for the purpose of experiment. I'm getting ready to build my next boat, that I think will be a Windsong. I enclose a photo of my boat, I'm sure you will agree, she's so beautiful."

In previous newsletters we have reported on the Kruger's voyage round the world in their Mira. After leaving Germany they spent a year sailing the Caribbean and east coast of the US (including some time in New York) before heading for Panama and the Pacific. In January Jurgen wrote: "We spent 6 months in the States and enjoyed the Western civilization. Now we are back in the Bahamas which are one of our favourite cruising grounds. The islands are nice and the people are easy and friendly. The lobsters are quite good and very easy to catch. Even the fish are easy to catch, and so are the coconuts. You see life is good in the Bahamas. But we plan to leave here in 2-3 weeks".

Then in April he wrote "We arrived in the Marquesas without any problems. From Balboa, Panama it took us 26 days, which is not very fast for the 3950 miles but we had some calm days which is the reason for "only" averaging 6.1 knots. The Pacific was not as nice as the Atlantic and we never had

the "real trade wind weather". But the cat and crew were all right, except that we had some very nasty (3cm long) barnacles. After all the weeks at sea we really like to be in port again. The Marquesas are a very nice place for a land-fall because the islands are absolutely gorgeous and the people very friendly and laid back. We plan to spend the next few months in French Polynesia, Cook and Tonga before we sail in October to New Zealand."

Walter Simmons of Fowey, Cornwall has been building his Sagitta for a couple of years. "As you can see I completed as much of each hull as possible at home but had to move to a flat site near the water due to the narrow roads and overhead cables here. Simultaneous glueing of all the bulkheads went well although I think the hulls may be 2 cm further apart at the bow than at the stern."

We have also written about Californian Ron Holback and his flat panel Flica in earlier newsletters. In November he wrote "I launched Toucan in August 93. I had built the boat at home on a steep hill and getting it off our property onto the road was a real concern. Most boat haulers would not touch the job, but the one I hired made it look easy. At 6 am on a Saturday we moved the boat 30 miles to Sacramento and launched it in the Sacramento river. Most of the trip was on the interstate driving down the middle of two traffic lanes at 60 mph. After that, motored down river 100 miles to San Francisco Bay.

I doubt if there's 6 catamarans total in the Bay, Toucan being the only modern one. Finally on December 17th we sailed under the Golden Gate bridge and turned left, heading for Mexico. We were about 3 months late, and brought up the end of that year's cruising pack. It's about 500 miles from San Francisco to the border. We spent Christmas in San Barbara, New Year in San Diego and entered Mexico a few days later. Spent the next 10 months leisurely working our way south, currently in Panama.

The boat has been an excellent live aboard for Erika and I and our boys Skip (7) and Hans (4). We've never regretted deciding on a Flica once, nor have we seen another sail boat of any size we'd consider trading for. The boat has earned you and I great compliments everywhere we've been. Toucan is at the Pedro Miguel Boat Club, on Miraflores Lake, in the middle of the Panama Canal. We've travelled well over 4000 miles this past year making land falls throughout Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and now Panama with no major problems.

It's virtually impossible for me to recount all the fun times and compliments this boat has provided us. For us it is the perfect home and will continue to be so for some years to come. We have lots of photos of the boat in exotic anchorages. We'll leave here in March, finish our transit of the canal, then sail down to Columbia, then up to Belize. Thanks for a great boat!"

Martin Pot and Liesbeth Nonhof from Holland are busy building Wizard no 9. "After receiving the excellent plans in August we first built a scale model in balsa wood. We then rented a cargo container to build the hulls, beams and cabin parts in. We started building in November. We had a serious delay because of the floods in Holland last winter. Fortunately nothing was damaged, but the building site was inaccessible for several weeks. Three weeks ago we finished the first hull. At this moment we are about to glue the deck onto the second hull. We are not unhappy with progress so far. Firstly because we only work at weekends and in holidays. Second because we have no prior experience in boat building. Fortunately we both have technical backgrounds and are quick to learn. Thank you for designing a great boat!"

Peter Sheriff and Linda Thompson of Corfu are one of the first rowing boat customers to have built their own boat as they wanted a seaworthy tender for their 40' live-aboard catamaran. "...So we bought the plans, which were really excellent. Everything was clear, nothing was missed, we really had no problems at all. What we had not expected was just how much pleasure we get from her. With two rowing you can really feel the power and can keep going for hours. Last summer we explored the bays and islands and the only river round here, doing up to 12 miles in a jaunt. With a bit of a sea running she feels in her element and totally at home, although we were a bit

apprehensive at first. Like cycling, head winds make a difference and once, caught out in a meltemi, we had a very slow tiring row home, but we made it fine. Rowing is such a pleasure in itself we don't think we will get around to a sailing rig and as for the outboard, we didn't even try it, just sold it. To us the two great features in rediscovering the skiff concept are the harmony and power of two rowers and the efficiency of a long slim hull combined with two oars. Good rowing! It's the next best thing to sailing"

1996 Newsletter

Norman Jenkins. Janus 22 "Two Fishes". "I should apologise for leaving you without news or pictures of our two epic crossings to Holland in "Two Fishes" our Janus, which is proving a really good boat. We have now logged hundreds of miles including a crossing to Vlissingen straight across the North sea last year, and the same landfall this year, via Ramsgate, Dunkirk, Ostende and Breskens..."

John Humphries Canada. Builder/Owner of a Meander "Dreamtime". "I had a visit the other day from Andy Slow, of Hornby Island BC, up the islands from here, he has completed and is sailing his "Merlin". Also saw him last May sailing at the BC. Multihulls meet . There's a fun race on the Sunday and I believe he left everyone behind! He also tells me there is a Strider in Vancouver, and a "Banshee" in Seattle. So maybe I'll track them up one of these days. I still keep in touch with Ray and Geraldine Gunnell in W Australia. They are progressing okay with building a Meander."

Bob Cole from St Augustine Florida sails a Strider. "We just returned from our most successful (fun) trip so far. Paul 12, Phil, 8, and I spent 3 weeks sailing down to Marathon in the Florida Keys 500 water miles from here. Then Peggy drove down and we rented a house for a week which had a place to tie up the boat, good fishing for Paul and Phil, kitchen, bathroom, refrigerator, air conditioning, etc! After our time there Peggy and Phil drove home and Paul and I had a nice sail home Our "Strider" is doing great. It is a very low maintenance, practical boat for us. Paul and Phil are very interested in fishing. Paul says they caught 60 fish of 15 different species on the trip."

Dennis Lapham from Zimbabwe is another builder/owner of a Strider. "It was incredible to get rain in May for our annual regatta on Lake Kariba. First time in memory, but the good wind accompanying it made up a little for the discomfort, as not many were expecting wet weather for 2 days! We had 41 racing/cruising boats for the week and with 6 Striders we were the largest class. Hope there will be 10 at least next year. Guy Redmile and I had a ding dong race, as forecast, and I won!"

Norman Tudball. Birkenhead. Builder/Owner Mira "Keine Marjie". "Enclosed a photo of the launch of our Mira on the 11th August. There have been a lot of compliments on the design and amount of space, and she floats level above the waterline. It was a great feeling when the boat actually floated after all the years spent on the building of her. I've got a 9.9 hp Yamaha and she handles really well."

Geoff Halsall. New Zealand. Flica "Teela". "We have been very pleased with our Flica (built in the UK at Millbrook) and the fact that we are still living aboard after nearly 6 years and have sailed half way round the world is proof of a well designed yacht."

Bill Parker. Wales. Builder/Owner Mira. "Given that I am probably more ponderous than some and untrained in woodworking, I will not be disappointed if I take 3 years to complete the project of building my "Mira". Working singlehanded I have not experienced any real difficulty, but I do appreciate being able to chat over any doubts with you and thank you for this valuable service. Should you have anyone who wants to chat about building a "Woods Catamaran", I am quite happy for you to give them my telephone number. My comments will be favourable. I am enjoying the building and the anticipation of sailing and must be careful that I don't become a perpetual builder!"

Peter and Marisa Williams from Malta sail a Quattro 16. A report from the Malta Times. "Malta School Open Dinghy Regatta". Having a class of their own was a first this year for the cats. Peter and Marisa Williams have raced Joe and Denise Farrugia for some time in their Quattro 16's but this year a few Hobie 16's have emerged, enough to make up a combined cat class. The Quattro's are a little faster than the Hobies with a PY of 83 to the Hobies of 85 but close enough to promise good racing in the future. Results.. Catamarans. 1. Peter and Marisa Williams (Quattro 16). 2. Joe and Denise Farrugia (Quattro 16). 3. Mario Valentino and David Gales (Hobie 16).

We get regular letters from Jurgen and Ines who are sailing round the world on their deep V ply Mira "Timana". They left Germany in 1992 and visited the East Coast of the USA and the Caribbean before sailing through the Panama Canal and into the Pacific to New Zealand and Australia. "We are sailing again! Day sailing along the east coast of Australia is very good fun. Plenty of good anchorages and always S.E.trade winds (downwind). All the nice islands along the way do slow us down a bit. Our visas are running out in Australia so we may go to Bali for the surfing season. At the moment we do enjoy the sailing life so much that we will take it very easy on our way west." Latest news is that they are now in Thailand.

