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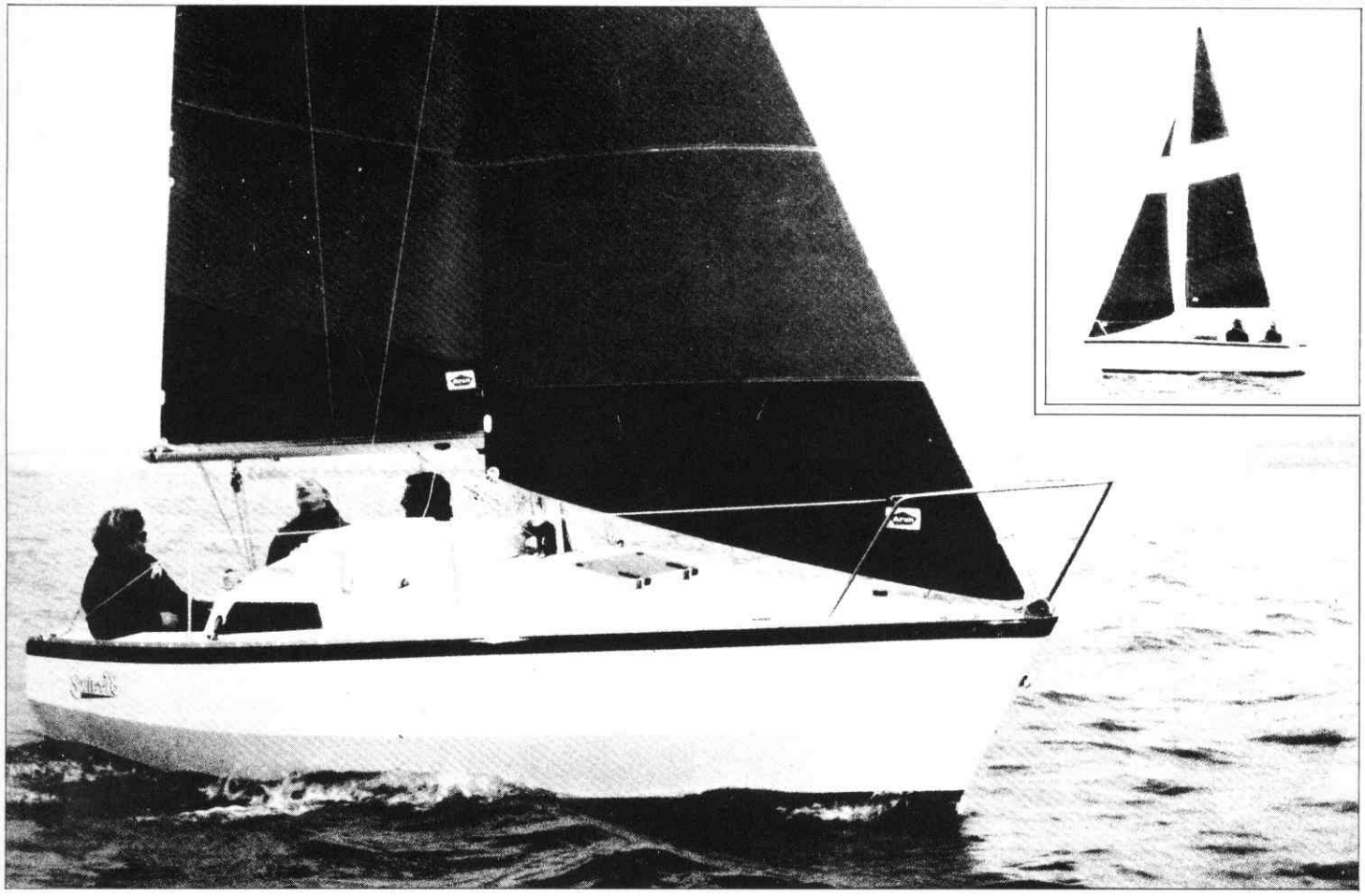
BOATS Power & Sail

conducted by RODGER WITT



SUCCESS COULD BE SWIFT

Rodger Witt's verdict on a new, exciting, 18-foot trailer-sailer

JOHN CHARNLEY, ex-marine, airline pilot, singlehanded transatlantic skipper and business man, has channelled his energies into boat building with customary flair, panache and a fair measure professionalism.

