



SAILING THE FAVOURITES

# *The Shrimper Revisited*

**She has dominated her marketplace for over two decades but there is still a sense of newness about the Cornish Shrimper.**

**Judy Brickhill went to find out why.  
With photographs by Peter Chesworth**

**I**t was over 23 years ago, back in 1979, that designer Roger Dongray created the Cornish Shrimper, the unassuming little cruiser which has since become one of Britain's most consistently successful small production gaffers. There are now nearly 900 of them on the water on both sides of the Atlantic, leaving the Cornish Crabbers workshops at a steady rate of 50 a year with no gaps in the order book in sight. This is a fascinating phenomenon in the mercurial world of boatbuilding and design and definitely worth a closer look.

So what is it about the Shrimper that appeals to so very many people – and has done for so long? Many things, it seems. We could start with her looks, a diminutive weekend gaffer with a low profiled cabin along the gentle sheer and a multichine GRP hull with wide 'lapstrake'

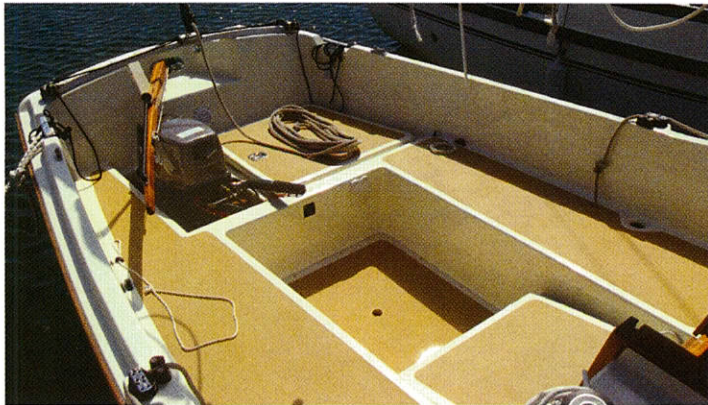
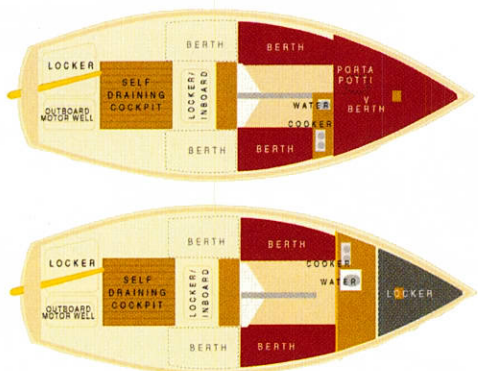
planking. She has a nice run aft to a slightly raked transom, with a long shallow keel to give her directional stability not only when sailing but also when lying at anchor or a mooring, avoiding that tendency to dance about in the wind. With her

straight stem, little bowsprit and tan sails, she was one of the first production traditional-looking boats and she certainly hit the spot!

Perhaps it is her construction, a very tried and tested business indeed, as it is nearly 30 years since Cornish Crabbers began building their range of GRP craft at Rock, just across the estuary from Padstow. Like all their boats the Shrimper has a hull moulding and a deck/cabin moulding, glued and fastened together at the rubbing strake, with teak trim to define her lines. Fine Rock sand was used when creating the female mould for the deck and

***Nearly 900 on the water  
on both sides of the Atlantic***





**Left above:** The '2+2' layout with vee-berth forward and galley shelf under the starboard cushion.

**Left below:** The original Shrimper layout with thwartships galley area forward of the mast compression strut.

**Above:** The raked lid behind the bridge deck hides a large locker or the engine in the inboard version.

**Below:** The neat anchor well and samson post.



coachroof to provide a permanent, non-slip surface, as well as for the cockpit floor, which is raised to allow it to self-drain. Ballast punchings are resined into her bilges just under the cabin sole and there are two buoyancy compartments built into the aft ends of the cockpit seats. Her construction is simple and strong and low maintenance, just what is needed if your leisure time is limited and you'd rather be sailing.

Then there is her size which, at 19'3" LOD, 7'2" beam and 18" draught with the centreplate up, (5.9 x 2.2 x 0.46m) makes for a very handy and easily manageable vessel, both in the water and out. With a weight of about 2,350 lbs (1,066 kg), she is eminently trailable, a fact that can be verified by the number of Shrimpers to be seen in just about every corner of Europe, where the owners have let the ferry take the strain.

Her design is such that, while she is just a big dinghy at heart as far as manoeuvrability is concerned, she provides sheltered and comfortable overnight accommodation for two – and with camping berths for more if the cockpit cover is used. A '2+2' version of the Shrimper is also available. There is a large companionway and hatch for light and air, leading into a well laid out cabin. There's a berth on each side, feet tucking under the quarter decks and the centreplate case at bunk height supports the infill cushion available to make a double. Despite her pleasingly low profile on the water, there is plenty of sitting headroom and the sense of space is enhanced by two portholes in the

hull. Against the aft bulkhead of the cabin are the electronics control panel and a shelf for navigation instruments. Up forward, between the wooden compression post and the louvred door giving access to the forepeak stowage compartment, is an amazingly simple and compact work area. Set into shaped holes in the thwartships work-surface is a gimbaled Gaz cooker and a one gallon (5 litre) water container with hand pump attached which reaches over into a rectangular bucket – aka the 'washing-up bowl' – with a handle for easy-emptying-without-any-holes-in-the-hull. All in all, an excellent arrangement.

