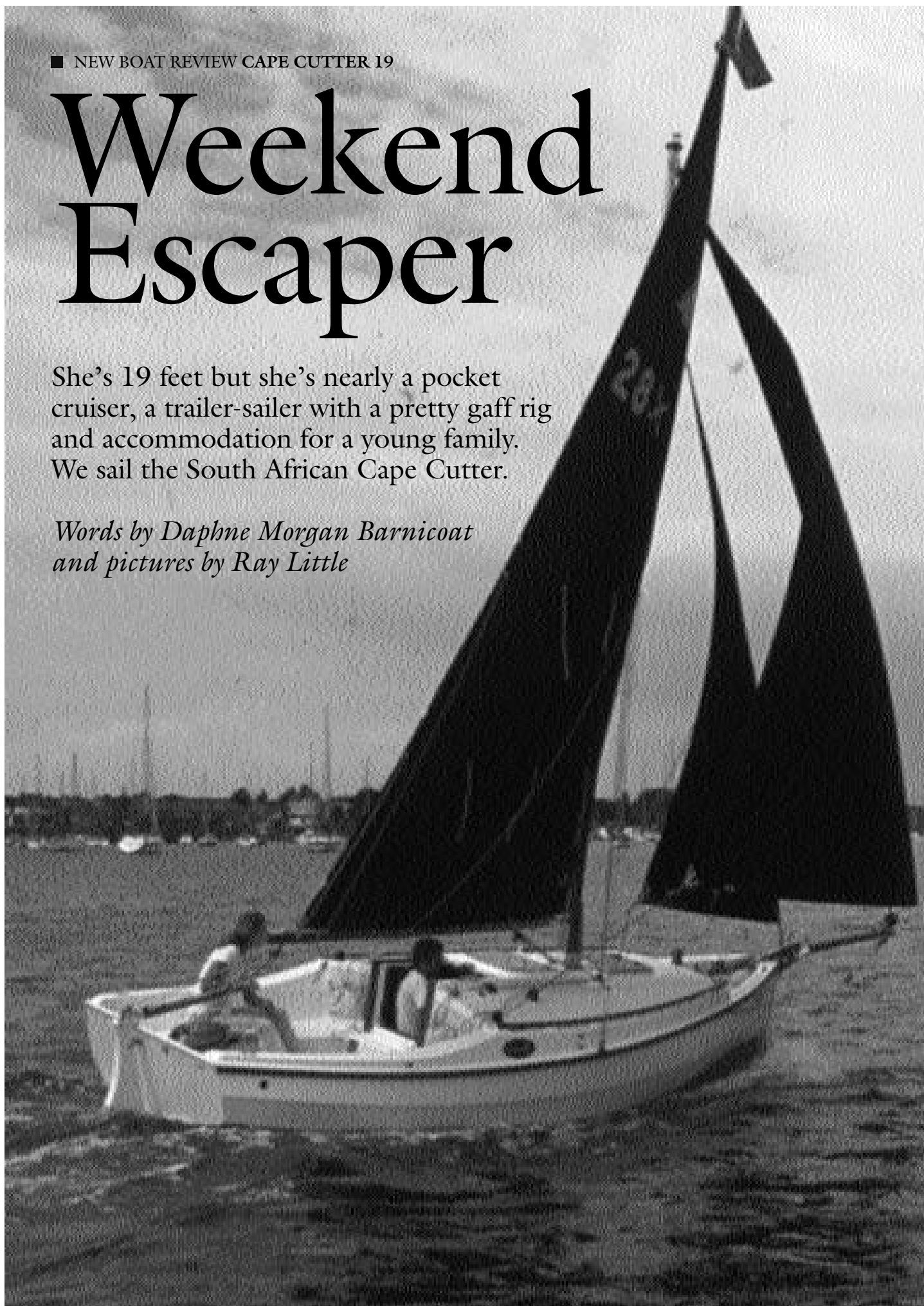


■ NEW BOAT REVIEW CAPE CUTTER 19

Weekend Escaper

She's 19 feet but she's nearly a pocket cruiser, a trailer-sailer with a pretty gaff rig and accommodation for a young family. We sail the South African Cape Cutter.

*Words by Daphne Morgan Barnicoat
and pictures by Ray Little*





Quest shows her straight transom as we reach out of Portsmouth

South African designer Dudley Dix is known for designing high performance, yet uncomplicated, yachts in a range of anything between 8ft to 80ft. Cape Cutter 19 *Quest* is one of these, and when I first saw her lying at Haslar Marina she certainly stood out from the vast array of other white plastic boats moored there.

