

It's never easy to make a near full-width coachroof attractive from every angle, but the new Shrimper doesn't disappoint



Meet the Shrimper's big sister

TESTED

How do you follow one of the biggest success stories in British boatbuilding? David Harding went to the home of the Cornish Shrimper to find out

Whether or not you have ever had reason to take an interest in small trailable gaffers, it would be hard to ignore the Cornish Shrimper.

Over 1,100 of these distinctive 19-footers have been launched since the late 1970s and have spread so widely as to be instantly recognisable by almost everyone who sails in the UK. The Shrimper isn't just a boat: she's an institution.

One reason for this popularity is her versatility. As a Poole-based owner put it after moving to a Shrimper from a racing keelboat,

'I chose a Shrimper because I could cruise it, camp in it, race it, sail it single-handed, take five people for a sail, go to Wareham for lunch, explore the shallows in Poole Harbour and trail it if I want to go anywhere else.'

For him, as for many others, the Shrimper does pretty well everything and everything pretty well. The people facing the challenge were her builders: what would their Shrimper owners move up to should they ever want to move up? And what would potential Shrimper owners buy if 19ft was just a bit too small for them?

Next in the range came the

Crabber 22 – deeper in the draught, nearly a ton heavier and more than twice the price. If you had the budget and, as a Shrimper owner, wanted to go from a trailable weekender to a pretty coastal cruiser with a slim hull, a low coachroof and beautifully finished but not particularly spacious accommodation, the Crabber 22 was a good choice. If, on the other hand, you wanted something closer to what you had already only with more space and pace and without spending nigh on £70,000 – well, that's what got Cornish Crabbers thinking.

The result is the Shrimper 21. Yes, there's now another Cornish Shrimper and it has the potential to confuse everyone. Even the fine folk at Cornish Crabbers can still sometimes be heard referring to the 19 as 'the Shrimper', so it's going to take a while to get used to the idea of Shrimpers in the plural. This is no small deal: a new boat that has the temerity to adopt the name of a sister who has become

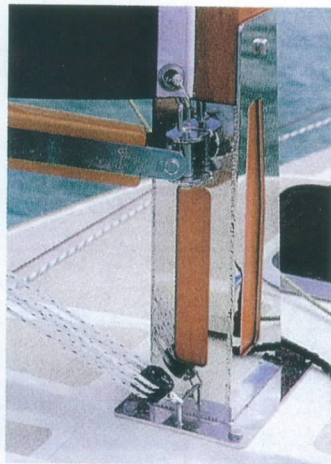
a legend in her own lifetime. And there's more, because the Crabber 17 has been renamed the Shrimper 17. Can you imagine the exchanges between these three boats in the corner of the fit-out shop after everyone has gone home for the evening? If boats were capable of such things, it would be pistols at dawn.

Crabbers' idea is that the smaller, trailable models in the range are now all called Shrimpers (unless they have Bermudan rigs, in which case both they and the Crabbers become Adventures). The larger models, from the 22 upwards, are called Crabbers – unless they're Adventures. It's all perfectly logical, even though one suspects that there will be always be 'the Shrimper'. Nothing is going to change that in a hurry.

Coming of age

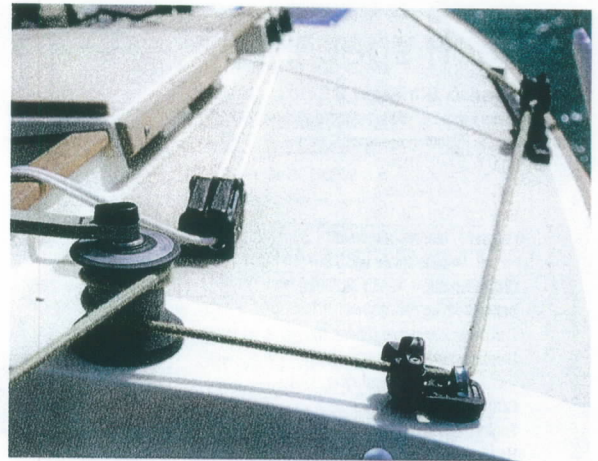
So, the plan was to create a bigger Shrimper. That meant incorporating features that have made the 19 so successful, making improvements where improvements could be made, and increasing size while keeping towing, rigging and launching as straightforward as possible.

