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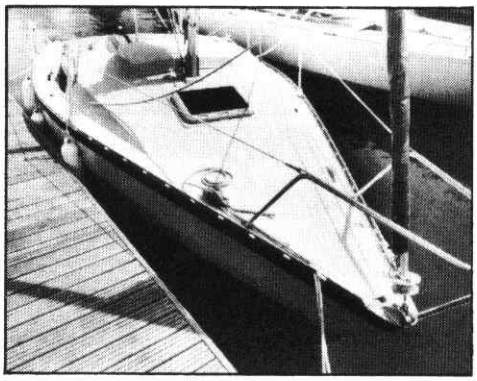
SWIFT 18

Designed by Colin Sylvester, this micro adheres to all the racing rules but is perhaps one of the roomiest boats of her size and well suited to family sailing.

John Charnley's Swift 18 happens to be a Micro Cupper. However, it's a long way from the flat-out racing boats that have dominated the Micro scene in the UK, with the absolute minimum appeal to sedate family sailing. Instead the Swift 18 is comfortable and well finished with four full length berts, which is still not enough to sacrifice a good turn of speed and an exciting sailing performance.

The Micro scene started in 1977 when the French magazine *Bateau* introduced micro rules which were aimed to promote 'trailerable, habitable, fast, seaworthy and inexpensive boats'. The rules were simplicity itself. A Micro should be: 18 foot long; have a maximum sail area of 199 sq feet, plus a spinnaker of the same area; weigh a minimum of 992lb (prototypes) and 1102lb (production boats); have an 8 foot maximum beam; a draught limit of 3.6 feet; be buoyant enough to float when swamped with three crew; and be able to self-right from 90 degrees of heel with 22lb attached



The wedge coachroof allows well proportioned decks. Roller reefing eases family sailing

The Micro soon became immensely popular in France, both in racing prototype form, and with more sedate cruising style Micros such as the Challenger Micro and First 18. In England Micros first appeared in 1979 with the very successful Rob Humphreys' designed Gem, but this paved the way to a class that attracted extremely frisky racing boats that tend to be tricky to

The Swift has not been designed to win any Micro championship. It is the British answer to the Challenger or First 18, and for many buyers the fact that it measures to Micro rules is irrelevant – particularly since there aren't that many Micros to race against in the UK anyway.

Design and construction

The man behind the Swift, John Charnley, came to boat building through a variety of careers. He started life in the Marines where he wanted to fly helicopters, and then left to become a British Airways' pilot. While in this job he set up his own yacht charter fleet which before long changed to the lucrative flotilla business. Named Greeksail it soon became so big that John was able to leave British Airways to concentrate on its growth, until having been taken over by the Guinness Group (as Island Sailing) he decided to sell out last year.

This gave him enough money to do nothing for a few months – but instead he became involved with the Swift through his contact with ex Illingworth & Primrose designer Colin Sylvester, whom he had met while engaged on putting together the Atlantic 43. Colin had a Micro drawn, and though it was originally intended for aluminium construction, John felt it represented the perfect hole in the market with which he could start boatbuilding.

He wanted an extremely cheap boat representing extremely good value as a first cruiser, but unlike the majority of boats of this type on the UK market it would be very rapid to sail. However it would not fall into the trap of being performance orientated alone. It would still retain the desirable family characteristics of being strongly built, with good accommodation, and easy to sail.

The design is relatively straightforward. The chines have been retained to give a little more stiffness to the sides of the boat, and they also give her a relatively flat bottom leading to a fine entry in the bows. The change to GRP construction required little attention to the designer's original intention.

