

Review of 1998

Boats mentioned: Gypsy, Savannah 26, Strider, Stealth

1997 was a boat building year, not just finishing my own boat - the 28' Gypsy - but also making the plugs, moulds and first production Savannah 26. So I was determined that 1998 would be a sailing year.

In February I helped deliver a 40' French designed catamaran from Plymouth to the Canaries. Sailing other peoples designs occasionally should be a "Must Do" for all designers, but I guess most would try to avoid sailing across the Bay of Biscay in mid winter. Even so, the 11 sailing days was about what we expected. We made a stop in Portugal for 24 hours because we didn't want to go to windward in the rain. To sum up: some of the trip was fun, some bad and some so-so; just like life really.

Then in May I spent 3 weeks in Zimbabwe cruising and racing a Strider on Lake Kariba. I had not raced, or even sailed, a Strider for 6 years so I knew I had to relearn fast if I was not to be embarrassed. There are 8 Striders on the lake, and 6 were racing in a fleet of 50 for the club championships. Racing consisted of a series of passage races from one anchorage to the next down the length of the lake and back.

When I arrived I was told that as Striders had won for the last 2 years they would be handicapped out for this year. So it was a bit embarrassing for the organisers when Striders not only finished first and second but I was third. Striders are an ideal boat for the lake. The big trampoline is ideal for sunbathing and sleeping on at night (no one sleeps in the hulls, it's too hot and anyway they are usually full of stores).

But it was a bit disconcerting to think that you were sleeping in the open on a trampoline possibly only 40 cm above crocodiles. It was also disconcerting that although we took food for a week with us we went sailing without taking any fresh water. You want a cup of tea? Just fill the kettle from the lake. The high temperatures and luke warm fresh water meant that it was very tempting to swim after racing.

I was advised that it was dangerous to swim within one mile of the shore as crocodiles patrolled in shallow water. In fact I only saw two, and, because it had been an unusually wet rainy season, I only saw a few other wild animals - elephant, waterbuck, wart hogs etc. I'm not sure whether to be pleased or sorry that I did not to see lions, although other sailors did - often too close for comfort. As a European I'm not used to the idea that wild animals could be dangerous, it definitely requires a different attitude of mind.

Then as a complete change of pace, I raced my Blaze dinghy in the inaugural National Championships and I won!

After a very pleasant two weeks cruising in my GYPSY to the Scilly Isles it was off to America to show the SAVANNAH 26 at the Annapolis Boat Show. We trailed the boat from S Carolina the 600 miles to the show in 12 hours and hundreds of people viewed the boat. Afterwards we sailed it against several other multihulls in the Multihulls Magazine supported Multihull

Demo Days.

We were pleased to find we were just as fast as boats like the Gemini 105 and Seawind 1000 and faster than the Aquilon and PDQ 36, despite being a much smaller boat. With the Aerorig the Savannah 26 can be easily sailed single handed and it is very manoeuvrable under both sail and power.

Review of 1999

Boats mentioned: Eclipse, Gypsy, Flica 37, Sango

As always, MOCRA held a Multihull Grand Prix over the last May weekend. This year I raced on a Dragonfly trimaran belonging to Simon Forbes - chief measurer at ISAF and a long time friend. Unfortunately we did not do very well, but it is nearly 20 years since I last helmed a trimaran in a race (back then it was Chay Blyths 54' tri Great Britain 4). But we had some fun and some close racing. It is certainly a lot harder to sail a trimaran than a catamaran in short round the buoys races, one reason why the trimarans race with 3 crew and the catamarans with 2.

But the main event of the weekend was before the first race when a line squall came across Plymouth Sound bringing with it winds over 60 knots (measured by the RNLI lifeboat) and torrential rain. When the squall hit we quickly dropped all sail and ran downwind under bare poles at 6 knots, just clearing Drakes Island and only 200 yards from Plymouth Hoe. As the shore came ever closer we began to get concerned but fortunately the worst of the wind quickly passed and we were just able to round up and enter the marina. A few more minutes of 60 knots and a lot of boats would have been on the shore as no one out that day was able to do anything except run before it. A good lesson on the potential dangers of a lee shore and the need for searoom at all times.

The June 1999 issue of Practical Boat Owner contained a review of my GYPSY. The reviewer was very impressed and finished by saying:

"To me it all makes a lot of sense. In fact of all the cats I've sailed the Gypsy presents about the strongest case in favour of cruising on two hulls."

I was away all of July delivering a FLICA 37 back to the UK from Majorca. An 1800 mile sail with the wind never aft of the beam. As usual the Med was one long motor. We waited in Gibraltar for 3 days until a westerly gale had blown itself out before slogging up the Portuguese coast against wind and current. (Moral: Don't try to sail against the trade winds).

The Portugese coast is one long sand dune, with an increasing number of new holiday developments. Not a very attractive cruising area, made worse by the huge number of fishing pot markers that made it risky to sail at night. The rias of N Spain were a lot more attractive, not that we could see much as there was thick fog for 2 of the 3 days we were there.

The trip finished with a 500 mile beat in winds up to 30 knots back to Plymouth. The owner

normally kept his spare toilet rolls in the bilges!?! they remained dry but we did have to close the companion way door at one stage as we had water in the cockpit - the first time I've had to do that in 12 years.

So not a particularly enjoyable trip, but a few lessons learnt. The first that living on board and sailing catamarans is normally very comfortable, while anyone who cruises a monohull is crazy! The second that the Flica is a very comfortable boat and still works extremely well. I'd only make a couple of minor changes to the design, a seat just inside the companionway would be useful as would a better sound deadened engine (I was sleeping above it).

I understand that eclipses cross a particular spot on the earth's surface once every 400 years. On August 11th at 11am there was a total solar eclipse that passed right over the Woods Designs office. Although the weather was cloudy, so we couldn't see the sun, it did go completely dark. 10 of us were sailing my GYPSY and we were out near the Eddystone rocks when the light was turned out. It was certainly the weirdest and most spooky experience any of us had experienced.

Pitch black for 2 minutes, but all around the horizon we could see light as the "black hole" passed along the English Channel and across into Europe. It was definitely THE event of the year, much more so than the advent of the new millennium which after all is just another midnight.

So I thought we should celebrate its passing with a new boat. There has been a gap between the Sagitta and Banshee in our range of performance boats. We have found in practice that both these boats are about the same speed in all conditions except when sailing to windward in a F5 or more, when the extra length of the Banshee helps it power away.

Obviously the Banshee has more carrying capacity for cruising and lots more room. But we found from personal experience, having sailed both boats extensively, that the Banshee is a big boat for just a couple. So it made sense to draw a boat in between the two, fortuitously that makes it 9.9m long.

Hence the Eclipse 99. It will have standing headroom in the bridgedeck, 6-8 berths and like the Sagitta, a choice of daggerboards or LAR keels.

Although the SANGO design has been around for a few years I have only recently had the opportunity to sail one. Similar in concept to the WIZARD but 1m longer it is a much quicker boat and has a more seakindly motion. With the same headroom in the cuddy and hulls as WIZARD it looks a lot sleeker as well. But compared to the WIZARD the rig is larger and that makes it harder to trail and step the mast.

Review of 2000

Boats mentioned: Eclipse, Elf 26, Flica 34, Savannah 26, Stealth, Strider

This was a very busy year: Lots of sailing - in four continents, boatbuilding - the prototype of the new Eclipse 99, as well as several new designs on the drawing board - Eclipse 99,

Romany and the Mirage

January

I was once again off on my travels. This time it was to the South Atlantic where I spent January racing from Capetown to Rio in a Simonis designed Norseman 43 catamaran. There were 3 Woods designs in the race, so you may wonder why I did not sail one of those. Well, for one thing I wasn't asked, for another, it's always good to sail other people's boats so that you can get new ideas.

Unfortunately, I found the Norseman to be a very disappointing design. It was slow and difficult to sail (10 knots in flat water, 120 degrees between tacks was not helped by a very poor deck layout). It was unstable (very narrow bows which were easy to pitchpole, we had the boat under water to the mast and the rudders out on one occasion). Finally, it was very uncomfortable (the low bridgedeck slammed a lot, there was only one comfortable seat in both the cockpit and the saloon while the bunks were very awkward to get into).

February

On my return from Brazil I was immediately very busy in the office preparing the drawings for the new 32' Eclipse 99. We hope that this will become a new production boat, falling midway between the Sagitta and Banshee designs. It has 3 double cabins, standing headroom throughout and - we hope - performance similar to Banshee.

March

It's unusual for me to mention other boats on my web page, but the whole world knows about Pete Goss and Team Philips. Pete lives near me and we sail at the same club so I've been following progress on his boat with interest. Team Philips has "wave piercing" bows, which are very fine indeed. I am not convinced of the logic of this approach. It certainly is not something the average owner who pays mooring fees, has to tie up alongside, etc would want to have on their boat. Launching boats is always a case of "Hurry up and wait", so we thought it would be more interesting to see the boat go the 12 miles down the River Dart to the sea rather than see the launch itself. It was certainly a dramatic sight as the river is not very wide at Totnes!

Later... As we all also know, Team Philips had major structural problems in relatively light winds on its first real sail. It's a vast boat so is hard to visualise. But try scaling it down. Say to 20' (1/6th the size). The hulls then become 18" high and 10" wide. So similar proportions to a Tornado. The beam of 70' becomes 12' (a Tornado is 10'). Now imagine a 20' mast set into each Tornado hull with no rigging wires to support it. Now imagine you are the hull. You're going to spend all your time trying to stop the mast from twisting the hull off the beams. You won't have time to think about what's happening at the bows. I suspect the bows snapped off because the mast twisting loads did not finish at the front beam, but continued to the bows, and the loadings from the waves hitting the unsupported bows were the final straw. From the TV pictures it looked as though the horizontal floor in the bow section finished short of the front beam. Also strange was the fact that there did not appear

to be a strong watertight bulkhead at the back of the daggerboard case.

Towards the end of each sailing season I always get letters from enthusiastic owners reporting on their sailing year. This year is no different and excerpts from three letters are printed below:

"Earlier this year I bought Strider sail # 57. I write this letter just to let you know that I have never had such fun with a boat. All boat designs are a compromise as with most things they have their stronger and weaker points. I plan to fit it out in a spartan manner for cruising, I can see that weight is a limiting factor. I am delighted to have joined the multi hull fraternity who all seem keen to discuss what makes their boats perform, much more so than mono hull owners it seems. It is almost true to say that I have a queue of sailing friends wanting to come for a sail!

I was a long time coming to multi hulls because most of the ones you see are pretty ugly creations and it wasn't until I discovered your designs and those of James Wharram that I realised they could actually look good. I gave up the Wharram idea as most of them are just a bit too crude. Enough rambling, just thought I would let you know that Striders have another fan. As someone who is coming up to retirement age I was a little worried by my choice of boat as I thought it might be just a bit too hairy, not so, it is well mannered and beautifully balanced and by my standards goes like hell, wonderful! "

Strider owners on Lake Kariba, Zimbabwe face different hazards from most of us. Dennis Lapham reports: "Got back from Kariba Tuesday 29 Aug. Took Cosmos out with two Ozzie's 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!"

The Elf is a 26' production boat, built in the UK by the Multihull Centre and also available in South Africa. We recently had a letter from a new owner in Canada "The ELF sails like a dream! We have had little cat experience so have not really pushed the boat yet, but have seen 11.4 knots reaching. It feels great to pass 40' monohulls in all winds and on all points of sail. The 9.9hp Nissan is more than adequate. Overall the design is well thought out. Thanks for building such a great boat!"

October/November

I was away for much of October as I was in the USA sailing the Savannah 26 about 1500 miles from S Carolina to the Annapolis boat show and back. It was an interesting trip, especially as I did it singlehanded and had not sailed the ICW before. The Savannah is fitted with an Aerorig and I have made some more comments about this rig on the "Technical

Comments" pages of my website

Another project is the ROMANY. This is a 34' (10.4m) version of the Gypsy. It shares the same basic concept of a three cabin layout and in fact uses essentially the same cuddy as Gypsy. But the hulls are much bigger and longer. This means much improved load carrying potential and also more speed and seakindliness. It should be a good boat (if only I wasn't building an Eclipse...)

Ron Holback built a Flica a few years ago, launched it in San Francisco and sailed it to Panama with his family. I had not heard from him for some years, but recently got this email:

Hi Richard, "To refresh your memory I launched my Flica "Toucan" back in 1993. My family and I immediately moved aboard and left the San Francisco bay headed south. We cruised Central America, eventually ending up in Panama where I started a boat repair business. A year ago we moved back aboard and cruised up the east coast of Central America, recently arriving in Texas. Let me congratulate you on designing a very comfortable home, one our family of 4 could live on for years without any problem!

Our situation is such that we'll be land based for awhile now and feel we should sell the boat to someone that will use her. It's too big and too nice a boat to be kept tied up in a marina for years. The boat is well built, has a new imron paint job, and looks good.

Review of 2001

Boats mentioned: Bee, Eclipse, Flica 34, Janus, Meander, Skua

JUNE

The prototype Eclipse was launched on May 31st. Still needing linings, unfinished below and missing cockpit seats it has now been test sailed about 100 miles.

We are all very pleased with its performance so far. Hands off sailing at 7.5 knots to windward for long periods. We beat a Sigma 38 (production cruiser racer) to windward in 15 knots apparent. 9.5 knots easy off wind on gps running as if on rails. Tacks as fast as I can get from one hull to the other. And no bridgedeck slam.

Two Eclipses are now being built. One is quite near me. Nigel Sheppard is building strip plank hulls to the knuckle and ply topsides. I viewed progress in early July and he's making an excellent job! Both hull bottoms are now finished, the topsides are going on, he has also made the bulkheads, beams, bunk boards etc. We thought we had problems building a 20' wide boat in a 17' wide shed, but Nigel is building in his extended garage. When he's finished the individual hulls and decks he's going to move it to his local boatyard (where Team Phillips was built) for final assembly - sometime in 2002.

When launched Eclipse floated about 70mm high at the stern and 50mm high at the bows, but since then I have fitted the dinghy in davits which has helped trim. Most of the stores, and of course all the crew, will be aft which will help trim the boat correctly. Still to make

are the cockpit seats. Interior lining is the other major job (Oh and fitting the 6 disc CD player and solid fuel stove chimney!)

Other builders have also emailed me photos direct. Jim Rajaratnam of Malaysia sent photos of his recently launched round bilge Meander. He wrote " Thank you for your plans, help and advise that you have given me to successfully complete the boat in about 18 months.

Robin McKay from Ireland is busy building a plywood Flica 34. After a years work he's getting close to completion. He says "only another months work before launching." (But he also says he's said that for several months already!)

JULY

It's been another busy month, fortunately this time that meant going sailing! Testing and trying out my new Eclipse and also finishing off the interior. Most of that is now done, save a few corners, plus carpets and table.

I've been very pleased with its performance, it certainly seems to be in the Banshee/Sagitta speed range. For example, on a 40 mile beat from Plymouth to Falmouth in 20 knots of wind I easily beat 3 Sigma 33's despite sailing singlehanded. (I say "easily beat" because when I was steering and had full rig I overtook them very easily, I then reefed and put the autopilot on and still beat the first one in by over 15 minutes. So I was taking it easy, they of course had all their crew on the rail).

A Moody 40 and Bavaria 37 left at the same time, they disappeared to lee and were out of sight behind in only a couple of hours sailing. Sigmas are well known as fast boats to windward and have been one of the mainstays of UK monohull racing fleets for the last 10 years or so. On the trip home, again with autopilot on, I did 15.5 knots under spinnaker. On a later sail with my (elderly) parents on board we did 17.5 knots in flat water. And all very comfortably and easily - no bridgedeck slam and finger light steering at all times.