UK Racing Roundup. The UK multihull association (MOCRA) organise many races each year. In 1996 the Banshee Hasty Lady, sailed by the Walkers and Lillywhites won the RORC offshore multihull division. The Round the Island Race (1200+ entries) was also a success for Woods Designs, Hasty Lady beating all the French designs, and 24 Carat (a 12 year old Strider) beating the first Melges 24 (a much hyped Sports Boat) by over an hour on elapsed time.

1997 Newsletter

Lachlan Wilson, of Australia launched the second Gypsy and writes: "Have now finished running her in. We are off to the Whitsundays for Christmas and start serious cruising next year. All up the Gypsy cost us £10,000 including a new outboard. This I find very reasonable considering it took 17 months to build, part time. I feel a lot of this is due to the single chine design, enabling a speedy manufacture of the hulls. Thanks for being able to build this cat to your design. The simplicity, phone help etc has enabled this very amateur to finish the Gypsy. It has been a short, worthwhile project. We find the 3 cabin set up not a problem for 2 or 3 as one still retains privacy, not so easily obtained on a bridgedeck cabin cat of this size."

We sold our prototype Wizard to two ladies from Norway. They write "We are thrilled with our new boat. She is absolutely fabulous. We will probably call her Sea Witch because she has be-witched us and can do so many tricks."

Bill Richards in New Zealand is now sailing his Wizard. "I've been sailing it now for a couple of months and the performance of the design is excellent. Everyone who's had a sail so far has been really impressed with the boat. Even diehard speed-boat freaks who never wanted to go sailing before are asking for trips. I would recommend this design to anyone looking for a fast and stable cruiser racer."

The Mira "Timana of Sylt" sailed by Jurgen and Ines Kruger nearly made it round the world. "The boat was sold in Sicily. Tacking up the Red Sea and through the Med was not always fun. March and April in the Med was horribly cold for us "tropical softies". We were not very keen on sailing further to Gibraltar and home to Germany, especially as Ines is 7 months pregnant. We sold the boat for a very reasonable price. After 35000 miles the boat is still in perfect shape, actually as good as new and we never had any real problems with her. Thanks again for the nice design job of the Mira. It was for us an almost perfect boat for the tropics. Fast, easy and cheap to build and safe, easy and fast to sail. What else can you ask for?"

Geir Myhre of Norway finished his Janus last year "I want to thank you for the quality of the plans and great designs. Your plans are very detailed and easy to understand even with my bad English. I

had a good time building the boat. We live on an island called Radoy on the west coast of Norway and the weather can be quite rough at times. The boat is fast and sails very good, is easy to handle either with sail or power. So we like our boat very much!!"

Beni von Daniken is building an Ondina in Sri Lanka "One hull of the Ondina is finished and we moved it out of the boatyard last week. Work like that always ends in a party and half of the fishing village is celebrating. I think the first hull is very nicely done and I am a little bit proud"

For the fourth time a Banshee successfully completed the grueling 2-Handed Round Britain and Ireland race. Unfortunately for the crews it was a heavy weather, windward race. Tony Purser and Pip Patterson did very well to finish 3rd in class and 3rd multihull on handicap. Tony is getting a lot of experience in offshore racing as he also finished the 1997 Fastnet race, the first catamaran ever to compete in this famous ocean race.

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1998 Newsletter

There have been several new boats sailing in Millbrook recently: Barry Winter launched his Wizard and very good it looked too. John and Sigi Melling are off sailing their modified foam sandwich Scylla, launched after 18 months concentrated work. They made most of the interior in grp using melamine faced chipboard moulds. The result, a stiff lightweight structure and very little finishing.

Peter Williams from Malta wrote: "Strider no 89 has been launched, I was extremely happy on the big day. I sailed in a F4-5 and she really travelled and was handling just like the Quattro, although the advantage was that I had all my family on board and there was no messing with trapeze wires etc."

Pete Benjamin wrote "You can also add a Sagitta trip from S Africa across the Atlantic to the Caribbean, through the Panama Canal across the Pacific to New Zealand" Greg West, S African Sagitta owner wrote: " I just want to tell you what a fine little boat she is. I sail on the SE coast and conditions are pretty rugged. She has handled the bad stuff extremely well".

Garett and Tonnae Hennigan, Vancouver, British Columbia "Our Gypsy 28 cat "Light Wave" has been in the water 3 months and we are really enjoying it. Our sails are used ones (ran out of money) and so are not full size (about 50 square feet short on each one) or full battened in the main. We figure we have 1 reef in all the time! At 20 knots of wind we are doing 8 to 10 knots. We were in 25 to 30 knots with 6 foot swells and were surfing between 10 and 15. Quite something! Thanks again for all your help. You truly did design one fantastic boat."

For the second time a Banshee won the multihull class in the gruelling 1999 2500 mile 2-Handed Azores and Back Race. (Lilian and I had won in 1987). Backlash, sailed by Tony Purser and Pip Patterson did very well to finish in a total time of just over 17 days. Tony is getting a lot of experience in offshore racing as he also finished the 1997 Fastnet race, the first catamaran ever to compete in this famous ocean race and finished 3rd in the 1998 Round Britain race (also with Pip as crew).

Also in a Banshee Dennis and Heather Williams have cruised from Alderney in the Channel Islands to the Caribbean via N Spain, Porto Santo, Las Palmas and Barbados before leaving the boat in Trinidad to return to work before carrying on cruising.

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1999-2002 Newsletters

Excerpts from Newsletter No 2

In the last newsletter I gave you a brief biography so in this one I'll say a bit about my design philosophy.

First, I won't make claims that I couldn't personally prove. Too many designers say a boat is suitable for ocean cruising yet wouldn't themselves take one offshore. Similarly I won't say a boat will do "20 knots" unless I have done it in flat water and a F5 (any boat can surf at high speeds down waves - but that doesn't count). I know that that attitude costs me sales, but I think one should be honest about a boat's capabilities.

Second, I only design boats I'd like to sail myself. This means the boat must sail well, I won't design a boat with a "country cottage" style accommodation, because boats like that tend to sail like cottages as well. People often say "I don't want a fast boat" but then admit they don't want a slow one either. What they mean is that they really want a boat that handles well, is controllable and basically does what they want, on demand. Much like when buying a car - few buy the fastest car but no-one wants to buy a car that is awkward to drive.

For some reason people think I like sailing when it's rough and windy - I don't! So third, I only design boats that are safe, comfortable and easy to handle. I am not a good boatbuilder (even my best friends say so). So I design boats that even I could build (the implication is that if I can anyone can). Because I don't like boatbuilding I want to get the boat built quickly so I am a great believer in using flat panels where-ever possible. I have done a few rounded boats - notably Wizard, Wizzer, Sango and also a 45' one-off years ago. But they take much longer to build and offer very little gain in return. Maybe my boats appear too slow for racers and too fast for cruisers, but I think they are just right.

One problem with efficiently designed boats is that they make little spray or wake. For example, the Strider "Striderman" shown sailing on the web page "Why Sail a Multihull?" doesn't look as though its going fast, yet was photographed as we sailed through the lee of a Dragonfly whose owner later reported that he was sailing at a steady 18 knots. In 1988 the CTC (the Dutch Multihull Association) held a major symposium/regatta. All the major designers were there and after the lectures about 40 multihulls had a race. In a F3 we were first to the windward mark in our 35' Banshee (despite a foul bottom). Close behind was John Shuttleworth in his open deck 35' performance cruiser, while Malcolm Tennant on HIS 35' performance cruiser was with the rest of the fleet, ie out of sight behind.

Then the wind dropped and it started to rain so we all motored home. But we had shown that our boats could take on the rest and win. I can design fast racing boats but such boats always have a low resale value and personally that puts me off owning one. I want my customers to get good value for money from their boats so please think carefully before buying too extreme a boat.

Have a look out for the December edition of Practical Boat Owner. It has the first in a short series on how to sail multihulls. I was credited as the "multihull expert". The first article looks at using an asymmetric spinnaker on a slow cruising cat (the Dean Cat, similar to a Prout Snowgoose).

The Recreational Craft Directive in Europe is sending shockwaves around the homeboatbuilding communities. In theory you are only exempt from the RCD if you do not sell your boat for 5 years. I recommend that all UK builders get a Small Ships Register for their new boat as soon as they buy the PLANS, rather than when they launch the boat. That will add 2 or 3 years to the life of their boat and help avoid complications later.

Excerpts from Newsletter 3

Now, back to the sailing:

I sailed a Norseman 43 catamaran in the Capetown to Rio race. You can read my report of the race by following the link on the Review 2000 page, so the following notes are further general comments.

We had a computer that linked to the SSB transceiver so that we could receive weather faxes and emails. Unfortunately for a variety of reasons the faxes were only received intermittently and were usually of poor quality so it was difficult to work out where the wind was - in the event of course there wasn't any. After the finish I looked through all the real weather charts and for several days there were no isobars in the whole of the S Atlantic - the S Atlantic trades are supposed to be the most reliable in the world! Something obviously happened this year.

I wrote in an earlier newsletter that I thought weatherfaxes were on the way out and the internet would take over. It seems we are in a sort of transition phase, the weather fax stations are closing down as most ships now have e-mail and internet facilities, while we found that the systems available to yachts were not reliable enough to be used sensibly. In time I'm sure e-mail transmissions by radio will get faster, cheaper and more reliable. But by then it will probably be taken over by satcomm phones. We had been lent one of these but it was designed for land-only use so, (because of our e-mail and fax experiences), we hadn't great hopes for it. Thus we were very surprised that when we laid the aerial on the aft deck we were able to phone home with a clear line very easily. Mind you the call charges are high so I wouldn't recommend surfing the internet with one just yet!

