



Above: Using Stewart Brown's special 'Drifter Lifter' it's possible to have her rigged and ready to go in a matter of minutes.

waters or onto a beach, as well as obviating the need to unship the rudder on launch and recovery. The tiller has a stainless steel section through the transom with a bronze elbow connecting to the wooden handle. Another interesting feature of the cockpit area is the control pillar which is set in the centre of the footwell and combines the function of a compass binnacle with the winch and cleats for the jib sheets.

Moving forward over the sidedecks – designed to accommodate a size 12 Wellington boot, according to Stewart! – is not too tricky

an operation with the two mast shrouds to hold onto but the foredeck does feel a little exposed, so Stewart intends to fasten a wooden handrail to the coachroof which could also be used as a clip-on point for a harness. However, there is little need to go up there while underway; the jib has roller furling gear and all the halyards lead back to the cockpit. To starboard of the bowsprit is a self-draining locker for the anchor and chain, providing a neat solution to the difficulty of accessible storage of ground tackle on a small boat.

Down below, there is an uncluttered, spacious cabin, well lit by large portholes in the sides and front of the coachroof and easily accessed from the cockpit through the double doors. The layout is simple, with the drop keels, which are housed in the side benches of the cockpit, continuing in their bunk-level cases along each side of the cabin sole. The ballast batteries under the forward part of the sole provide plenty of power for creature comforts, so the galley can include a fridge compartment, opposite the cooker to port. Immediately forward of the fridge is the Portaloo in its own compartment and beyond that are two long bunks stretching under the foredeck to the forward bulkhead in the bows. There is plenty of room to stretch your legs and I imagine it would make a very comfortable space to congregate at one of the many Drascombe rallies – I would be a bit shy about using the toilet in company though!

The new Drifter's 234 square feet (21.7m²) of sail is rigged in the customary Drascombe style as a gunter yawl. The mizzen mast is wedged into its step just inside the transom and mizzen sheets to a small bumkin hinged onto the foot of the mast for ease of stowing. The mainmast is stepped on the coachroof in a tabernacle and supported by two side stays. The loose-footed mainsail sheets back to blocks on the two quarters and thence to the cockpit.

The rigging is fairly simple to set up when there are two pairs of hands but Stewart has come up with an ingenious technique for doing it singlehanded. When Ches and I met him at Ashlett Sailing Club on Southampton Water to review the new addition to the Drascombe family, he gave us a demonstration. With the mast lying on the top of the coachroof, the shrouds set up and the halyards and furled jib in position along it, he attached the stem end of the jib to a pole affectionately called the 'Drifter Lifter'. This has a steel pin at its other end which fits into a hole at the base of the mast and a D-ring some way down to which the end of the trailer winch webbing was then shackled. As the webbing was winched in over a temporary roller fitted next to the bowsprit, the mast pivoted up in its tabernacle, bringing the Lifter down to a horizontal position on the foredeck. From here the jib was transferred to its stem fastening, the Lifter unhooked and the boat was ready to go. In fact, it probably took less time to rig her than it has taken me to describe how to do it.

With the boat rigged and ready, launching was a straightforward affair and in no time we were afloat and heading down the winding channel that led out of moorings and into the open water beyond. There wasn't a great deal of wind, just enough to fill the sails and get us moving before one of those enormous car carriers powered past, giving us a good sized wake to jump over. The wind picked up a little as we sailed further out and I was agreeably surprised to find that the extra wetted surface of the second drop plate didn't seem to slow her down at all. She tacked and gybed like a good