The concept for the Cape Cutter 19 was initiated by Nick and Lindsay Voorhoeve. They had been running a charter business in the Caribbean aboard a Dix-designed Shearwater 39 (a traditional-looking GRP gaff-rigged schooner with a modern under-body) when they were taken with the idea to produce a trailer-sailer. Selling the charter business they approached Dix with a brief: design a boat with a traditional workboat image, shallow draft and high performance. Also, the boat should be capable of fitting into a 20ft (6m) shipping container in order for the company to tap in to the international markets.

Following the brief, Dix arrived at the Cape Cutter 19 which came off the drawing board with a plumb bow and straight transom to maximise waterline length and therefore hull speed – under sail she punches to windward with ease and her traditional full bow resists burying. To complete the traditional picture she comes with bowsprit, gaff mainsail and a cutter rig, which can be put together or dismantled, with a few tools, in around 15 minutes.

Nick's concept stemmed from the belief that while many sailors want to enjoy boats with classic lines, not everyone can afford the time or expense of maintaining a timber classic. With 40 Cape Cutter 19s afloat already and 17 more on order, after only two years in business, the boat is certainly appealing to many people.



The Cape Cutter 19 at home in South Africa

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Under motor

In a bid to catch a glimmer of sun through the otherwise forboding Solent sky, we quickly got aboard *Quest* and were soon making for open water. With the outboard (not included in the package price) fired up straight away, Nick handed the tiller over to me to leave the Haslar pontoon. In common with many outboard powered sailing boats, the engine is fixed and to steer under motor, one uses the tiller.

In a boat of this size an engine is always going to be intrusive and while acknowledging that iron topsails are a necessary part of boating life, it would be an improvement if this one was seen and heard a little less. The engine's arrangement on the Cape Cutter is a let-down, sitting in the cockpit to steer under motor is like sitting on a washing machine doing a spin cycle. To compound the problem, the motor sits high at the aft of the cockpit and would benefit greatly from being tucked into some sort of casing.

Despite these gripes, few people would want to be bobbing about in the Solent shipping channel without the ability to fire up the donk and get to safety quickly, so these issues must be

taken in context. Under engine the Cape Cutter shifts impressively, the 5hp four stroke Mariner that she was fitted with for the test day, gave us about 5knots. Having a 4ft (1.22m) centre-plate rather than the long keel that perhaps her lines might hint at, means that *Quest* has a tight turning circle, making her very manoeuvrable under engine. But, Nick was keen to point out that with the centreboard raised she becomes a tricky boat to handle under motor.

As many modern outboards have a 12Volt output socket for charging batteries, Cape Cutter provide the conduiting to allow cables to be run up the mast for powering electric navigation lights.

Under sail

Nick made short work of hoisting the sails, the main's gaff is high peaked so there is no topsail to consider, and things are further simplified because the jam cleats for the throat and peak halyards are placed side by side, on the coach roof next to the cockpit, allowing them to be hoisted simultaneously.

Tensioning the main is easy with the Lewmar winch fitted just abaft the jam cleats. Locked off at the jam cleats, both halyards are led into the cockpit.

Those sailors used to working boats might be surprised to find that all of this hauling and cleating is done from the safety of the cockpit, in fact the Cape Cutter 19 is designed so that there is rarely any need to leave the relative safety of the cockpit at all.

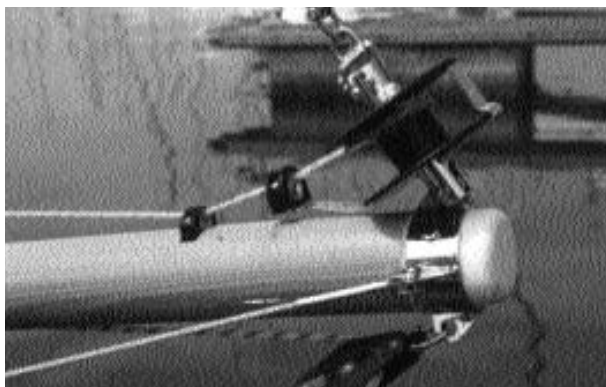
Deploying the Genoa is also straight forward, as a South African made Ronstan roller-furling system is installed at the end of the bowsprit. The furling line is eased out while sheeting in and it's set.