While talking about emails, I had 497 to answer when I got home, so I apologise to all if my replies took longer than you would have liked. As a result of these emails I am now hard at work drawing the Flica 38 plans as the first set has now been sold and the first boat will be professionally built in the UK. The plan is to build a hull mould so that professionally built hulls will be available. But I am also working hard on the Eclipse 99. Work should start on the hull and deck plugs by the end of March. But I must also get my Gypsy ready for the new sailing season. And of course I'm still sailing my Stealth dinghy whenever the weather allows.

So I have a busy few months ahead of me and it's hard to see when I'll have time to do any more long distance sailing. One thing I won't do again is sail offshore on a boat with fine bows. In my race report I deliberately didn't emphasis the danger we were in but in fact our nose dive was the nearest I've ever got to capsizing a catamaran in 30,000 miles and 25 years. I have never drawn offshore boats that did not have good forward reserve buoyancy and as a result of our nose-diving exploits I never will. The Norseman is nearly twice the length of a Strider, yet 3m back from the bow the hull was actually narrower!

One problem with vertical bows is that it's not possible to have any hull flare as the hull has to come to a point from the waterline to the gunwale. Obviously there is no bow overhang either. So not only is there no reserve buoyancy but there is no dynamic lift from the hull. With flare and overhang the bow would be lifted dynamically as well as statically (from the buoyancy increase) as the hull submerged. The logic of the vertical bow is to reduce pitching when going to windward, but there are 5 other boat motions to consider, while nose-diving when sailing fast is potentially far more dangerous than a boat that pitches more.

The May issue of Practical Boat Owner will be carrying another "How to Sail a Multihull", and although featuring a Dean Cat will have a lot of input from myself, so worth looking out for. More next month, when I hope to have drawings of both the Eclipse and Flica 38 on the web site.

Excerpts from Newsletter 4

My sailing club goes by the odd name of Torpoint Mosquito. It recently celebrated its centenary and it's surprisingly large with over 1000 members. Although admittedly less than 100 actually sail regularly. But of these there are a few household names. For a start there's Bryn Vaile who was the last UK sailor to win an Olympic gold medal (sailing a Star in 1988) But the name that even non sailors recognise is Pete Goss, who was born and brought up in Torpoint. The club has always supported his exploits, starting with his Firebird in the 1988 OSTAR before going on to be one of the British Steel Challenge skippers and then his famous rescue of Raphael Dinelli in the Vende Globe. As most people know his latest project was to set up a company, Goss Challenges, and to organise the building of Team Phillips for The Race. MD of Goss challenges is Mark Orr, whose interest in multihulls started when he bought the first production Strider back in 1984. Sailmaker Graham Goff is a Team Phillips crew member. I sailed with Graham in 1994 on Firebird when we won UK Micro Nationals.

Team Phillips is a very sophisticated boat with light weight wave piercing hulls and a central cuddy. Although it's 120 ft long it is actually the beam that impresses most, or rather the gap between the hulls. A 65ft hull centreline spacing must be the most ever seen and looks especially wide as the hulls are only 4ft wide at their widest (the same as a Gypsy!) The boat features 2 unstayed carbon wing masts, one on each hull. These were incredibly complicated to build, apparently taking over 60,000 hours to construct. By implication wave piercing hulls will make it a very wet boat.

Unfortunately it's the rig that causes me the most concern. One of the main advantages of a catamaran is that there is plenty of deck space round the mast to work ship in safety. That's not so with Team Phillips. As the hulls have very cambered decks and its not possible to reach either the boom or sail on the lee mast as they overhang the water. Reefing is going to be horrific in gale at night in the Southern Ocean. Climbing the mast when there's no rigging to hold on to and a mast that's too big to wrap one's feet around won't be easy either. There's also problems of sail interactions when one sail is permanently to lee of other.

Team Phillips was recently launched at Totnes and then sailed the to London to be named by the Queen. Apparently the only other non Royal Navy boat the Queen has ever named was the QE2 so this was a major honour for Pete. Rather than watch the launch itself we thought it would be more dramatic to go downstream and watch the boat come down the (very narrow) river. I've put some photos on the web site while the Team Phillips web site is at <http://www.teamphillips.com>.

I went back one evening a week later to see the masts put in. It needed very skilfull crane drivers (2 cranes were needed) not least because the masts are 130ft long yet the space between the sheds was only 120ft so each mast had to be zigzagged round the corner. As they were lifted vertical we could appreciate just how huge the masts were. Eventually both masts were fitted at 1.30 in the morning - apparently there were still a few hundred spectators watching - I had left at 10.30pm after the first mast had been fitted.

To visualise the rig more readily I compare it to a Laser (which is about 1/10th the length). To scale a Laser would only be 5" wide and 3" deep, yet it would have to support the same rig as a standard Laser. Pete has some very good designers in his team, but its obvious that with only 9ft of mast in the boat there are major structural loadings in that area.

I have to stop there. This newsletter was going to be emailed out on Tuesday when I heard on the news of the dramatic breakage of Team Phillips. So although all the above still holds true we will have to wait and see what, if any, repairs are feasible. From the few seconds of film I've seen it seems as though the bow reinforcing finished just short of the daggerboard case, implying that the most highly loaded area had less strength than the surrounding areas. I think it broke because the mast was twisting the whole hull and this load was not fully included into the stress calculations. My suggestion to make a good repair and to stiffen the hulls and reduce my anxieties about the mast loadings is to add a blister or wing on the inner hull side between the beams and extending forward

5m or so. From the outside the boat would look as it does now. But it would be much stronger. A blister would also make it easier to work on the hulls safely.

But enough about other people's boats. We have now made a start on the plugs and moulds for the new Eclipse 99. So if I'm hard to get hold of in the coming weeks please bear with me, I'm probably in the boatshed supervising the work. A sailplan of the new boat is on the website, while photos of its construction will be appearing in the coming months.

Even with my Gypsy laid up I still do sail as much as I can. My Stealth dinghy is going better all time especially since I've made the mast more flexible. For example I can 5th at the Chew Valley Winter Open (over 30 entries in my class). I recently heard from builders in Hungary who are almost ready to launch. Other boats are building as far afield as Austria to USA.

Excerpts from Woods Designs news No 5

Those of you who have already built a boat will know what those about to start will learn very quickly. And that is - boatbuilding takes over your life! There's a phrase in Millbrook we all use "Sorry, can't do that - I've got a boat to build!"

Most of you know that I have started the plugs and moulds of the new 32' Eclipse 99 design and it is taking up all my spare time. And that's why this newsletter is late and why my web site has not been updated for several weeks. Most of my last newsletter dealt with the Team Philips problems. We now know what went wrong (the main structural stringers were poorly bonded) and why (SP Systems made a series of mistakes - again). It now appears that the boat will be in the (re)build shed till August - which will probably mean September. That doesn't leave much time to sail the boat before The Race

Another reason for the late arrival of this news it that I have been commissioned to write a series of multihull related articles for a new web based sailing magazine www.sailsail.com. The first has just appeared. Also just published is the next instalment of the "How to Sail a Multihull" series in the UK's Practical Boat Owner magazine. A further instalment is due for the July issue. The light evenings means that I now spend at least 3 days a week sailing. Two evenings dinghy racing in my Stealth and one in the First Class 8. I leave my catamaran sailing for the weekends when I am not at regattas.

The last regatta I attended was the Easter Grand Slam. I won this event 3 years ago, was 5th last year and despite strong winds that did not suit my rig set up was 4th this time in my Stealth. Stealth builders in Hungary are nearing completing their boat, while it has had a mention in a New Zealand magazine with sales resulting. Meanwhile, a keen UK dinghy sailor is planning a carbon epoxy version.

On the "click here first" web page are photos of the hull plug of the Eclipse and photos of the interior of a similar boat to give an idea of the hull layout. This particular boat is a modified Sagitta and was built in Millbrook a couple of years ago. It sailed to the Baltic and spent the 98 winter in Stockholm before returning to the UK.

I recently received a letter from a happy Flica 35 owner: "We bought Bema-Gus in the UK in 1988 and for the last few years have been enjoying the Turkish coastline and for the foreseeable future we shall remain in this area. We would like to take this opportunity to tell you that your Flica design is excellent. We have lived aboard for 11 years. She is much loved and admired by both sailing and non sailing people and we consider her to be the perfect craft for living aboard"

So, a very complimentary letter! I just wish more owners would write to tell us all about their experiences and to that end I have set up an owners forum on my web site so those who wish can write in with their own comments and ideas. Such letters and comments help me design better boats and help you solve builders problems more easily and should inspire you to go sailing, so please keep those letters coming!

Well, I've got a boat to build, so more next time!

Excerpts from Newsletter No 6

I have still been very busy with the plugs and moulds of the new 9.9m Eclipse. This is going well and we are now making the cabin roof plug. It's clear that the Eclipse will have much more accommodation than the Sagitta and, at 2.5T racing displacement, should be as fast as a Banshee.

Just published are the next two instalments of the "How to Sail a Multihull" series in the UK's Practical Boat Owner magazine (June and July issues). A couple more articles are planned for later in the year. The series covers all aspects of multihull sailing in several different types of boat (not just my designs) so worth hunting out.

