A full-page photograph of a sailboat with a large white sail sailing on the water. The boat is angled towards the right, and the sail is fully deployed. The water is dark and choppy, and the sky is a clear blue. The boat has a red flag at the bottom of the mast.

# A CURLEW

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## *From* CHRISTCHURCH

Yes, they do still build beautiful boats today, as  
Martin Tregoning and Peter Chesworth  
discovered.



Just over 50 years ago, Charles Purbrook took a break from working with silver in order to build himself a small clinker dinghy. No sooner had he finished than someone insisted upon buying her from him. He started another and before long had changed the silversmith's apron for that of a boat-builder. The Coot class dinghy was replaced in 1938 by the pretty Shelduck, a half decked dayboat but production was interrupted to build lifeboats and ship's whalers during the war. The Shelduck reappeared after hostilities in a canvas sided cabin version and showed the typical raised foredeck which has since become a practical feature of all the boats from the yard.

In 1949, two years before Charles Purbrook retired, the 22 foot Heron was launched to be followed a few years later by the Pintail, a 27 footer designed by his partner Hugh Rossiter. Finally in 1979, a year after Hugh's own son Charles joined the firm, the 32 foot Curlew was launched. Early Pintail and Curlew hulls were built in wood but when their popularity de-



manded the change to GRP, Rossiter's went out of their way to blend solid timber and glass fibre into a single unit.

When you step aboard a Curlew there are many aspects about the boat which you might notice immediately: the wide decks, solid fittings, raised foredeck and so on. I am confident that the one thing you will not notice is that this boat is built in glass fibre. No attempt is made to hide Curlew's modern origins, but neither is the practicality and charm of wood lost; the two materials harmonizing to create a splendid example of the traditional boat builder's craft.

The Curlew's strong lines, broad beam on top of a long keel with external iron ballast, have produced a stiff hull which rises readily to the seas and responds equally predictably to sudden gusts – even when over-canvased. The boat is available in three hull configurations: bilge keel, long deep keel or the long keel with a centre plate which Classic Boat sailed.

When photographer Peter Chesworth and I

*The varnished topsides, uncluttered main deck and comfortable cockpit are the hallmarks of the Curlew.*



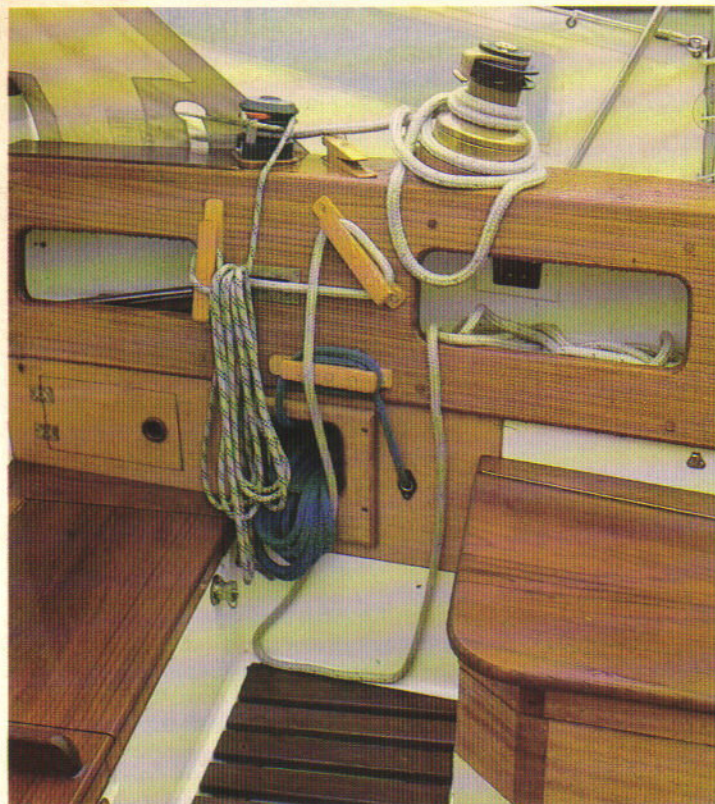
arrived at Rossiter's Christchurch yard, we looked at one of the hulls ashore and could fully appreciate the depth forward which creates so seaworthy a craft. The high freeboard could be a disadvantage for swimming or, more importantly, a man overboard but the low after decks surrounding the cockpit allow easy access back on board.