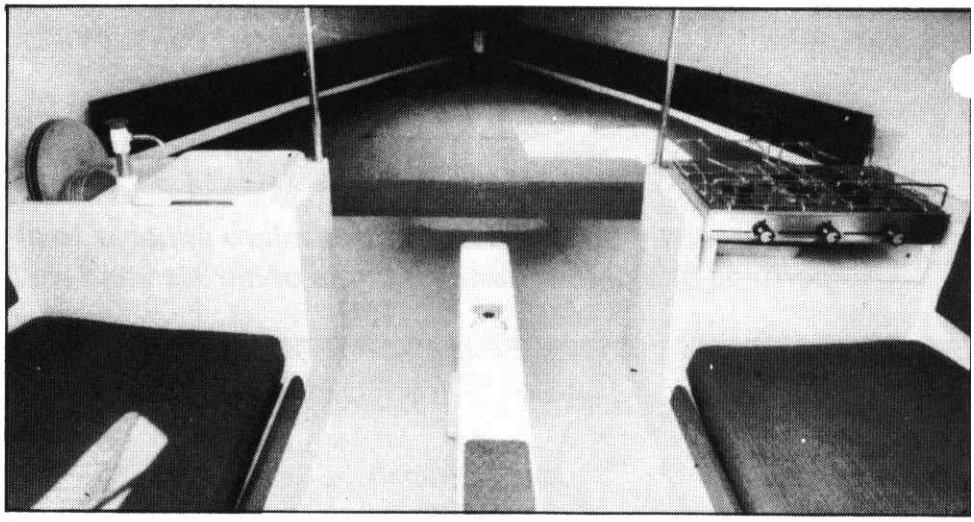
While Sylvester drew the hull and the rig, Charnley took responsibility for the all important cockpit and interior, as well as the centreboard arrangement. With his experience in the charter field, he felt he knew exactly what the customer would want

cell from Fairways plugs, but now Charnley's own company, Swift Boats, has taken over their construction. They have a capacity of 75-100 boats per annum.

All the lay-up is by hand, with extensive use of balsa sandwich in the deck, transom, and top chine of the hull. The one-piece inner lining module is reinforced with marine ply, and comes up to half height inside the boat before being bonded to the hull. The voids between it and the hull are then injected with polystyrene foam to make the Swift unsinkable. Berth lockers are of course integral with the lining module and completely watertight.

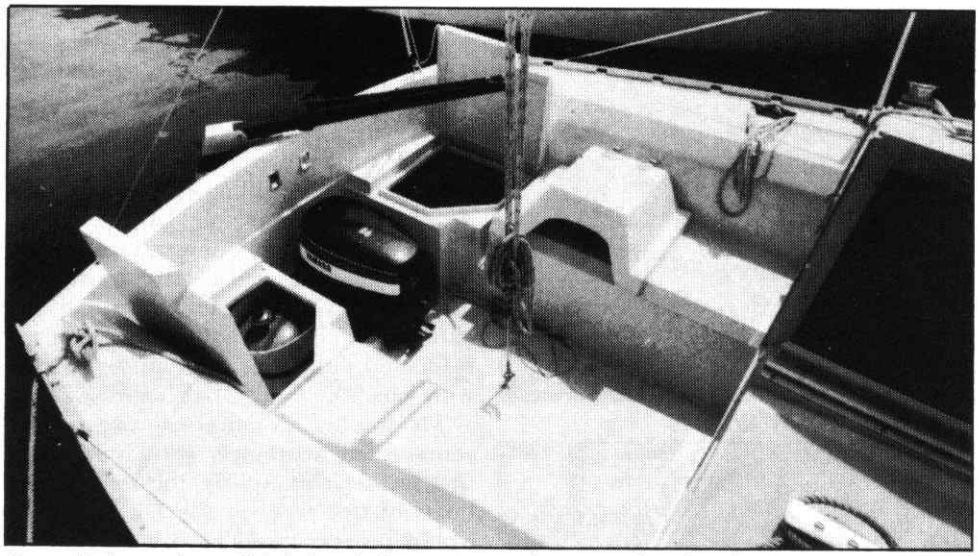
The remainder of the interior is lined with vinyl, either glued or attached to ply backing pads. Charnley is considering the use of a full GRP headliner, but points out that though it would neither weigh nor cost any more, it would have the considerable disadvantage of restricting access to the deckhead fittings.

The centreboard is cast iron which is epoxied for protection and a smooth finish. It retracts on a stainless steel screw-jack with Delrin bearings, but will swing back on impact if you should run aground. Conversely, in the exceptionally unlikely event of the boat going over on its side, it should stay in the down position.