Although I have done little sailing in the last few weeks that's not the case for everyone. The Singlehanded Race (nee OSTAR) has been and gone (but I guess several boats are still out there). Won in record time by Francis Joyon, although I note many magazines say Ellen McArthur "won" in her 60' monohull Kingfisher when she actually finished 5 days behind the first multihull. In other words she was 50% slower! I took friends out to watch the start and it was interesting to see how similar the multihull speeds were and how different the performance of the 60' monohulls was. Several were surprisingly slow to windward.

Also in the news last month was Club Med, the 100'+ cat skippered by Grant Dalton for The Race. I have always said that this was the boat to look out for. It proved so by doing 625 miles in 24 hours, a new world record, when less than a month old. Near sister ships are being launched soon, but I'd still put my money on Club Med because of the enormous experience of its crew. Playstation was also in the news as it spent a few weeks in the UK. I had a look at it when it was in Plymouth. Its a huge boat but it has very fine bows and it's no wonder it nearly pitch-poled last year.

Excerpts from Newsletter No 7

On one of my rare weekends off I joined the annual club cruise down to Falmouth, sailing singlehanded in my Gypsy. It's a 40 mile sail and this year we were joined by a fleet of French cruisers on a cultural exchange. 25 boats set off, initially to windward, and I became depressed as all the monohulls overtook me. But then as we rounded the first headland they all began to slow and I realised that they had all been motor-sailing. It's something that we multihull sailors who use outboard engines don't/can't do. I'm sure you've noticed that most monohulls faced with a beat roll up their headsail and put the engine on. Anyway we had a close reach down to Falmouth, autopilot on all the way and I revised my opinion of monohulls. They're slow!! I was beaten in by only 2 monohulls, both 50' long. More of a surprise was that I got to Falmouth only 10 minutes behind a Banshee and 1/2 hour ahead of an Iroquois. After a night stop in Falmouth it was back to Plymouth. Again autopilot on all the way, but this time under spinnaker and no mainsail. Its the only way to sail!! With the main down the boat can steer up to 20 degrees off-course without the spinnaker collapsing, so the autopilot can cope.

Elsewhere, The Race has been in the news again. During her return Atlantic trip from New York Club Med did a "Team Phillips" and lost part of her bow. Non multihull sailors always worry about capsize, those of us who sail them know that its collision when sailing fast at night that probably poses the biggest threat. It appears that Club Med hit something (although it may only have been water) and the sacrificial bow fell off, unfortunately damaging part of the real bow as it broke. This means that of the 4 confirmed entries to The Race none are actually sailing. That's because Playstation is also in a boatyard being lengthened to try and stop it nose-diving. You will recall in my last newsletter that I said it had very fine bows. Team Phillips is due for a relaunch on Sept 23rd, there has been no news form the Polish entry since it broke its mast some time ago.

How many boats make a race? There has to be at least 3 entries and at least 1 finisher. Maybe Suhali should enter!! I have been pessimistically saying that maybe there will be no race and that it all depended on Club Med's performance. I think that this is one event when a "good little one" (if a 90' cat can be considered "little") will beat an untested bigger boat. Unfortunately the only "good little one" is Tony Bullimore's ex Enza and he appears to have run out of money and won't make the

start. Club Med's 625.7 miles in 24 hours is a fantastic feat, so imagine the disappointment on board the 60' tri that did 625.4 miles a couple of weeks later. Sailing so fast and then being only 500m off a new record (that's only about 40 seconds sailing at that speed!)

Extracts from Newsletter No 8

The dinghy regatta "Poole Week" is something of a tradition in my family. I first did a complete week back in 1966, while my father has competed in every one since 1967. So I thought it would be good fun to do the Week in my Stealth dinghy, especially since my father would again be racing and would even be in the same class. Although we've both been sailing over 40 years we realised that we had never actually raced against each other before. Most dinghy races these days are "triangles and sausages" and rarely last more than 40 minutes. So it was something of a shock to be given a course card with over 40 different courses on it and to be told that our time limit was 6pm - we started racing at 12.30.

The weather varied from hot and calm to a good 25 knots, Force 6. It always seems a bit odd to be sailing a high performance dinghy and be overtaking cruisers that are double reefed. On that particular day the race committee were cruel and set us a very long course, it took over an hour to do the first beat and the Stealth is not a slow boat! There were several good sailors in the fleet, including at least 2 ex national champions. I found it difficult to spot all the buoys, while the tidal streams in Poole Harbour are quite complicated, two reasons why I did not do as well as I'd hoped. My best result was a 3rd and I finished 5th overall. My father tended to bring up the tail, but did beat two boats in the last race.

My next dinghy project is going to be a "geriatric boat". I am planning a 14' trimaran singlehanded dinghy suitable for those like me who still want to race high performance boats but are getting too old for energetic hiking. The STRIKE still only exists as a concept, but the details will be worked up over the next couple of months. My plan is to have a main hull like the Stealth but have small outriggers attached to the ends of the wings. These will be height adjustable so that they can be lowered in strong winds, or at all times for those less agile, and raised clear of the water for ultimate speed. Two rigs will be available. Either a Laser rig (as these are readily available world wide very cheaply) or the Stealth rig. As with Stealth the Strike will be home built in ply and epoxy.

The Strider owners on Lake Kariba, Zimbabwe face different hazards from most of us. Dennis Lapham wrote recently "Got back from Kariba Tuesday 29 Aug. Took Cosmos out with two Aussies and had four nights on the lake. Palm Bay, Ume river, Terrys Bay, Sampas and back to yacht club. Lion were roaring at Terrys Bay in the upper reaches, what a super sound in the afternoon as we fished off the transom. (enough for a meal) After turning in for the night we were rudely awakened by an ear splitting, spine chilling ROAR!!!! Shining the torch we saw a pair of eyes 70 meters away. We woke our friends who slept through the roar!?!?. Shining the torch again we saw three pairs of eyes!!!! We cast off to anchor out between two trees in the bay for the night !!! Brrrr... what an experience. Did two drawings, without the lion!

I am going to be out of the office from September 15th to October 27th as I am going to the US to sail the Savannah 26. This is currently based near Savannah and we plan to sail it to and from the Annapolis Boat Show. Last time we trailed it there, but it's a boring 600 mile drive so I said I'd only do it again if we could sail.

Excerpts from Newsletter 9

As you know, I missed October's newsletter as I was in the USA sailing the Savannah 26 to and from S Carolina to Annapolis to exhibit it at both the Annapolis boat show and the multihull demo days. It was an interesting trip, especially as I was singlehanded.

I learnt a lot about the US sailing conditions. It's great multihull country as the waters are often too shallow for monohulls. But the winds are generally light and in fact I spent about 90% of my time motoring or motor-sailing. The buoyage system is excellent, and there are constantly updated

weather reports on VHF. It was always possible to anchor at night (in 1500 miles and 19 days sailing I never paid mooring fees.) Nor did I lose a day's sailing due to bad weather. But a major drawback were the bugs.

The Annapolis boat show was again crowded with multihulls, I counted 40. A similar number attended the Multihull Demo Days run by Tony Smith and his family from their Gemini base. 2 years ago the event was dogged by light winds. This time we were lucky to have a good sailing breeze both days. Despite being almost the smallest boat we found we could keep up with most of the catamarans. For example, we easily overtook a Privilege 42 and only just failed to sail a complete circle round a Lagoon 38. People kept asking me, "How come your boat is so fast?" The only possible reply was "Because I designed it"

The Savannah 26 has an Aerorig and I learnt good deal about it. It is a good idea and certainly works well when motorsailing. But the detail engineering needs sorting out before it properly fulfils the promise that the concept implies.

Despite the terrible weather (winds over 90 mph were recorded in Plymouth, as well as a month's rainfall in a couple of days and it's still raining!) we are still getting on well with the prototype grp Eclipse. Two sets of plans have now been sold to home builders.

Also on the drawing board is the Romany. This is a new design and essentially is a 34' (10.4m) Gypsy. It has the same cuddy as Gypsy, but a bigger cockpit and larger hulls which offer much better load-carrying and seakindliness. I expect it to take about 2000 hours to build a sailing shell. Study plans are available now, full building plans during 2001.

Excerpts from Newsletter 10

When I last wrote The Race was due to start. Now its nearly over. There have been some amazing speeds by Club Med. But I had thought Innovation Explorer would have provided more of a threat. It seems like they made a poor choice of sail inventory. As I expected, Team Adventure was pushed too hard and so has had to stop twice for structural repairs - and the worst bit is still to come. I never thought Play Station would get far. But the French boats are amazing machines. Faster than most ships and we now think 500 miles in 24 hours to be slow! The race boats were trying to get through the South Atlantic high almost exactly a year after we did the Cape to Rio race. No one who goes past Isle de Trinidad will forget it. Tony Bullimore got really stuck and at one stage was virtually motionless for 24 hours.

There is something very wrong with the world's weather. The S Atlantic high is supposed to produce the steadiest trade winds in the world and they just haven't been there for two years. In an early newsletter I wondered whether SSB weather faxes have had their day, now that most ships will get email and web downloads at sea. We had lots of problems with none existent faxes during the Rio race, while its been recently reported that Britain will soon stop transmitting weather faxes, even if its possibly against international treaties. Seems to me that weather forecasting is a very cost effective way of reducing accidents at sea. But as so often the case (health service etc) politicians prefer to spend more when disaster strikes rather than spend a little on prevention.