The result, an innovative 18-foot trailer-sailer which conforms to French Micro Cup rules, is undoubtedly good enough to stand comparison with the best that Europe can offer.

It all started when Charnley met designer Colin Silvester who had a design, but needed a builder. Together, they modified, developed and jiggled what was to have been an aluminium Micro, and what emerged as the Swift.

Clearly, this embryonic phase was crucial to the final outcome, and Charnley resisted any temptation to rush it. He did his homework, scrutinising the competition, studying basic ergonomics, and drawing on his own considerable experience. The end product would have to stand up, not just against slick foreign imports, but 'bargain buys' on an overcrowded secondhand market. Which made it doubly important to offer as unique a blend of features as possible.

Of course, the Micro label would help, so long as Micro racing took off; at the same time, the rule itself dictated numerous design characteristics — built-in buoyancy, retractable keel, etc. — which were seen as thoroughly sensible, and having wide appeal.

Changing from alloy to resin-glass seemed a logical move; for one thing, customers would probably prefer it, and there was a wider choice of builders. Chines were retained, as much to improve stability as anything else, but they also added strength, and slimmed down the freeboard — or, at least, visually had that effect. In the same way, chines allowed a flatter bottom and shallower draft.

But what about the difference in weight. Surely, a glass hull would be heavier and, therefore, down on her marks? In practice, by using

SWIFT 18

LOA	18ft.
LWL	16ft. 4in.
Beam	7ft. 11in.
Draft (keel up/down)	9in/3ft. 6 in.
Displacement	1450lb.
Ballast	375lb.
Sail Area	199sq. ft.
Designer	Colin Silvester
Builders	Honnor Marine (UK) Ltd.

balsa sandwich in certain strategic areas, with subtle combinations of woven rovings and chopped strand mat, her displacement stayed the same.

This then, is a light boat with a high aspect rig, which makes her more of a racer than, say, Beneteau's First 18 (PBO 157) — up till now, the best selling Micro of all. The question is, have they made her too sporty?

On test, in a nasty Force 6/7 northerly, and with two reefs in the main, she stayed light on the helm, was well balanced, and galloped along like a racehorse.

A couple of times, in the gusts, I held the mainsheet tight, just to see what would happen. She heeled fairly readily at first, then stiffened up markedly, and finally luffed. In other words, she knows when she's had enough, even if you don't.

A close winded craft, she feels tremendously buoyant, with a pleasant, sort of cushioned motion, unusual on a boat of this size. Downwind, as you might expect, she sizzles.

Too sporty then? For some, perhaps. But dinghy types moving up, will adore her, so will anyone who wants a well designed, high performance, miniature cruiser-racer.

More than that, Swift has a well organised accommodation lay-out with central galley, two full-length settee berths aft, and large double berth forward; an open plan arrangement that makes sense and wins friends.

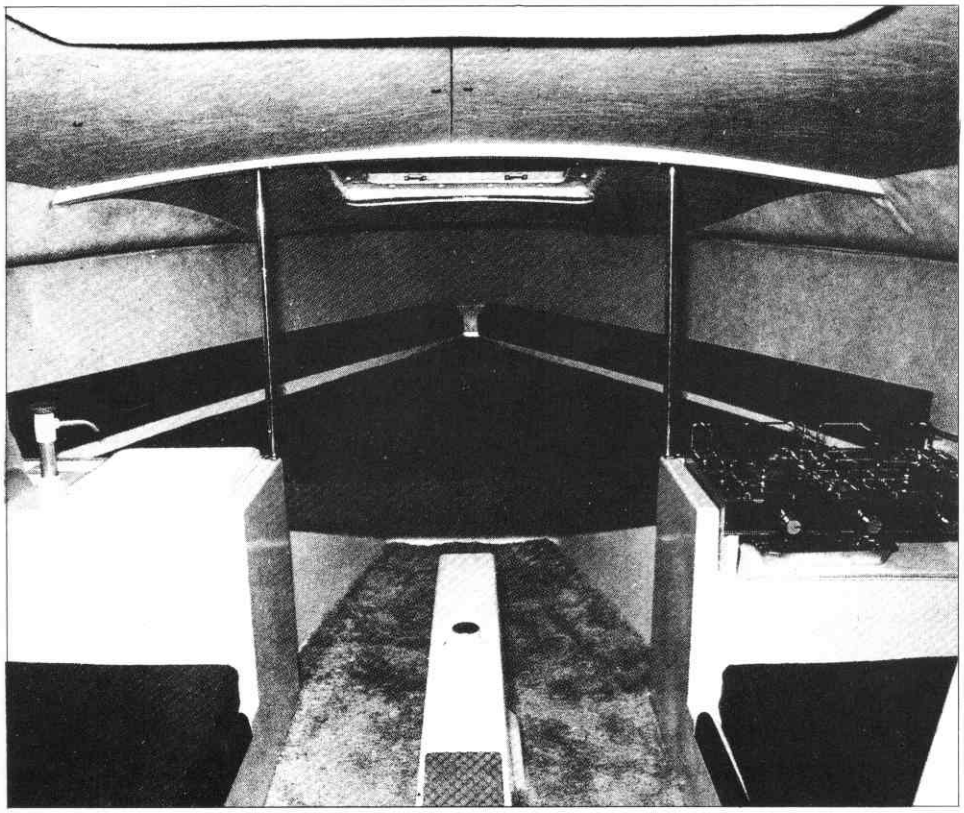
The two burner cooker designed mainly for in-harbour use, is fixed, without gimbals, but has sensible fiddles and potholders, and joins the Gaz bottle which lives in a cockpit locker, with sturdy copper pipe. Opposite, is a simple sink with portable water container and hand pump. The bowl itself is moulded resinglass which surprised me a bit, but Charnley insists that nobody seems to make a really nice, square, domestic type bowl you can buy off the shelf.

