

# Alluring Aloora

Victorian-bred cruiser puts headroom and performance in a small package. . . a quart in a pint pot.  
MARK ROTHFIELD reports.



**V**ICTORIAN yacht designer Ossie Whittlely was given a formidable design brief before he began drawing the lines of what is now the Aloora 720 trailer sailer.

Six yachtsmen, each with the aim of buying a finished boat, had put their heads together and produced a list of desirable features. They wanted standing headroom, a large galley, six berths and a separate shower/head compartment, and the boat had to be seaworthy and a good performer in light airs.

That's not unreasonable if the boat is 30ft (9.1m) long, but the 'committee' stipulated a length of 23ft (7m) for ease of towing and handling. Past experience had shown that no yacht, particularly one of this size, could be both floating gin palace and Grand Prix racer. . . speed or space had to be sacrificed for the other.

The assignment was sufficiently challenging to bring Whittlely out of semi-retirement and he managed to come up with a reasonable compromise; so good that the Melbourne yachties decided to build them on demand through word-of-mouth advertising. Called the Aloora 720, it has sold steadily in Victoria for the past five years and was recently introduced to the northern States.

The initial impression is that it's the biggest little yacht on the market, with the accent definitely leaning towards cruising comfort. To achieve full headroom and interior volume, the cabin rises to almost waist height above the gunwale and encroaches onto the cockpit, which is less than 2m long.

A full-length dark stripe helps to improve the cabin's top heavy appearance, while the cockpit has been redesigned since the test to seat six people, the number the cabin accommodates. The MkI version's cockpit was somewhat cramped and the skipper had to sit on a stainless steel coaming rail to see over the coachhouse, which became a real pain in the backside. It will be replaced in future by a conventional coaming and pushpit arrangement.

In other areas, however, the cockpit has some nice features. The floor, for example, is rounded so your feet always find a supporting angle. A centreline outboard well with a Honda 9.9hp motor raised and lowered by tackle worked extremely efficiently. The propeller is low down where it won't be affected by pitching and, with ventilation coming through the stern, the motor can be covered by a special hatch for sound dampening.

A large locker accepts all the sails and gear,

keeping it out of the cabin. The mainsheet is attached above the curved companionway — there's no pop-top to worry about — and was easy to reach, as were the halyards and control lines led aft from the mast.

The skipper is able to raise and lower the Aloora's bilge keels by winding a handle mounted on the stern; 20 turns either way. The twin keels respond simultaneously via an ingenious, patented, rod and pulley linkage system that's contained inside the settee berths, the sides of which incorporate the keel cases to provide hull rigidity and a nice, open floorplan.

There's 350kg of ballast in the keels to offset the weight of a high cabin and 140kg of internal ballast has been added to MkII versions in an attempt to lower the bow and reduce a tendency to slip to leeward. In every other department, the performance was something of a surprise.

Light air speed was reasonable considering we were underpowered with a small working headsail. A nicely-cut spinnaker boosted our speed considerably and the Aloora proved extremely easy and pleasant to sail, if not sizzling. As a curious concession to racing, the owner being something of a buff, the rig featured a number of go-fasts including a twin-foil headstay, and it comes with a racing mainsail, three headsails and a