So what have I been doing since I last wrote? Apart from supervising the building of the prototype Eclipse I have also been busy drawing the Romany and new versions of Mira (with hard chine hulls similar to the Flica 34) and the Ocean Spirit 40 built by Coplan Boats in S Africa

Excerpts from Newsletter 11

I've been away with my Eclipse at the Southampton Boat Show. I gather it was generally rather quiet on the new boat front this year, although I met lots of multihull sailing friends.

One of the boats I went on was a Moody 54, just to see how the other half lives. It is sold as a "go anywhere" ocean cruiser, but I must say I was very disappointed. It would be a good boat for a couple entertaining in a marina, but otherwise only sensible as a day sailer. It had big open spaces in the saloon (so would be dangerous at sea), no seaberths, an uncomfortable cockpit, nowhere to stow

a dinghy. The list goes on... It had a nice wet locker though. Sometimes one has to wonder why more people don't sail multihulls. A £400,000 (\$700,000) 54' monohull had less sensible living space for sea use than a 32' catamaran available for less than a third of the price. Obviously the Moody would be a slower boat and equally it would be a lot more uncomfortable at sea. Multihull sailing is after all "no brusin cruisin".

Having said that, I have recently also had the opportunity to sail (for the first time) a Prout Snowgoose 37. I wish I could think of something kind to say about it, but it didn't even have a nice wet locker! The interior was small, dark and gloomy. The cockpit cramped and poorly laid out. It was noisy under power, sailed slowly and slammed in even small waves. Maybe that's why Prouts went into liquidation during the Southampton Boat Show. Their boats were always expensive, although they do seem to hold their second hand price well.

The Multihull Centre have built a couple of unusual craft this year, one being a windmill powered Ocean Twins 36. A 40' (12m) windmill replaces the sails and drives a 5' (1.5m) diameter water propeller. It has now sailed a couple of times, once when I was out on a test sail on my Eclipse. The wind was about 20 knots true. I met it when we were sailing goose-winged with one reef. BIG surprise! It pulled away from us (just). Turning onto a reach I realised I had to sail properly and then overtook it easily. To windward we took out the reef and were doing 8.8 Knots at 32 deg to apparent wind. The windmill boat was doing 7.5 knots straight in to the wind, so there wasn't much in it.

The boat is certainly a lot quicker than the conventionally rigged Twins. I understand that the "sail area" of a windmill is the swept area - in this case around 1200 sq ft. The standard boat has about 600 sq ft. But the boat trimmed aft as if it were under power when going to windward and this would probably limit top speed. The boat is not "point and steer", at least not yet, and its easy to stall by mistake (no telltales or flapping sails to show what's happening) In light winds the boat is less successful and won't go until there's 10 knots true wind. But that's probably because of the water prop being incorrectly pitched.

Excerpts from Newsletter 12

This October has been the warmest on record and it has meant we've had some good sails on the Eclipse even though many people have already laid their boats up for the winter. But the downside of the mild weather has been that there's often been only light winds.

David Harding from Practical Boat Owner magazine came down to test the Eclipse a couple of weeks ago. He always likes to have sunny skies so that photos look good in print, so we provided him with a day without a cloud in the sky - not bad for late October. However, he likes to have wind as well, something we didn't manage to supply in sufficient quantity. It means we will have to meet up again before Christmas for a proper sail. He got some nice photos though... When he tested the Gypsy he concluded the report with the following comment: "Of all the cats I've sailed the Gypsy presents about the strongest case in favour of cruising on two hulls" So it will be interesting to see what he says this time! We'll find out early next year.

It takes all sorts..

These days many people charter a boat rather than own one and there are numerous get rich quick schemes run by charter companies where one can "own" a boat yet only pay 1/2 its value so long as you let the charter company use it. (I must confess I don't see the logic of it at all. Would you buy a Mercedes at a discount price, give it to a taxi company for 5 years and then want it back afterwards? No, I thought not.)

Viewers of the "Multihull Sailors Have More Fun!" video know I used to live in a house by the water with a large garden. Useful for building boats - but as I hate gardening a jungle had developed around the boat shed by the time we sold the house. If on the very rare occasion I want to see some nice flowers I'd go to the local park. If I want to see nature in its more wild state I'd go for walk on the moors. It's only recently that I learnt that some people actually LIKE gardening and find it

relaxing. It's the same with cooking. I tend to eat 3 minute microwave meals, partly because I never think about food until I'm hungry, (which is about one hour too late if one wants to cook a proper meal) partly because I eat to get energy rather than to enjoy the taste and texture of the food per se.

What's the point of this? Well I was working on the Eclipse the other day with a glorious sailing breeze blowing and not a cloud in the sky. My neighbour had driven for 3 hours to get to his Sagitta and I asked him why he wasn't sailing. "Oh I've got jobs to do on the boat" (which seemed to involve lying on the aft deck reading a book - maybe it was an instruction manual, but maybe not!). For sailing a boat is only part of the appeal of owning one. Being on a boat is often satisfaction enough. But you can't do that unless you own your own boat. Far more satisfying still is when you've built the boat yourself. So despite the hard work and long hours during the building its ultimately much more rewarding than just buying a standard mass produced "factory" boat

Excerpts from Newsletter 13

Significant Others

I suspect that, like me, you are a man. That's OK, nothing to be ashamed about, only its easy to forget that other people have different requirements for a boat and want to use it in a different way.

It seems that too many men ignore the wishes of their family and end up buying a boat that only they enjoy. Its a great shame because sailing is one of the few activities that can be genuinely enjoyed by the whole family. You can take passengers but it's more fun if everyone is involved with the actual sailing of the boat. For example, the 14' Pixie has always been popular with children. Many have been built as school projects or in youth clubs, while the Quattro 14 was designed as a youth trainer.

Obviously you need a bigger boat if you want to take the whole family sailing. I have written before that there is no point in having a fast boat if it can't be sailed by anyone on board. I've found that even if some aren't interested in steering they will always feel more secure in a boat that's easy to sail and so enjoy the sailing more. Tonnae Hennigan's article "The Boatbuilder's Wife" in which she wrote about building her Gypsy gives one woman's view of the experience.

And this is where we need your help. We'd really like some articles sent in by spouses and younger sailors to inspire us all by sharing your experiences. We've got some ideas about offering prizes to those who write in with suitable articles so please give it a go, you never know!

As a starter, the following is an excerpt from my first ever article, written nearly 40 years ago and was, as I recall, totally unaided. (The full article will be appearing on the web site soon, complete with pictures). The AB was our first boat, a 8' 6" (2.75m) pram bowed, gunter rigged dinghy. Just a bit faster than an Optimist, but more seaworthy and a better load carrier.

"Instead of the Ferry" by Richard Woods (aged 8) from Poole AB Newsletter December 1962

"On the last day of our holidays in the Isle of Wight my father and I sailed across from East Cowes to Southampton docks in Poole AB no 50. When we started we had the wind on the beam and the tide under us, once we got out of the shelter of the trees it began to get rougher and even rougher... We did not speak a word until we got past Calshot light vessel which marks the mouth of Southampton Water. Then we went on and on until we got to the seaward side of Hythe pier.

We turned in here because we saw some boats there, we thought there would be a place to eat our lunch although the time was nearly four o'clock although we had started out at half past twelve... When we got in we found that it was Hythe Sailing Club. The people there very kindly said we could have our lunch there. While we were eating our lunch we had a good look round. After a time a sailing canoe came in and we had a good look at that too... Some people said they wished they had a camera.

Soon after that I wished I had my camera because as soon as the canoe went out it capsized. I wish I had that capsize with the capsize of the Duke of Edinburgh I had taken the day before. As we had

some time to spare we sailed up to Eling to almost the bridge, it was about five hundred yards away from us when we turned back. as the tide was running out fast we turned round and went to the boat slipway to land.

Then we unrigged and ate our tea and then waited for the car to come to put the boat on the roof. Thus we ended our adventurous voyage, Mummy was so surprised to see us at the pier, because she had expected to go down to Netley to fetch us."

Excerpts from Newsletter 14

What I did on my holidays

When Lorrie first started working for me I think she thought "research and development" was a joke for the benefit of the taxman and really I just wanted an excuse to go for a sail. But after a 70 mile beat in a bitterly cold NE wind, gusting up to 54 knots apparent, she began to realise that a designer's life is not always easy. Someone has to test a new design and push it to its limits in bad weather, and who else should do that but the designer? So she was a bit reluctant when she heard of my plans for Christmas.

The Scilly Isles lie out in the Atlantic, 30 miles west of Lands End, and are the most western part of England. As the prevailing winds tend to be SW - NW getting to them for most UK sailors is more challenging than sailing across the English Channel to France. (But sailing to the Scillies from France usually involves a reach both ways - which is why there are always more French boats in the Scillies than English ones.) Furthermore, the Scillies lie at the junction of the English Channel going east and the Irish Sea going north and so is a place of frequent fogs and unpredictable weather.

They cover an area of over 50 square miles, yet comprise only five inhabited islands (the largest is just 3 miles wide) but there are hundreds of rocks - most of which dry at low tide. They have a fearsome reputation as ship killers. From Sir Cloudesley Shovell who led his ships (and 2000 men) onto the rocks in 1707 (all drowned), to the tanker Torrey Canyon (the first major pollution incident caused by a supertanker) and most recently the Ceta (ran aground on St Marys, 20 miles off course with the helmsman asleep at the wheel), wrecks there are a plenty... The pilot guide for the islands warns "Apart from the obvious dangers of any group of islands strewn with rocks, mostly unmarked, large areas of shallow water and strong and often unpredictable currents and tide races, it also lacks an anchorage that is secure in all weather.."