Once aboard the full expanse of level deck can be appreciated, lacking nothing yet unclut-

tered by the gadgets typical of more modern cruiser/racers. Movement around the decks is safe and easy even with substantial angles of heel: the low coachroof has full length grab rails and the stanchions and guardwires run firmly between pulpit and pushpit.

The deck itself is symmetrically covered with a Vetus non slip deck covering which is recessed flush with the surface. The mast is deck mounted with all the running rigging retained





The T-shaped cockpit sole allows the crew to stand when working the winches.

The neat pinrail for the tiller exemplifies the outstanding joinery above and below.



Light from the small seamanlike ports is reflected by lots of white paint in the main saloon. A proper chart table but Martin would have liked the navigator to be able to wedge himself in more securely.

at its foot rather than the often messy practice of leading all lines to the cockpit. The toe rails are wood and have frequent drain holes along their length, while low breakwaters stop any water that is still aboard from reaching the crew.

The Curlew feels safe and secure in the deep wood-lined cockpit with its wide wood capped coamings. Winches for jib sheets and roller furling are mounted on the capping with wooden jamming cleats alongside. The mainsheet, secured to a steel horse over the tiller, has two hauling parts which lead, via blocks and sheaves, down opposite sidedecks through into the cockpit. All this cordage can

be very neatly stowed away into small recessed lockers together with the braided centreplate control line.

The cockpit has the conventional arrangement of side and stern benches with deep lockers beneath, the after one is so cavernous that it will hold inflatable, outboard and liferaft! Across the fore end of the cockpit is the usual step locker and lifting the centre lid reveals the engine compartment, while the port and starboard lockers each house interconnected 28 gallon water tanks. Unusually the side benches stop short of the step lockers giving clear standing access on each side of the cockpit to the winches and sheets. The cockpit drain

sumps are well outboard and although the cockpit is self draining, one of the two bilge pumps is used for removing any water that does collect.

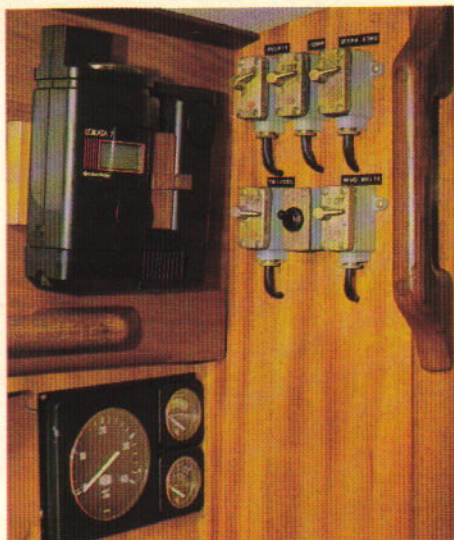
The 28 hp Volvo lies beneath the cockpit sole, and is one of the quietest installations I have come across. Routine engine checks are carried out by removing the companion ladder or via a small round watertight hatch under the cockpit grating but the sole can be lifted for major maintenance. The diesel filler is right aft above the 50 gallon tank and alongside the large, two bottle self draining gas locker.

The boat we were to sail was berthed at Lymington, amid one of the Solent's aluminium forests, the area carved from what was once a raw salt marsh. I had always thought that the Solent's marinas were to be admired so it was disappointing to find that finger piers were short with insufficient mooring cleats on the pontoons: the boat's owner had to make one painter fast around the pontoon framework itself. All of which had some bearing upon clearing the pontoon, since while



manoeuvring stern first out of the berth, we discovered about the only vice of any consequence that the Curlew seems to possess. The high freeboard forward is bound to catch the wind and combined with a large three bladed prop and heavy transom rudder, it appears very difficult to go astern in a straight line. On such occasions the seamanlike answer is to take the line of least resistance: since we could not turn her head into the wind, we left the marina stern first and with some extra backing and filling, which took a little longer, the job was completed safely. Generally the boat handled very well under power although her weight meant full power was needed to stop her.