My brother is a keen Laser sailor and with his help and the masthead spinnaker up we did 8.3 knots in 4 knots apparent wind (10 knots true) and later 8.5 knots to windward, tacking through 80 degrees on the compass, or 32 deg to the apparent wind.

AUGUST

At last I was able to get away and have a proper sail in the Eclipse. We sailed up to the Solent to watch the 150th Anniversary Americas Cup Regatta.

Two of us sailed Eclipse the 130 miles to the Solent, Lorrie had just crossed the Atlantic on a monohull, but this was her first sail on a catamaran. The wind slowly increased as did our speed, until approaching Portland Bill and its famous race we touched 21 knots with regular steady non surfing speeds in the high teens

The main race was the re-enactment of the original 60 mile Round the Island race that started the whole Americas Cup saga. The race started in glorious sunshine and 20 knots of breeze - ideal conditions! Joining in with the IMS/IRC racing monohull fleet we were rather

surprised to find ourselves sailing faster and outpointing a 50' ketch set up for racing with mylar sails etc.

We let them go in the end, but it was obvious the 15+ crew were not impressed to be beaten by a catamaran 20' shorter crewed by 3 people, plus 3 month old baby! Peter spent the whole time sleeping on the saloon seats, quite oblivious to everything.

Later we chased the boats back up the Solent on the run to the finish and in particular had fun trying to beat Extra Beat, the only boat I've seen with 6 spreaders. We almost made it! It wasn't clear quite what sort of boat she was, the 6 spreaders implied a racer, but she only carried a (huge) cruising chute.

We also met a stray Gemini which disappeared rather quickly into our wake. Maybe they weren't sailing it very well. But unlike us they had empty davits, no solid fuel stove and probably didn't have a generator, boatbuilding tools etc on board.

SEPTEMBER

As always, the end of a sailing season brings more boat launchings.

A Brazilian Janus: Airton wrote "Winds at 25 knot and 2m waves reduced our sail to 35 or 40 minutes, just to check the boat under strong winds. When closed hauled she pointed very well!! The boat tacks very easily no matter the wave effects.

After a last tack we got running and the boat was really flying. We saw the breaking waves coming from the stern but they could not reach us."

And an Irish Flica: Robin Mackay wrote "After 22 months work we finally launched on the morning of 8 September - and it (she?) is still afloat. It really looks great and has got lots of compliments including one enquiry for your website"

Meantime, we were back up to the Solent to have the Eclipse available for viewing at the Southampton Boat Show. Typically, the day we took a couple out for a test sail was the worst of the week. Rain and a maximum gust of 50 knots when sailing under double reefed main and half rolled jib. Bryn had sailed monohulls for years, but Kate had never been on a boat before and was justifiably nervous. But that didn't stop her taking the helm as soon as we'd hoisted sail, and Bryn will never be able to live down the fact that it was Kate who recorded the highest speed of the day - 14.46 knots.

There is no point in designing a fast boat if only experienced, skillful sailors can sail it. A few weeks earlier we'd taken a family out sailing, the 11 year old daughter was very proud that she'd sailed at over 13 knots when her father only managed 10.5. We seem to have got used to sailing Eclipse at speeds in the high teens. On our last three Channel passages our highest speeds have been 21, then 19.6 then 18.8 knots. The boat will go faster but we are lazy. Higher speeds would mean hand steering and someone tending the sheets. We prefer to sail with sheets cleated, auto pilot on and be sitting back admiring the view.

Progress on Nigel Sheppard's strip plank Eclipse is progressing well. Photos showed the

starboard hull after 1100 hours work (the port hull is equally complete). Somewhat confusing to visualise, but that's because Nigel's building shed is his extended garage and also because he's fitting all the deck stringers before the hull topsides have been planked. It makes sense as it's easy to get to all parts of the boat, but you've got to be as skilful a builder as Nigel is to avoid making mistakes when most of the boat is empty space!

OCTOBER

We don't often get news from our rowing boat owners, but recently received the following:

"I thought you might like to see a picture of BEE at speed. I am pleased to report that our BEE successfully completed the Great River Race down the Thames from Richmond to Cutty Sark in 3hrs 24 mins. Result 111 out of 252. We had cox'n; 2 x scullers and a passenger. Interestingly on the day with four up she was less stable than in practice with only three up, nothing to worry about though.

You will note that we fitted a tiller. Quite simple, we pinned a piece of 3x2 into the stern rowlock positions and then put a 12mm dia mild steel shaft down with a 150mm sq plate on the end. It worked very well. We used 8ft long douglas fir oars and found them heavy. So have bought fir strips to make hollow oars. I'll let you know how she performs when I finish them next spring. Need some time off from boat building now!" regards Bob.

We also heard from Frank and Boris of Germany who recently bought a five year old Skua "We hope to visit you in Millbrook next year by boat. Our first trip, cruising the boat across the German Bight last week was great fun. Much more than with the Wharram I have sailed from '96 - '99. O.K., we are used to Hobie 18 - standards for the last two years. We are looking forward to do a lot of voyaging the next years."

NOVEMBER

Lorrie Wood, (no, not a relation, notice the lack of an S at the end of her surname), an American sailor, has been working with me for the past few months, both sailing and assisting in the office. Her most recent project has been updating the web site and the newly redesigned article section.

Lorrie writes- "Catamarans don't go to windward, don't tack well, and go turtle every chance they get, right? They might be OK for daysailing, but they aren't proper bluewater cruisers, isn't that what you heard? I had heard it all too, but still thought I should give it a look. I read the information on Richard's web pages and was convinced that he, at least, thought they were safe and his designs looked sensible too.

So I sailed over to England, and have been sailing on the Woods 9.9 metre Eclipse for the past few months. I am entirely persuaded it is the fastest, most comfortable, and safe boat I have been on. The Eclipse's stability is great and I don't miss heeling one bit. We sailed fast and comfortably in sea conditions that I have experienced on monohulls and wouldn't have called comfortable. She has reached speeds in excess of 20 knots but it hardly felt like it.

After two Trans-Atlantic crossings on larger monohulls (38' and 44') and as a professional

crew on sailboats in the 70'-80 range I can't believe the difference two hulls make. While as a cook I can not say enough about the galley, which even has a window to look out. I do get a bit of the mal-de-mer at times when working in the galley or when hanging upside down to work on an engine while inhaling diesel fumes, but that was not the case here. I never felt a twinge of seasickness even while preparing dinners underway. I don't miss rolling and heeling a bit. After spending a full week aboard without putting my foot on dry land I had not a bruise nor bump. What they say is true, "It's no bruising, cruising." That's not only what I heard, that's what I now believe. I am a thoroughly convinced catamaran convert."

DECEMBER

While I guess most of you were sitting by a warm fire over Christmas, I decided to sail my 32' Eclipse to the Scilly Isles. 30 miles out into the Atlantic, the most western part of the UK.

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day were spent anchored off the beach in Bryher. Then sailed home on the 26th. Old films on TV, turkey and all the trimmings, roasting chestnuts on the solid fuel stove... it just had to be Christmas!

Not a bad trip, there was ice on deck only one day, and the wind never got over 45 knots apparent (Eclipse was sailing fast (over 17 knots) downwind in the biggest gusts). And there were no other boats out sailing (can't think why!?)

Review of 2002

Boats mentioned: Eclipse, Flica, Gypsy, Linnet, Merlin, Mira, Rhea, Strider, Skua

For some years I had been keen to show my designs in the USA and so in late October 2002 I left the UK in my Eclipse bound for the east coast of the USA. I followed the scenic route, ie via Spain, Portugal, Canary Islands and the Caribbean before heading north through the Bahamas to the East coast of the USA eventually reaching Maine in August 2003. Then we sailed south to Cuba and Belize.

News from builders and sailors

Pat Lynch wrote: "I bought Ron Holback's Flica 34 "Toucan" a little over 18 months ago. I've been very happy with the boat. Ron did an excellent job and the design has garnered lots of compliments. I sailed from Ft Lauderdale (from 2Hulls) to Annapolis and was very pleased with the handling and sailing characteristics. On two separate 36 hour stretches we averaged 9.5 kts with speeds hitting 15 kts whilst surfing. I've since added a roller-furler and a spinnaker to best take advantage of mid summer breezes in the Chesapeake."

Our Strider design (especially the Club version) is probably our best known design, yet it has not been available as a production boat for over 10 years. Fortunately that has now changed as new builders, Strider Marine, have made a new set of moulds, and have just launched their first boat.

While making the moulds we took the opportunity to update the design. It now has increased freeboard, to give more interior space, and sugar scoop transoms to lengthen the

waterline (so the new boat is called the Strider Club 25) and provide a boarding step. The most significant change, though, is that we have increased the rig size to 25 sqm. When originally designed the Strider Club had a very small rig, purely for economic reasons. However this did mean it needed at least a F4 (15 knots wind) before it would perform well. The new rig has transformed the boat. Its now great fun to sail in even light winds and its easy to get 11-12 knots on the GPS offwind in a F4.

January

During an office clearout I found a MOCRA newsletter dating from December 1993 which included the following article written by David Kayll:

"All monohull sailors should be forced to sail a multihull sometimes in their lives. My wife and I have been well and truly converted, hesitation has now turned to enthusiasm. All our lives our family has cruised and raced in monos, from ferro, wood, glass to strip cedar we built, sailed it and sold it. Each boat was going to fulfil the dream of the perfect boat, but as we approach 50 we realise that perfection is an illusion, and satisfaction is only reached with compromise.

So why did we build and sail a multihull? Our families last boat was a fast cruiser racer designed by Ron Holland to the IOR rule. We built her in strip cedar with a varnished finish - it took three years. Having campaigned on the UK's East Coast, completed a 2STAR and taken part in Cowes Week, we finally threw in the towel. The sheer pressure of organisation and high cost forced a re-think of sailing pleasure. On the 2STAR we watched helplessly as cheaper multihulls disappeared over the horizon ahead of us with far less effort, knocking almost a week off our transatlantic crossing. There had to be something in being level and fast. We had to try it.

We fitted out a strip plank Merlin. We were amazed how easy she was to sail, no furious sail changing, no hordes of crew clambering over the deck. My wife and I alone sped along at 8-15 knots with minimum effort. Soon we were thirsting for more speed, a taller mast and taking out surplus weight produced more power. We were hooked. Every monohull friend who came to sail was amazed at how easy it all was - all glued to the speedo - willing it to hit the stop at 20 knots.

We sold the Merlin and built a Javelin. Sailing her for the last three months has been wonderful. We have had the worst summer for years but nothing takes away the thrill of sailing and tuning a new boat you have built. Surprisingly nothing has broken, bent or groaned (maybe we built her too heavy?) In some heavy weather she powered to windward with little fuss at about 8-10 knots, making short work of steep seas."

February

A Italian Linnet "Domenica, 3 febbraio was a nice day to launch and test the new Linnet, she's great! Best wishes gian michele"

I also had the following message from Xen Zambas

"Back in '95 we started building a round bilge Mira in Saskatchewan, Canada. We completed the boat and moved it to B.C. where we lived on-board for a couple of years while getting used to the boat. We then sailed down to Mexico and then made the jump to the Marquesas.

We now find ourselves in New Zealand and plan to be here for two or three years while we work and decide what to do next. We have been so happy with your design. Despite being loaded down with all the cruising gear she performed well and we always felt safe. Structurally there have been absolutely no problems and we look forward to many more miles cruising in her."

March

At long last I think my Eclipse is finished! Although I've been sailing it for 9 months, there have been more than a few minor completion jobs to do. (I'm afraid I never finish a boat before launching, I'm always too keen to sail it). Some jobs were more complex than I expected. For example the table doesn't have conventional flaps as these are awkward to open when you're already sitting at the table, but rather it has draw leaves. I have never seen these on a boat before, and having had them made I can see why. Worth it in the end though.

Some things are simple, but ease comfort and convenience enormously. For example, the wet locker has a shelf for hats and gloves as well as a boot rack. While the aft cabins have proper vanity units, complete with light and make up mirror (its not there for me!)

April

As always, we get a steady stream of boat launching news. This photo is of Robin McKay's Flica 34 that he built in Ireland and has now begun to enjoy sailing. Roger Axon's Gypsy was also recently launched. There are now 3 Gypsy's in the Plymouth area.

A boat I didn't design is Playstation. I was lucky enough to be out sailing when she started her record breaking run Plymouth to La Rochelle. The boom is 60ft long. It took 10 men 10 minutes hard work to hoist the mainsail while head to wind. Glad I don't sail on it!

May

Eclipse wins her first race! Against 12 multihulls, for 40 miles and in light winds, Plymouth to Falmouth.

June

For a complete change of pace, I spent the Queen's Jubilee weekend cruising on Eclipse in company with my cousin David and his family. His wife Jane now works in the Woods Designs

Despite the appalling weather we've been having in the UK this "summer" a few people have managed to get sailing.

Simon Mansfield wrote: "Last week we brought Tardis (a modified Scylla) round from Cornwall to Essex. I must say at once that she behaved impeccably. She inspires confidence, is easy to sail, and impressed us with her speed. The six of us ranging in age from 68 to 5 completed the sail in three days including two night sails. My father, a confirmed Prout man, overcame initial scepticism and warmed to her seakeeping and sailing qualities. The three children had a great time. There was very little seasickness - and I am sure that this is largely due to the seakindly motion."

From Australia a Gypsy builder wrote: "I don't know what happens when you start building a boat, always searching for an alternative usually cheaper way of doing things, even though deep down you know that the standard method is probably best. Currently ready to glass the second hull, completed the cabin shell and thoroughly enjoyed the whole process so far (why do people go on about what an effort it is to build a boat?)"

July

The original Banshee (now 16 years old) comes second in the Round Britain Race!

Eclipse wins her class in the Round the Island Race!

August

English Gypsy owner Mike Appleby has one of the most travelled Gypsies around. Only he hasn't finished it yet! Currently the cuddy is lying finished in one country while he finishes the hulls in another. Gypsy is designed to be built in sections and assembled at the end of the project, but I never expected people to build parts in different countries!!

Nigel Sheppard and his partners are building a really nice strip plank Eclipse. I last saw the boat in April when Nigel was still working on the hulls. He has since moved all the bits (to the yard where Team Phillips was built), and now has a structurally complete boat. When I visited they were sanding the decks prior to painting, launching is due early next year.

To accommodate 4 single men, Nigel has made a few changes to the layout, and also lengthened the main cabin a bit to allow access to a forward bunk

I saw this quote online: "This brightly coloured catamaran (Pixie) was built by my daughter Sarah, when she was 16..." I'm sure her father would be keen to build you one of our small boats.

September

Banshee wins 2 handed Round the Island! Eclipse comes second!

Roger Axon is having fun with his Gypsy, beautifully built and launched a few months ago "Yesterday we averaged 7 knots from Cameret to Audierne and as we approached Audierne we did 10 knots and kept up with a Hobie. Its not sailing, its low level flying - and no bruises either - yet!"

A German Skua owner Frank Schernikau recently reported "we had a fantastic crossing of

Bay of Biscay, 49 hours from Audierne/France to Cedeira/Spain, almost all the time under screecher, the colour of the water changing to a phantastic blue and watching dolphins playing around the bows at night". Not bad for a boat designed as an inshore racer! Incidentally, the Skua is now available with increased freeboard, a longer cabin and a bigger, updated rig.

Review of 2003/4

Boats mentioned: Banshee, Eclipse, Merlin, Surfsong

Eclipse spent the 2004 hurricane season in Mario's Marina in the Rio Dulce, Central America, which is probably the safest hurricane hole in the Caribbean. It's a secure place to leave a boat - in every sense.

In late 2004 we sailed to the San Blas islands, in NE Panama via the Bay Islands, Honduras; Providencia, Colombia and the whole north coast of Panama.