So it seemed to me like the ideal place for a Christmas cruise!

The winds for the few days before Christmas were favourable - a light north-easterly. Midwinter in the UK means only 9 hours of daylight. Even in summer, day sailing is always more pleasant than night passages. In winter the chill sets in by 3pm, so we limited ourselves to 40 miles a day. Sailing my Eclipse we had a gentle sail to Falmouth, then a short sail in a F7 to the Helford river (often judged the prettiest river in England). Next day the wind had dropped and we motor sailed round the Lizard (the most southern point of England) and across Mounts Bay to St Michael's Mount. Some may say that this is just a large rock topped with a house (originally it was built as a monastery in the 1100's) but its actually one of the most dramatic and impressive homes in England.

So far we had been lucky with the weather but when we got up next morning there was thick ice on deck. Seawater doesn't freeze so easily and thus it's easy to wash off ice. Down below the solid fuel Dickinson stove ate up charcoal and Coalite faster than you can say Santa Claus but kept the saloon at around 23 deg C (75 deg F).

We made slow progress towards the Scillies. One benefit of sailing over a holiday is that there are few ships. We saw three on our trip out and only one on the return. Normally you can expect a dozen or more to be in sight at the same time. A pod of dolphins joined us as we approached the islands, and then two seal heads appeared as we picked up our mooring. We arrived in the Scillies on the 23rd, and had a walk round Bryher's white sandy beaches on Christmas Eve.

Unfortunately it was too windy - over F7 - to get off the boat on Christmas Day, so we were forced to sit on board, roasting chestnuts on the fire, watching old movies on the TV and stuffing ourselves with roast turkey and all the trimmings. So just a normal Christmas Day really!

I wanted to get back to Plymouth for some dinghy racing, so we started our sail home on the 26th. There was still a big sea running and the wind strong so we started with two reefs. But the NW wind slowly moderated and we had to motor the last 20 miles back to the Helford. The forecast wasn't good for the next few days, NW F7 at best, so we decided to press on and so left the next morning, again with 2 reefs and half a jib. This time the wind didn't drop but fortunately we missed most of the rain whilst the worst squalls were shortlived (the highest gust we saw was 42 knots apparent when sailing downwind at 13 knots).

We got back to Millbrook an hour before dusk, having averaged over 8.5 knots for the last 45 miles with a top speed of 17.5. And we hadn't seen another sailboat the whole trip (can't think why not!?)

Roll on summer!

Excerpts from Newsletter 15

We seem to be getting more and more emails reporting on builders progress. Some people included photos and so they have made it to the web site - see the latest news section. Others haven't, but I've reported on some of them here.

For example, Leon Dellit wrote from Australia "We launched our new Sango with all the fanfare of the Queen Mary on 6th January. Everyone who has viewed the boat has been extremely impressed, members of the local catamaran club are eager for us to join to see how "OFFCUT" shall perform under sail, she really is the prettiest boat in the fleet!"

While Alan Bell wrote from Ecuador: "You might be interested to know that a friend of mine has a Flica, he bought it in Miami from a Canadian couple, sailed it down to Ecuador (I helped with the Panama Canal transit) and has since taken it up to Costa Rica. It is one of the most comfortable boats I have been on and with some added ventilation will make an excellent boat for the tropics."

Brian Hand from S Africa wrote saying "I previously owned a Flica 37 built in Richards Bay, South Africa, she is called Zulani and was very good to us. I was delighted with the boat in general, but it had a few problems, which have made me wary of going the same route again, although I still favour the general design, particularly it's performance in heavy seas (Zulani was the only catamaran to ever finish the Vasco Da Gama race - in 1995) we finished 7th overall, despite a 1 hour starting handicap in seas of up to 10m and consistent winds of 55 knots plus. Even the famous Marchioness was forced to retire while we were barbecuing in the cockpit. Our maiden cruise was also through mountainous seas and howling gales."

It appears most of his problems were because his (professional) builder had made several unauthorised modifications to the boat. I don't mind you making minor design changes to my boats, but PLEASE ask me first!!!

As you know I keep going on about choosing the smallest boat you NEED rather than the biggest you WANT, and that complex boats take a very long time to build and that if you want to get sailing quickly you must build a simple boat.

Well it seems that car manufacturers don't believe in that philosophy at all, for cars get more and more complex all the time. For example, my previous car had central locking - yours probably does as well. So what happens if it breaks down, as mine did? I know you'll think, "how can I get in?", only my locks failed to open when I was already IN the car. Good thing I had a sun roof... My current car has "proper" locks.

Apparently some new cars don't even have a key to open the doors, they rely entirely on the remote locking system. Suppose the battery goes flat? It does sometimes doesn't it! You won't be able to open the car doors, so won't be able to open the bonnet to recharge the battery! Think about it. You

may have a garage just round the corner where you can get your car fixed but there aren't that many at sea!

You are in a better position than most if you've built your own boat as you know how it was put together and will have the confidence to fix most of it. But what about the GPS, cooker, even in mast reefing gear? It's a good rule to assume that everything will break down at some stage. Then you either have to be able to fix it, or be able to sail without it. Electronics seem to cause the most problems and I always have a debate with myself. Do I buy the cheapest, knowing it will break down and so I won't have lost too much money. Or do I buy the most expensive and then assume that it won't ever break. I seem to lose out whichever system I use!

Excerpts from Newsletter 16

After several months of trying, David Harding from PBO and I managed to finish the Eclipse boat test that we'd started back in October. It was a windier day than I'd hoped, and a rather choppy sea so we began by sailing reefed. Even so, David reported that we were tacking through 80 degrees with 7.5 knots of boat speed. The wind slowly moderated on the run home. I was below making lunch when David said we did nearly 14 knots on the gps. (If only we'd had the spinnaker up...) We also successfully experimented with various ways of heaving to on a catamaran. We will all have to wait until the summer before the test appears to find out what David really thought.

I recently received the following, rather sobering, message from Bill Richards in New Zealand, who was one of the first Wizard builders. He has been sailing his boat for over 5 years so is pretty experienced.

"I thought you may be interested to hear of my recent boating mishap. About 1 month ago I was racing my Wizard in the Marlborough Sounds NZ on a long harbour race. The course was about 40 miles long and I was the only multihull entered. The forecast was for 20 knots of wind dying out in the afternoon. So we all expected a quick first half of the race and a slow trip back as the wind died down.

The trip down the sound was a good sail and we easily overtook and passed all but 2 of the much larger monohulls. We were reaching all the way. The wind then started to pick up as we reached the half way point which was a large island. We held off reefing down till we got under the shelter of the island. We then reefed down and set off again. I estimate that the wind was blowing 25 knots and we started to make our way to Pattens Passage which is a small channel between the island and the shore. This channel is surrounded by steep hills which are approx 700 meters high. The island is of similar height.

As we got nearer the passage the wind started really screaming, but the Wizard handled it well and showed no signs of lifting a hull. We took a couple of really strong gusts that shook the boat and rattled the sails but these never gave us too much concern as the windward hull did not rise at all. The next thing I remember was being thrown into the water from a great height. My crew man had disappeared from sight and then I was swimming back up to the surface! I then realised what had happened - the boat had flipped. It was an extremely violent capsize as I do not recall the windward hull rising and I did not slide down the deck into the water. One second we were OK, the next we were not.

I got onto the upturned hull and then dragged my crew on board. He was a bit shocked and so was I as the cold soon hit us. Luckily for us we were quickly towed into shelter and taken off and given dry clothes. When we were on the upturned boat I realized why we had gone upside down. You could see the wind rushing down the hill sides, hit the water and pick up sheets of water. These blasts of wind would then travel several hundred meters before dying out. Our rescuers then told us a storm warning had just been issued and it was currently blowing 50 knots with gusts far stronger. These gusts always came in a very different direction from the usual wind. It was one of these gusts blowing from a different direction that caused the boat to go upside down. I do not know how I

could have avoided this capsize apart from not being where I was or by being in a much heavier boat.

Some friends of mine in a 40ft 7 ton yacht who helped right my boat got knocked down to 45 degrees several times with no sails up, just bare poles. This storm caused another monohull to lose its mast and 2 other boats in the area got into serious difficulties and had to be rescued by the coast guard. Righting the boat caused a few head aches as I had never thought about how to get it back up right. Eventually I attached lines to the bow and pulled the bow over the stern. I got a bit worried when it was stern down and the bows pointing straight up as the boat just stood there for a long time before it came up the right way. The boat floated with the hatches above the water line even with 2 guys sitting in the stern bailing like mad to get the water from the hulls. Once upright and emptied out we got towed home.

All up very little damage was done to the boat and I suspect this was done whilst trying to right it. The mast got bent due to being towed in too far into shallow water. The rest of the damage was confined to dings and dents. I now have almost finished rebuilding the mast and filling in the scratches etc. So hopefully I will be back out sailing again.

Even though I messed up and went upside down I was quite pleased I was not in a similar sized monohull as I suspect, given the strength and power of the gusts that catapulted us upside down, a monohull of this size would have been in far greater danger, perhaps even sinking. Hopefully I will not meet such weather again and if I do I will be a bit more cautious! Do you know of anyone else who has come a cropper? Hopefully some one may get something useful out of my swimming session.