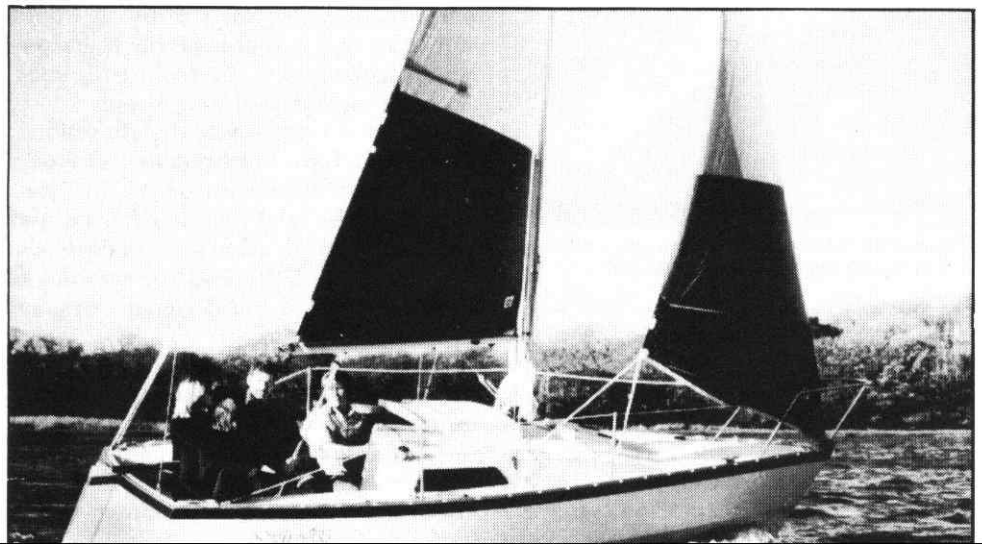


The accommodation is surprisingly spacious with beds for four in the double and two quarter berths

It takes 45 turns with the winch handle to retract the centreboard to its horizontal position, which leaves 3 inches protruding beneath the hull. This is enough for the boat to dry out on without the need of any bilge runners, and helps ensure that small stones are kept out of the centreboard box. They could probably be wound out in any case. One last point is that the centreboard case takes up very little room in the saloon, which is extremely unusual on this type of boat.



The cockpits sports sensible lockers in the quarters and a neat outboard well with cover



On deck

The coachroof of the Swift may seem a trifle boxy for some tastes, but it leaves room for sidedecks with easy access to the small foredeck, where there is an anchor locker with a pulpit for security and safety.

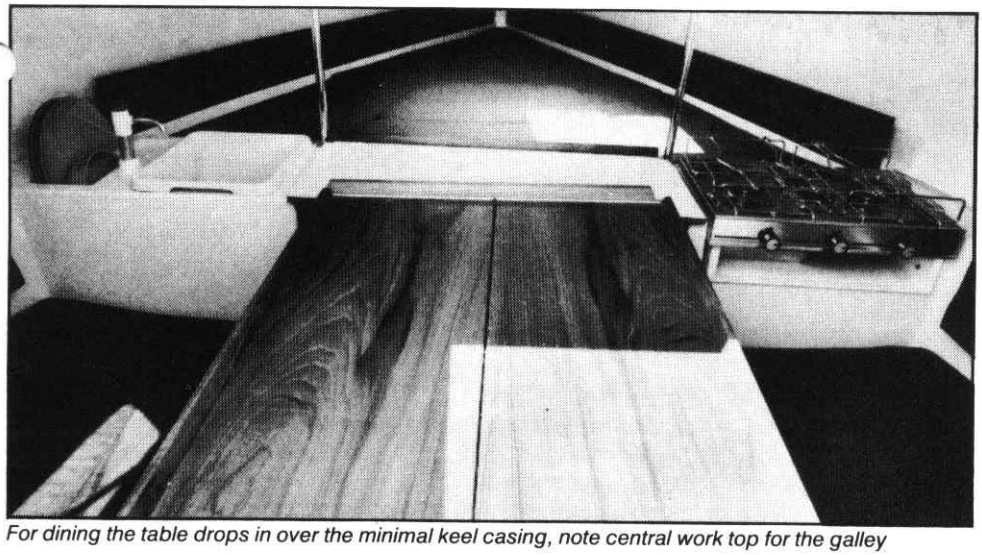
The cockpit is extremely successful. The coamings have been shaped with as much care as the Swift's French competitors, making them very comfortable to sit on or against, with enough room for four adults. In the after quarters there are two identical lockers (open to the bottom of the hull rather than lined) which are quite big enough to swallow all the necessary mooring gear, plus a bucket, broom, and petrol tank etc. Between them is the outboard well with room for a small outboard of around 4hp. This sits out of sight beneath a cover, but it can be removed if the owner wants to extract top performance while racing. The outboard can then be stowed on the cabin sole with an infill sealing off the bottom of the well.

Charnley plans to provide a full cockpit tent as an optional extra which would be useful for English weather. The cockpit seats are just about long enough for two children to sleep on. Another option is a pushpit, which would probably go down well with families, and there is a sprayhood which is as broad as the coachroof.

