

Technical Reviews, Part 1: Autumn 1980

Philip Tolhurst · BDA Autumn Newsletter 1980, pp. 1-2

Summary. Philip Tolhurst's round-up of new ideas seen on Dragons in 1980. He describes the first composite boats (GRP hull with a wooden deck), John Boyce's plan to extrude Dragon masts at Burnham, and Lewmar small winches with bottom-action handles at about £51.50 + VAT. He explains in detail the two-ended wire-and-rope runner system with a six-to-one fine adjustment used by European Champion "Donald Duck", and surveys cockpit spinnaker launching, mainsail control lines led aft or through the coachroof, and through-deck spinnaker sheets.

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Since the Notes were last published there have been quite a few new ideas that have appeared on various boats; some of these I have listed below. Reflecting the younger and possibly therefore more innovated group that are now sailing Dragons, particularly abroad, few of these ideas have necessitated actual changes in the rules. In fact the only items appearing on this year's I.Y.R.U. Agenda was to confirm the banning of hydraulics and also banning of any device altering the length of the forestay during the race.

The major innovation, of course, being the introduction of "composite" boats, i.e. G.R.P. hull with a conventional wooden deck. The first of these was Marcus Glass's "CHICHILLI" followed by "WARLORD II" and "STORM". Since then Borresen has completed a new boat for Klaus Oldendorf. Externally this boat is very nice indeed, the internal layout is traditional Borresen although he had incorporated "a perspex shelf at the front end of the cabin", which I thought was a very useful and particularly dry way of keeping tools and the like. The boat also has been built using blast in shelf system for joining deck to hull, which will also be used in Mike Patten's new Dragon that is now being finished off at Burnham.

There is a possibility that another three or four new Dragons may be finished off in this way over the next six months, and if so sail numbers should reach 500 some time next summer.

More particular items of note:

Masts

John Boyce of Burnham has acquired the necessary extruding equipment to make Dragon masts, and hopes to be in production by next Spring. At the moment there are no prices available and details of fittings have to be sorted out, but almost certainly the masts will be cheaper than importing them from Denmark for no other reason than saving shipping and freight charges.

Winches

Lewmar have confirmed that their brand of small winches can be supplied with bottom action handle, cost approximately £51.50 + V.A.T.

An Alternative to Runner Winches

“DONALD DUCK”, which won this year’s European Championships, had dispensed with their runner wheels, instead were using a two ended system. A run of wire was led onto a single block through which was led some heavy duty non-stretch rope, one end of which was led back to the cleat beam at the halyard drop, and the other through a turning block and onto a six to one purchase which in turn led to a cleat on the side of the coaming by the main sheet traveller. The block on the wire pulled afterwards on two lengths of shock cord led to the stern of the boat. This is the first block system I have seen that seems to have any chance of success. The crew of “DONALD DUCK” said it worked extremely well. On the beat the technique was to use “coarse” adjustment, take the slack out of the run of wire when it was just clear of the leeward side of the mainsail. When they tack one of the crew merely took up all the strain on the six to one purchase. When they came to tack again the only thing to be let off was this fine adjustment rope which was on a retaining line, but there was no need to either let off any more wire or take up any slack. I think, however, that it might take a fairly strong crew to make this system work really well, but I am sure that a number of boats will be using it next Season.

Spinnakers

A very large number of boats have now dispensed with their chutes and are using the launch system from the cockpit. This, of course, necessitates very long spinnaker sheets. One or two boats have devised a stainless steel protector to stop the sheets snagging around the bottom of the forestay.

Mainsail Control

Again a number of boats have this year been experimenting with taking the main sheet control aft so that the crew can adjust whilst sitting out to weather. The Americans had them all coming up through the floor to a mini cleat beam situated across the boat just under the main sheet traveller. I could not see how they could really reach this sitting out to weather in any weight of wind. The Austrians led their Cunningham & Kicker controls out through the top of the coach roof. This was probably the simplest system; it was probably difficult to get a good purchase, and it certainly didn’t add anything to the look of the boat. “WARLORD’s” are led aft under the deck and come up through the deck by the cleat beam, and the Finn, “WHITE LADY”, led kicker, backstay control with matching cleats either side of the traveller. It was also interesting to note that “WHITE LADY” had no drum winches on board and was getting the power for kicker by leading a double ended wire strap through a double block on the floor and then up to a three to one purchase on either side to give the necessary power.

Through Deck Spinnaker Sheets

Several boats have also devised systems to take the spinnaker sheet down through the stern deck and then up through the side deck halfway between the end of the cockpit and the shrouds. Bearing in mind the number of times we got our spinnaker sheets into something approaching a cat's cradle, I think this is something we might introduce before next Season!

— *Philip Tolhurst*

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