An extract from my Eclipse log book won the 2004 Venture Trophy, presented by MOCRA (the British Multihull Association) for the best multihull cruising story published in 2004.

News from builders and sailors

Practical Boat Owner magazine in the UK published the three articles about my cruising preparations and trip across the Atlantic. They also published the article on my lightning strike.

Although I am away sailing at present I am still drawing new boats. For some time its been obvious that I need some boats in the 11-11.5m (36-38ft) range. Accordingly, the first of these is a larger Eclipse, called Transit.

Although the heading photo changes frequently, the April/May issue of the on-line MOCRA news has a great photo of Ben Goodlands Strider "Tigger". He has been racing it with huge success, as the MOCRA reports show. Not bad for a 18 year old boat and a 22 year old design. I think it mainly has to do with the crew though!

Having said that, I know that the older designs Merlin and Gwahir are faster all round boats than a Strider and that the newer Wizard and especially Wizzer are faster again. To support that comment, here is part of a letter from long time Strider owner David Marshland after he had sailed a Merlin

"What really impressed me with Merlin was the way the finer bows cut through the slop in the Solent when a Strider would have been stopped almost dead. The steadier motion clearly allowed her to develop more power where the bluffer bowed Strider simply bounced and lost drive.." But he then goes on to say "...My Strider was a lovely boat and I have an affection for her which her successor has never really inspired. At least partly because on a value and competency per dollar basis I don't think any boat compares with a Strider" So he clearly likes both boats!

Probably the major news of early 2004 is that the May issue of Practical Boat Owner

magazine (the UK's largest yachting magazine) carried an excellent boat test on the Eclipse. Furthermore, I will be writing several articles about my trip across the Atlantic that will appear in future issues of the magazine. I can't reprint the whole article here for copyright reasons, but I think I can use these excerpts.

"Even in the light airs of my first outing, the Eclipse's 615sq ft (57sq m) of sail made sure that she felt comfortable. In 10 knots of breeze and a slight chop, when some cruising multihulls would have bobbed about aimlessly, we recorded up to 6 knots of boatspeed to windward in the flatter patches and tacked through about 100°... "

"...I was keen to see the boat in a bit more breeze, so we headed out again a few months later into a south-westerly Force six that followed several weeks of gales. Not surprisingly, the seas off Penlee Point were still on the lively side. We made good progress upwind nonetheless, with 5.8 to 6.3 knots showing on the log most of the time on port tack. The extra breeze brought our tacking angle down to between 80 and 90° and, with the seas at a more comfortable angle on starboard tack - as they often seem to be off Plymouth in a south-westerly - we picked up to nearly 9 knots at times.

Inevitably in those conditions, sailing downwind was the most fun. Had we shaken out the reef, we'd easily have exceeded the 13.2 knots we achieved surfing down a wave, but we kept the slab tucked in, ready for the reach back up Plymouth Sound. In terms of handling qualities, the Eclipse was as undemanding as you could wish for. I counted remarkably few thuds from under the bridgedeck and found the boat quite happy to sail herself upwind with the traveller eased down the track. Tacking was fast and positive, though the daggerboards must have resulted in more positive handling - and better upwind performance - than could be expected from LAR keels..."

As you will read on the 2002 review pages David sailed with me in the Round the Island Race (1700 starters, over 50 multihulls). We won our class, but David's comments comparing our performance with that of the monohulls are interesting.

"We were five minutes faster than the first Sigma 38 and, in the latter stages of the race, we found ourselves in close company with the leading Mumm 30s. They had gained on us around the back of the island, where our need to gybe the angles downwind pushed us out into the tide. In situations like that, boats with conventional, poled-out spinnakers can hug the shore more closely. We were not surprised to find ourselves level-pegging with the Mumms on the two-sail reach from Bembridge to the fort; what nobody had expected was to see us pulling away from them on the windward leg back to the finish line off Cowes."

Summing up he wrote:

"Something worth saying is that the Eclipse makes you realise the value of a designer's practical, hands-on experience. Everything works: the hulls, the foils, the rig, the deck layout and the arrangement below decks. And while the boat is more expensive - at least in ready-built form - than most single-hulled alternatives of similar overall length, don't forget that her accommodation and performance put her on a par with monohulls a good deal longer....Whatever your inclinations, it's hard to deny the practicality of a cat such as the

Eclipse for long-distance sailing. Or even for a quick whizz around the Isle of Wight".

I have also heard of a Banshee that has recently arrived in New Zealand, having sailed there from the UK. Also in the southern hemisphere Ray Gunnell wrote from Australia about his Meander "...Beautiful to sail, so safe! Plans bought 1989, been sailing and living aboard her about three years."

Review of 2005

Boats mentioned: Eclipse, Romany

Cruising on Eclipse

In late 2004 we sailed to the San Blas islands, in NE Panama via the Bay Islands, Honduras; Providencia, Colombia and the whole north coast of Panama. In March 2005 we left Eclipse in a Panamanian marina, and went home to work for the summer. However we later took a break from work and helped sail a friend's monohull south from Wrangell, Alaska to Oregon, through the fantastic cruising ground of British Columbia. Then it was back to the Eclipse in October 2005.

Latest boat launchings

The first Romany was built by Brad Mandell from Annapolis, USA and was launched at the end of May. Brad writes:

" I had my first sail on the Woods Design Romany "Bombay Duck". I was delighted. Top speed as recorded on my GPS was 9.2 knots. This was in 15 knots of wind. We sailed mostly in the mid 7's with hardly any fuss. This was with a very used mainsail with no battens and a flapping leech! (New mainsail next year). In lighter air (under 10 knots) we made 4.5 to 5. She steered well but had a little weather helm. This is due I think to my slightly undersized jib.

There was 4 of us aboard with food and gear for a weekend. She pointed as well as a cruising cat which is less than a monohull but off the wind she took off quickly. Heaving to could be a problem as the main was against the shrouds and with full battens in the sail, there would be much chafe. I have to experiment more there. It's strange to be sailing and not building but I'll get used to it soon! The 9.9 high thrust Yamaha was fine, but motoring directly into the wind the boat did hobbyhorse and the 9.9 topped out at 6 knots. All in all I'm very happy with the boat. I think I can average at least a knot faster sailing with a new main and jib."

In September he wrote "I want to report a great increase in ther performance of my Romany with my new mainsail. It was built according to the plans in Hong Kong with full battens. My boat now sails better in light air and will point up with all but the faster nonohulls! I have the LAR keels on the boat. In 15 knots of wind I was making 6.5 close hauled and was keeping up with 90% of the monos on the Chesapeake!

Cracked off a bit we accelerated to over 8 and pulled away from all the monohulls. I'm not a

racer but it was much fun seeing the reactions from the monohull skippers. I was amazed at the difference that the new mainsail makes. I still need a new jib but will get that next year along with a drifter for light air downwind sailing."

The first wood Eclipse was launched about a couple of years ago, another is now sailing in Millbrook. When I saw it in May 2004 one hull had just been turned over while the other was being glassed. It was launched in summer 2005.

Review of 2006

Boats mentioned: Eclipse, Gypsy, Merlin, Strider

As most people know, the big news this year was the fact that we abandoned our Eclipse on January 18th when caught out in a severe storm off S Mexico. Prior to that disaster we had been sailing in the Caribbean and then made a Panama Canal transit in December 2005.

The forum pages gave the news as it occurred, but please check the Eclipse cruising reports for my accounts of what really happened. As always the media - including some of the sailing press unfortunately - rarely gave the true facts. Not surprising I didn't take any photos during the storm, so all the published articles used sketches or stock photos.

None were correct, for had we had the conditions shown in the stock photos we wouldn't have had problems. Instead we actually experienced very high and steep breaking waves, making it impossible to sail down wind.

By coincidence the day we lost Eclipse was also the day we completed the purchase of a house on Saturna Island, in the Gulf Islands of British Columbia. Regular visitors to this web site will know that we sailed in the area last year, which was enough to convince us to come back to live and sail in the Strait of Georgia, at least during the summer!

There are many island anchorages in the Strait of Georgia and San Juans to sail to, so, as distances are short and the weather usually dry with light winds, we have bought a Merlin to cruise and race while we are in Canada. Check my Inshore Cruising articles to read a report of our first year's cruising.

I am getting excited about the prospect of sailing smaller faster multihulls again. To add to my enthusiasm I recently received the following email from Klaas Jan Hoeve who is a very keen Strider sailor in Holland.

"I have recorded GPS speeds and windspeeds and angles. Siamees is clearly an upwind boat, for we could do better than 75 % of true windspeed at 45 deg. upwind, downwind I need the spi or genny to stay within 60 % of true windspeed.

Clearly this is a result of the choices my sailmaker Arjen Kooy and I made, ie max efficiency upwind and not losing too much downwind by getting something colourful hoisted.

Max speed I have ever seen was 22.5 knots with full main and gennaker, bearing down in a squall. Scary! Texel rating is now 128, which gives me a good chance when racing Dragonflies and Farriers. When the pictures were taken I was doing 8/ 10 knots in 12/ 15

knots true wind, later with the smaller jib up it was a bit more in 18 knots true. "

Winfried von Mann has just launched his Gypsy in Panama. He became very frustrated trying to cope with the bureaucracy in a country where building recreational boats is rare. So in December 2005 he escaped and helped us sail Eclipse through the Panama Canal and on to Costa Rica. Then back to boatbuilding until June 8th when he wrote to us:

"My Gypsy has finally been launched, float well well above WL. Very good, mast tomorrow and pictures later" As promised, later he wrote: "Just come from the boat, the mast was raised yesterday using a tree with huge help from the local fishermen. Today sails, cleaning. Some stuff broke during transportation and raising the mast, that was fixed. Everything excellent. Boat very stable, light (floats well above WL, so a little difficult to manoeuvre under engine in the river). And I do NOT regret the maststeps"

He plans some Pacific cruising later this year. No doubt he will tell us all how he gets on. (Update - he sold his boat, moved back to Germany. But the new owner sailed it Panama to Tahiti)

Review of 2007

Boats mentioned: Merlin, Sango, Gypsy, Saturn, Transit

As many people know, 2006 started disastrously for us as we lost our 32ft catamaran Eclipse. You can see more on the Eclipse Log Book pages. As a final, final update we recently received the following email:

"We met on USS FORD last January, where I was the Executive Officer at the time. I saw your sight and am sorry for the fate of ECLIPSE, but it is a tribute that she is still floating. I am writing to share with you that AW2 Christopher Gotelli was named as the Commander, Naval Air Forces Pacific Enlisted Aircrewman of the Year. Of all the young men and women we have flying as aircrew, only one from each coast is chosen for this honor. Petty Officer Gotelli is about to deploy again on one of the ships in my squadron. " (Chris was our rescue swimmer.)

When sailing in BC we met up with Garret and Carllie Hennigan who have built a beautiful Gypsy, "Lightwave". Indeed it looks like a high quality professionally built boat - but in fact it was the first boat they had ever built! After about 8 years cruising BC they have now sailed south.

British Columbia and the Strait of Georgia are still new cruising grounds for us. You can read about our new summer house in the Gulf Islands and the story of our first years cruising on our new boat, a Merlin "Tucanu" on my website. As a result of that experience I have decided to make some changes to our Merlin, changes that could also be made to a Janus or Strider.

In late November 2006 I went ocean sailing again. Aussie Alan sailed his Crowther 33 ft catamaran Rush to the UK about 10 years ago. As a boatbuilder he helped build the prototype Savannah 26 and later a Sagitta. But now he has decided it is time to sail home.

So I joined him in the Canaries and sailed on Rush until late February, by which time we had arrived in Panama.

We had Christmas in Tobago. Writing that made me think where I had spent last Christmas. Looking back I realised I had spent the last 5 Christmases on board Eclipse. Not only that, but each Christmas was in a different country! The Scilly Islands, UK, in 2001, Barbados in 2002, Bahamas in 2003, Panama in 2004 and Costa Rica in 2005.

After returning to Canada in late March we spent some time refitting Tucanu with its new mast beam and cuddy.

I jacked the boat up with a support under each bow and each stern. Then I took one of the chocks away. So the hull was well clear of the aft trailer chock, only being held up by a chock under the bow and by the aft crossbeam, yet the boat didn't noticeably deflect. It looks scary, and is certainly a load that you wouldn't get at sea, but it does give one a lot of reassurance.

I have often written that designers should sail on other peoples designs as much as they can. I always take any opportunity offered.

The major offshore race in British Columbia is the VanIsle 360. Held every two years this is a fully crewed race in 10 legs that takes competitors right round Vancouver Island. Although it's not a long race (the longest leg is only 130 miles) the tidal currents, potential gales in the north and remoteness of the west coast make it a challenging event. (Driving north to join my boat we saw a bear by the side of the road.) It is also much colder and wetter than further south, it rained non stop in Winter Harbour.

I was invited to crew on a F31R (an all carbon Farrier 31ft trimaran) "Blue Lightning" to race from Port Hardy in the north down the west coast of Vancouver Island to Victoria in the south. In 2005 we had sailed from Port Hardy to Victoria using the inside passage, so this trip meant that I would circumnavigate Vancouver Island, admittedly in two different boats.

In brief the race was dogged by light winds (the leg to Victoria was abandoned as only 6 boats finished in the time limit (we were 6th). A 60ft monohull had the shortest elapsed time, while the smallest boat in the fleet, a F25C was third fastest round the island.

That's what I like about these races that are open to monohulls and multihulls. The monohulls learn that some multihulls do sail well. For my part I learnt that although modern trimarans are fast they are very uncomfortable, small and wet to sail compared to a catamaran. I also didn't like the fact that the only dry part of the boat is the windward outrigger, but to get there involved a leap over the aft beam with nothing except sea under one. Potentially very dangerous. Finally, I found that the flat bottomed main hull slammed far more than Eclipse ever did when sailing to windward.

As I say, sailing other people's designs is something all designers should do.

Lindsay writes " I sail my Sango around Scotland. Mostly on the west coast but presently in the Firth of Forth (I live in Edinburgh), weekendng and doing a bit of racing. I've

"circumnavigated" Scotland a couple of times. Up the east coast to Orkney, down the west and back through the Forth-Clyde Canal. I really need to sort myself out with a trailer since I've done the F-C Canal seven times now and it would be a lot quicker trailering when I'm trying to get out to the Western Isles. "

The Sango is proving a very popular design, but some people are put off by the fact that the hulls are built in strip cedar. I am drawing extra plan sheets for those who want to build in foam sandwich. I am also drawing a modified version using a hard chine hull instead of round bilge hull. This version is suitable for those who want an easy build Sango and are not too worried about ultimate performance.

Although I have been working hard on new designs and magazine articles

this summer we have also taken time out to go sailing. Sadly this year we didn't manage to get as far north as Desolation Sound, as we did last year, but we did race in the BCMS September regatta, and we won again, just as we did in May. Fortunately this time it didn't rain, but there was once again very little wind.

The Transit 38's and Saturns are both progressing well. The first Transit should be launched early in 2008 in Virginia USA. The first hull of the two Canadian Saturns currently building is now complete. Launch date will be sometime in 2008.

Review of 2008

Boats mentioned: Wizard, Gypsy, Mirage, Romany, Sagitta, Banshee, Saturn, Merlin, Sango, Strike, Eclipse, Pixie, Janus, Transit

December 2007- February 2008

So far this century I have managed to be on board a boat every Christmas. Not only that, but each year I have been in a different country. 2007 was no exception, and saw us in San Diego, USA, preparing to sail south to Mexico's Baja Peninsula on a Maple Leaf 48. Yes I know, it is a monohull, but as I always say, designers have to sail as much as they can if they are to design the best boats.

