

*A guide to Australian Trailer-Sailers, possibly written by
Bob Ross circa late 70s*

Australian trailer-sailers

RL 24

For me, a good trailer yacht is one which is roomy and comfortable inside, easily rigged and sailed, turns in a good performance, puts no strain on the family sedan, is easily launched by two people and can be dropped off the trailer into relatively shallow water.

A tall order, maybe, but one which has been filled by designer-builder Robin Legg in his RL 24. Once you have sailed this boat, you can understand why it is so popular, for everything is done with the minimum of fuss, and yet returns the maximum result.

First, perhaps, the question of launching. With so many bad ramps in New South Wales and Victoria, trailer-sailer manufacturers could be forgiven for throwing up their hands in frustration. How do you launch a 7 or 8 metre yacht in a couple of centimetres of water, which is the usual condition on most ramps? The answer, according to Robin Legg is the RL 24—she floats in just 36 centimetres of water, which means if you had a bathtub big enough you could use an RL 24 instead of your rubber ducky!

Getting the boat on and off the trailer is a one-man job. The 660 kilograms of boat is stretched into a long, low hull with a 12 degree deadrise along the bottom and no skeg, meaning that she can slide easily on and off using a standard hand winch. The relatively low weight also means you can use a standard trailer—no need for twin-wheel bogeys here.

Indeed, launching the RL 24 is like launching a large Flying Dutchman, and the similarity does not end there, for the lines of this boat reveal the designer's feeling for the flightier centreboarders. Her speed in the water indicates this too, but more about that later.

All over this boat there is a feeling of firmness and solidity which relies her long, low hull line. She looks racy—she is racy—but she is not flimsy like so many racy craft; she is solid and well built. The only slightly-constructed part I could find was the sliding hatch which gave a bit when I stood on it—a minor point.

As mentioned, this boat has a long, lean profile. The stem has a moderate to severe rake and

curves under the forefoot sharply into what is almost a straight-line keel. Almost, but not quite for there is a gentle convex curve to the bottom of the hull which lifts towards the stern so that there is a slight overhang at the reverse transom.

In plan view, undoubtedly the most impressive feature is the cockpit. I can safely say that I have not seen a more roomy cockpit in a keel yacht, let alone a trailer yacht. Like the Marauder 725 and the Hood 23, the RL 24 utilises virtually the whole of her 2.2 metre beam by carrying the coamings out to the gunwales. This gives remarkable leg space and seating space—so much so that the carrying capacity of the cockpit would be limited more by the trim of the boat than the constriction of room. Six adults would not crowd this cockpit.

Top marks to designer Legg also for offering a wide, wide cockpit coaming to relieve 'bum bunions'! Knowing that sailors have a habit of perching on the coaming especially when sailing hard, Rob determined at least to make it comfortable for them. It is—as a confirmed coaming-percher I can vouch for it.

Placing a sheeting track in the centre of the cockpit has a tendency to break up the space, but the big wide cockpit area takes care of this in the RL 24. Keeping cleats and leads on the cabin top or outside the coaming, and the motor tucked away right aft in a well, leaves the cockpit area free and uncluttered—a feature of this boat which must endear it to cruising and racing families alike.

Forward, there is a front opening hatch into the cabin and a rather novel anchor hatch which is so big it can take anchor, warp, spinnaker basket (applause from the racing fraternity) and kids! Kids love to sit on the foredeck and a shallow hatch such as this keeps them inside the boat instead of slithering all over the deck with the attendant man-overboard risks.

Down below, the accommodation arrangements of the RL 24 are fairly standard but adequate for comfortable family cruising. There is a lot of room (roominess seems to be the most obvious factor in this boat) with berths to sleep four adults, yet ample space to move around despite the intrusion of the centreplate housing. A

Trailer-sailers

sink on the port side and galley space on the starboard side combine with a folding teak table on the housing to complete a comfortable cruising setup.

The windows and the very wide companionway hatch make the interior of this craft very airy and light. Headroom is good and the finish excellent including, in the luxury version, teak racks and lockers. The raising purchase for the centreplate intrudes somewhat, but these fittings are never attractive no matter what they look like.

Flotation is provided in an interesting manner with the entire 'eyes' of the bow fitted with positive foam material as well as a 'capsule' of foam fitting the entire section of the boat (right up into the cockpit coaming) near the stern. Most boats tend to fit flotation material beneath the floor, but here again the designer has used a centreboarder technique—keep the buoyancy high so that the gunwales are held well up in the event of flooding.

A cast-iron centreplate coated with epoxy tar weighs 150 kilograms, giving the boat a 1.3 metre draft when lowered. This offers adequate lateral resistance while at the same time making the boat completely self-righting from a horizontal 'knock down' position. Provision for a locking bolt makes her in effect a keeler.

Perhaps the most surprising feature of all in this boat is the rig. It is extremely light, consisting in the standard version of a tapered mast, forestay and one set of shrouds. Yet it is extremely strong, employing a thick mast wall and diamond stays to retain strength. There is no backstay but runners are fitted in the racing version to offset the added strain of a spinnaker, or give support on hard windward work.

Rigging this boat would be the simplest job in the world, yet in hard sailing and competitive racing over the past three years, not one of the 200-odd masts has been lost—a testimony to the effectiveness of the rig. And to add to the centreboarder concept of the rig, the mast is over-rotating and she carries trapeze wires, although I discovered that the later are used more by families as a way to keep the kids amused than by hard-racing sheet hands trying to strain an extra fraction of a knot out of the boat!

The RL 24 handles delightfully. She is very responsive to the slightest pressure on the helm and is nicely balanced even in the gusts. There was little or no weather helm even hard on the wind and I feel certain that with the effect of the tapered mast 'bleeding' off excessive wind, it would be hard to put this boat under severe pressure even in hard gusts.

She points well and foots along at a fine rate. It is easy to see where this boat gets her racing reputation from, for she moved through the water effortlessly. I said 7.3 metre yachts almost every day of the year in my sailing school, so I am well qualified to judge the speed of a boat of this size, and I judged the RL 24 to be a fast boat.

Off the wind it was a moment's work and no effort to pull the plate up a bit, and the boat responded by picking up her skirts and flying. Downwind she was just rearing to get up and plane, and one could feel the flat after section of the hull coming into effect. Unfortunately being a new boat, she was not yet equipped with spinnaker gear, so I had to forgo the pleasure of what I can well imagine would be an exciting downhill run.

This boat is very stable and never at any time did she heel excessively. The centreplate and bilge section took care of any incipient instability, while the tapered mast allowed the sail to exhaust automatically as the wind pressure increased.

We sailed her through every point of the compass, and on each leg she proved that on handling, it would be almost impossible to fault her. We landed her on a beach, pushed her off, took her into water with mangrove roots showing, and generally gave her the rounds of the sailing kitchen. But she laughed it all off.

Summing up, I can only agree with those who said I would find the RL 24 a trailer yacht of some note. She is a first-class craft with tremendous versatility, both as a racing yacht and as a family cruiser. And most important of all, she is easily trailered and launched.

It is no surprise to me, having sailed the RL 24, to learn that she was given the Good Design Award for 1976.