Roger Dongray – designer of the



RIGHT Hardware is efficient and unashamedly modern throughout

LEFT A tabernacle with a high pivot point allows the boom to stay on the gooseneck with the mast lowered



Broad teak cappings make for a comfortable perch on the coamings should you choose to sit up
INSET The 'track and strap' system for the mainsail



original Shrimper and many of the other boats in the range – drew the lines and developed the 21 in conjunction with David Thomas Yachts. Although David Thomas sadly died last year, the company that bears his name continues. With David's son Peter now in charge of Cornish Crabbers and Peter's nephew, David Thomas Jnr, putting his engineering and design skills to good use in his role as general manager, Crabbers have plenty of in-house expertise at their disposal.

Importantly – and not surprisingly, given Dongray's flair for drawing pretty boats – the new Shrimper looks the business. There's no mistaking her pedigree. Yet there are differences between her and her little sister. Some are obvious from a quick glance at the profile drawing: the vertical stem and more upright stern for a more modern appearance and longer waterline, the extended coachroof for greater accommodation, a more pronounced sheerline, a keel that's cut away at its aft end to give greater manoeuvrability, a higher aspect-ratio centreplate for better performance and a balanced rudder for a lighter helm.

Other differences are confirmed

or revealed once you see her in the flesh. For a start, the profile gives few clues that this is a pretty high-volume hull. Providing a generous amount of space below decks was a priority, though the waterline is relatively narrow and the volume is created by flared topsides coupled with a coachroof that's both long and wide.

Despite her greater size, the 21 is only around 700lb (317kg) heavier than the 19, so owners who upgrade their boats will often be spared the need to upgrade their tow-car. Once you've reached the slipway, her builders reckon the 21 is appreciably quicker to rig: with practice she should need around 30 minutes rather than the hour or so for which the 19 will typically keep her owners occupied.

A whole host of factors contributes to the speedier launching. For example, there's no need to attach and detach the boom because a higher tabernacle allows it to remain

on the gooseneck with the mast lowered. Bending on the mainsail is easier, too: it slides into a track on the yard rather than being laced in the conventional manner. Similarly modern thinking has been applied to the luff between the gooseneck and the throat, where we find webbing straps with hook-and-loop fastening around the mast. Crabbers have dubbed this the 'track-and-strap' approach and, while there will doubtless be those who disapprove, it should save a lot of fiddling.

Add a hinge-up bowsprit for single-handed raising and lowering of the mast, and a flexible carbon headfoil from Aeroluff instead of the stiffer, heavier and easily-damaged conventional aluminium extrusion, and it's easy to see why big sis gets to splash first.

Expanding the options

Where you really feel the extra size of the 21 is in the cockpit. Self-draining and able to swallow

five adults with reasonable comfort, it has high coamings topped by broad teak cappings that provide a comfortable perch.

Beneath the sole is a 9hp Yanmar diesel if, as have most owners to date, you plump for the inboard option. Alternatively, an outboard (4-6hp would be ample) can be hinged clear of the water in a central well that occupies the space otherwise used for the Yanmar's diesel tank in the stern.

Engine choice comes down to preference and budget. It's significant that Crabbers have managed to keep the starting price for the outboard version the same as for an inboard-powered 19. That's good going given the difference in size and is the result of her being designed and engineered for production efficiency in ways that the 19 never was. For example, the ballast (iron encapsulated in resin) is poured into the hull after the interior moulding has been fitted, so it can



Tech spec

Cornish Shrimper 21

Price: From £33,600 (outboard version)/£42,250 (inboard)

Length including bowsprit: 7.57m (24ft 10in)

LOA: 6.40m (21ft 0in)

LWL: 6.09m (20ft 0in)

Beam: 2.40m (7ft 10in)

Draught – centreplate down: 1.35m (4ft 5in)

– centreplate up: 0.6m (1ft 10in)

Displacement: 1,400kg (3,086lb)

Ballast: 425kg (937lb)

Sail area: 23.6 sq m (254sq ft)