The only improvement I could suggest on the Wizard design is to slightly increase the amount of built in bouyancy in the hulls as after I got it upright again it did float with the hatches above the waterline, but if the sea was lumpy I suspect water would have got through the hatches faster than I could have bailed it out. There is definitely enough strength in the beams and hulls as I was worried that these may have been cracked due to the force exerted on them but everything was fine. All up I am still pleased with my Wizard but will one day look at something a wee bit bigger"

This is the first reported capsize of a Woods Design for about 10 years. Despite what some builders and designers claim, no one has got a 100% safety record when it comes to capsize. ALL catamarans can be capsized if you are unlucky with the weather. However, righting small cats is usually easy (but you'll need a sensible power boat owner to help you). In general it's best done the way Bill did, ie end over end rather than sideways. Different designs need different techniques, but usually it's best to first try somersaulting the boat bows down. The bows are finer so sink quicker and there is less chance of damaging the companionway hatches. As Bill found, the water is always less deep than you expect!

Excerpts from Newsletter 17

It has been an interesting few weeks.

Its not often that you hear a Mayday on the VHF, but I did recently. It was from a monohull sinking (what - again?). During the emergency the Coastguard asked "Do you have a mobile (cell) phone, if so can you call us on it?" The UK Coastguard (and I'm sure other countries as well) keep saying to the public "Don't rely on a cell phone to call for help, fit a proper VHF set". So why would they request a call on a cell phone themselves during an emergency? Strange.

Out on the water I spent a weekend as RIB (rigid inflatable boat) driver for one of the Solent's top marine photographers. We were covering a Laser Olympic qualifier event. About 170 boats entered with world championship entry and lottery funding at stake. So it was really sad to see that the professional sailors were having courses set, very badly, by amateur race officials. In one race there wasn't even a beat to the first mark. It reminded me of all the poor tennis and cricket umpiring decisions there have been in the past. But despite that, as usual, the best sailors won.

As we motored through the fleet looking for photo opportunities it was very obvious why the winners won - they tried harder! There is always something one can do to make a boat go faster, and in a Laser that will almost certainly mean physical effort! The nearer to the back of the fleet we got the more people sat back and let their boat sail itself.

More worrying than poor courses however were the tales of cheating that I heard about. Even the event winner admitted to me he'd spent a long time tiller wagging when out of sight of the on-the-water judges.

A couple of weeks later I sailed my Eclipse round to Torbay (about 40 miles from Plymouth). Nothing to write home about, except for the fact that while drifting along, minding my own business, I was accosted by a pod of maybe 12 bottlenosed dolphins. I think dolphins like multihulls because there are two hulls to play with. Their favourite game seems to be to swim as fast as possible diagonally from stern to opposite bow and get as close to the bow as possible. Usually they do it in pairs, one on each side thus meeting under the bridgedeck. I remember once a dolphin misjudged it completely and hit the bow quite hard. You could see the other dolphins laughing at him.

This time though it was different as the dolphins behaved in a way I'd never seem before. It was almost as though they were trying to scratch themselves as they rubbed their bodies up and down the boat, sometimes they'd bump the bottom quite badly, it felt a bit like when you start to dry out. They were even getting under the daggerboards and lifting them up 500-600mm (18" - 24"). We've all heard the stories of killer whales attacking yachts, but this was the first time I'd seen dolphins do something similar. I was very glad the dolphins were "only" 3m (10') long. They kept it up for about 45 minutes, right up to the entrance to Brixham harbour. Now the weird thing was that the next day, off Bigbury on my way home - some 20 miles from Brixham, I met the same pod and they tried to do the same thing again. (I knew it was the same ones as one was disfigured) There were other yachts around at the time, but they only picked on me. It didn't last long this time, partly I suspect because it was rougher water. So what was all that about? If anyone has had similar experiences I'd like to hear about them.

Last weekend I raced my Eclipse for the first time. To set the scene... The Plymouth-Falmouth-Plymouth race is the first coastal race of the year and is open to both multihulls and monohulls. 40 miles down the coast to Falmouth on Saturday. Sunday race 20 miles back to Fowey and Monday Fowey to Plymouth. Over the years the multihull fleet has increased (to 12 this year) but the "club racer" monohulls have all but disappeared leaving only the committed monohull race boats (45 this time). When I first did the race 15 years ago on our Banshee I remember getting back to Plymouth, mooring up, tidying the boat and eating lunch before the second boat had even finished. This year the Banshee was rated slowest multihull. On Eclipse we were rated second slowest, nearly 40% slower than the fastest trimaran. I was sailing with Joe and Mel who had only sailed catamarans for 1 hour before the race. But they are very experienced dinghy and monohull racers.

Saturday: Not a cloud in the sky all day, but no wind at the start (not good for the fast boats). We made multihull racing history by protesting a trimaran BEFORE the start. They accepted their penalty turns. Once clear of Plymouth Sound we settled down to a long spinnaker run. On Eclipse we "knew" that there was no wind out to sea and we guessed that the sea-breeze would pick up and swing west with the sun later in the day. So there was no point in going inshore. It also made sense in the light winds to sail the shortest course. Keeping the apparent wind at 135 deg we did very well for the first 20 miles and as predicted the boats that went out to sea gybed back in well behind us. It seemed that we were second or third multihull on the water and there were probably only 8 monohulls ahead. But then the wind started to head. It took us an hour of frustration to realise that the asymmetric was slowing us down so we changed to our masthead drifter. Then we were at least able to keep station, but not until several multihulls had overtaken. At the finish we still had our main rivals in sight though, so weren't surprised to learn that we won on handicap. On a domestic note we discovered a fault with the fridge thermostat when Mel tried to make coffee and found that

the milk was frozen. That evening we watched the TV forecast for Sunday which gave 20 knot NE winds but at least it would remain sunny.

Sunday: The wind funnels in Falmouth harbour, but fortunately was northerly not NE. That meant a running start to the first turning mark and then almost hard on the wind to Fowey. We started with a reef and small spinnaker, again trying to sail as straight as speed would allow to the mark. But the wind wasn't as bad as we'd thought so once on the wind we shook out the reef. In flat water all the multihulls were sailing fast. Ideal for the trimarans and they powered ahead into the far distance. We were pulling past most of the monohulls (which had started 10 minutes before us). The genoa wasn't cleated the whole race as Joe played it constantly, while Mel was equally attentive on the mainsail traveller. But the Banshee behind was hot on our trail. At the Fowey harbour buoy they were only 6 minutes behind us, so ahead on handicap. But due to Joe's clever wind spotting (and a bit of luck) in the fluky shifts going into Fowey we were able to extend that gap to 12 minutes. Result, the fast trimarans were first and second and we were third. That evening we invited the other two Millbrook boats for a meal. The rain came at last and the temperature dropped so while Mel finished preparing the risotto and rhubarb fool, Joe vacuum cleaned the carpets and I lit the fire. We then discovered a social faux-paux - only 6 place mats for 8 guests! Fortunately they were too polite to comment.

Monday: A cold NE wind at about 20 knots meant another windward sail in hats, gloves and full oilskins. Again all the multihulls began pulling past the monohulls. As we neared the entrance to Plymouth we were in company with a J29, a J92, a X-Yacht 99 and a SJ320. The faster multihulls ahead seemed to be sailing a strange tactical course. We counted one boat doing 8 tacks to our one, so soon we were catching them up. However, as expected, as we neared the land the wind started to die and very slowly the monohulls overtook and just piped us at the finish (but of course they had started 10 minutes before us). Even so, its good for the monohull sailors hanging over the windward rail to see smaller multihulls sailing past them, upright and in comfort with dinghies in davits. They certainly no longer believe that multihulls don't go to windward! So we finished 4th on corrected time, but less than 1 minute behind the third placed boat. That result meant we had the second shortest corrected time over the three races. All in all pretty good for our first race series.

Excerpts from Newsletter 18

Those of you who live in the UK will know that we've been having terrible weather these last few weeks. Eg 1" (25mm) rain in 12 hours and 3 gales this week (up to 60 knots wind). Its been more like November than early summer. So no sailing to report this time!

Instead I'd like to introduce the newest member of Woods Designs. Jane Russell has been sailing since a child and, after meeting my cousin David at college and subsequently marrying him, they set off round the world in a 37' steel monohull (I know, but they know better now, see below!). A very successful 5 year, 40,000 mile trip. On their return they bought a house in Millbrook and also bought my old Strider Club "Yeta" . They have re rigged it with the bigger rig and it has certainly made a big difference to its performance.

Jane is going to be running the office while I'm away sailing so that you don't have to wait so long for plans to be sent off. As an experienced sailor she will be able to answer most of the questions you have, but we will stay in daily contact by phone and email so I can answer any directly if necessary.

Excerpts from Newsletter 19

I began writing this (rather long) newsletter on board Yeta, my "Day Sail to Russia" Strider, now owned by my cousin David. It's been 13 years since I last sailed her and I'd forgotten what fun a small, simple boat can be!

David, Jane, baby Peter and dog Chester had all been off cruising for 3 weeks to the Scillies and I joined the boat for the trip back from Falmouth to Plymouth. Looking around the boat I saw that

most of the gear I'd fitted was still there and surprisingly, still working. The original spinnaker was looking very tired, and, since David increased the rig size last winter, it also looked very small! But even so, no one overtook us on the run home. 11 knots on the GPS and no spray on deck.

Striders haven't been built for about 10 years, but that's about to change as a new set of moulds have been made and the first boat is soon to sail. More details soon.