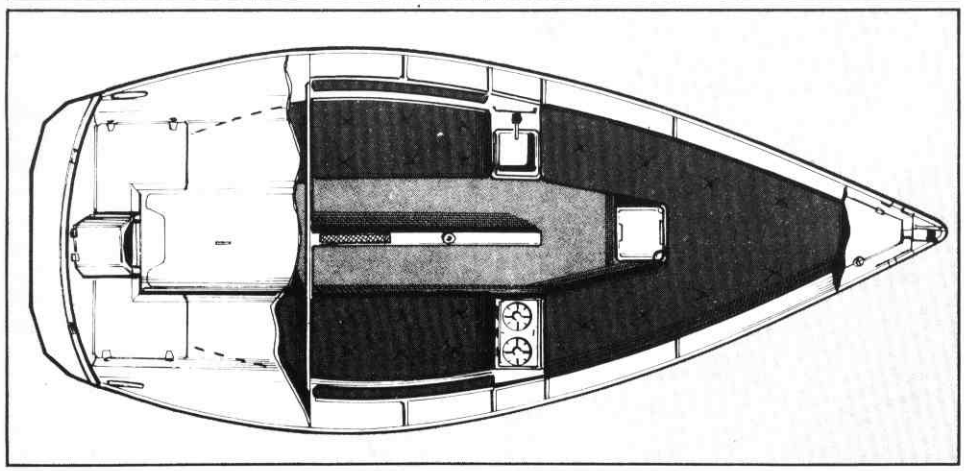
The settees are a shade narrow at 1ft. 8in., but the enterprising could in-fill the space either side of the keel box (see pic.) to give a bit more room. As for the Vee berth which tapers from 5ft. 6in. wide to almost nothing, over a length of 6ft. 6in. an infill here is an integral component, and would be removed only to provide access to the chemical toilet beneath; with around only 1ft. 7in. headroom forward, there's little point in trying to convert for daytime seating; instead, the design majors on comfortable sitting headroom aft.

Finish is excellent, with a smooth inner moulding up to bunk level sealing in 1620lb. of foam buoyancy which makes her 'unsinkable', and neat vinyl linings on cabin sides and plywood panelled deckhead. Lockers have smooth moulded 'innards' so Swift's good looks are more than superficial. This air of quality contributes greatly to what, in my book, is the best Micro interior yet. But perhaps you disagree?

Either way, it must be admitted that our demo boat was produced in its entirety by plug makers extrordinaire Fairweather Marine of Southampton whose reputation in the trade is second to none, which makes her somewhat special. But Blondecell of Lymington, now entrusted with the manufacture of production boats, are no mean moulders themselves, which augurs well . . .

At least the major design details





Open-plan layouts make sense on small boats. This one manages four berths, with separate cooker and sink. A simple table slots on the companionway step.

WHAT IS A MICRO CUPPER?