Driving south to join Sabbatical we met Ralph Maggio who, as I have reported before, has been building a beautiful Wizard, certainly the nicest I have ever seen. He launched the week following our visit and reported:

"Today was the big day... Put the boat in the water and had a sail. Every thing went off without a hitch. To start with she was right on her lines. First thing to try was how she motored - no problem, powered about for 10 minutes, all was well. Next was motor off and sail under mainsail only - tacked well never got stuck. Was able to do 5 knots (on gps) in about 9 knots of wind. Then main and jib.... what can I say - a dream. Wind was light but we did see 8 knots in a puff. With some wind 10 knots and better is going to be easy."

Later he wrote after his third sail

"It was perfect sailing. The wind was not more than 13knot (no white caps), we were flat

and relaxed as we did a cool 10.5 to 11 knots (11.8 was our max). At this point the mono's had their leeward rails down and their crews on the weather rails; we were flat and smooth."

Meanwhile, back in Mexico:

Unfortunately we didn't really enjoy our time on board Sabbatical. Partly because we had forgotten how uncomfortable and uncivilized sailing a monohull can be. It was a heavy displacement 48ft motor sailer and the rolling at anchor and hard-to-handle, heavy gear wore us out. Mind you, the motion on a smaller light displacement monohull would be even worse.

While we were in the Baja we met up again with Garret and Carllie of the Gypsy Lightwave; we had last seen them the day they left British Columbia on their way south. Unfortunately we weren't able to sail their newly extended boat but we did spend a couple of fun evenings on board.

In mid January we cut our Mexico cruise short and flew to S America. First to the lovely old Spanish colonial city of Cartagena. Rahula, a Banshee catamaran currently sailing round the world, arrived in Cartagena a few days after we left. Bad timing on our part!

After a week in Cartagena we flew south to Ecuador. In part so that we could say we'd been to the Equator but mainly because we wanted to cruise in the Amazon basin. What we hadn't realised when we booked our trip was that our "flotel" was a 98ft trimaran, and that we'd be the only passengers! The things I do in the name of R and D.

We spent a week on board, mainly travelling by motorised canoe, but occasionally paddling our own. We all know the Amazon basin is huge, but it wasn't until we got there that we appreciated just how big an area it covers. We were over 2000 miles from the sea on a minor Amazon tributary, yet the river was wider than the Thames at London, or the Sacramento at San Francisco.

Nature programmes on TV are very misleading; in real life not only are animals rare sightings, but it is also really hard to photograph them. So although we saw fresh water dolphins, caimen, turtles, as well as lots of birds and butterflies it was much easier taking pictures of trees - and some are pretty impressive! And of course we had to fish for (and later eat) piranhas.

We had hoped to continue on to Machu Picchu and Lake Titicaca, but unfortunately Peruvian politics and transport strikes prevented us from getting anywhere, so we flew home; but not before we got rather too close to an erupting volcano.

On our way home we stopped off in Miami to have a look at Ric Caselli's Mirage. He's doing an excellent job and is currently fitting out the interior while using Libe as a motor boat. Sailing is planned for later this year. Even I was surprised by the room inside, the bunks are large and airy, while the heads compartment is bigger than on an Eclipse.

March 2008

We are now back in Canada for the summer where, apart from sailing on our Merlin Tucanu and working on new designs, I am also busy writing articles. Two have recently appeared in Sail magazine, while we can now be seen regularly in "Latitudes and Attitudes" magazine in the USA and Practical Boat Owner magazine in the UK. I have also written a number of articles for a new UK based multihull magazine, The Multihull Review and for the Australian Multihull World magazine.

April - May 2008

Although we really enjoy our summers in Canada, we are not Canadians and cannot stay on Saturna year round. Furthermore we miss the cruising lifestyle, so since losing Eclipse we have been on the look out for a replacement.

On May 1st we became the new owners of Bombay Duck, the first Romany to be launched (back in 2005). I went to view it at Norfolk, Va, USA, in April but we won't sail it until September when we leave Canada. The plan this year is to spend the winter working on the boat (as it has been a bit neglected since returning from a successful cruise to the Bahamas) and then to sail down the east coast of the USA to the Bahamas. So look out for us!

While in Virginia I spent a day looking over Tom's Transit 38. He has done an amazing amount of work since the last time I saw his boat back in October. Launching will be sometime this year, but already one can see that it will be a huge comfortable boat.

The aft cabins are simply enormous. Each has a King size bed with room for a 40in flat screen TV at its foot, should the scenery outside pall. Plus lots of storage and dressing space. The full size chart table over the heads will work well and frees up more space in the saloon. Of course there is comfortable standing headroom throughout, while maintaining full all round vision from the helm and saloon.

As you will have already read, we met Carllie and Garret of the Gypsy Lightwave in La Paz, Mexico in January. They are now sailing back home to Vancouver and on March 29th we heard that they had successfully sailed to Hawaii. I gather it was a bit of a bumpy crossing, and by sheer chance they met Sabbatical in mid ocean.

Also crossing oceans at the same time was Bill Corcoran on his Sagitta Mandu. This was the second Sagitta built (we supplied the mouldings in 1992 and original owner Bob Smith fitted them out). Bill left Millbrook in August 2007 and slowly cruised down to the Canaries before crossing the Atlantic to the Caribbean. He arrived in St. Lucia on April 7 after 23 days at sea and emailed "I wouldn't describe it as a "Milk Run", so I guess he had a bumpy crossing as well. Not really surprising as the trades build steadily over the winter and March is probably the roughest and windiest time of year in the Atlantic tradewind belt.

Meantime the Banshee Rahula is now in the Galapagos midway through a world cruise.

Andrew Slow is building a beautiful Saturn. Currently one hull is finished and the other is being decked. As some of you know, Tucanu is the Merlin that Andrew built 18 years ago.

We are very lucky indeed to own a boat built by such a good boatbuilder.

May - June 2008

The weather is slowly warming up so it's sailing time again.

May was a busy racing month for us. First was the BCMS regatta on the adjacent island of Pender. Last year we had miserable weather, pouring rain and little wind. This year was a complete contrast with bright sun, 15 knots of wind and flat water. Perfect! Close reaching we were recording a steady 14-15 knots on the gps, we sailed faster still once we had borne off and hoisted the spinnaker. And just like last year we won the race in Tucanu. Second to finish was Bad Kitty, see below for more, third a 36ft wing masted Tennant cat and fourth a F9A.

The Swiftsure Race, held at the end of May, is to the Pacific NW what the Fastnet is to UK racers or the Sydney Hobart to Australians. Although much shorter (only 100 miles or so) it can be a tough race out to Cape Flattery at the west end of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

For most of this year's race, however, it lived up to its nickname of the Driftsure. I was invited to crew on Bad Kitty, a 25 year old home designed and built 35ft catamaran. Despite appearances it is a well sorted boat and the rest of the crew know how to sail it to its full potential, so usually it will beat the fastest Farrier trimarans.

We had a long slow beat west, and then around midnight the wind slowly built for the run home. Our highest speed was 22 knots when racing through the narrow gap between two sets of unlit rocks only 100 ft apart on a pitch black night. However the best bit was earlier in the day when we overtook the big monohulls to windward in light airs (including a 75ft ULDB, a couple of SC52 etc). We even took a video to prove it!

We finished just ahead of the F40 Dragonfly to be first boat home. Third to finish was a F25C which beat us on corrected time by 1 minute. But since the race took over 20 hours I reckon that was a dead heat! Then came the monohulls, about 150 of them....

I wrote this just after we came back from shopping. As we live on an island that meant a 3 hour sail to the nearest big supermarket and another 3 hours back again. Beats taking the ferry (which is expensive and anyway still takes 2 hours) every way you look at it!

Of course we race Tucanu as an open deck boat. Before the Cow Bay regatta we expect to have a few weeks in cruising mode, complete with cuddy, sailing once again to Desolation Sound.

From a recent email: "This is The Russian Sango at the Black Sea in May. There are 20 people on the board! Good nautical qualities. Maximum conditions in which the boat was tested are: 2 m wave, 15 m/s wind, 12 knots speed. We sailed two times, 100 miles each time. Good livability. There were 3 of us. We are taking it out on the coast to make more accurate regulations. We'll send more pics and reports on the speed of the wind and the boat. We are glad that didn't make a mistake with the choice of the project. Thanks a lot. "

Strike 18

Despite just a small note about this new trimaran design on my New Designs page I am currently getting 1 - 2 enquiries a week for it. Clearly there is a large demand for a simple to build boat that uses a beach cat for the rig and outriggers. Thus building the prototype has rapidly moved up my "must do" list. So much so that I recently bought a USD600 (GBP300) beach cat to use as the rig and outriggers shown above, together with the plywood to build the main hull.

So we began to build. After 25 hours work all the bulkheads have been setup, stringers and gunwales fitted and glued in place. All hull side and keel panels were fitted ready for glueing.

After another 50 hours work the hull was now the right way up and, apart from the beam boxes, almost structurally complete.

Last winter I sold set of Eclipse plans to a builder in Lebanon. I understood the idea was to build an open deck version and to fit big engines, as was done on Banshee Express 20 years ago. With no deck saloon there would naturally be quite a saving in build time. Even so I was both surprised and amazed to get an email in mid June saying the boat was finished.

"Dear Richard, I have completed in five months this fiberglass version of Eclipse. I haven't yet installed any mast since I wanted to test the boat for a while first. I have installed two 60hp outboards on the transoms. A maximum speed of 14 knots is reached when on full throttle.

Thanks, I am very fond of my boat and of the clarity of the plans that made the building a piece of cake."

July 2008

There are hundreds of islands off the SE coast of Vancouver Island, each with several safe anchorages. This is only our third summer in BC and so we still have many places to visit. We took a couple of weeks off and cruised north to visit Hornby Island, where Tucanu was born 16 years ago. A great trip, enlivened by the story below.

Whale watching is big business here in the PNW and it is easy to see where the whales are, just follow the trip boats. So we did. Clearly one male got bored with the company and headed off, straight for us. Fortunately he passed just astern, we assume he knew we were there.

Wild life viewing is sometimes more stressful than it looks. As I always say, "the only time I want to see a lion is in a cage". To give a sense of scale the fin of a 30ft orca is about 5ft high, so a bit like an upside down 30ft monohull. Heart stopping on a smaller boat. Maybe I prefer English wild animals like bunny rabbits. They are certainly better than the family of 10 otters that live in our marina and wake us up at dawn!

The big news this month is the successful completion of Garrett and Carllie Hennigan's two

year cruise in their Gypsy from Vancouver to Mexico, Hawaii and back.

We will be leaving Canada in mid August and going to our new Romany on 1st October. We will be sailing down the ICW from Norfolk, Va to West Palm Beach, Fl by the end of November and then across to the Bahamas for the winter.

We had a few tense days as TS Hanna made her way north up the east coast of the USA. We had deliberately left Romany just SW of the Langley AF Base, in the Southern Chesapeake area, to be north of the hurricane belt. It was not to be, as Hanna's eye passed directly over the boat, fortunately without causing any damage.

September 2008

Martin P recently emailed me to say " I have just completed the construction of my Pixie catamaran, and have been sailing it this last few weekends. Can I just say how pleased I am with the design and performance of the craft. I have always sailed monohull dinghies and was a bit concerned about the ability of the catamaran to tack through the wind. I need not have worried, after using a bit of jib backing, it tacked wonderfully and turned on a dime (and that was in a 3 MPH wind).

The cat is fitted out with a racing rig and when sailed on a windier day the performance was breathtaking, but felt very safe and the controls very responsive. After several runs on a reach my fifteen year old son and I were whooping with joy at the boats phenomenal acceleration produced during gusts. Thanks again for a great design."

David, building a Saturn, is getting on well with a planned launching in 2009. He emailed to say "Both hulls are over here and painted (the second hull I had to raise on a couple of saw horses to paint - you were correct, it is easier to do before turning.) This week I will begin installing the dagger board cases before doing the cabin sections of the hulls. "

I have drawn removable hull cabins for the Wizard and Sango. The cabins are removed for trailing and fit one inside the other on the cockpit. The new cabins give more light and ventilation and increase headroom to 1.5m (5ft). Although designed for the hard chine version they can also be fitted to the original strip plank boat.

October 2008

After a 3 year hiatus we are once again in cruising mode, this time aboard our 34ft Romany catamaran.

As always when I sail I am working on new designs. Currently the big project is some consultancy and basic design work for a 55ft catamaran. We have a lot to do to Romany to bring it up to the standard I want, but even so I hope to have time to finish the Strike and Skoota plans before too long.

December 2008

John Hartzenburg has been building his Janus in Australia for some years, but it is now

launched. He wrote:

"We had an average wind of about 7 knots and my GPS showed our boat speed about 5 knots on a close reach. Very happy with the helm. I could let the helm go when trimmed and she would maintain course. And, by the way, we were four adults and four children on board weighing approximately 420kg. I also have a ply decks to the mast, and an icebox and gas storage box in the centre"

Looks like they are having fun!!

Also recently launched is the first Transit. Built over 18 months by Tom Garetson in Virginia it still waits for sails, but is currently motoring around. A huge comfortable boat, I look forward to sailing it early next year.

I write this last update of 2008 anchored in an idyllic bay in the Abacos, Bahamas, a flat calm and a lovely sunset. It's all about to change tomorrow though, as another cold front comes through.

As I mention on the Romany cruising pages, the Abaco chain of islands in the northern Bahamas are really a great cruising area. Most of the time we have been working on the boat and drawing, but at weekends, we, like everyone else, take time out to go sailing.

As you know, I have spent the last 7 Christmases on board, and until this year each time it had been in a different country. My record was spoilt this year as I was also in the Bahamas in 2003. However in consolation, we did go out for a sail on Christmas Day and, looking back through my life, I realised that it was the first time I have ever actually sailed on Christmas Day.

There are a number of charter cats in the Abacos and we have fun overtaking them. We have found our homebuilt 34ft Romany is easily faster than a Lagoon 38 and surprisingly is also slightly faster than a Lagoon 42.

Friends with a well equipped and well sailed Bristol 40, (a Ted Hood design, so a good sailer) joined us recently for a photo shoot as it isn't often that we can get photos of our own boats sailing. It was an ideal morning for sailing; bright sun, 15-20 knots of true wind and flat water. We both reefed to make the close quarters manouvering easier. As expected we were much quicker off wind, but even I was a bit surprised to find we were also quite a bit quicker to windward.

We find that in these 15-20 knot conditions and loaded for live aboard cruising, we can do 7-8 knots to windward with full sail, and a much more comfortable 6-7 knots with a reef tucked in.

Review of 2009

Boats mentioned: Romany, Wizard, Mirage, Flica, Saturn, Merlin, Sango, Strike, Ondina, Transit, Bee

Jan - March 2009

We spent October 2008 to March 2009 sailing our Romany catamaran down the east coast of the USA, across to the Bahamas and back to Florida. We left Romany for the summer in the St Johns River, about 20 miles south of Jacksonville, Florida, and flew/drove back to our house on Saturna, BC, Canada where we arrived on April 1st, ready for another six months of boatbuilding, drawing and sailing.

Ralph Maggio built a beautiful Wizard in S California and, as an expert sailor, enjoys racing against, and beating, much larger monohulls.

"We joined a fleet of 15 boats to do a 23 mile race. 14 mono hulls between 25 and 36ft and one 22ft catamaran. We came in about a minute late to the start but to weather of most of the fleet. The 1st mark was about a quarter mile out on a broad reach we slipped over most of the the other boats to be third around behind a J109 and a J105.

The next mark was 8 miles away dead down wind. As we have a screecher/reacher and not a spinnaker this is a bad point of sail for us, and means we have to sail hot and tack down wind and in light wind this is very bad. The monos set their chutes and go right to the mark! By the time we get to the mark we are ten boats back and to the next mark is 4 miles up wind.

