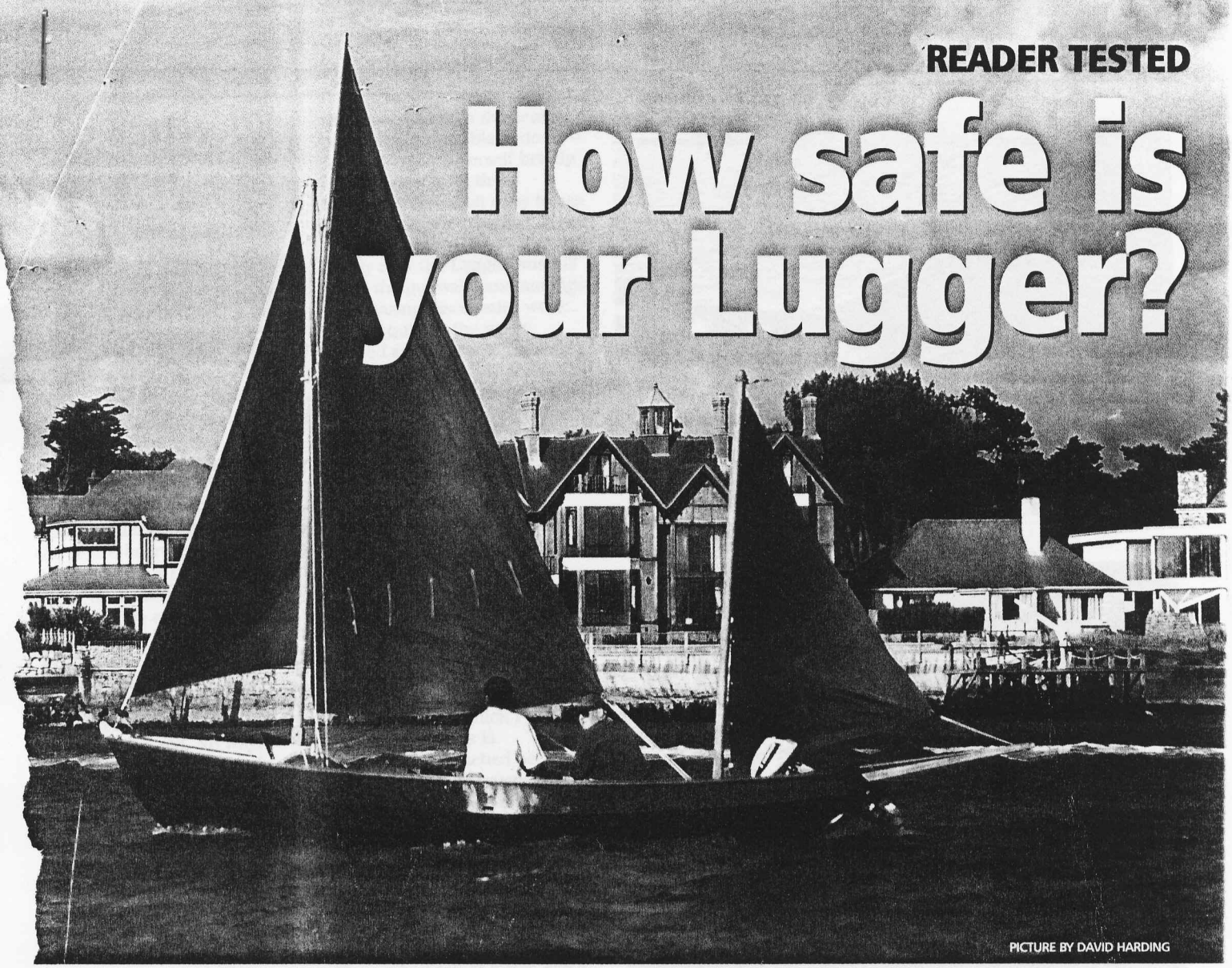
How safe is your Lugger?



PICTURE BY DAVID HARDING

Does the Drascombe Lugger float? Would she capsize when swamped? Could she be righted? Ex French importer Jean Louis Grenier had his doubts, so he decided to put his Lugger to the test.

WHY TRY? It's true that Webb Chiles' experience is quite convincing: he says he sailed the Red Sea backwards, sitting in his Lugger full of water! The builders also claim that Luggers float. But my experience as a former Drascombe importer has made me wary; for example, my advice is that if you have a Scaffie built before 1990, you would be wise to test her as the result might come as a shock. There doesn't seem to be the same problem with Dabbers, however: I have a video film of Mike sitting cheerfully in his swamped Dabber during the Morbihan Rally in 1989; and I tested one in 1990, when with me and 40 kg on board and there was still 15cm of freeboard left, although the stability was limited.