Introduced by the French magazine *Bateaux* in 1977, the Micro Cup Rule was devised to promote *"trailerable, habitable, fast, seaworthy and inexpensive boats"* which could race on a level handicap basis. Amongst other things, it stipulates minimum and maximum allowable displacements (992-1212lb. for prototypes; 1102-1322lb. for production boats) and a maximum beam (7.96ft.). The draft limit is 3.28ft. for a fixed fin, and 3.6ft. for boats with retractable keels. Other hull dimensions must fit within a grid which specifies a maximum hull length of 18ft. at a freeboard height of 2.29ft. Maximum sail area for windward work is 199.13sq. ft., and the boat must self-right or at least stay in balance at 90 degrees heel, with keel raised (where applicable) and a 22lb. weight at the masthead. The Rule also insists on a self-draining cockpit, plus sufficient buoyancy to support the laden boat and three crew. Note: for the definitive, unexpurgated and thoroughly more reliable version of the Rule, write to: Bateaux Socpresse, 14 rue Brunel, 75017 Paris, France.

have been thoroughly tried and tested in advance, which is not always the case, sad to say. It means that Charnley will stick with kick-up rudder-blade — much safer in the shallows than a slide-up type, I would say. Also vindicated is the swing-up, aerofoil section ballast keel controlled by a screw jack (45 turns down-to-up) which obviates the need for unsightly vertical structures in the cabin, and yet leaves minimal draft for easy trailer-sailing. It also provides a positive lock in any position, unlike most vertical lifting keels, and can be used more like a centreboard. In other words you can reduce draft in the shallows or off the wind, without having the worry, danger, or inconvenience of a heavy lump of metal rising up into the cabin which is precisely what you get with a lifting keel design. Then again the screw itself is free to slide up should the keel strike something hard . . .

Another praiseworthy feature is the sensible outboard well. So much more practical than a pad on the transom which has you stretching and straining, a well also offers better engine protection in sloppy seas. This one incorporates cockpit drains, has a removable lid with slide-off hinges, and a fairing piece which, having removed the motor, you slot in place to reduce drag.

Performance under power with a 4hp Mariner was excellent. Nippy, she was easy to steer, turned sharply, and answered up well in astern.

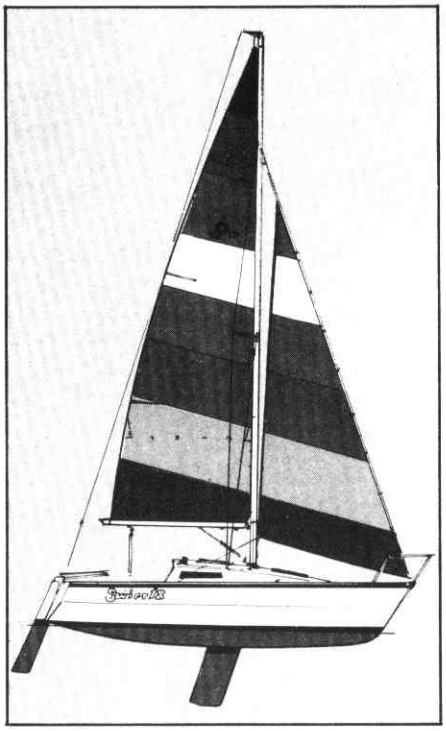
Equally impressive is the cockpit geometry with its gently angled coamings offering civilised support, and closely positioned benches, 2 feet apart, which make it easy to brace yourself comfortably as the boat heels.

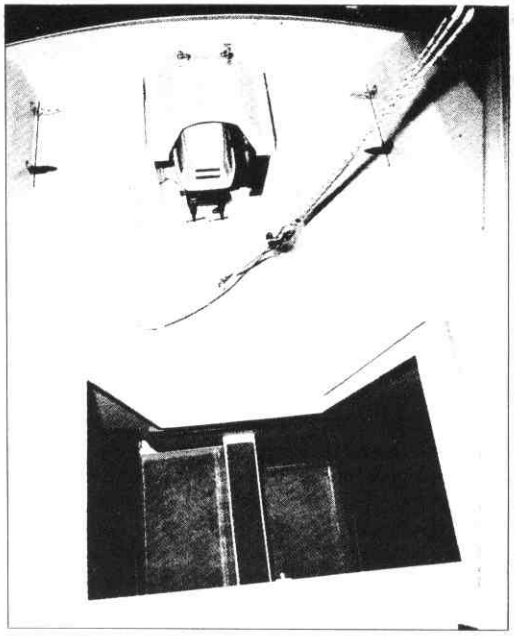
The only debatable point, I feel, is the central mainsheet which tends to get in the way when you tack. But finding a better place for it might be difficult. I would move it further forward, and put up with less easy access below, but others may have different ideas.