The helmsman has just got full all around visibility when seated, so the tiller is longer perhaps than normal and curves gracefully up and is well positioned for steering from the



*Serious switches and a sensible housing for the RDF.*

*Deep fiddles and lots of storage space around the galley area.*

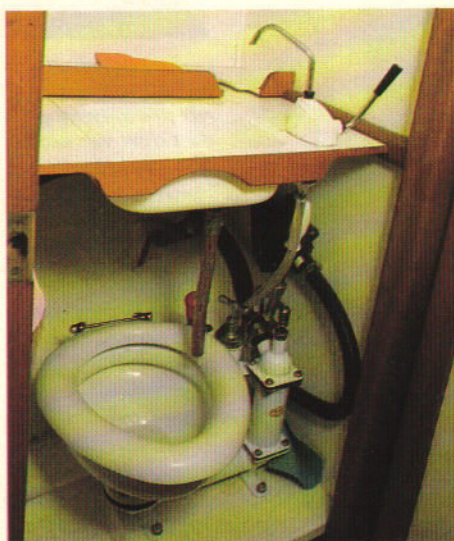


*To save on seacocks, the slide-away hand basin drains into the proper marine toilet.*

cockpit sides. I did find that the tiller's length made the single lever engine control a little difficult to reach when manoeuvring at close quarters.

The boat is available with either sloop or cutter rig which would be my preference. However, our sloop rigged Curlew had the optional Kemp Furlex reefing, a valuable addition for short handed or family sailing. The masthead rig with 578 square feet is by no means small yet Curlew is forgiving as I discovered in the strong north easterly. During the early part of the sail, she would have been lighter on the helm had we taken a reef on the main. The long wood tiller allowed me to continue under full sail although this was occasionally a two-handed task, yet at no time was there a sense that the boat could become difficult to handle in the sudden gusts.

I was able to push the boat around as we posed her for Peter's photographs and I was pleased with response to the tiller as we tacked and gybed: the Curlew passed through the wind in a very ladylike manner and she was equally well mannered sailing under main or genoa alone. Once the modelling session was



over, we were able to get under way.

Performance is good but not startling: she is after all a heavy displacement boat so rapid acceleration is not one of her strong points; she is

a solid, reliable, long distance cruising boat with none of the tenderness unfortunately common amongst more recent designs. You won't spend the whole time laying on your ear even in light winds aboard this boat. After rounding Hurst Castle, I was able to free off a little, heading towards Christchurch. The Stowe log showed a very steady 6 plus knots and the eventual passage time supported its readings.

Settled on course the tiller may be left to its own devices resting against a brass pin, in one of a row of holes along the cockpit's after coaming: a seamanlike system which permits finer adjustment with the addition of intermediate holes or by slight alterations to sail trim.

A prospective buyer can always check a boat's accommodation on a mooring or even ashore at a Boat Show but nothing can replace the practicality of moving around below when underway. Unfortunately our sail through North Channel saw only a little sea running and down below movement was easy and the motion comfortable but I would expect this to be the same in a good blow. When making my way around I was pleased that a grab handle was never out of reach, essential in any yacht with seagoing intentions.

The main cabin is reached through a sliding hatch and two solid wood doors. The companionway is wide, taking nearly the full width of the narrower than customary coachroof. Below, the advantage of the long raised foredeck becomes obvious, creating spacious 5 berth accommodation. Plenty of natural daylight enters the cabin which can be supplemented by the numerous lights, all individually switched.

Power comes from two sets of batteries: Rossiters believe in plenty of amps so use two pairs of 6 volt batteries wired in series for both domestic and engine needs. The pair used for engine starting are stowed in a locker at the foot of the companionway while the domestic batteries are under the cabin sole. Typical of the attention to detail are the waterproof switches for the navigation lights located just next to the main hatch. The switches are made of brass and have a nice solid feel.