The rudder is aluminium, and it lifts through 90 degrees on a lanyard. As with the centreboard, it would swing up on impact.

Accommodation

The Swift probably has better accommodation than any other Micro boat, with more room than either the Challenger or First. Charnley has managed to use the full beam without making the boat look ungainly, and this gives a saloon area where four people could sit down in reasonable comfort. There is a simple but efficient dining table with enough room for them to eat, and with a 2 burner + grill cooker to starboard, and plumbed-in washing up bowl to port, they can live pretty well.



For dining the table drops in over the minimal keel casing, note central work top for the galley

would make a pleasant berth as there is plenty of headroom and light with the forehatch directly overhead.

Stowage is in the small moulded bins beneath the berths; in ply fronted shelves outboard; and in the large after quarters of the boat.

Performance

With the keel protruding a mere three inches, the Swift would be an easy boat to launch, and you could consider trailer-sailing her quite realistically.

She performs extremely well under engine. The outboard is sited so that it is easy to start with the controls readily accessible, and has the advantage that the cover muffles the noise and fumes which would normally enter the cockpit. With the transom hung rudder she is very easily driven and very manoeuvrable. We were able to turn her astern and then reverse straight across a brisk wind with little noticeable effect of windage on the boat. Anyone would find her easy to control in a tight space as she turns in her own length.

The current production boats are equipped with Holt sails and spars, with most of the controls led aft. In fact once under way there is very little need to go forward if the boat is equipped with the optional headsail roller reefing. If you want to reef, you can reach the luff of the sail and the gooseneck by standing in the companionway.

We sailed the Swift in gusty weather with the wind approaching Force 4. In these conditions she was most tractable with one reef (another one to go, and a smaller jib), particularly as she likes to be sailed relatively flat. Going upwind weight on the weather deck does help, but we were pleased to find that she will still behave if everyone is sitting down in the cockpit, and either position is equally comfortable for the helmsman. If you choose to sit inboard, you can simply feather her upwind during the squalls.

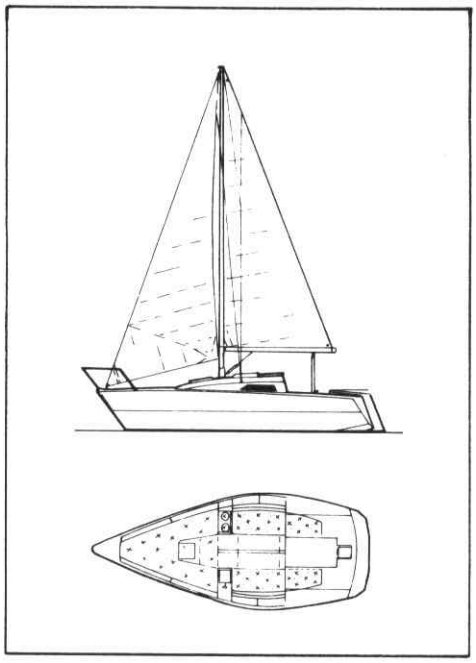
She is light and easy on the helm, and seemed very well balanced. No Micro likes a short chop, but she coped with the one we encountered reasonably happily on the upwind legs, and predictably was quick and easy to sail offwind. All in all, a rewarding and good fun little boat to sail.

Conclusion

Since first introducing the prototype of the Swift at the Southampton Boat Show in September last year, John Charnley has sold 31 boats. In terms of the current state of British boatbuilding, this is extremely successful.

There seems little doubt that he has got it right. He has gone for a boat that is cheap, fun and fast to sail, attractive to look at, and well finished. It has a big advantage over the First 18, for with considerably less draught it is easier to launch and far more suitable for drying out, while it has much more room than the Challenger.

Charnley set out to beat the French at their own game of producing good family performance boats at low cost – it's excellent news that a British entrepreneur has succeeded in producing a Volkswagen of the sea. – Jeremy Evans.



Designer: Colin Sylvester
Builder: JCA Marine, 19 Shamrock Quay, William Street, Northam, Southampton. Tel: 0703 332566
Construction: GRP
Keel: Cast iron swinging centreplate. 375lb.
Displacement: 1450lb
LOA: 18ft
LWL: 16ft 4in
Beam: 7ft 11in
Draught: 9in centreboard up/3ft 6in centreboard down.
Headroom: 4ft 4in
Berths: 4 x 6ft 6in
Sail Area: 199sq ft. Optional racing sails available from Hood.
Engine: Yamaha 4hp or Suzuki 3.5hp outboard.