

Tender

MERCIES

A NEW KEEL AND LIGHTER RIG HAVE TRANSFORMED THIS ONCE-TENDER TS.

TEST: SPIDER 24 MKII

NEIL PATCHETT AND HIS FAMILY GAVE IT THE ULTIMATE WORKOUT DURING A WINDY WEEKEND ON SYDNEY'S HAWKESBURY/PITWATER

They say it is amazing the difference a day makes. Well, from what I can tell it is equally amazing the difference a new keel makes. When the Spider 24 was originally launched in the winter of 1989 it attracted plenty of interest among sailors looking for a mid-sized trailable boat with a bit of accommodation, performance which remained easy to manage when towing and sailing.

The Spider 24 was, however, a bit too tender for some. Going upwind, it would heel quickly, make leeway and generally fall away to windward. Six years later, this characteristic of the boat has been reversed.

David Bray, a key figure behind the range of Spider yachts, says some cross-fertilisation between different boats in the range was the answer to the 24-footer's lack of windward performance.

"We came to the conclusion that there was a strong market for committed tender yachts wanting to cruise and sometimes race ... mostly always, short handed," he said.

"The message we kept getting was keep it simple, keep it stable and keep it efficient and modern."

Meanwhile, one of the most used Spider 24s in NSW had an accident on Lake Macquarie. The couple who owned the boat, and who raced in Tender Yacht Association events and who cruised without extra crew, managed to hit the only rock in the lake. The resulting insurance pay-out allowed them to fit a Spider 28 keel in an experiment to find extra stability. It worked.

Bray needed to further proof and stem ahead with the production of the MKII Spider 24. The new keel projects 1.5m deeper and carries 350kg of lead moulded into a Scott Jensen-designed keel.



Adding this keel (the MKI had 290kg in the keel and 80kg in the hull) meant weight had to be saved in other areas if the overall displacement was to be kept down to the towing limits of family sedans. Lighter and stronger laminates were the answer.

Typical of modern yachts, a laminated sandwich construction method was used to build the Spiders. Balsa provides the core material for the hulls, while foam is used in the deck areas. Bray says this method and the choice of vinyl ester resin was not a cheap building method.

However, he adds, the resulting boat had good "wear and tear resistance", which was important in a boat that had to run on and off trailers and was occasionally beached.

A new rig was then developed to further enhance the righting moment of the boat. A tapered lightweight Spinnaker mast replaced the heavier section previously used. Double swept-back spreaders of quite hefty size were fitted to the mast to put plenty of rigging into the rig.

Bray says the difference is enormous, the Lake Macquarie boat showing this by being faster than all but one well-sailed South Coast Magnum. "Of particular interest was the windward performance, with the Spider 24 now being as high winded as boats like the Maseri 730," he said.

"It is much better to windward. Off the wind there is not much difference but you do notice the improvement in reaching power because it is a lot more stable. Further testing of the first two Spider 24 MKIIs with the new rig shows a further significant improvement ... particularly into the higher wind ranges."

Had a sail on the Spider at the end of winter. Lucky for me and my family, which includes two young children, the weather was near perfect for an overnight excursion on Pittwater. Unusually warm winds





Adding the motor, Spider 24 had and abiding with all the improvements the 24's, making able, as well as the many performance in the kids and not keep their heads off the tiller!

The Spider was now loaded with five adults and three kids under the age of five, yet it remained easy to sail

The Spider was the only boat on the beach. All other craft in the bay were either keelboats or displacement cruisers and they simply could not get into the sand. The crews of those boats had to come ashore in dinghies or just swim for it. That is the beauty of a trailerable. If you see a beach and the tide is favourable, in you go to put the family ashore. Great stuff!

We had so much fun swimming with the kids on the beach, playing under the trees and exploring the fringes of the national park that we decided to stay the night in the bay and do it all again in the morning. After organising dinner ashore with a barbecue, we boarded the boat and pushed off. A short motor out into the bay with the keel lowered for stability and we found an ideal place to motor for the night.

Now, two kids under the age of five can be a bit feisty at sundown. But our two were so knackered from the day's activities that they fell into their bunks with little protest. In fact, the two quarter berths aft were ideal for Simon and Margo. They were both secure in their own cosy "cubbies" but at the same time they had the security of being able to see each other and us.

The main cabin area, and the entire interior, was comfortable and remarkably spacious for a 24 footer. Liz and I were able to relax for an hour or so, doing crosswords, reading and talking. When it came time to sleep, we retired forward into the fo'c's'le where a vee berth was waiting.