Even hoisting and dowsing the hanked-on staysail can be performed from the cockpit. There is a downhaul fed up inside the bronze hanks to its head, so it's a matter of hauling on the halyard while paying out the downhaul to raise it and reversing the process to lower it. If it's necessary to tie the sail down, this can be done by going below and reaching up through the forehatch – this boat is all about being user-friendly.

If it does become necessary to change headsails, the system employed means that this is not easy while underway. The process involves leaning out to the end of the bowsprit where a snap-shackle on the furler has to be released, which would be unpleasant in any kind of rough sea.



Quest is well balanced and light on the helm upwind



The roller-furling headsail makes sailing her a simple affair



She manoeuvres well under power as long as the centreboard is down!



Homeward bound: *Quest* powers along at her 5knot hull-speed

With all of *Quest's* 295sq ft (27.4m²) sail area up and a light 5-8knot breeze we reached out of Portsmouth harbour. On this point of sail, the gaff rig and Genoa came into their own in the light airs and we made around 5knots through the water. *Quest* responded quickly to the helm, in fact steering her is much like handling a big dinghy, the 5:1 advantage of the main sheet makes sheeting easy enough even for the fairer and less macho sex, though that main, with 129sqft (12m²) of area, is a powerful sail.

Quest's creator, Nick has had her out in 25 knots of wind under the staysail and triple reefed main – from his account it seems that she handled these conditions well. It's understandable why in this heavier weather Nick choses not to use the 100% Genoa. Even in the stronger gusts on the test day it was easy to get a taste for what *Quest* is really capable of, and being so close to the water makes the 5 knots hull speed feel quicker still.

However, these factors do not conspire to give an intimidating boat for first-time sailors or those new to the boat, the cockpit is deep and spacious and everything is easily to hand. Which is just as well because the Cape Cutter has no lifelines. OK she is not designed to be taken offshore in bad weather, but if something comes adrift or there is need to go forward for any reason you have to rely on handrails. At the very least this makes the boat unsuitable for children, however rigging jackstays for short harnesses would solve this problem.

For our test the Cape Cutter was rigged with a Genoa and staysail combination, which has to date been the only configuration on offer. However, Nick is contemplating offering a yankee and staysail combination as standard with the Genoa as an option, the idea being that reducing the sail area will help the boat to tack more quickly.

Down below

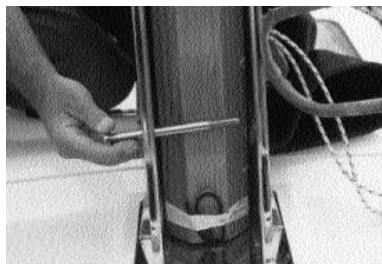
Below decks the Cape Cutter 19, is surprisingly spacious and simplicity is the essence of the layout. The forepeak is taken up with a 6ft 3in (1.92m) long V-berth under which is a removable Thereford Portapotty. This item seems well sealed so nasty smells shouldn't be much of a problem, but with no bulkhead and no privacy it's probably only ever going to be used if you're caught short. On



Un-strap the mast



Lift it into the tabernacle



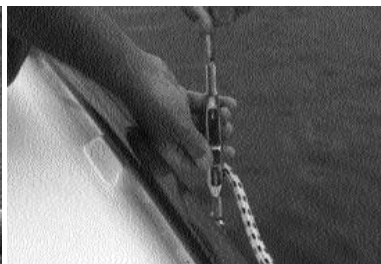
Fix the mast in place with the safety bolt



Release the halyards and shrouds



Fix the inner-forestay to hold the mast up



Then fix the midship shrouds



Lift the bowsprit up in its hinged bracket



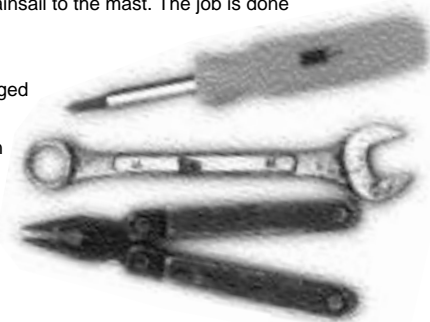
Lower it by taking up on the bobstay

How to rig a Cape Cutter 19

Raising the mast: Undo securing straps and lift the mast into the tabernacle. Fix it in place with the safety bolt, release all halyards and the shrouds from around the mast and fix the forestay on first to take the weight of the rig, then the midship shrouds. Fix the gooseneck to the tabernacle and lace the mainsail to the mast. The job is done in about 15 minutes.