In the last newsletter I promised that I'd write about the Round Britain and the Round the Island races. There was lots of local interest in the Round Britain and Ireland Race, with 5 crews from Millbrook entered, including Peter and Ralph Kinch. Peter is an ex Banshee owner - you can see him and a very young Ralph sailing the Pixie and Banshee on my "Multihull Sailors Have More Fun!" video. Ralph is now a proud Strider owner, but for the RBR they were sailing Peter's Pegasus, an Outremer 44 catamaran.

You can finish first in a race in 2 ways, either by winning or by not losing. The latter is often easier! and it's certainly the case with long races like the Round Britain race. Open to both monohulls and multihulls its held every 4 years, it's an 1800 mile 2 handed race starting and finishing in Plymouth and going clockwise round the British Isles. Its held in mid-summer so should be a light weather affair.

Not this time! The race started in a full gale to windward. By the end of the first day a third of the fleet had retired, and it wasn't only the casual sailors who got beaten by the weather. Prestart favourites Robin Knox Johnston and Graham Goff (ex Team Phillips) both retired. So there was some amazement when the leader at the first stopover in S Ireland was the smallest boat in the fleet. Meridian is a 30' Shuttleworth trimaran and is now 15 years old. I read somewhere that multihulls don't go to windward...

Further back in the fleet many boats sought shelter between Plymouth and Falmouth, including Multihull Centre Backlash the Banshee sailed by Tony Purser and Pip Patterson. A well travelled duo - they had done the RBR before, as well as raced to the Azores. Backlash was also the first catamaran to enter the famous Fastnet race. Unfortunately, even after reaching Crosshaven the bad weather wasn't over. The next leg is to Barra in the Outer Hebrides which is normally considered a fair weather day stop with room for just a few boats. When Backlash arrived the wind was up to F9 and still increasing. Pip said they were very lucky to get past a very rocky lee shore. No crew went ashore for 2 days while the lifeboat was on continuous standby.

The gale was still blowing when the first boats were due to leave which meant the race effectively restarted as the fleet waited for better weather. Meridian was still leading but sadly lost its mast just before the next stop at Lerwick. A fast leg down the E coast of England saw the 40' racing trimaran Mollymawk and Pegasus pull out a safe lead which they held to the finish, with Mollymawk finishing 5 hours ahead of Pegasus with the first monohull only 29 minutes later. But then the wind increased again and later boats, like Backlash, had yet another 200 mile beat to windward. (Two F8 and one F10 in 3 weeks in mid summer doesn't sound very fair!) After temporary stops in Swanage and Weymouth, Backlash finished on July 4th to come 2nd on handicap behind Pegasus.

The Round the Island race is much more my sort of scene, and it's billed as the biggest yacht race in the world. (This year there were 1,641 starters, including 50 multihulls in 3 classes). The race is about 50 miles round the Isle of Wight starting and finishing in Cowes.

But first I had to get there. Cowes is about 140 miles from Plymouth. The first 80 miles was downwind, F4, under spinnaker. Sounds ideal, except being England there is always a catch. This time it was that visibility was 1/2 mile at best. One of those sails when I was glad I'd fitted radar to my Eclipse. Interestingly the radar picked up the tidal race off Portland Bill very clearly, even if it missed a couple of yachts that passed close by.

After a couple of quiet days up the far reaches of the Medina (the river that exits at Cowes) I picked up my usual "dream team" crew of Mel and Joe, while joining us this time was David Harding from

Practical Boat Owner. I once did the race with only 2 on board which is very hard work. We felt that 4 crew would be of great benefit especially during the later stages of the race, and so it proved.

The tide ebbs strongly in the Solent and the main tactic for the first 15 miles is to catch it right. The trick is to sail as close to the Island shore as possible, but staying in the main channel until Yarmouth, when one cuts across to Hurst Castle and so get shot out of the Solent past the Shingles bank in the strongest tide. Although anathema to cruising people, the idea is to stay in the rough water as that's where the strongest tide is.

I think everyone in the world has seen a photo of the Needles at the entrance to the Solent. What isn't visible is a wreck less than 2m below the surface less than 100m off the lighthouse. Spurred on by my crew we were one of the first boats to cut the corner and sail between wreck and lighthouse. Worth doing as we overtook 3 boats that had gone round the outside. As we started the run down the back of the Island we were feeling pretty pleased with ourselves...

Apart from Maiden (ex-Grant Dalton's 120' Club Med, which had just sailed 697 miles in 24 hours - so doesn't really count!) we were first catamaran and ahead of both the 10m Dragonflies and several F27's and F24's, while the vast majority of the other cats were out of sight behind. So on the run round the back of the Island we became lazy. We put the spinnaker up, but then had lunch, sat back and admired the view. That is until the first monohulls (Mumm30's) started catching us by dodging the tide close inshore. Following the boats behind when one's ahead is always tricky, but we started copying them and realised how much there is to gain by going really close in.

The race was now beginning to hot up again. 4 Mumm30's, 2 Cork 1720 sportsboats and ourselves were all converging on the Bembridge Ledge buoy in line abreast. The first Mumm and us gybed for the mark. The second Mumm attempted to gybe, then broached and we had a very good look at the bulb keel and propshaft (That "multihulls don't go to windward" book also said that monohulls don't capsize). They were lucky that we didn't cut them in half. In the ensuing chaos 2 more Mums overtook and we nearly got a Cork bowman in our cockpit. Eventually we rounded the mark safely and then had a 4 mile close reach to the next turning mark.

Close racing now ensued with everyone luffing to try and keep clear wind. Getting bored with that we decided to go low and slowly pulled through the lee of the Mums ahead. Much mutterings by their skippers! We rounded the fort with only one Mumm30 ahead. It was now a flat water beat to the finish, in a wind that had increased to around 20 knots.

Back to "that" book. How does its author explain how we overtook the Mumm30 to windward? (lots of very audible mutterings from the Mumm skipper) especially as they are pure racing boats with no creature comforts, kevlar sails, 8 crew hiking hard etc. We had 4 crew, solid fuel stove, big freezer etc. We also had a bit of fun forcing a couple of the big (60' plus) monohulls to tack as we skirted Ryde Sands. But sadly as we approached the finish we found our own private wind hole and all we'd gained over the last 7 miles was lost 1/2mile from the finish. But eventually, we crossed the line at 4pm with around 1600 boats still behind us.

So what of the results?

Well suffice to say that Maiden finished in 3hr 20 min, while we took 7 1/2 hours. But on corrected time we won our class by over an hour! So we could have anchored for lunch and still won!

I've now done the race 5 times, and been first in class twice and second once. In mid August there is another Round the Island, but this time 2 handed. I hope to race, but probably won't do so well again as I won't be so fortunate with my choice of crew. The highlight of the race was definitely overtaking the top Mumm30 to windward. They were not amused, but it's why I like doing these sorts of races. I'm tired of people who say multihulls don't sail well.

Excerpts from Newsletter 20

One reason why the web site hasn't been updated recently is because I've been ill, in fact I had to go to hospital. But that hasn't stopped me sailing (for yes, at last summer has arrived in the UK, only 2 months late!)

In mid August there was another "Round the Island" race. This time it was two handed. About 100 monohulls and 5 multihulls took part, including the Banshee Backlash, fresh from the Round Britain Race, and my Eclipse. Not much wind, in fact it was the worst possible conditions for multihulls as we were all undercanvassed with full sail, but had too much for masthead drifters.

Despite that we did well on a close spi reach down the Solent and by Hurst Castle we were still ahead of a 8m Dragonfly and not far behind the Farrier trimarans. Backlash was some way behind. After passing the Needles and coming onto a beat we did even better, overtaking many of the monohulls that had started 1hr before us and also overtaking a F24. But then it all started going horribly wrong and I still haven't worked out why. We just couldn't stay ahead of monohulls that we had beaten easily a month earlier. Worse still the trimarans pulled ahead and even Backlash started gaining.

As it was a slow race we arrived at the forts, effectively the channel markers at the east end of the Solent, at the top of the ebbing tide. Everyone bunched up and it took 10 minutes or so to break clear. A long bout of short tacking along the sand spits then followed. That's OK as we can tack as fast as a monohull, but we weren't happy to be forced aground by one boat and have to tack away (when on starboard) by a non racing port tacker! And I was definitely unhappy with myself to have totally misjudged the approach of a ferry which cost us 200 hard won yards from a Dehler 41. So by the finish I was pretty disappointed. Backlash was only 20 minutes behind so easily beat us on handicap. So I was VERY surprised to discover later that Backlash had won the race and we'd come second.

The last Tall Ships Race of 2002 finished at Portsmouth, only a few miles from Cowes. So after the race we sailed over to watch the Parade of Sail. The wind was very light and sadly although the tall ships hoisted sail they all motored to and fro. Mind you, that could have been a blessing, for reports later said there were 700,000 people on the shore and 6,000 boats on the water.

Then it was off down to the Scillies again (you may remember I went there for Christmas). It's still a wonderful place to cruise, but as always it's hard to do any sailing when there. That is because either it's too windy to risk moving away from shelter, or it's calm - and anyway all the anchorages are only a mile or two apart and it never seems worth hoisting sail.

Arriving back in Millbrook I saw that I've now sailed over 3,700 miles in Eclipse in the last year. It really is a very comfortable cruising boat, so much so that I'm living on it now full time, and have rented out my house.