Displacement/length ratio: 172

Sail area/displacement ratio: 19.15

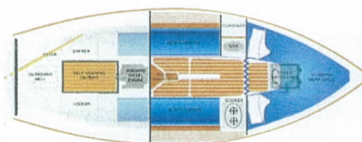
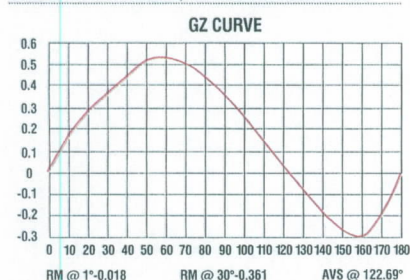
RCD category: C

Engine: 4-8hp outboard or Yanmar 9hp diesel inboard

Headroom: 1.32m (4ft 4in)

Designer: Roger Dongray/David Thomas Yachts

Builder: Cornish Crabbers, www.cornishcrabbers.co.uk



Cooker with a cover: the neat two-burner gas hob

be distributed according to whether an inboard or outboard version is chosen. The engine is fitted afterwards too, the cockpit moulding remaining the same either way (unlike on the 19, which has to be built to accommodate one engine or the other). This flexibility simplifies production and planning enormously.

There's no headliner in the cabin. Who needs one? It makes sense to save both the cost and, importantly in a trailable boat, the weight. With mass-volume builders, production expediencies sometimes result in restricted access to systems and perhaps to structural compromises. That doesn't appear to be the case here: it's about allowing production to flow in a way that minimises waste and keeps delivery times as short as possible once an owner has chosen his or her specification, be it for an inboard-powered Shrimper 21 or an Adventure version with an outboard.

What matters most is that the 21 looks and feels like a bigger version of the 19. She has varnished spars and (as standard) tan sails, now made rather nicely by Freeman Sails in a loft just across the estuary in Padstow. Exterior trim is teak. Hardware is principally from Seldén, with the addition of a pair of Barton winches, a Houdini forehatch and clutches from Spinlock.

It's all simple and it works, as

I found on a trip to Rock to sail Shrimper 21 No2. Despite not being officially No1, she was the first to hit the water. It often works this way in boatbuilding.

Our sail had to be fitted between the boat's initial trials and her departure to her new home in Plymouth. It also had to coincide with middle-of-the-day high tides (you could walk or wade most of the way to Padstow at low water) and a suitable weather window. In the end it all came together and the Camel Estuary is a lovely place to sail, even if flat water and extremely shifty winds do impose a few restrictions when it comes to putting a boat through her paces.

A modern gaffer

Many new-generation gaffers aim to blend traditional charm with modern convenience. In this they broadly succeed, though I have often thought they would have wider appeal if only they were a little lighter and more nimble to sail. While long keels and unbalanced rudders are what you expect on traditional working craft, a lighter helm and greater manoeuvrability would surely make modern classics more attractive to owners who accept that what they really want is a modern boat dressed in a traditional costume. Who would buy a retro-styled modern car if it drove like the original?

If you're after a shoal-draught

gaffer like this you have to live with some compromises in performance – first with the gaff rig (see our comparison between the Shrimper and Adventure 19 in PBO August 2013) and then with the combination of a long shallow keel and flat steel centreplate. That's the nature of the beast. At the same time, there's no reason why your flat steel centreplate shouldn't be deeper in the draught and shorter in the chord, as on the 21. Neither is there any reason why the keel shouldn't be a little shorter as well, though it makes sense to have a keel to protect the prop and stern gear on a boat that's trailed, sailed in shallow water and often kept on a drying mooring.

And then there's the rudder. Sailing a gaffer shouldn't mean having your shoulders ripped out of their sockets when the wind comes abaft the beam. That's definitely not part of the charm. Gaffers are prone to developing weather helm off the wind because of the length of the boom, but throw an unbalanced rudder into the equation and sailing can become hard work.