The wind is still light about 5 to 6knots and the big monos are going well. We suffer our way to weather and round the mark now very behind the leaders. The next mark is a very, very close reach - almost a beat to weather to lay it. We unroll the reacher and go a for speed by sailing low of the mark. Slowly the wind builds and moves a little aft so our heading and speed improve. We end up laying the mark, and passing almost the entire fleet doing 13knots at times(GPS) and averaging 9.5 to 10 in about 11+knots of wind. Its not to bad to catch a J80 on a reach with his asymmetric spinnaker up and sail though his lee to beat him by over 10 minutes. We were third to finish less than a minute behind a J109 and an X36, and third corrected. "

And later I got this report:

"Last weekend (1-10-09) we did another race on Sea Monkey our Wizard catamaran. It was from Marina Del Rey to Ship Rock (Santa Catalina Island) and back, for a total of 48 miles. The day started very light beating to weather by mid day we were in the middle of the fleet and the wind had started to fill. As it did we were able to crack off and still hold the lay line. We unrolled the screecher at about 40 to 45 apparent and we were off!

We reeled them in one by one and about a mile from the mark we sailed through the J109's lee doing 10knots. After rounding the mark we found the the lay line for the return trip was a close reach and that suited us just fine for sailing home.

We ended up 4th to finish doing it in 8hrs 25 minutes and got 2nd place corrected, the F31 trimaran beat us by an hour but we corrected in front of him by 7 seconds.

The three boats that beat us were a Beneteau 44.7, Corsair F31, and J 120. Some of the

boats we beat boat for boat were the Jeanneau 49DS, Tartan 10, J 109, Jeaneau SF37, and C&C 40T. It was a great day on the water - we had dolphins and whales, a killer sunset and got a trophy."

You can see photos of Ric Caselli's Mirage in motorboat trim on the 2008 pages. We were very pleased to get the following email from him in February

"What a day! We had our first sail on Libe. It wasn't probably the best day because it was blowing pretty hard. We left with a reef in the main. Jib is hanked on so no reefing there. Out of Port Everglades we headed south for about 10 miles and on the handheld GPS we got 10 knots top going into pretty steep 4-5 footers. When we turned around going north the GPS showed 14.5 max so we must have done around 11.5-12 really considering the Gulf Stream. Seas were growing a little, maybe 6 ft, I was on autopilot and then the portable GPS battery ran out.

It was pretty exciting and the boat felt light and responsive with no bad behaviour in the gusts. I kinda stopped pushing her hard and tried to get a feel of the motion to get comfortable, maybe going around 8 kts with sheets rather loose. After about another hour or two we were back towards Port Everglades nearer shore and out of the Gulf Stream.

The water was much flatter and so we put her in the groove and SHE TOOK OFF! The gusts came and she started moving, leaving the water behind like a powerboat. I'm sure we were doing over 15 but I don't really know. She felt in control though and it was AWESOME.

All in all she feels like the Arabian horses I used to jump back in Italy, definitely kept me on my toes. Now I have a list of things to set correctly for the running rigging and I can't wait to go out again next weekend. I would love for you to come and sail her sometimes to show me how is really done.

Thank you very much for designing such an awesome boat. "

May - June 2009

Whiskers, a Flica 37, was built in the UK and sailed to New Zealand some years ago. Nice to see one floating so high. Current owner Brian reports "I have just been out for the 115th time in two years - not bad eh!"

I have been able to work a few hours a day on the prototype Strike trimaran and hope to have it ready for painting by the end of June. We'll see, like all builders I'm optimistic.

Also working hard on his boat is Mutlu Keceli from Turkey who is building one of the first hard chine Sangos. He has already finished the cuddy, so I hope to have some sailing photos soon.

In November the first Transit 38 was launched (on the east coast USA), then in May the second (a Millbrook based boat) was also launched. After a brief sail the builder reported

"Bill and I sailed his boat in the Hamoaze; about 5 knots wind, it sails fine; like a giant Strider but tacks faster, we did about 5 knot to windward with apparent wind at 9 something so

probably approaching windspeed. Boat steers fine etc."

Mike drove down for a test sail and reported: "Bill's boat is very impressive. Wonderful space and comfort and goes through the sea with a silence and lack of fuss which is astonishing for such a big ship. Spins on a sixpence (as used to be said, perhaps a dime would be better). Bill and Jane are going to the Scillies and back for a test run and then across the Bay to Spain and home to the Med."

The interior is very different to the US Transit. Although the basic layout is the same, Bills boat has been finished conventionally in wood and vinyl linings. Whereas the US boat has a sprayed interior. The latter is lighter and quicker to do.

Another potential customer who viewed this boat wrote: "It is an incredibly roomy boat, but also very light, I was impressed by the layout, on the way up from Plymouth in about 20-26 knots of wind she was merrily going along at 12-14 knots very comfortably."

July 2009

Fortunately it hasn't all been work. We've also been out sailing Tucanu, our Merlin. Racing in local events we've had a first, 3rd and 4th. As I raced in three events with three different crew, two of whom had never sailed any catamaran before I'm reasonably happy and look forward to doing better later in the year.

Before then we will revert to cruising mode and refit the cuddy (a 1/2 hour job) and sail north again towards Desolation Sound. So if you don't get a quick reply to your emails, you know where I am!

We really like sailing Tucanu, but now that we own four boats one will have to go. So if any one wants a fully fitted, excellently built Merlin with lots of gear (8 sails!) please email me.

This site is all about catamarans, but I also have a small line of dinghy plans that don't often get mentioned here. However I recently received the following email:

"I wanted to thank you and share with you all the enjoyment that building Bee brought me. They were certainly some of the most enjoyable hours I have spent in a long time. Unfortunately my time spent on Bee was quite unexpectedly cut short.

The very day that I launched Bee, as I was about to recover her from the launching site at our local reservoir I was approached by a father and his young son. He complimented me on the boat and inquired where it was purchased. Telling him that I had built myself was very satisfying indeed and I offered the use of the boat to them.

The sheer joy and excitement that young boy expressed took me back to my own youthful days, what a great reminder! After about an hour or so, they returned and the father asked if I would sell them the boat.

One glance at the son and I knew I could not refuse. Thank you for the opportunity to give another generation a lifetime of memories that like my own, richly provided me. "

In between other projects I have at last been able to get more work done on the prototype Strike. On July 1st we moved it outside for the initial final assembly. Still quite a bit of work to do, mainly on tidying up the beach cat we had bought to act as the Strike outriggers and rig. And now it is outside of course the first rain in weeks is forecast.

August 2009

What a difference a coat of paint makes! The Strike is still not sailing, in part because we have been sailing (what, again?) but also because of visitors that prevented work.

Others are "lucky" enough to be sailing. (Once you've read the report you see the reason for the inverted commas). The second Transit launched has a home base in the Mediterranean, here is the owners first report of their trip south from the UK.

"Our proper sea trials with Duo started on the 25th July with a 'shake down' trip to the Exe and up to Topsham to see friends. There was a good wind (force 5+) a moderate sea (a bit rough to start) and we were delighted with the speed (hit 13.9 knots - Bill took photo as evidence) and the way the boat rides the waves. We reefed and continued to make good speed and sailed comfortably especially as the sea settled in the shelter of headlands. We also stayed offshore to avoid the rainstorms over the coast.

The Exe was harder - bouys in places different to those marked on our 2009 almanac and then grinding to a halt on a shingle bank in the marked channel just before Topsham quay. Once afloat further difficulty making it to a mooring on the quay. Once achieved we licked our wounds and had a lovely couple of days with family and friends with some reasonable weather.

Monday was wet and windy and getting worse and we needed to get out of the Exe so we left and headed west. Windy and rough so we made it round to Brixham, two reefs in and the jib reefed, again the boat was good but we were unimpressed by bashing into the wind in sheets of rain! Salcombe was reached the next day where we stayed while the gale forecasts loomed. Some terrible weather but also a nice day spent with Pip and Debbie from the Multihull Centre.

Friday we were back in Plymouth and getting ready for departure on Sunday when Nikki and Nigel arrived as crew for our first leg across the Channel and round Brittany. The trials were a bit brief but we felt that both the boat and ourselves had been well tested and we needed to get started on the voyage south. In June we secured a marina berth at Canet (just off Perpignan) so had a 'home' to go to.

Sunday 2nd August we left the quay for Cawsand in the evening to be ready for a morning getaway. Bill had his first climb up the mast as the mainsail halyard wrapped itself around the radar reflector - another achievement! Again wet and windy and a rolling night at anchor.

We made an early start and had a pretty uncomfortable sail around to Fowey - again the boat was fine but it was a rough sea. Waited for the weather to improve and the wind to be helpful and made a 5.30 start on Weds 5th August. Overcast start but winds predicted to be

okay so we headed south for L'Aber Wrac' on the Brittany coast. Sun shone from mid afternoon and wind was okay but a little light so a lot of motoring, sea had big swell from the Atlantic but it was comfortable. Saw porpoises and avoided huge ships and finally rolled our way into port as the sun set.

Onwards and southwards. We left Nigel heading for the Roscoff ferry, then went around to Audierne to southern Brittany and stayed a night. Next day down to Ile de Groix - we decided on island hopping - in sunshine, light winds and with the spinnaker up. Dolphins came and swam around us but moved on quickly, the fish were more important. Bill also caught a mackerel. A slow day but we relaxed into it. Port Tudy was busy but they squeezed us in, literally, we were rafted with about twelve others and the port then declared full! A bumpy night as in addition to the swell and proximity of the boats, ferries whizzed in and out!

Next day we escaped early not wishing to be caught in the mad scramble to extricate the knit of boats and ropes. Another spinnaker run down to Belle Ile - and it is. First call Sauzon, described in the almanac as peaceful, not so, it was a festival of the sea day - processions, live music food etc.

Unfortunately our purpose was to dry out, check all the underneath bits and paint a stripe around the waterline. The harbour master said we should not go into the inner harbour as it was drying out and by the time we had explained ourselves we had settled on the bottom anyway!

Jobs all done and back out and round to the main port of Palais. Again crazy - full up and with ferries in and out at high speed. We anchored outside and rolled and banged all night! It is high season and every where is very busy and we are a bit wide, also the wind (little that there is of it)and tide seems to create swell.

Nikki took the ferry from Palais on Monday the 10th and we shopped for food and then set off for Ile de Yeu - a longer trip. Spinnaker up again we made good time but then spent time looking for somewhere to stop. Eventually settled in a cove behind the lighthouse. This is another pretty island with lovely little beaches and good rock formations.

Today we left Ile de Yeu for the mainland - Les Sables de L'Onne - in rain and fog but made it by mid afternoon when the weather cleared. So one week on we are half way down the French coast, have found the sun and made some miles even in light winds.

The boat continues to please and is good to live on. We are doing okay but could with better nights sleep! We will restock, sort out any niggles and plan our passage to the Spanish coast."

September 2009

The prototype Strike was launched on September 2nd. Unfortunately as is often the case in BC in the summer winds for the first sail were very light. Even so the boat sailed really well and was extremely comfortable to sail. We look forward to some more wind, when I will

make a more detailed report of the sailing performance

I am experimenting with a boomless mainsail, early days yet. On the prototype the outriggers are cut down 18ft singlehander hulls. The mainsail a cut down 18sqm and the mast a shortened Tornado mast. The jib is also from a Tornado, but 35 years old. So, as you can see, with a bit of time spent modifying things, you can use parts from most beach cats.

The Strike is not intended as a fast, "hairy" boat to sail. Instead it is for those who may be new to boatbuilding and multihulls and want to start with a quick and easy project. And it is also perfect for those who already have a beach cat and enjoy it, but who also want to be able to take the whole family out on gentle sails.

October 2009

I spent a very busy few weeks in the UK and also managed to get in a quick trip to Berlin. There I saw three builders, one who has a very nice Flica that had been launched as a shell, then motored 300 miles down canals to be hauled out for final finishing. Also a beautifully built ply Ondina. A huge boat being built with great care and finally a Strider owner. Mind you I didn't see the boat, but I did see the 5th floor apartment where his Strider was built. Once finished it was "launched" by lowering it out of the window to the street below.

I also found time to do some monohull sailing on an east coast (UK) river with my brother and nephew. I remembered that monohulls heel over in gusts rather than accelerate, but I completely forgot that if you let go of the tiller the boat will round up immediately. Funny things monohulls!

While on the east coast I helped with the writing of parts of the new RCC Atlantic Crossing guide, due to be published next year. Look out for it, it will be THE authority on making an Atlantic circuit for years to come.

I also toured an Oyster 57. My guide showed me the aft cabin. "Why its the same size as the one on the Transit" I said. We took out a tape measure to check, and to be honest the Oyster cabin was 12in wider. But then I said "Of course the Transit has two aft cabins like this not just one"

November 2009

In late October we returned to Florida and began sailing south and east again. This year we plan to sail in the Florida Keys and then cross the Gulf Stream to some of the Bahamian islands that we have not yet visited, and finally back to Ft Pierce, Florida in April where we will leave the boat for the 2010 hurricane season.

A quick explanation: We had left the boat for 7 months in Florida and returned Nov 1st. We spent a few days shopping and tidying the boat before sailing away. But we didn't get a chance to clean the bottom, which, as it has been in warm water for over a year, is covered with very large barnacles. Furthermore we hadn't stowed any of the gear, just thrown it on board. So the boat was bow down.

Despite these handicaps, and the fact that I was sailing it singlehanded as Jetti filmed me, you can still see that the boat sails well (over 7 knots in the youtube clip) and tacks fast. The mainsail luff appears short, but that is because we still have to fit a rigid bimini, when we do that we will raise the boom. Later we beached the boat and removed some of the barnacles. New antifouling paint will have to wait until next year, even so our cruising speed under power went from 4.8 knots to 5.4, a significant increase!

One reason for the rush south was because we wanted to see the Space Shuttle launch on Nov 16th. One of man's major achievements, and an incredible sight when seen in real life rather than on a TV screen. Amazing to think that there were people actually inside it, especially when considering the speed it accelerated and the size of the flames coming out the back end. By way of complete contrast, later the same day I stroked the back of a curious manatee. I know, totally illegal, but so tempting when it surfaced next to my dinghy as I rowed along.

The Indian River is one of the nicer sections of the ICW, better still, it is wide enough to allow some real sailing. We stopped off to visit friends and also to meet up with David of BoatSmith in Jupiter. A master boatbuilder, expert in wood and grp work. Well worth considering if you want a boat built professionally in S Florida.

We spent the last two weeks of November in Ft Lauderdale staying at the home of Ric Caselli, the Mirage owner. His house is some 2 miles inland from the sea where the canals get narrower and narrower. Romany is over 20ft wide, the narrowest section is 22ft, and with no room to turn round we had to go out backwards. A good thing Romany handles so reliably when under power!

During our stay we were able to do many of the Romany projects we had planned for the winter. Like, for example, finishing off the new stack pack sail cover Jetti had started when in Canada. Jetti had brought her sewing machine to the boat as hand luggage on the plane. Yes it is legal to take one through security!!

We also refitted the hull windows and raised the saloon floor and seating area (something, as I suggest on the Plan Updates page, all Romany builders should do).

We also found time to sail on Ric's Mirage in Biscayne Bay. A great place to sail! The Mirage sailed really well, despite the prevailing light winds.

With two 9.9hp Yamaha outboards we could motor at 8.5 knots. We met friends on a Shuttleworth Spectrum 45, keen racers and a well fitted-out boat with nice sails. We left the anchorage together but the Spectrum took a short cut over some shallows so was a mile ahead when when started to sail home. Two hours later they were only just ahead. I was really surprised that we caught them up on a cruising boat that was 9 feet shorter, especially since some of the crew were more interested in playing checkers than sailing! The Mirage is a great party boat for warmer climes with lots of deck space, yet four adults and two children still had plenty of room and privacy below decks.