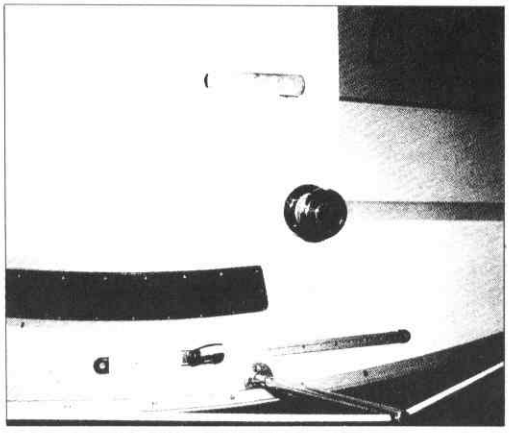
Everyone, I think, will like the sensible hardware on deck — the sturdy cleats and sensible anchor well — but the bow roller's cheeks could be higher, and I for one would feel a lot safer if the shrouds had toggles. Production boats will be modified accordingly on both counts, says Mr Charnley.

As already intimated, construction is sophisticated and varies from area to area. Minimum hull lay-up includes ½ inch balsa, sandwiched between, on one side, a double gel coat, two layers of mat and an 8oz. roving, and, on the other, a single, 1½oz. mat — the kind of construction that demands enormous care to ensure adequate inter-laminar adhesion.

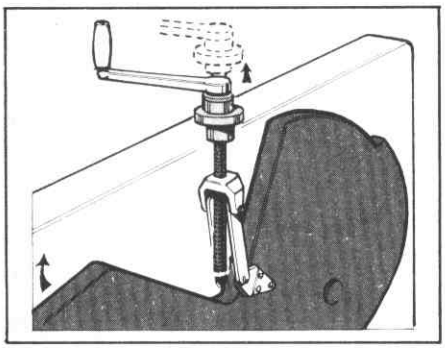
That's just what you get, says Charnley — a thorough sort of chap who doesn't cut corners, even though, with this sort of boat, her skipper certainly can.

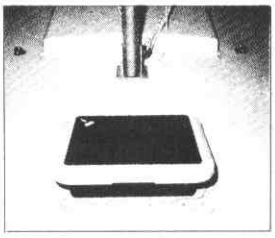


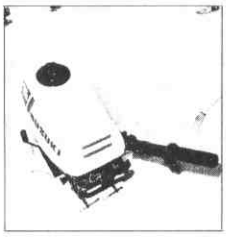




Swift has a high-volume hull, with adequate freeboard, and tall, efficient rig. Her outboard lives in a well, protected by a slide-off cover; quality fittings abound. Note Canpa hatch and extruded alloy toe rail. The keel, which winds up on a screw-jack, kicks up on impact.







Further details from:

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Telephone: 0725 22472
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THE MICRO MARKET

Other Micro Cuppers you might like to look at:

First 18: Evasion First Ltd., Hamble Point Marina, School Lane, Hamble, Southampton (042122) 5454.

Gem: Mike Parry Yachts, 72 Stopples Lane, Hordle, Lymington, Hants. (New Milton) 616518.

Jeanneau Microsail: Euroyachts, Clyde Place, Glasgow (041) 429 3766, or Hamble Point Marina, Hamble, Hants (042122) 5607.

Kelt 550: Kelt Yachts, PO Box 112, Imperial Way, Watford (0923) 33477.

Meteor: Brian H. Skinner, The Billet, Spellbrook Lane West, Sawbridgeworth, Herts. (0279) 724139.

Micro 18: Iain Graham Yachts, 2 Dalmore Crescent, Helensburgh, Scotland (0436 3812.

Micro Challenger: Challenger Yachts (UK), Port Challenge, Ilsham Marine Drive, Torquay, Devon (0803) 25414.

Micro Chip: Woof Boats, 60 Haven Road, Exeter, Devon.

Sheba: South Hants Engineering, Winchester Road, Chandlers Ford, Southampton, Hants. (04215) 2241.

Sparrow: Salty Marine, Unit 91, Springvale Industrial Estate, Cwmbran, Gwent (06333) 70166.