So I wanted to be sure, as I didn't fancy finding myself half-way across the Channel in a boat full of cruising gear, sinking beneath me...

Originally, my Lugger had standard polystyrene volumes but I've since filled the forward compartment to the brim with extra polystyrene pieces as it was only threequarters full. Also, at the far end of the locker, I had to add four, one-person polystyrene life-rafts to comply with French regulations. These measure about 50cm x 50cm x 10cm and fit perfectly well in a vertical position, two either side of the case aft of the mizzen. The reason for this was to add buoyancy and to compensate for the weight of the engine and the petrol cans, thus keeping the engine out of the water and the stern high. I also tried to lodge two of the large fenders, which I use as rollers to haul the boat on to the beach, on either side of the engine shaft (see photo 2) but during the experiment, they remained above water level. All these alterations contributed, I think, to the positive results of the test.

Getting ready

Last September *Anne-Lise* was anchored in approximately 1.7metres (5½ft) of water on the Bassin d'Arcachon. I'd already stripped her of anything that might be damaged by sea-water. I replaced the engine by 20 kg of my grandfather's old iron wedges in a wooden case

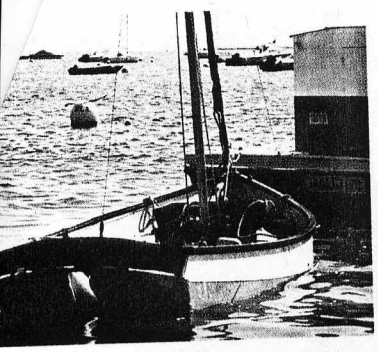


Photo 2: I even squeezed fenders into the outboard well for extra buoyancy.

fastened in the box abaft the mizzen mast. I also placed 40kg of breeze blocks in two plastic crates on the floorboards aft of the centre-board case. Total weight: 60kg, 40 of which were under the waterline and 20 above (as the engine would be).

Then...

1 I started trying to capsize *Anne-Lise* by hanging on to the mast and rocking the boat as hard as I could. No way! Then I opened the bunghole, and poured water in with a bucket, still trying to capsize her from time to time. It was only when the water reached about half-way up the side benches that I eventually managed to heel her sufficiently for the water to pour in over the side. At sea, of course, there would be waves and the pressure of the wind on the sails but I was nevertheless amazed at the initial stability of the Lugger. A real pontoon!

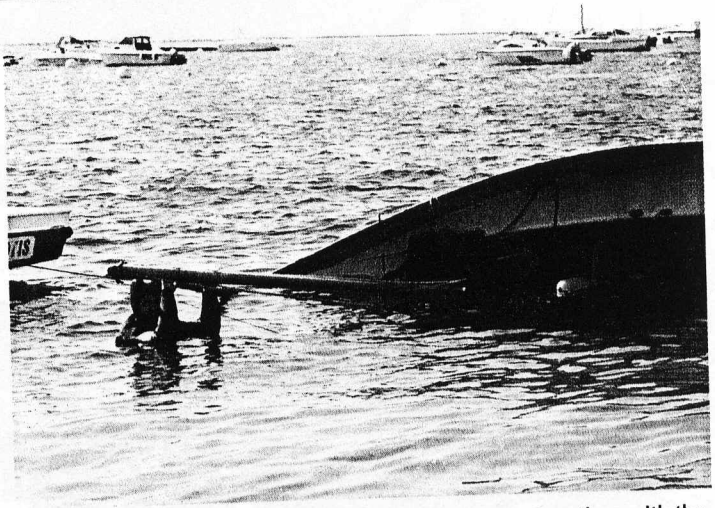
2 When the mast was horizontal, half the hull stayed out of the water. When I let it go – and with the centre-board and rudder-blade down – the boat righted herself briskly. I tried this several times because it was such a joy to see how quickly she returned to her normal position.

3 By now the Lugger was full to the gunwale, and amongst my amazing discoveries were:
a) how quickly the water drained away naturally, mainly through the engine well and the side holes; and
b) how high in the water she floated when back in her final stable position – she still had about 20cm of freeboard amidships.