Ric is a keen sailor and likes to drive his boat hard, but usually his family dictate permissible

boat speeds. So on another trip Ric's crew were a nursing mother and three 11 year old girls out for a birthday treat. The girls on the aft deck counting the starfish as we sailed along (Biscayne Bay is only about 6ft deep)

A few days later Ric sailed his boat singlehanded for the first time. So he was able to push a bit harder, 14.9 knots on the gps, and (as he reported) he was sailing in only 15 knots of wind. We were actually sailing our Romany nearby so can confirm that winds were under 15 knots.

Review of 2010

Boats mentioned: Romany, Shadow, Gypsy, Sango, Strider, Saturn, Banshee, Transit, Strike 16, Strike 18, Skoota, Sagitta

Jan - March 2010

Rajen keeps me updated regularly with his Romany (below) being professionally built in India. It's taking a bit longer than he hoped, but then all boats do.

In Italy Mariana Sanchez Penino has been sailing his Shadow, the wooden version of the Strider Club. Also recently launched, but not yet rigged, is Isaac's Gypsy in Vigo, Spain

I like getting photos of boats in build as well as sailing but it doesn't actually happen very often. In fact neither of the two above builders ever contacted me after buying the plans until now. The up side is that it shows that my plans are detailed enough for home builders to finish their boat without help.

We spent November 2009 to March 2010 sailing our Romany in Florida and the Bahamas. Although we spent some time in the Abacos, as we had done the year before, we also sailed south through the Exumas to the tropic line at Georgetown.

This was our fourth visit to the Bahamas and unfortunately, due probably to a combination of El Nino, solar activity and climate change, the weather there was the worst ever recorded, with almost constant gales and lots of rain. On the few nice days there was usually little wind (the calm before the next storm). If this weather pattern continues then the Bahamas will no longer be such an attractive cruising ground for "snowbirds".

So we spent a lot of time at anchor or on a mooring. As a result I talked boats to lots of fellow cruisers, many of whom (especially those older sailors no longer as fit as they once were) said they should have bought a smaller, simpler boat.

We had a busy March. After a couple of months with just Jetty for company, my sister flew out from the UK for her annual sailing trip. Sadly most of the time the weather kept us at anchor, but she still managed to swim everyday, something she doesn't do at home in Liverpool!

Then no sooner had she left than Jeff and Heather, Romany builders from Minneapolis, USA flew in to sail Romany back to Florida with us. We had never met before, so this was one time when Romany's split accommodation layout really proved its worth. We all had privacy

and in fact didn't really notice they were on board.

Neither Jeff nor Heather had ever sailed a catamaran before (so I thought they were quite brave to start building one) and became excited on their first day when in light winds we sailed at a steady 8 knots. Later, after Jeff had helmed across the Gulf Stream and touched 12 knots under double reefed main and the genoa rolled away, 8 knots seemed really passe.

Regulars to the site will know we have had Romany on the market for a couple of months. It has now been sold to Chris and Carol, plus Kelly and Shane, who will be live-aboard cruisers following a similar route to us, sailing up to Annapolis for the summer and then south to the Florida Keys, the Bahamas and beyond. We wish them safe, enjoyable sailing.

But first I have to finish our Skoota power cat. This has had an embarrassing long gestation time, so to speed it's completion we had Andrew Slow build its second hull. It was a bit of a surprise to see how he delivered it, on the roof of his car! But at least he proved it's light and strong and, with both hulls and the cuddy now complete, we should be motoring around this summer.

Of course one reason for the delay in completing Skoota is that the Strike 18 distracted me. Plans were finished late last year and sales are now going well, and just as important, we will soon be sailing our own Strike again. We now have a newer mainsail (from a Trac 16) which not only is much fuller than the original but also has a square top giving more area. We also bought a used screecher, plus furling gear, so sailing performance should be much improved, maybe we'll even race it.

I have also been working on the Strike 16 plans. This uses a 14ft beach cat (eg Pixie, Quattro 14) for outriggers and, like the 18, has a windscreen to raise the boom. Plans should be available by mid summer.

The Strike 15 is the smallest in my trimaran range. Maybe it's simplest to say it is a "home builders Weta" or a "Stealth with training wheels". But, however you like to think of it, I consider it a "geriatric dinghy". My concept all along has been to design a boat that is as fast and fun as a modern skiff, yet easy for less agile sailors to sail, maybe even for those who are disabled. The Strike 15 has a bigger rig than the Weta, so should be faster and, with the outriggers mounted further forward, be less prone to nose diving.

May 2010

After returning to our summer house in Canada we spent a week refitting our Strike 18. A new mainsail and bowsprit for the screecher were top of the list, while we also fitted the much-needed trampolines and a bracket for a 2hp outboard. We launched on May 12th.

Unfolding and bolting the outriggers in place took literally a couple of minutes (no need to touch the trampolines). Then it is as easy to rig as a beach cat, so two men could be sailing in 1/2 hour. We take a bit longer, as we use the boom to raise the mast, that way it can be done easily by one person. Even so we were afloat and sailing in less than an hour, and on only our second go at rigging the boat. If we trailed regularly we'd get better and faster.

A 2hp outboard is all you need, using it our GPS showed a cruising speed of 5.1 knots, so clearly it has ample horsepower. Videos from the recent BCMS meeting taken by Tim on board Flying Kiwi, a 35ft open deck racing catamaran, sailing only a little bit faster than Strike, can be seen on my Woods Designs youtube channel.

Just before the BCMS race we recorded 11.6 knots, our highest speed with two on board. The wind slowly moderated during the race, allowing Flying Kiwi to pull ahead. But we still overtook a Beneteau 36 to windward. Of course once we had done so it rolled up its sails and started motoring, but we find most monohulls do that after being overtaken to windward by a smaller multihull.

June - July 2010

I flew back to the UK for a few weeks, partly to work, partly for family commitments. The first time I have been in the UK during the summer for 8 years. I had forgotten how nice it is in warm, not to say hot, weather! While there I sailed on Backlash, a 25year old Banshee, from Plymouth to the Scillies, 100 miles away. Backlash is a veteran of two Round Britain races, an Azores race and is the first catamaran ever to complete the famous Fastnet race.

Sadly there was little wind and most of the trip was motor sailing. A complete contrast from the year before when over 19 knots was recorded on Backlash's gps.

The Scillies were great as always. I last visited for Christmas 2001, see my Articles page. Back then of course I was the only yacht. In midsummer it is very different, and a real bun fight ensues every evening as moorings are in short supply and the holding often poor if one tries to anchor.

The Scillies comprise dozens of small islands, some with attractive cottages and white sand beaches, so just like the Bahamas - only the rocks and tidal range were different.

While in the UK I received an email from Captain Wong, currently building a Gypsy. It contained the log of a 450 mile trip by the new owners of his old Strider, Phil Tinker and his wife KC. I have posted it in the Cruising section of my Articles pages. The trip was made noteworthy because the combined age of the crew was 126.

Meantime, on the other side of the world, the Dutch Sagitta Glatisant is busy cruising the Azores. Although Marc's blog is in Dutch, using the translation feature of Google I read this:

"And that was already the fifth day at sea. Tonight I saw that we were halfway. We have logged a total of 825 miles in 104 hours!"

An 8 knot average speed is not bad for a 30ft cruising catamaran crossing an ocean. It may not sound much, but in fact is a higher speed than Phil Weld averaged when he won the 1980 OSTAR on his 50ft Newick trimaran Moxie.

August 2010

Another long cabin version Sagitta, Midnight Rambler, has recently been launched. It has

had a somewhat chequered history, so it was great to hear that it is now sailing.

Ghita writes "It's been an adventure this week.... Midnight Rambler brought me and crew (Graham Burton) safely to Brighton. 38 hours from Ramsgate to Brighton - atrocious weather with all the winds and tides against us. Thank you so much to Peter with whom I built her... shes an amazing boat and the thought and work he has put in has really paid off. I have had such a lovely time on her even if it was force 6 and wind over tide... I STILL didnt spill my coffee!!!!!! woohoo!!!"

October 2010

In late September we raced our Strike again. This time in the BCMS Saturna regatta. As always there was little wind, but that didn't stop us having a great race against a Reynolds 21 catamaran. In a 2 1/2hr race they beat us by a boat-length. My fault, we were ahead until just before the finish.

However, the big event this month is the launch of my first powercat design, the trailable Skoota 20 (although I'm afraid to say it is still cosmetically unfinished)

It uses a central 25hp Yamaha outboard and features a small central cabin (with double berth and galley) so could also be used as a basic cruising boat.

With one person on board it will do 15 knots, or 14 knots with three on board. The Skoota hull is a semi-displacement hull, so unsuitable for higher speeds. I actually designed it to run at 12 knots, so 15 was a very pleasant surprise.

The overall beam of Skoota is 14ft, but it folds, like my similar length sailing catamaran Wizard, to 8ft on the trailer. Which is one reason for using a central engine as two would make the steering and throttles harder to organise. Note, the Skoota design actually has transom steps even though the prototype has decked over transoms.

However before motoring far I will be fitting a small (4hp) get-me-home outboard on a transom bracket. I am nervous about the Skoota as I have never before owned a boat that I couldn't sail home. But I know that for many, if not the majority, of boaters a single outboard is all they have.

As I just said, I am a sailor, not a motor boat man. So I have been using a very experienced outboard motor/small craft expert as a consultant, although, to be honest, after the first few minutes he tends to lose me during our discussions. But then, why use a consultant if you know as much as they do? His advice seems to work though, for after seeing videos he wrote:

"Your latest videos show proper trim , no wake between the hulls, no rooster tail. Very impressive actually. I think you are getting her dialled in now. 15 knots on 20 foot hulls ! That is unbelievable. And there is no visible bow wave! I think it's in there somewhere, right under your cg. You can't possibly be displacement at that speed. Bravo! I am very impressed."

And then later, after I emailed him my final outboard nacelle drawings he wrote:

"That looks very good. You are adding about 15 degrees of driveshaft angle and 5 inches of depth simultaneously. So when the going is tough you can tuck your bows in and slog it out, and when the conditions allow you can let her run her bows higher. Users can experiment with trim pin positions to fine tune the system. The result is a completely tune-able boat. A 'completely tune-able, semi planing, single engined power catamaran' Brilliant."

And my consultant is not alone in his praise. These recent emails about Skoota are typical: "I want one" CL

"I just finished watching the Skoota 20 launch videos. As I watched the video, I kept on saying to myself over and over again was "THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR!!!". ED.

"I have watched the video footage....and I've only got two words to say... VERY IMPRESSIVE Those lovely slender hulls look very efficient. My ultimate goal is to travel in that elusive 12-16 knot range regardless of chop. Skoota looks to be just what the doctor ordered. " NJ

While we were moving the Skoota to its winter storage behind our house I did the normal trick of removing one of the 4 chocks under the hulls, so that one hull is only supported at the transom, the beams hold the rest of the hull up in the air. (The other hull has supports at bow and stern of course). I think you'll agree this is a pretty extreme test compared to what a boat endures when at sea.

When launching the trailer backs into the water and then the buoyancy of the hulls opens it out automatically. On retrieval gravity folds it up. Two bolts hold it all together when afloat, strong enough as the 3 chock test, above, shows. So no lifting or winching needed - nature does the work in seconds.

Meanwhile...

John M, a prospective customer wrote recently: " I have been sailing on Lindsay Henderson's Sango. What an impressive boat! She is the first of your designs I have actually seen in the flesh. She sailed like a witch, both under all plain sail and under screecher and spinnaker.

That was a very enjoyable day, doing 9 knots by gps on a true windspeed not much more than that, and all without any fuss whatsoever - and that was with me on the helm with my decided lack of recent catamaran experience. Lindsay could make her sing. It has answered my question as to what Richard Woods' designs are like - I would not go wrong with any of them."

We are now approaching the end of our time in Canada for the year, our 6 months is up. We will be back next May, but before then we have plenty of sailing ahead. In mid November we fly to the east coast USA (again!) but this time we will be sailing on Tom Garetson's Transit 38.

We are still not quite sure where to, but definitely "south" and "Bahamas" have been mentioned. Fortunately this is a complete, finished boat, so we won't have any repairing/filling/sanding/painting to do as we have for the last couple of seasons. That will mean on our in-port days I'll be able to draw, write and of course answer emails. We have an Iphone and found we could get a signal pretty much everywhere we sailed last year. So I will be rarely incommunicado - a far cry from even a couple of years ago.

We then have made tentative plans to sail in the eastern Mediterranean next spring on a friends 36ft catamaran, but that trip is still in the early planning stage. More when we know it ourselves.

November 2010

We left Canada in late October, sadly three days before Andrew Slow launched his beautifully built Saturn in Victoria. We won't be able to see it in the water until next June, but Andrew has promised to send photos of his trial sails.

He wrote: "she's beautiful, more bouyant aft than I had hoped for, tracks and steers well and I think she is going to be fast. Feels heavy but sits 2ins above waterline so can't be. Just a bigger boat than Tucanu by far. Lots to learn and play with. I'm very happy, thank you very much Richard. I'll give you a better up date when we have finished our cruise to Hornby this week"

A few days later Andrew wrote:

"Arrived at Ford Cove 6.30pm in the dark last night after some fantastic sailing up from Victoria in very good weather. On the way up the Haro Strait we hit 14knots with ease, perfectly balanced on the helm and absolutely bone dry on deck, no spray at all.

The last leg of the sail from Nanaimo was in South East 15- 20 knts and the typical Georgia strait chop that Tucanu sometimes struggled in. We flew along averaging 9knts and again made a 14knts high. She is so easy to handle in these difficult conditions and again was astonishingly dry and comfortable. The great thing about surfing down those 4ft swells is that the forward chines give great dynamic lift to keep you moving and in control.

There was occasional slop and drag on the aft end of the nacelle but no slamming or spray at all which all adds up to a very confidence inspiring stress free boat to cruise on.

So thanks so much for designing such a "Sweet Heart" of a boat, I couldn't wish for anything better. I hope the weather picks up enough for you to get South and East safely and soon, take care, Andrew. PS She tacks flawlessly, even from a broad reach."

On Nov 5th Jetti, Slater (Jetti's son) and I we went on board the Transit 38 "Crystal" in Reedsville, Ma, USA and a few days later we started sailing south to Norfolk and then the ICW. We are taking Crystal south for owner Tom and will sail it until sold. This is our seventh ICW trip, so we are getting to know the routine.

Our first days sail was across Mobjack Bay and south to Norfolk. Easy comfortable sailing

with the boat steering itself at 8-9 knots, occasionally surfing to 11-12.

We had only been moored there a few hours when there was a knock on the hull "Is this a Woods catamaran?" A long boat design chat and meal followed.

A quick update. We have now sailed the Transit about 300 miles. It is proving a very comfortable and fast boat. Our best sail to date was sailing to windward at 9.5 knots in 28 knots apparent wind under full sail and overtaking a motoring monohull. HE was heeling more than we were and he had no sails up! More to come in the weeks ahead!

December 2010

The shuttle launch we had hoped to see (again) was delayed again until at least February, so it was good we didn't wait for it. We sailed south down the Indian River to Stuart Fl where we are currently waiting for good weather to cross to the Bahamas. The sailing itself was fast (up to 11 knots), very fast given the narrow waterway, but we tried to avoid sailing when it was cold. Most people think of Florida as an ideal warm winters destination and don't realise it can often be very cold. One day we had to scrape ice off the decks before raising sail, something you don't expect in Florida.

I wrote earlier about the Strike 16 that had just started being built in the UK. Incredibly it is now almost finished after just a few weeks.