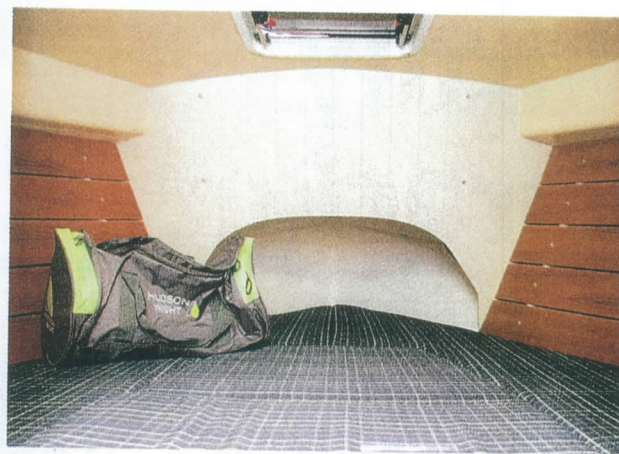
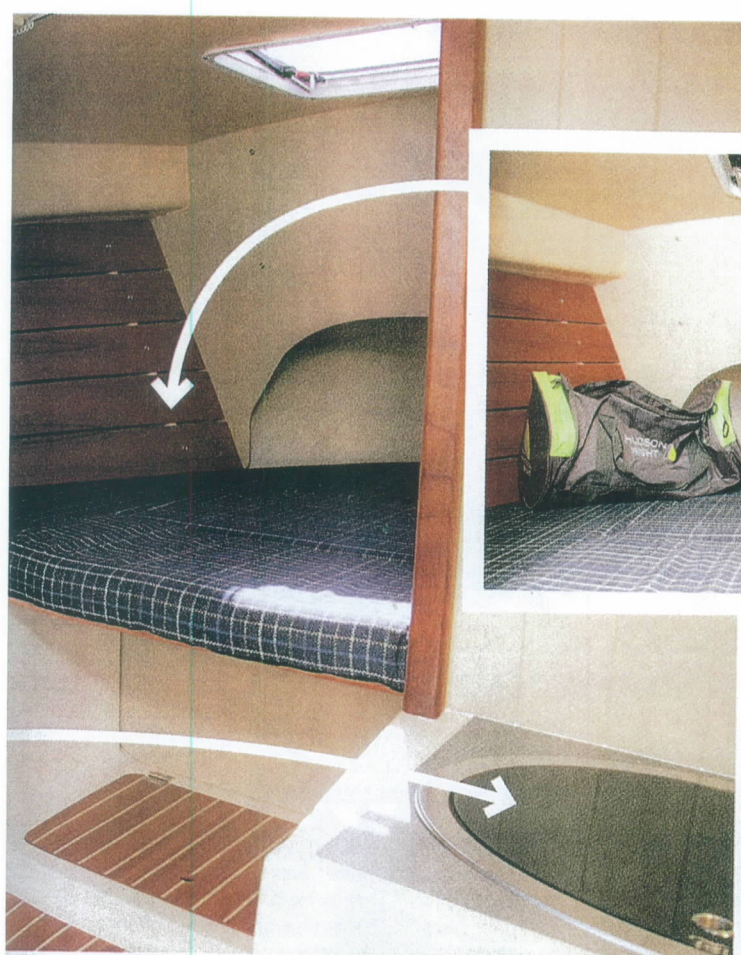
You're less likely to become friendly with your physiotherapist if you own a Shrimper 21. Instead of sitting inboard, bracing your feet on the opposite side of the cockpit and using all your strength to wrestle with the tiller, you can enjoy sitting on the coaming – if you so choose – and steering with the

extension while creaming along on a broad reach at 6.5 knots. Hurrah for a bit of balance.

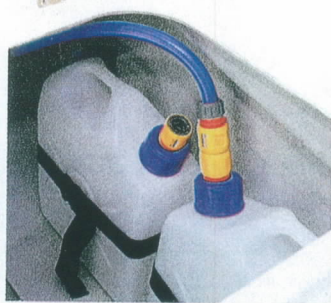
The new Shrimper doesn't sail like a sporty fin-keeler and still needs a firm shove on the helm to bring her through the wind. Spinning on a sixpence is not in the repertoire of boats like this and is not intended to be. On the other hand she's surprisingly light and responsive, combining satisfying performance with a high degree of tolerance and forgiveness.

We started out in a gentle breeze that picked up to 15-17 knots by the end. It was enough to let us push the boat reasonably hard and might have encouraged some owners to think about reefing. Upwind we clocked between 5 or 5.5 knots most of the time. Even allowing for a tacking angle that's probably no less than 90° – it was impossible to judge in the shifty conditions – that's not bad going. With the sheets eased we soon stopped commenting when 6.5 knots showed on the dial, though the appearance of 7 knots did elicit a reaction, as did the minimum wash. Mr Dongray appears to have given the new Shrimper a nicely slippery hull combined with plenty of stability.