Typical of a small boat, the fo'c's'le ends up harbours an array of gear from sails to clothing. Fortunately, we had already tackled this problem by stowing these items away. The Spider was certainly well provided for when it came to storage space. There were lockers under all three quarter berths and under the vee berth. There was also sufficient storage compartments in convenient locations throughout.



the anchor line to pass through when the lid was closed. Moving aft, the base of the mast was the next for an array of running blocks and leads guiding various control lines back to the cockpit. The headsail sheeting systems varied from bungee lines on the slideslides for large sails to short tracks on the cabin top for the heavy-duty gear.

The keel was fitted with a hydraulic system operated down below. The crew could either opt for the push button system, or get stuck into the physical lever action. Either way, the keel could be raised in a few minutes. It was also reassuring to know that the cockpitboard was enclosed in a stainless steel case to reduce damage from accidental collisions.

The box of the dagger rudder and tiller was a well fabricated unit that passed on a sense of security to the helmsman via the tiller extension. Raising and lowering the rudder was a breeze.

With the motor, weather tightening off, we decided to run onto a protected bay cutting into Ku-Ring-Gai Chase National Park. The further we progressed into the bay the less breeze we had. So, lifting the cockpit seat, we dropped the outboard back into the water and summoned it to action.

Plunging the sails and raising the boards, we motored onto the top of the bay searching for a place to drop anchor. But wait one, why stand off the beach when the tide has just begun to flood? With that in mind, we simply nudged the boat onto the sand and hopped over the bow with anchor, kyle, picnic and towels.

stepped from the west-north-west on day one and fresh out - over - east on day two.

With the help of the Sydney Sailboat Centre yacht tender we were able to ferry the kyle and gear out to the Spider which was on a marina mooring. After a few preliminary checks of the safety gear, including the lashing of batteries, we took Simon and Margo, we cast off.

The dingy outboard pushed its way on a zig zag course through the moorings of lower Puttwater. Once clear of obstructions, we hoisted the main. As the boat settled down to a steady 3 knots the fuel line off the outboard and let the engine splutter itself out - it was then possible to swing the outboard cockpit seat forward and raise the outboard into its storage position. This arrangement clears the outboard to stow and prevents from the water to reduce drag and allows the chance of damage in tight mooring situations.

A light wind forced us for the initial beam reach down Puttwater. Under main only, the boat was light on the helm and comfortable to steer. The boat was well set up with a windward steering traveller car running on a straight track that had plenty of room for movement. The deck was practical and reasonably clear of obstacles, and the cockpit offered more than enough room for the four of us.

Maryanne and I sat cockpit base, were led onto the cabin top from the starboard side of the cockpit, and back of the cockpit to the starboard side of the cockpit. Ronstan provided the bulk of the hardware.



Going forward, the side decks were reasonably wide and clear of fittings. Although it was necessary to take care while manoeuvring around the side steps which run into chain plates that enter the middle of the slideslides. Thankfully, a non-skid finish was installed into the deck, cabin top and cockpit area, and the gunwales were finished by adding toe rails and stanchions with lifelines. The non-skid, however, did feel slippery at times.

The foredeck was uncluttered and featured a good-sized hatch that hinged open to allow sails or gear or people to take a short cut between the fo'c's'le and deck. A self-draining anchor locker was provided, although the locker hatch did not have a curtain to allow



Snug as bugs in their quarter berth "cubbies", the Patchett prodigies enjoyed a peaceful but all too short night's sleep. They were up and ready to play at 4.30am. Kids ...

SPECIFICATIONS

SPIDER 24 MKII

LOA: 7.30m
 Beam: 2.50m
 Displacement: 1100kg
 Ballast: 350kg
 Sail area: 29.3sqm
 Price (as tested): \$50,000
 Agent: Sydney Sailboat Centre
 phone (02) 9997 8999

10-15 knots with the occasional stronger gusts. In the meantime, we had picked up three adults and one 12 month-old boy.

In the morning the kids were up at the crack. And I mean the crack. That's 4.30am. I told myself that they were keen to see the dawn of the new day from the cockpit, even though that event was about 90 minutes away.

Shrugging off the early start, we ate breakfast on board and motored out of the bay and into Pittwater. By 8.30am the nor'-wester had built to 10 knots. This was great sailing. Full main, self-tacking headsail and everyone on deck with Broken Bay to ourselves.

Then, with little warning, a southerly sprang up. With Liz and the two kids below, I sailed the boat back towards the lee of the shore. Thanks to the efficient and wide traveller, it was possible to flatten the main and feather into all but the strongest gusts. The little Spider acquitted itself well in these conditions and despite the wind exceeding 20 knots at times, it felt safe and controllable at all times.

A little later in the day and the wind at backed off to

The Spider was now loaded with five adults and three kids under the age of five, yet it remained easy to sail. The traffic across the cockpit was like peak hour during tacks, but there was enough room for everyone.

And the price? Somewhere in the \$50,000 range depending on options. Although David Bray reckons there would be strong interest from people considering the purchase of the bonded hull and deck for a DIY fitout.