I had another email from Andrew Slow, the first Saturn builder, who sails in British Columbia

"Went round Hornby Island in two and half hours last week. deep reef in main and a couple of wraps in the jib, just flying but very comfortable. OK, it was a little wet going to windward at 10kts but dry going downwind at 15kts. I'm liking her more and more." Andrew

Rajen launched his Romany in India on December 25th and wrote "Yesterday, we made a maiden voyage on Romany-Golden Cat from the boat yard to her home town 20 miles away. Initially we motored as there was no wind through a winding shallow river for 8 miles. By mid afternoon the sea breeze picked up to about force 3. We sailed at 7 kts average sog for 15 nm dist and touched max sog 9 kts.

She sailed beautifully - far better than my expectation. We could prepare a hot lunch and eat it as well while sailing, which would have been impossible on a mono hull. She sailed about 2 inches above water line with 5 people onboard. Finally I'm very satisfied and happy man with your design and our boat builder's construction."

On December 28th Andrew Slow wrote again from British Columbia (where of course it was mid winter) to say:

"I've been sailing quite a bit though and like the boat more and more as I get to know her. The day after Boxing Day I took my kids and their partners out for a windy sail in relatively flat water. With a reef in and a few rolls in the jib I guess we got up to 17kts or more very easily going to windward with no fuss at all. They were very impressed and said they could water ski behind if they had the nerve and a very thick wet suit."

Review of 2012

Boats mentioned: Skoota 28, Pixie, Mirage, Saturn, Strike 15, Strike 16, Strike 18, Strider, Eclipse

January/February 2012

We spent much of January snowed in. But at least it gave me a chance to get on with the drawing of the Vardo and Skoota 28 and 36

In February we drove to Lake Havasu Az, USA, home to the old London Bridge, and the HPCC, with our Strike 18 in tow. A 2820 mile round trip!

You can see more here <http://www.sailhavas.com> Nearly 200 boats made the trip into the desert, along with over 350 people. I gave a seminar "Multihull Sailors Have More Fun!" which you can see on my website.

We had a great time, staying in a "Room with a View". And it only rained twice! Actually rain was a surprise, as was the cold wind. Average yearly rainfall is 35mm (1 1/2in). We have been sailing our Strike in Canada for three years, yet this was the first time we ever had to reef.

We took three youtube videos taken during the meeting. In the first you can see how far we were ahead of the second boat in the Long Distance race. We led from start to finish and sailed though the fleet again on the run to the finish while the rest were still beating up to the turning mark. No real surprise there though, most of the boats were small monohulls. But it is always nice to prove that multihulls can sail to windward

There were several Windrider trimarans at the event, one is a 17ft design, so similar in size and concept to the Strike. Only the Strike has much more room in the main hull (it can seat 6)

The last video was taken from our hotel balcony, you can see how small the area was that I was sailing in. Obviously the wind blowing round the hotel made for very flukey sailing conditions. You can see our new furling genoa, approx 8sqm (80sqft) which adds significantly to windward speed as it is nearly twice the size of our old Tornado jib, and it is 40 years newer.

March/April 2012

We have decided to have a Skoota 28 powercat built for our own use in the Pacific North West. It is being professionally built in Sequim, Wa USA

We spent a month touring the UK, primarily England and Wales, however we did drive north of Hadrian's Wall so we would have been in Scotland in Roman times.

Apart from being tourists I was also viewing customers boats.

The first was the "Panama Mirage" currently on a mooring in Poole Harbour. Unfortunately

the seagulls had made a real mess of the decks over the winter, but I was impressed with the large covered cockpit complete with outside galley/bar and steering console. The boat certainly didn't give any impression of being a singlehanded transatlantic veteran.

Then it was on to the Cotswolds, right in the middle of England and about as far from the sea as is possible. In a cowshed I found John's Eclipse, being beautifully built, although it was hard to see how he was going to get it out of the farm, never mind to the sea.

In the NE was Martin's Strike 16 which you will remember is being built outside (his build was stopped by snow last year). Almost ready for launching, he is using his 5 year old Pixie as outriggers. He epoxied 65mm aluminium stub beams into the hulls and then used a separate outer tube sleeved over the stubs so he can still use the Pixie as a beach cat. A great idea. Martin plans to sail his Strike on a local reservoir

We stayed in the Lake District for several days and while there I sailed on Noit Volmaat, my old Strider Turbo that we used to win the 1987 Micromultihull UK and European Championships. I hadn't sailed it since selling it 25 years ago. Last year it was completely refurbished by International Paints and looks stunning

The day after our sail the weather changed, and from 20deg (70F) temperature snow fell and the wind blew, and many of the roads we had driven over a few days earlier were closed because of snow.

Earlier on our trip we'd gone punting along the "backs" at Cambridge and motor boated on the Norfolk Broads, so quite a mix of boating experiences. Unfortunately my planned sail on a Banshee was aborted due to a complete lack of wind.

We were travelling in a campervan (RV) which had an interior smaller than the Skoota 28, so it was a very useful test of how we could cope with the space limitation. Very well as it turned out, even when my sister came to stay for a week we had plenty of room. Bodes well for the Skoota 28

1980 miles driving, not as far as the Havasu trip, but even so, it cost a lot more in fuel, I'd grown too used to the very cheap fuel in the USA, so spending GBP100 (USD150) to fill the tank was a shock. Especially as 300 miles later we had to do it again.

Then it was back to Millbrook, the Multihull Centre, and some work before flying back to the USA

May 2012

Josh took our first Skoota 28 hull out of his shed in Sequim, Washington, USA, in mid May. The hull is very light, the 6 men are carrying it easily. The outer stem has yet to be fitted and the transom still has to be trimmed back (and the temporary frame removed). And sanding, filling and painting of course! The second hull should be finished by early July. Then the central cabin will be made so hopefully the boat can be assembled while it is still good weather. Only then will it all be painted. More photos are on the Skoota powercats page

We are very pleased with the quality of Josh's work. If you would like him to build your own wood boat please email me and I will pass on your request.

June 2012

We moved back to Canada for the summer May 1st and spent a few days refitting the Strike and launching it. The first event in the BCMS calendar was on Pender Island, the next island to us. We raced our Strike in a light, but slowly building wind. The normal triangular course was enlivened by having to do a loop round an anchored ship.

We were, of course, by far the smallest boat. Even so after an hour racing we went round the lee mark just ahead of a Crowther 40 trimaran. They beat us home though. Still we had a good sail which is the main thing. And the rain held off, just, although Jetty was prepared wearing full oilskins and carrying an umbrella.

The Swiftsure Race, held over the last weekend in May is the biggest offshore race in the Pacific North West. Long time readers will recall that I raced on Bad Kitty a few years ago when we were first to finish. This year I was asked to helm Flying Kiwi, a 35ft Banks catamaran, in the inshore race. Flying Kiwi is a 30 year old boat, sailed on a budget. The genoa is original and the only dacron sail in the fleet, so usually it finishes near the back.

The start was postponed for 30 minutes due to lack of wind. When we did eventually start the wind slowly picked up to maybe 5 knots true. We had a 10 mile beat (actually we laid it on one tack, the tide helped) and rounded just behind the consistently best sailed boat in the PNW, "Geneva" a F24.

On the run downwind we passed Geneva, but we only had a small symmetrical spinnaker and an even smaller asymmetric, so we were overtaken, temporarily, by a much modified Viva 27 racing catamaran. However we kept the F31, F27's at bay.

You'll all groan, but I'll write it anyway. By sheer fluke I managed to orcastrate some killer whales to surface just next to the boat. See my youtube channel for the video. I just wish Tim had used his phone to upload the video as then it would have been a real podcast. Told you you'd groan!

We then had to wait for a couple of impatient ships to barge past us before we could start the close reach in a building wind to the finish. You all know that sailing is often hours of nothing much going on and then it all happens in a rush. That's what it was like on the reach home....

"Sheet in, more downhaul, tighten the foot, what's the mastbend like?" "Quick - more on the runner, where's the Viva cat? "behind us", how deep is it lan?", "only 12ft", "what's that kelp ahead? how fast are we going, "18 knots", "I can't release the mainsheet, dump the traveller!!!!" "No, I can't luff because of the rocks, what do you mean the furlers jammed!!! where's that kelp now?, s**t the Viva's overtaken us."

And so on to the finish.

July 2012

We have just been day sailing our Strike 18 and working on new designs. In particular on the new Strike 15, which is currently being built. Cutting out the panels, gluing on the framing, making and fitting the daggerboard case took about 25 hours. Then the assembly of all the parts ready to glass took 12 minutes. I know the exact time as you can see a 12 minute video of the assembly of the main hull. For once the video has sound, so turn the speakers up, and note it is all one shot, no editing even when I drop the screws.

In a couple of weeks I will be away for the weekend and camping on board our Strike 18, so we made a boom tent. It works well and keeps the cockpit dry, even in a recent severe thunderstorm. It hooks down at each beam box and to the centre of the outriggers.

Two Strike 16's have recently been launched. Sailing photos will, I hope, be coming soon.

One owner reported "I finally got my Strike 16 into the water last week. In summary, I expected it to not feel very nimble in comparison to the original SeaSpray cat, but it actually maneuvers quite nicely. I don't have the jib cleats yet so when sailing alone I can't use the jib but it still tacks which surprised me. Perhaps not super fast. My top speed this weekend was 8.4 mph, but I expect I will get higher with more consistent winds later this year. It works well for my family." Note: this Strike is sailed on a mountain lake at 7000ft where the air pressure, and thus driving force, is less than at sea level.

I posted a number of Strike 18 videos on my Youtube channel. Not many boats, even monohulls (try it if you own one) can be sailed round and round in circles with the rudder held down. So the video of our Strike 18 doing donuts may surprise some. I was able to do the same thing with the jib rolled away. OK it was slower, but it still went round and round. Yet if you check back on my earlier Strike 18 videos you will see the boat sailing "hands off" on it's first ever sail. And in a later video sailing at 8 knots in 5 knots of wind with the tiller balanced on my thumb. Not all multihulls are unresponsive or unmanouverable!

The second Skoota 28 hull came out of its shed a couple of weeks ago. Only 4 men to carry it this time. Currently the decks are being fitted, photos will be posted in next months report.

Cameron has been working on the Strike 15. After a total of 57 hours the cockpit was finished and the foredeck ready to fit. Main hull is almost complete!

August 2012

In early August I crewed on a F24 in a local regatta. I sailed about 25 miles to the regatta on our Strike 18 and lived on board for 4 days under the cockpit tent.

It was comfortable and roomy, but the tent did little to dampen the party music from the boat next door! We had a fun time in very hot, sunny weather and came third overall

September 2012

This was a busy month. It started with two regattas on Saturna. Our Strike 18 came second

overall in the multihull regatta, while Tucanu, our old Merlin, won the most prizes in the Saturna Island regatta

We then packed up the Strike 18, the part built Strike 15 and our house for the winter and drove to Port Townsend, Wa, USA to the Wooden Boat Festival. With no boat to exhibit this year, Jetti and I were volunteers. Somehow Jetti ended up running the bar while I was on garbage detail. Not sure how that one worked out!

On day I saw a Pixie on the beach. Built by Sean and Robert, with only a little adult help, it looked very good!

Next year we plan to exhibit both the Strike 15 and the Skoota 28. With no boat of our own to sail I had to crew for others. First in a local race on a Thunderbird 26. We finished second, even though it was the first time in 15 years that I had worked the foredeck on a monohull. Then a day cruise in a Caledonia yawl (open decked 18ft) and a junk rigged 18ft Alacrity, built in the UK in 1965.

I thought the yawl was a poor windward performer until I sailed the Alacrity! This was the first time I'd ever sailed a junk rigged boat. I knew it wouldn't sail well, but I was very disappointed to find that it hardly went to windward at all. And I was equally surprised by the number of lines that dropped into the cockpit on every tack and gybe. Very dangerous I thought and I can see no reason for fitting such a rig on any boat.

Each week we'd go over to Sequim to check on the Skoota 28 progress. Josh is doing a superb job. A "queen size" double bed, large galley with double sink and fridge plus a big shower compartment. We are still looking at an early 2013 launch

October 2012

In early October I flew to Lake Eufaula, Oklahoma right in the middle of the USA to help run Sail OK, a few days of small boat sailing, racing, demonstrating and lectures. The first day was perfect sailing weather, but then not one but two cold fronts passed over us. The temperature dropped from a pleasant 26C (85F) to a less pleasant 12C (55F), then 8C(45F), then 4C(37F). And you can guess which was the day I demonstrated the capsized recovery tests!

So as a result there wasn't much sailing and we presenters had to work hard to think of things 80-100 people could do at a sailing meeting that didn't involve sailing

However the highlight for me was to sail a home builders Strike 18, the first I'd seen. This was fitted with Prindle 16 outriggers and rig. Despite three heavy men and two boys on board it sailed as fast as a Windrider 17

The owner started assembling his Strike about noon, launched before 1pm, took me and several other interested people out on sailing trips, took the boat ashore, packed it up and left to drive home again at 4pm. If nothing else it showed the Strike was a genuine trailable daysailer.

After the meeting I flew to the UK for work and meetings. But I did find time to sail. Twice in Lasers (once in a local race, which I won despite not having raced a Laser for nearly 15 years), once in a Walker Bay 10, and also in a 24ft monohull and a 43ft catamaran. So in six weeks I sailed ten different boats in five locations, and three countries yet not one boat was mine!

As I always say, designers should sail as much as possible in a variety of boats to get a wide range of experiences, which they can use when designing new and better boats

Review of 2013

January/February 2013

As always the winter is a time for design work so I have been busy finishing off the Vardo plans - three now building - and the Skoota 28 and Strike 15 - twelve now building.

We have been going over to Sequim every week to admire Josh's workmanship on our own Skoota 28. I must say I really like to watch craftsmen at work. A pity I cannot afford to employ them full time. As always the pace is slower than we had hoped, but that's normal, so no real surprise. By the end of January the structural work had been done, "just" sanding/painting and fitting deck gear left to do.

One Friday in late January we left Port Townsend and drove south to San Francisco. On the way south I thought "I wonder if there is any multihull sailing this weekend?" I checked online and found that indeed there was, in fact the years biggest race in the Bay area was to be held the following day. The 2-handed Three Bridge Fiasco already had over 350 entries, including 35 multihulls. Read more on my website.

While in the UK I heard from Josh and learnt that the whole boat has now been primed and the hull bottoms have four layers of Coppercoat. So launching is imminent! (The anchor locker is being made and painted separately)

I also received the following email from Rajen Shah of India who had his Romany professionally built a couple of years ago

"Golden Cat (Romany) and I were on front page of Times of India, Amdavad edition for state of Gujarat - a major English newspaper. We were also in news in local papers all on front pages. This was a first sailing voyage to Lakshadweep from Gujarat. There may be a couple from Mumbai, but all were on larger imported production yachts with professional crew on board. On our Golden Cat I was the only one RYA qualified, rest were all trained by me.

This was big and unheard of news in this part of the world. The Romany superb design and my builder quality work has helped me to complete my dream. We sailed at least for two days in 23 kts wind with 2 reefs. Romany sailed smoothly in a rough sea of 1.5 to 2 meter waves. We also had about 18 kts wind while crossing my longest offshore passage of 150 nm two ways.

