



The original Drascombe Drifter was part of the Drascombe range designed by John Watkinson, a development of the Coaster which, amongst other refinements, incorporated a long centre keel with bilge plates to avoid the invasion of cabin space by a centreboard housing. A total of 110 Drifters had been built between 1977 to 1986 and although production stopped, any Drifters that come onto the secondhand market are still snapped up eagerly by members of the Drascombe fraternity despite a few drawbacks which have been identified over the years.

There was obviously a place in the Drascombe range for a new version of the Drifter and this is exactly what Stewart has been developing. A couple of years ago, in consultation with John Watkinson's widow, Kate, he commissioned a design from Paul Fisher of Selway-Fisher Design – see *Grand Designs*, W51 – which would incorporate all the amendments he had pinpointed over years of personal experience of sailing Drascombes and of talking to other Drascombe owners. The result is the Drascombe Drifter 22, with which Stewart is, as they say, well pleased.

The new leader of the Drascombe pack has a waterline length of 19'3" (5.9m), only a little longer than the Coaster but with a 7'3" (2.2m) beam, 9" (225mm) wider, she is significantly more spacious. Even so, Paul's design is very much in keeping with the style and character for which Drascombes are so well known. The prototype hull, from which Stewart intends to create the GRP production boats, is constructed of epoxy-sheathed plywood, with wide clinker planks and the characteristic Drascombe

*The new Drifter can sail in shoal waters or onto a beach... obviating the need to unship the rudder on launch and recovery.*

sheer. Instead of the fixed keel of the earlier Drifter, she has twin drop keels – bilge plates – of galvanised mild steel which increase her draft from 1'3" to a purposeful 3'5" (0.38/1.07m). She weighs in at 1,985 lbs (900kg), carrying her ballast in the form of two batteries stored under the cabin sole by the mast, as well as some movable lead weights for trimming.

One of the most noticeable design changes, the self-draining cockpit, is a first for any Drascombe. This has a skin fitting in the hull with a non-return valve and to keep feet safe from any water which does get into the cockpit, there is a channel around the sides of the sole to direct the flow. The sole has an inset panel, hinged at the forward edge, which can be raised to form a washboard below the cabin doors.

The cockpit itself is a good 6' (1.8m) long, with deep lockers under the seats and a substantial coaming curving round aft to the outboard well. This cunning design positions the engine immediately ahead of the rudder for maximum steering efficiency, as the wash from the prop over it helps to turn the boat. But this is not its only feature. The motor mounting pad is set at an angle to the boat's centreline so that when sailing, the engine can be turned and tilted up into the well, avoiding the drag of the prop in the water without encroaching on the cockpit space. Stewart feels this design is so innovative, it's bound to be copied!

Even further aft, there is another item from Stewart's list of improvements: a transom-hung rudder with a galvanised mild steel drop blade. This means that the new Drifter can make full use of her retractable keels, having the ability to sail in shoal