Between them, he and Crabber



The forecabin berth is long and wide enough for two large adults



Water neat idea: two small water bottles with Hozelock connectors

With four full-length berths, a separate forecabin, comfortable sitting headroom and a galley and toilet, the new Shrimper offers plenty of space for a trailable 21-footer. Extra stowage units can be fitted in the saloon

have also bestowed her with remarkably good manners. Spun through 360° with the sheets pinned in so she came out of the circle virtually dead in the water, she regained speed quickly and with little tendency to stall. On the wind she could be pinched mercilessly without losing steerageway. If we bore away in the strongest gusts we could find without easing the sheets, only rarely did the rudder lose grip.

All told, the big Shrimper proved

to be an engaging and rewarding boat to sail; one that's capable of satisfying those who enjoy sailing for sailing's sake, while doing nothing to frighten owners who want something roomy, practical, easy to handle and slightly trad in which to enjoy simply bobbing about on the water.

It's not only in sailing mode that her manners are in evidence. Under power we could describe a figure-of-eight in astern with a brisk wind on the bow. The Yanmar

should provide ample power in most conditions, even if some owners might be tempted to replace the two-bladed fixed prop with a folder or, at the very least, to align the blades behind the keel.

Stacks of stowage

In the cockpit is a full-depth locker each side. The battery lives in the starboard one and a gas locker is built into its after end. At the forward end of the port locker are two bottles for the fresh water,

fitted with Hozelock connectors so the pipe can easily be switched from one to the other. The idea, first used on the Hunter 20 when Cornish Crabbers owned Hunter Boats, is that it's easier to carry two smaller bottles aboard than one big one.

A hinged hatch in the cockpit sole gives access to the engine. The whole sole can be unscrewed and lifted out if necessary. In the bow is a deep anchor well, a Samson post on its after face providing a pivot point for the bowsprit (which, incidentally, is shared with the Shrimper 19).

Accommodation

The pictures tell the story here. In summary it's neat and functional, finished in white-painted tongue-and-groove-effect timber and varnished trim. Up to bunk level the accommodation is formed by the interior moulding.

Both berths in the saloon are 1.9m (6ft 3in) long. Between them and the main bulkhead is the galley: sink to port and cooker, complete with hinge-down cover to leave a near-flush surface, to starboard. If you want a table in the saloon, lift out the infill board from the aft end of the forecabin berth and fix it up on its bracket – or use it to bridge the space between the two sides of the galley and you have a seat.

Access to the forecabin, with a berth that's over 2m (6ft 6in) long and almost as wide at the aft end, is easy because there's no central compression post. A bit of design work has seen to that and also kept the centreplate's case shorter than you would expect.

With 1.32m (4ft 4in) of headroom and a sea toilet with holding tank – or a chemical loo if you prefer – under the fore berth, the new Shrimper provides pretty civilised accommodation for a 6.4m (21ft) trailable gaffer.

Other boats to look at



BayCruiser 20

PRICE: £35,940

Yawl-rigged, much lighter than the Shrimper and with water-ballast to minimise the trailing weight, she's different in many ways but still likely to be compared because of her modern-classic appearance and similar size.

www.swallowboats.com



Kite

PRICE: £31,950

Also lighter than the Shrimper and sportier in nature, this new design by Andrew Wolstenholme has a large cockpit, a relatively small cabin and a single-chined hull. Auxiliary propulsion is from an outboard only. Full production is just starting.

www.demonyachts.co.uk



Méaban

PRICE: £POA

Built in wood-epoxy near St Malo, this pretty 22-footer is designed for easy trailering, offered with gaff or Bermudan rigs and available for home completion too. Four berths, space for a cooker and loo; outboard engine.

www.gomarine.co.uk

PBO verdict

Simple efficiency is what the new Shrimper is all about, but simple efficiency doesn't happen on its own. Everything about the boat has been carefully calculated and, from the order book to date, it looks as though the calculations have been to good effect. If I were a Shrimper 19, I think I would perhaps be just a little envious of my new big sister.