Both time the sea was fully built with tall waves, most inter island Lakshadweep ships

cancelled their trips but we sailed without problem - in fact the wind helped us to cross faster. We didn't see a single sailing yacht during our 40 days voyage". Regards, Rajen

I sold a set of Vardo plans to the Philippines on January 9th. On Feb 23rd I got a photo showing the first hull all set up, stringers faired and ready to plank. Fast work! Also from the Philippines

"My SKOOTA 24 was launched last Saturday Feb 16, 2013. It is powered with a Yamaha 50 hp 2 stroke using a 11-3/4" x 10" pitch propeller which gave it 5000 rpm at WOT and a top speed of 28 kilometers per hour. It will probably go faster as the boat was heavily loaded with the sea trial crew of 8 adults"

April 2013

We are very pleased with our Skoota 28. Comfortable, fast and economic. Even at 16 knots we use less than 3 gal an hour with our twin 20hp outboards. I was amused recently to see an advert for a similar powercat that said "Worlds most efficient! 4.9gph at 16 knots"

Recently we motored from Port Townsend, Wa where the boat was launched to Sidney, BC via a "drive past" of Friday Harbor. A distance of 49.3 miles. We left 8.30 am, arrived 1.45pm, and used 7 gallons of fuel. No photos as it poured with rain all day. The Skoota was very heavy as not only did we have all the tools and spare epoxy/glass etc aboard, but also I had the outriggers and complete rig for my new Strike 15. Plus lots of gear/clothes for 5 months in Canada.

Meantime other builders have also been active. I was recently sent a photo of a Saturn building in Florida. Getting close to finishing! Also in Florida, Jeff is making good progress on his Vardo, despite the cramped working conditions. He has now reached the assembly stage, you can see more on his detailed blog. <http://sailingcatamarans.blogspot.ca/>

So we now have a boat to motor, and the sailing season is on us, so our Strike 18 will be going back in the water shortly. However my next major project is to finish off my Strike 15. I now have the complete rig and foils, the outrigger panels are cut out, so as soon as the rain stops we will be back at work and hope to launch in May/June

May 2013

Summer arrived in British Columbia on May 1st. No rain, no clouds, temperature in the high 60's - mid 70's. Definitely T shirts and shorts weather. So we took off for the weekend in our Skoota 28. We motored up through the Gulf Islands about 20 miles to one of our favourite spots, Wallace Island, for the night. The small harbour is well protected, but it means we have to "med moor" - ie take a stern line to the shore while anchoring from the bow. That's a bit tricky with no dinghy and a rocky shoreline, but we managed it.

The newly fitted convertible bed works really well. We had a night "in" and watched movies on the laptop. Next morning we were off at 7.30am to catch the tidal gate at Porlier Pass. At its peak the tide runs through the pass at 9 knots so getting slack water is essential. From there it was a 20 mile crossing of the Strait of Georgia to Vancouver. Unfortunately we had

to "bash to windward", yes you do that even in motor boats, for about 10 miles before we began to get into the lee of the Whistler mountains. One reason why Jetty stayed below and in her pajamas until we got to Vancouver.

Despite the wind we still tied up at the free dock at Granville Island at 11am. Granville Island is a big market with fresh produce, restaurants and buskers. So something like London's Covent Garden but by the water.

Lots of people came by, including a very experienced cruising couple who were interested in building their own Skoota. They have visited us several times but after trialing our Skoota and spending time on board they decided to build a Skoota 36 as a liveaboard cruiser in the PNW.

We wanted to get back to Saturna before dark so left at 2.30pm. 38 miles later at 5.50pm we tied up to our dock and were at home by 6.30pm. A good weekend, lets hope for more like that one.

We are still experimenting with speed/fuel economy. The windward bash obviously didn't help, but the run back was mainly in flat water. On our return we averaged 11 knots and used 5gals of fuel. 7mpg is pretty good for a motorboat where many only do 1-2mpg.

June 2013

It's been a busy few weeks, currently we are both working 12 hour days, yet not much seems to have been finished. We are still working on the Strike 15 and finishing off the last few jobs on the Skoota 28. But then, boats are never finished.

In part it was the normal wet spring weather that slowed us down. Hopefully that will change now that summer is here. It's been very frustrating at times, obviously the Skoota work is very weather dependent as the boat is in the water, while the Strike 15 has got to the final assembly stage and really needs to be outside.

We have the Skoota booked into the Vancouver Wooden Boatshow August 22-25 and the Port Townsend Wooden Boat Festival Sept 6-9. The PT show will be a busy time as we will possibly also have the Strike 15 on display and I will be giving a couple of one hour talks. One on the Saturday and another on the Sunday, different subjects, but, of course, both multihull related. I hope to see some friendly faces in the audience

After the PT festival we will be living on board and cruising our Skoota 28 in the US San Juan islands. Then we fly to Greece to join my family for a two week charter on a Athena 38 catamaran. It will be the first time I have ever chartered a boat, and the first time sailing a Fountaine Pajot. So an interesting trip in store.

I recently heard from John that he had launched his Sango. He wrote " In the two weeks we put our Sango in the water, motored a lot, put the mast up, took delivery on new sails, figured out how to attach them, added much in the way of hardware, and had one very low wind trial. Yesterday, with the local sailing guru aboard, we did 12.5 knots in 12 to 15 knots of wind. The rig was way too loose, the sails weren't all the way up, no outhaul... terribly

shaped sails: and this boat was flying! And so far it handles like a dream. The local guru was amazed! Thanks Richard for a great design."

Sept 2013

The last few weeks have been particularly busy. Not only am I trying to sail the newly launched Strike 15 as much as possible, but also we had two boat shows to attend (Vancouver and Port Townsend WBF). The former was a small affair, even so we were very pleased when our Skoota won the "Most Interesting Boat" prize.

The Port Townsend Festival is huge with over 300 boats on display and lots of talks and demonstrations. Apart from having the Skoota on display I also gave two, hour long, presentations.

One was a variation of the "Multihull Sailors Have More fun" talk that I gave at the HPCC last year and which you can read on my website. The HPCC talk was naturally aimed at small trailable boats, while the WBF talk featured bigger boats. Even so there seems little point in uploading both versions.

The Festival culminates with a "sail by" of most of the boats. We took the builders family out to see the show. With 10 people on board (over 1/2T in weight) our top speed was only 12 knots, however "a good time was had by all"

Although we are now living on our Skoota and will do so until early October we aren't cruising the PNW as much as we want to. That's because the weather has basically been horrible since the WBF. Either foggy, very wet or thundery all coupled with no wind. A complete contrast to last year when we suffered from 49 continuous days without rain. So we are tucked into a marina and working away on computers (me) and sewing machine (Jetti)

Our winter plans have now changed slightly. We are still going to Greece in October to charter a catamaran with my extended family. Then in November I do "business stuff" in the UK. Then we fly to the Bahamas again to sail on the Transit "Crystal". The same boat we sailed south a couple of years ago. However it has now been sold, so we are only going for a couple of weeks to show the new owner how to sail it.

Four Vardos have been sold, with two now well under way, one in the US, one in the Philippines. Both are right side up and being decked.

A slightly modified Skoota 36 is being built in ply in Vancouver, Canada. It will be a live aboard boat for a very experienced cruising couple, it is a MUCH bigger boat than the Skoota 28!!

December 2013

Others have also been busy building and sailing. A home built Gypsy has just launched in New Zealand, it's owner reported "Well I am on the water after 18 months. Mast is stepped, but I am still waiting for the sails.

It sat high on its lines. I will need to add a touch of weight to the stern just to make it right but I will wait until we have all our stuff on before I do that. It motored very well the 12 nautical miles back to its mooring from the lift-in point. Using an old 9.9 Yamaha into a 3/4m chop and 15-20 kn wind and against tide Gypsy cruised 5.7-6.2 Once it flattened out we were 6.8 – 7.2 measured on GPS."

A Swiss Flica 34 was recently seen in the Canaries prior to crossing the Atlantic, while another has just been relaunched in Berlin. Nice to see them both floating high on their marks. So many multihulls are overweight.

I don't often get news from my larger home built boats, but a Nimbus, built in the UK, was seen in the Caribbean. In June 2006 she left England with her husband and wife crew and sailed to the Mediterranean via the coasts of France, northern Spain and Portugal. Her owners lived aboard for two years in Spain, the Balearic Islands and Morocco before crossing the Atlantic Ocean via Tenerife in the Canary Islands to Tobago at the beginning of 2009.

Meanwhile the owner of a modified production version, the Ocean Spirit 40 from S Africa reports "14 years old and still looking good", while a Sagitta is currently mid Atlantic on a singlehanded crossing to the Caribbean.

Builders have also been working hard. Dinis is getting on well with his Skoota 36 build, currently preparing to plank the hulls (he is building the two hulls and bridgedeck in one piece)

When in Florida I had a chance to look at a Vardo being built in an amazing small, low headroom, garage in the middle of a residential area. The neighbours must have had a shock when they saw the first hull appear on the front lawn! It has bigger hulls and saloon than the 32ft Eclipse, while the side decks are much wider, making access forward easier. So just as I had planned. Like builder Jeff I cannot wait to see how it sails.

Rajan sent me a long article about cruising the length of the west coast of India in his Romany to the Lakshadweep islands off SW India. It really showed how difficult it is to have a cruising boat in developing countries that don't even understand the concept of recreational sailing, never mind the lack of facilities like marinas, or even the "freedom of the seas". And he had an Indian flagged boat, crewed by Indians, so wasn't a foreign vessel.

Coming from a frugal sailing background as I do I am continually amazed by how much fuel powerboaters expect to use.

I read recently the press release of a production 28' powercat that proudly claimed it does 3.5mpg and then I saw this headline in a magazine "If a 28 foot power boat, capable of cruising at 12knots while getting 2.6 miles per gallon is of interest, read on". The designers won three innovation awards for this "gas guzzler". For they say "This level of fuel economy is unmatched in the world! ... best ever".

Not so sure about that! The Skoota 28 is half the weight and cruises at 12 knots at least 5mpg. Indeed we are still using the 3gal tanks that came with the outboards sometime this

winter I will fit our "big" - 16gal - tanks.

Skoota is also wider, so has less wave interference, and you can get under the bridgedeck in a dinghy, whereas most powercats have very low bridgedecks which are often carried well forward. The resulting slamming when underway must be frightful. Skoota's cockpit is bigger, as is the shower compartment. Mind you we don't have a coffin, sorry, single berth for a guest.

The modern sailing catamarans are not much better. The Lagoon 39 has huge hulls and just cannot sail well and why is it twice the weight of the Transit 38?

Especially when it has an almost identical interior layout (except it's galley up not down) and has the same sized engines and tank capacity. I doubt if it will ever reach flat water speeds in the mid teens as the Transit does easily. But nevertheless I know it will be a commercial success

My cruising blog concentrated on the sailing we did in Greece, so now I have time to write about the problems we had with Fountaine Pajot Athena 38. Although the deck layout and cockpit worked well the boat didn't sail very well - 130deg between tacks in 15 knots wind was typical.

The interior was very uncomfortable and with a galley up there was a lot of wasted space in the hulls - cheap to build though. And of course we only had one bag each and tried to eat ashore whenever possible. So we didn't need the dedicated storage space that cruisers need.

Midway through the charter I sent an email to the agents listing 21 things wrong with the boat itself (not with the design). Major problems were a blown out headsail, no legal navigation lights, old and thus always flat batteries (we couldn't use the fridge and once had to jumpstart an engine) and most scary, a very dangerous propane system (the bottle was in an unvented stern locker, just regular rubber hose, and with warps and fenders thrown on top) Moral: although it will be cheap, don't charter an old boat at the end of the season.

Review of 2014

The second Vardo was launched in early June in St Augustine. I visited this boat in December and was very impressed with the boat and builder. As always, launching was apparently an "interesting" time, but it made it unscathed and sits nice and high on its marks.

After his first couple of sails he wrote "Sunday was the annual St Augustine Father's Day race. It was a beautiful day for sailing and the first time I've been fully out the inlet onto the ocean since I've lived in St Augustine. We were not actually entered in the race, but started about 1 min after the cruising fleet. Some of those boats had bad starts so were not very far ahead when we started.

I have no GPS at present or knot meter so was rather unsure of how we'd match up. It was quite odd to be literally wobbling along between vertical and maybe a few degrees heel in

the light winds of around 6-8 knots to windward and overtaking boats.

I kept feeling like "we'd really have something" with another 5 knots of wind. Of course my current mainsail is about 70 sq feet smaller than drawn and the jib roughly 50 sq ft.

But long story short, we lost a bit on the top 2/3 of the beat on right hand shift but rounded the windward mark just behind two 38' monohulls that had made good starts. Mind you, all were cruising boats like the Vardo, but ones that race regularly.

On the beam reach we immediately passed the Hunter 386 and closed with the Hinckley at the gybe mark. The wind strengthened on the final leg which was almost a run under jib and mains and we had gained almost 2 minutes on the Hinckley on the final leg.

Overall, I was quite happy with how we matched up especially the ability to hold lanes upwind in the light winds. I would imagine in a strong breeze we would have been relatively much faster upwind." He later said he was fitting a proper sized mainsail and genoa, which will certainly improve performance.

We launched our 10ft Duo dinghy in April, but only had time for a short row before I left for the UK. Since my return we have been busy sorting out the rig and the inflatable collar. Even a small boat takes time to sort out, but we are getting there. Plans are now available and as I write this 10 sets have been sold.

When we return to the USA we will be fitting a custom made inflatable collar instead of the beach rollers we are currently using. Although expensive they will look better and mean we can keep the rollers for their real job on the Strike 15.

Not a new launching (I sailed this Wizard a few years ago in S California) but a new owner, who reported "Richard, thanks for such a fun design! Don't let anybody say a Wizard is slow - Saturday sailing in Southern California out of Marina del Rey, heading up the coast past Santa Monica. Wind 12-15 (whitecaps just starting to form) Upwind @ 10 kts, downwind with masthead spinnaker @ 16 kts!"

Strike 16 Comments from a Florida builder "Mr. Woods' plans are very easy to follow and it's possible to build this boat in a side or backyard.

What do I like about this boat? I like having the ability to just buy a derelict Prindle catamaran, half buried in the beach, for next to nothing, then being able to just cut the amas in half and use all the equipment, including the rudder, for this new trimaran.

The ride on this boat is very, very dry. The main reason I built this trimaran was to take my wife out, as she does not like the wet ride of my proa, or the small catamaran I have.

The ride is fairly good. As with most trapezoidal designs, there is some slamming when the weather picks up and the waves get bigger and you are going upwind. On the plus side, the boat surfs very nicely. There is plenty of space for a weekend gear and provisions, and you could sleep inside of the boat if needed.

I have an outboard cradle, but haven't used it yet ... I do not have to as just paddling is very

easy. I think the best days on this boat are when we can take a bunch of people on board and it still sails decently. I have 3 kids, so although a little bit cramped, we have sailed with 5 people at a very decent speed.

Being a trailerable boat really opens up possibilities to explore all over Florida, on both coasts, and through all the Florida key chains and the Everglades Park."

A report from a French Strike 15 builder (a slightly modified boat)

"Newly launched Strike 15 Citronette had its first testsail on 06 and 07 May. She was very well balanced, light and responsive, a real pleasure to helm. The first day with very light wind she sailed consistently at 7 kt . The second day with more wind, she sailed consistently at 9 to 10 average speed, with maximum 10 s average speed of 11.5 kt (no anemometer record in the close vicinity, but my estimate is around 9 kt average wind).

My feeling to windward was very positive, with average speed comparable to A class cat. On a beam reach I had the feeling of a drag hump to go over 11 kt, compared to my A cat, but it is only a feeling as I had no opponents. The sailing school manager of the club, on the water, reported me he was puzzled by the boat speed with not much wind. Congratulations Richard, Strike 15 is a good vintage!"

"Just an up date on our Vardo Alona Blue, she is 99% finished and we sail her at least once a week. We have been doing some Island hopping and sunsets and she sails great! I am so happy with her performance and handling. I have 6ft head room and a beautiful Cat..... I could not be happier.....!

As you know I stretched her to 36 feet and to compensate I had the jib cut to 140%, she is very balanced on all points of sail. We will continue to finish the details that we want then sail the southern island of the Philippines.

You must feel good that you have helped to create yacht deigns to give so many people their dreams to live....."