

Crabber 17

£12,000 plus might sound over the top for a 17ft dayboat, but the Crabber 17 has a few surprises up its sleeve... By **David Parker**

The Crabber 17 is a successful blend of old and new – a traditional looking boat built by modern technology. She's a solid little dayboat with an easily handled gaff rig, and a combined boat and trailer weight of 1,934lb (879kg) which enables her to be trailed with no problem by a family saloon car. She can be sailed single-handed or accommodate up to five for day sailing – or two for overnight camping under the sprayhood.



Unmistakably a Crabber, the 17 has distinctive tan sails and wooden deck accessories

First introduced in 1992, some 80 Crabber 17s have been built since. This is a boat that's unmistakably from the Cornish Crabber stable, whose boats range from the 12ft Cormorant to the Crabber 30 Pilot Cutter, the characteristic designs of which are by Roger Dongray.

His original design, a wooden gaff cutter, was taken on by a dinghy-building company 25 years ago, and from that grew Cornish Crabbers. This is the boatbuilding equivalent of Morgan cars – everything is hand-built and hand finished.

Cornish Crabbers' reputation for producing well-built and seakindly craft is not solely down to the ubiquitous Shrimper and Crabber 22, but also some more radical designs including the Cool Cat racing catamaran with a £55,000 price tag (a cruising version costs just under £50,000). At this year's London Boat Show, Cornish Crabbers introduced another surprise, the 26ft Piper, a one design by David Boyd.

All the boats are built in the village of Rock, in Cornwall, and half of them are exported – there's a particularly thriving market in Japan.

Although this range of craft is expensive, these boats are sought after and will hold their price – indeed, some models have proved to be a very shrewd investment (see 'Second-hand boats' panel overleaf).

When you first step aboard the Crabber 17, your first impression is of a robust and elegantly crafted boat. She has oiled hardwood gunwale trims and side-deck slats, with an iroko tiller and mast support post. The mast,

boom, gaff and bowsprit are made from douglas spruce and varnished. This timber, combined with the tan sails, gives this boat her characteristic Crabber looks, along with the distinctive wide-planked, multi-chine effect of the glassfibre hull – a traditional looking boat that doesn't require a traditional amount of maintenance.

Overall length, including bowsprit, is 20 feet, and sitting in the cockpit this dayboat does feel very roomy. With aft, central and forw'd stowage plus cave lockers there's plenty of room for everything whether you're out with the family for the day or using her as a weekendender.

Roger Cox, manager of Cornish Crabbers, came with us on our test sail. He told us that most people tend to sail with the sprayhood up, and with squalls threatening from the south west we got ours up in case the rain did arrive.

The hood can be put up quickly to provide simple yet effective protection from the weather. It has windows at the front and transforms the front of the boat into a surprisingly cosy but light cabin. There are cushions on the side benches and running athwartships. There's also plenty of stowage with lockers under the cushions and more cave lockers above the berths. This degree of comfortable accommodation on a dayboat is a tremendous bonus.

Rigged and ready to go

The mast is stepped in a tabernacle, but since our test boat had recently been commissioned for its new owner we didn't try rigging the boat because she was ready to go. However, we were assured that this is an easy boat to launch and retrieve single-handed.

The loose-footed main was already lashed to the



Multi-chined effect disguises the glassfibre hull

mast and the gaff, and the jib neatly wrapped around the forestay thanks to the standard furling system on the bowsprit. We motored off the pontoon and discovered that hoisting the main with the combined lazyjack/topping lift system is effortless because two lines guide the peak as you hoist or drop the sail.

The galvanised steel centreplate is raised and lowered from the aft cockpit using a drum housed in the midships locker. The reduction gear makes light work of handling this chunky 16mm plate. If sailing alone, the position of the rope tail operating the drum enables you to access it easily from the helming position. There's also a small lifting plate in the rudder to give you extra bite on the water.

Under sail, the Crabber 17 is extremely light on the helm and you need to sit out on the side deck to balance her. She doesn't point brilliantly, being a gaffer, but the high-peaked sail enables you to sail up to 50° to windward. Against an ebb tide, our progress was slow but steady – however, the boat has enough weight to carry her way well and loses little speed when tacking.

On a reach she cracks along beautifully. In a Force 3-4 we had 5.5 knots out of her on a broad reach, her fastest point of sail. She has a tiller extension and the toestraps are conveniently placed for when she's heeled over, but she didn't once threaten to ship any water. This is a very sturdy, dry boat, but if you do get a wave in your lap there's a self-draining cockpit which will also allow you to leave her afloat without a cover.

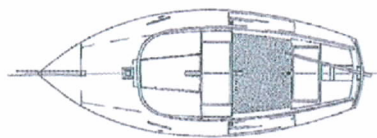
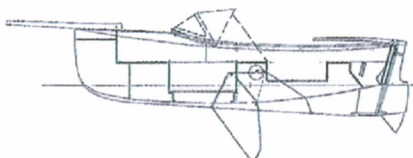
If you balance the main and jib and let go the tiller, she'll sail herself – she's also easily steered by altering the sail trim. Some may prefer more weather helm, but this