The layout on deck has the same characteristics of uncluttered practicality. The cockpit is wide and open with comfortable coamings backing the 6' (1.8m) side benches and a minute after deck to take the mainsheet track. The outboard version of the Shrimper – she's also available with an inboard engine – has a well in the starboard quarter and a locker in which the outboard can be safely stowed away on the port side.

At the forward end of the cockpit, under the bridge deck, is a large locker for fenders and the like, which houses the 9hp Yanmar 1GM10 diesel in the inboard version. To facilitate singlehanded, all halyards and sheets lead back to the cockpit and the centreplate controls, on the bridge deck, are within easy reach of the helm. There is even a tiller extension which I privately thought was a bit of wishful thinking but of which more later! Purchase on







the wide coachroof is very good, so there is no difficulty getting forward to the little, sunken foredeck for anchoring or mooring. The little bowsprit runs over the foredeck, from the wooden housing forward of the cabin and through a gammon iron on the stem. This is stainless steel, like the mast tabernacle, the other deck fittings and the rigging.

Part of the Shrimper's attraction is, of course, her gaff sloop rig. She has a high-peaked main and a good sized jib giving her a working sail area of 194 sq.ft (18 s.m). Although owners are welcome to add spinnakers and genoas, this is the standard suit of sails for the class and the one with which they race. This means that the Shrimper is very much a one-design class for racing in terms of weight,

#### **CORNISH SHRIMPER SPECIFICATION**

Length over spars: 22'6" (6.9m)

LOD: 19'3" (5.9m)

LWL: 17'7" (5.3m)

Beam: 7'2" (2.2m)

Draught – c/p raised: 1'6" (0.46m)

c/p lowered: 4' (1.2m)

Disp: 2350 lbs (1066 kg)

Sail area: 194 sq.ft (18 s.m)

size, and sail plan and the popularity of their regattas shows how owners appreciate this, pitting their sailing skills against each other on a level playing field. Their annual rallies are also attended in large numbers as the Shrimper is first and foremost a cruising boat, ideally suited to exploring estuaries and shoal waters and who better to do it with than a gathering of like-minded, like-boated people?

Indeed, such is the popularity of the Shrimper that it is an unusual marina that doesn't sport at least one of these much sought-after little pocket cruisers. Mylor Harbour, near Falmouth, has several, I noticed as I paced the boards looking for 'Budgie', the man in charge of the flow of finished craft from Rock, who was only too happy to spend a few hours out on the water showing off his own Shrimper. As I stopped to admire a trim specimen in a particularly striking shade of blue – though all Shrimpers are equal, some are a bit more equal than others – Budgie materialised from below, so perhaps this one has a slight advantage.

With a light easterly against us, we fired up the outboard and extricated ourselves from the labyrinthine pontoons to emerge into Carrick Roads where the wind was freshening and the International 14s were just taking to the water for their day's racing. Well, the Shrimper may not be in their league but that tiller extension certainly came into its own as the boat went through her paces for me. With her 4' (1.2m) centreplate to grip the water, we powered up, down and around Ches as he struggled with camera in one hand and the controls of the support boat in the other – it was much easier in the Shrimper where all we had to do was jam our feet against the leeside of the cockpit

#### ***The same characteristics of uncluttered practicality***

and lean out to weather as the boat bounced over the chop.

There was a reasonable amount of weather helm to bring her safely up into the wind if left to her own devices but nothing too heavy on the helm. One feature that I really liked was the Spinlock mainsheet cleat fitting. This is not actually intended for use on a mainsheet track, rather for lifting a heavy centreplate and there is a knack to it but generally I find it so much easier to flick the sheet downwards to secure it and pull it upwards to release.

All too quickly for a Monday morning's work, it was time to come up into the wind to furl the jib, lower the main, start the engine and head back down the winding channel to the marina berth. Over coffee and doughnuts, we discussed the price of this pleasant little package of smart good looks, sound build and practical fun. With the extras of anchor and warps, outboard and fenders, Budgie's Shrimper cost him in the region of £22,000, a fairly standard figure for a new 20' (6m) pocket cruiser these days and for that you get a product that has had all the wrinkles ironed out, a comfortable, practical, efficient, well-designed little craft, as happy creek crawling as thrashing round the buoys anywhere in the world. At this very moment one is travelling by container to the Bahamas – now there's a thought!

#### **CONTACT**

Cornish Crabbers Ltd, Rock, Wadebridge, Cornwall PL27 6PH. Tel: +44 (0)1208 862666 Fax: +44 (0)1208 862375  
email: sales@crabbers.co.uk www.crabbers.co.uk