Sensible stowage is so often foresaken for ease of construction or appearance but this is not the case aboard the Curlew. The main and forward cabins each contained ample lockers and drawers for clothing, personal items and of course consumables, enough for a prolonged family cruise or more distant voyages. The drawers have small lugs on their runners to prevent them sliding open when the boat is heeled but it's a pity that there are not additional lugs to stop them coming all the way out.

The galley is to port and illustrates the care that has gone into design and completion. The food preparation area is laminated, with high fiddles dividing it into small work surfaces. This whole area is compact with stove, stainless sink and work surfaces arranged around the cook. There is plenty of cave stowage plus lockers for crockery and stores. The oven is fixed and separate from the two burner stove above which can be used gimbaled at sea or secured in port. I was surprised not to find a galley crash bar or safety strap. On board our



boat, the sink had a useful salt water tap and small fridge fitted behind the oven.

To starboard opposite the galley is a deep oilskin locker which allows the skipper to forbid wet gear forward of this point, a great help in keeping the rest of the boat dry and salt free. The chart table and navigation area are also to starboard, just forward of the wet locker. A deep bookshelf above the table and a fiddled shelf outboard provides stowage for the navigator who sits at the end of the starboard berth. He has nothing to lean or brace himself against and would soon become tired in a sea-way.

There are two full length settee berths, the port converting very neatly into a double. A large folding table is offset slightly to port to allow easy passage fore and aft. The padded settee backs hide deep lockers and the forward bulkhead has more bookshelves fitted which I think essential aboard any boat planning extended cruising.

The doors separating the main and forward cabins close to provide privacy for the heads and the same arrangement can also create an optional shower cubicle. To reduce the number of through-hull discharges, the slideway wash basin drains into the heads when used and a simple yet clever piece of design prevents the heads door from being closed

after use if the overboard valve is left open which saves unpleasant flooding. Stowage is still not forgotten even here: individual cave lockers are provided for toiletries, toothbrush etc. Opposite the heads is a large hanging locker for any other gear like the dinner suit – just in case!

The forward compartment is fairly simple in comparison with the main cabin, having only two single bunks which extend right forward. The sails are stowed beneath the port bunk and under the starboard one are more lockers and drawers for the crew. A wooden spurling pipe takes 30 fathoms of  $\frac{5}{16}$ th chain down to an open chain locker amidships between the bunks. This allows plenty of fresh dry air to circulate around the cable though it might smell a bit salty if all the mud and weed hasn't been washed off. A simple step locker between the two bunks makes useful seaboot stowage and assists an exit through the fore hatch.

Ventilation is provided mainly by the forward and main hatches although this is supplemented by mushroom vents over the galley and in the fore cabin plus a ventlite in the heads. Our crew's night board was a very cold one; anti freeze of the malt variety being used but in the morning there was not a sign of condensation neither was it that cold in the boat. (Well he wasn't: I have it on good authority that

*Martin lay warm in his bunk while the technical half of the dynamic duo cooked the bacon butties – Ed.)*

### Summary

Curlew is the result of considerable attention to detail both in design and final fit out. As further examples, the sheet tidies in the cockpit have limber holes to drain away water that collects and any wood which is liable to be stepped upon, like the cockpit lockers, is left unvarnished to reduce slippery surfaces and unsightly worn varnish. She comes with a very comprehensive inventory, for example the boat is equipped with two anchors as standard with wooden stowage pads for each, a Sestrel Moore compass and bi-colour, tri-colour and all round masthead navigation lights.

A well built boat providing most of the comforts of home within a moderate sized, beamy boat. Her performance is reliable and of the quality that will meet the needs of family weekend or extended summer holiday cruises or for a couple of long term liveaboards.

I thoroughly enjoyed a very brisk sail aboard Curlew and it has whetted my desire to become further acquainted with this elegant lady. Perhaps compiling a volume on classic anchorages, havens and hostels for boat reporters – who knows?