Dropping the bowsprit: The bowsprit is hinged back onto the coach roof for transport or in a tight berth. Lift it up to vertical and take up on the bobstay while easing it down into position. Harden up the bobstay and belay at the cleat. All done in 5 minutes.

The only tools we used (right).



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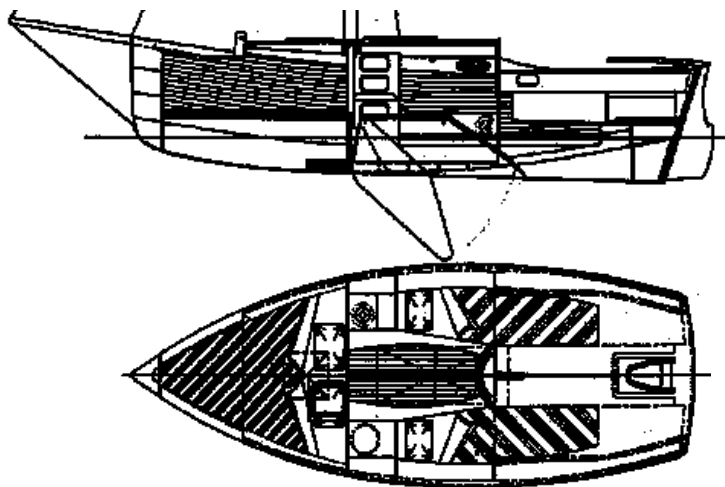
The interior is very spacious, light and airy – the 6ft V-berth dominates the bow



The companionway hinges up for headroom

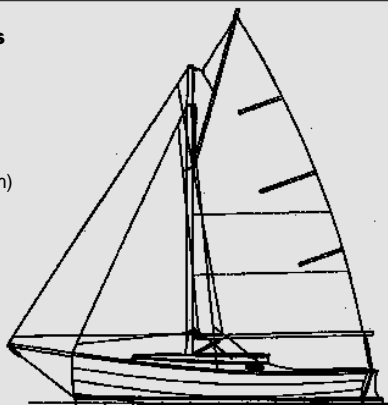


Optional extra – an eyesore in the cockpit



Cape Cutter 19 specifications

LOA: 19ft (5.8m)
 Over spars: 23ft 8in (7.2m)
 LWL: 18ft (5.5m)
 Beam: 7ft 3in (2.2m)
 Draught: up 1ft 6in (45cm) down 4ft (1.22m)
 Displacement: 2255lbs (1100Kg)
 Ballast: 882lbs (400Kg)
 Positive stability to 110 degrees
 Berths: 4
 Sail Area: 295sq ft (90m²)
 Price: £16,950



the port side, aft of the forepeak is a cupboard and sink with a tap that pumps water from a 10 litre flexi-container stowed under the forward bunk. To starboard is a unit which can take a camping-style cooker or a small navigation. Amid-ships the centre-plate casing robs any floor space between the two side bunks, which are long enough to accommodate someone six-foot-three tall (1.9m). These double as comfortable seats, but the centreplate box is crying out to have table fitted to it. The companionway hatch hinges upwards, as well as sliding, neatly giving extra headroom and daylight.

On deck

On deck, modern and traditional blend together. The glass-fibre and balsa-core deck, which joins to the hull with an over-lapping lip to reduce the risk of water getting between the laminates, is off-set by African mahogany trim and handrails. All spars are made from clear Oregon pine. The mast is hollow.

The choice of deck gear would not suit the staunch traditionalist, as it is a mixed bag of items. Some fittings are custom-made stainless steel, others are made from black plastic and there are Spinlock jamming cleats. But the deck layout is undeniably well thought out and un-cluttered.

Unlike some other trailer-sailers the Cape Cutter 19 does not take long to rig and derig – it takes about an hour from trailer to sailer, in the water. We rigged the mast and bowsprit in the space of 20 minutes (see panel). The boom's gooseneck fits onto the tabernacle, so you can leave it there, and the forestay attaches to the stem, rather than bowsprit, which is safer. Getting the boat on and off the trailer requires two people though. A medium sized car can tow her.

The Cape Cutter 19 has the clean and un-cluttered lines of a traditional boat, her rig is balanced and performs well. She is a comfortable and well thought-out weekend coastal-cruiser that can turn her hand to racing – *Quest* won the modern gaffers class in this year's Round the Island race – yet only requires minimal annual maintenance.

She will appeal to many sailors and can nurture first-time owners from the safety of her cockpit while they gain confidence and skills, but she can also show exhilarating performance for the more daring and experienced.