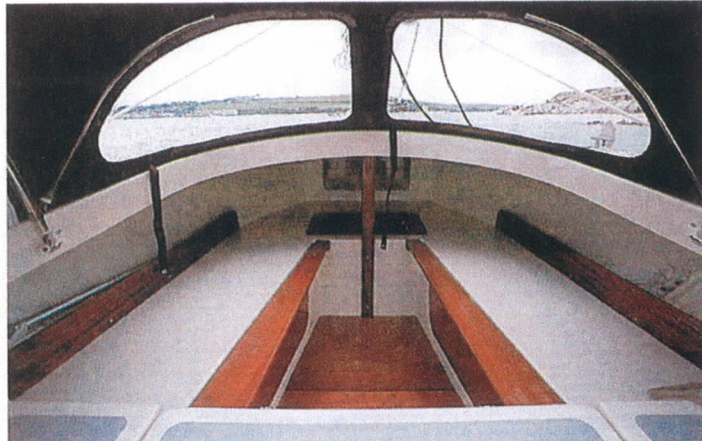
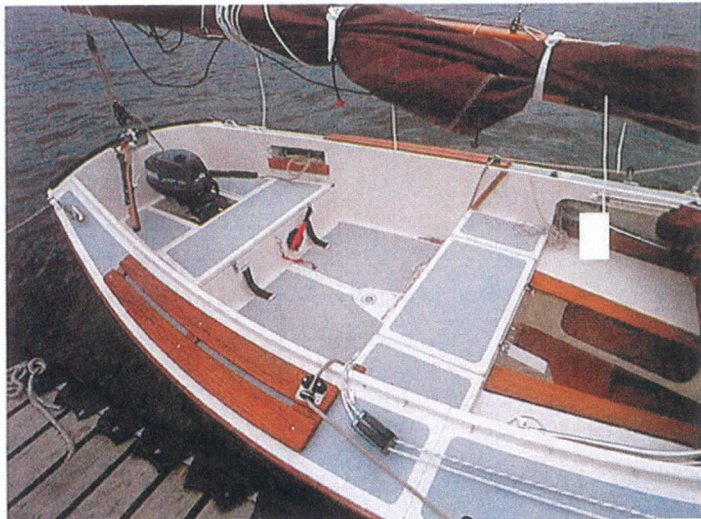
Specifications

LOA	6.10m	20ft
LOD	5.18m	17ft
LWL	4.88m	16ft
Beam	2.06m	6ft 9in
Draught	0.483m-1.219m	1ft 7in-4ft
Displacement	657.70kg	1,450lb
Sail area	16.54m ²	178ft ²

Designer Roger Dongray
Price £12,393 (standard boat)
Built by Cornish Crabbers Ltd, Rock, Wadebridge, Cornwall PL27 6NT
 ☎ 01208 862666 Fax 01208 862375
Website www.crabbers.co.uk



CHARTER Denmark



The open boat can be transformed by erecting the windowed sprayhood. It immediately provides a surprisingly light and comfortable cabin with plenty of dry stowage



The mechanism on the rudder to raise and lower a small lifting plate for more bite on the water



The drum for raising and lowering the steel centreplate is housed in the midships locker



Main halyard and lazyjack/topping lift are led through clutches on the side-deck

high-peaked gaff tacks quickly and will gybe smoothly. All in all, she's a well-balanced boat and a pleasure to sail.

During our test, we carried out several manoeuvres to put the rig through its paces. Under mainsail alone she only lost half a knot of speed on a reach and was still sufficiently controllable to sail in and out of the moorings, with the advantage of being able to depower her quickly. Hove to, she levels up to be a stable platform for brewing up while still holding her position comfortably across the wind. The mainsail has standard slab reefing with two sets of reefing points.

Under power

Our test boat was fitted with a four-stroke 4hp Yamaha outboard although she will take up to a 6hp engine. We found the 4hp model was ample for the Crabber 17 with its easily driven hull. The engine is located in an outboard well forward of the rudder and on the centreline.

The aft locker has been cleverly designed with a horizontal outboard bracket. During our test sail we left the engine on this bracket, where it was well out of the way when sailing but gave immediate access to start up quickly.

With the prop wash over the rudder, the Crabber 17 will virtually turn in a boat length, pivoting on the centreplate. Wind up the plate for shallower waters and the modest hull draught gives enough directional stability to retain an impressive turning circle. Directional control in reverse was also excellent during our test – up or down tide, in or out of the wind. Basically, this boat will let you put her just where you want her.



Sailing Today July 2000

Second-hand boats

Crabber 17s sell fast on the used boat market, often by word of mouth. Keep a look out in the classifieds or search the boats for sale on the Cornish Crabbers website: www.crabbers.co.uk.

The only Crabber 17 advertised here at the time of going to press was number 40 (1996) with an asking price of £5,500. Alex Haig at Anglia Yacht Brokerage (☎ 01359 271747) has just sold No 27 for £9,500. He says that there don't tend to be any problems with these robustly built boats and that owners hang on to them for a long time.

Contact the Cornish Crabbers Association ☎ 01525 240350 for more information on where to buy used boats.



The sprayhood is extremely well-fitted and can be put up quickly in the event of bad weather

SAILING TODAY

Verdict

The Crabber 17 is a roomy dayboat which handles well under sail and effortlessly under power. As an open boat, however, what makes her exceptional is her versatile accommodation. The well-fitted sprayhood gives you a weatherproof cabin, and in good weather you've got comfortable berths in which to stretch out and relax in the sun.

Her shoal draught means she'll take the ground and this is an ideal boat in which to explore creeks and shallower waters. As a trailer sailer, all the spars will stow in the length of the boat.

FOR

Versatile accommodation
Low maintenance
Easily handled rig
Low depreciation

AGAINST

Windward performance suffers compared to Bermudan boat
Relatively high price
Longer rigging time for gaff

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