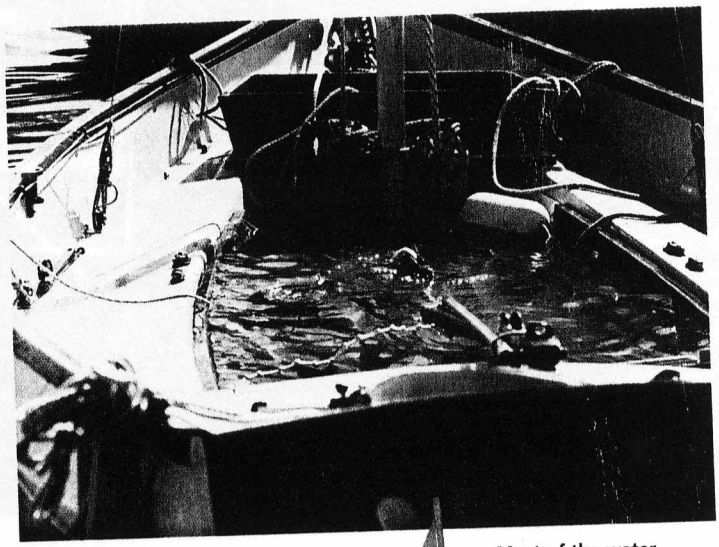
4 Whenever Webb Chiles' boat was swamped, water would come back in through the open top of the centreboard case, as fast as he tried to bale her out. I now had the opportunity of testing my own system for overcoming this difficulty – a sort of acrylic and foam sandwich which I wedge into the slot. This is permanently attached nearby, handy for any emergency.

It took me about 150 half bucketfuls and ten minutes pumping to get the boat completely dry. And my conclusions? Well, the answers were all very positive.

- the boat is immensely stiff.
- she will right herself readily.
- even half-full of water, she'll retain some stability and it'll be possible to steer and empty her at the same time.
- even when full of water, there's still be a lot of freeboard (probably thanks to the extra buoyancy I've added) which should enable the crew to bale her out as long as the sea's not too rough;
- water coming in through the top of the centre-board case is no longer a problem.



I had to half fill her with water before she would capsize. Even then, with the centreboard and rudder blade down, she righted quickly.

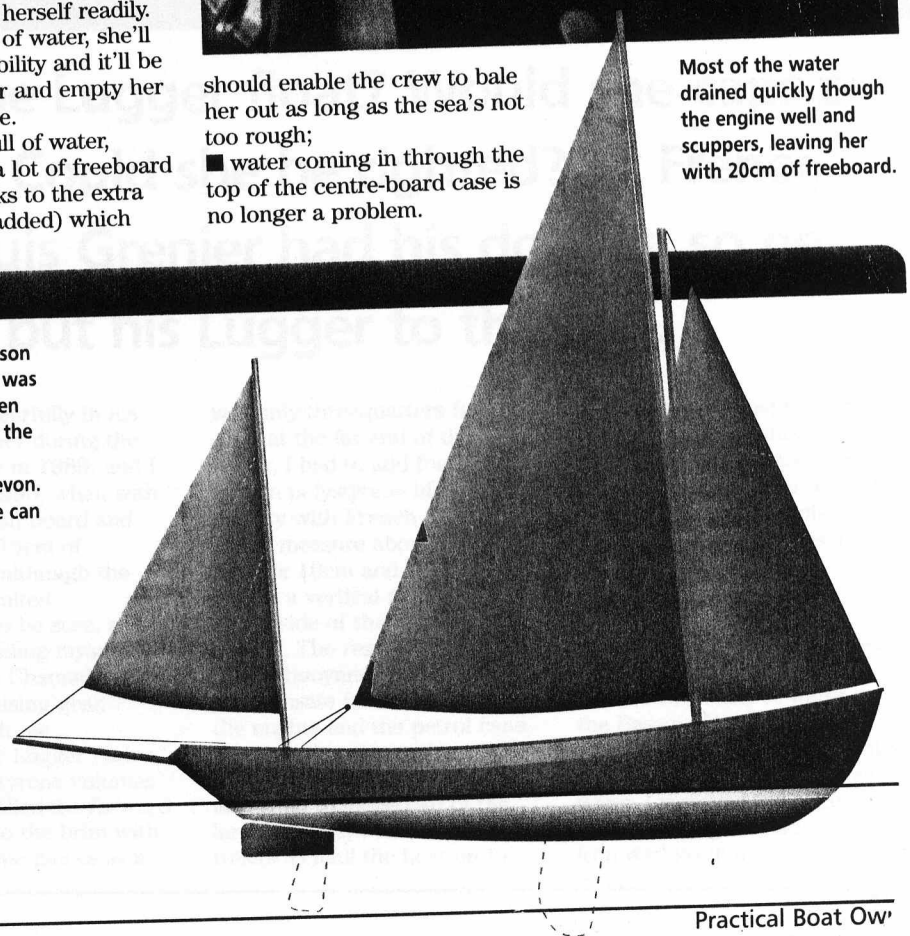


Most of the water drained quickly though the engine well and scuppers, leaving her with 20cm of freeboard.

DRASCOMBE LUGGER

Possibly Britain's best known day boat, the John Watkinson designed Drascombe Lugger first appeared in 1967 and was built by Honnor Marine until the middle of last year when production was taken over by McNulty Boats. Although the builders are based in Hebburn, Tyne & Wear, sales are handled by Ron Wallwork from his office in Honiton, Devon. With an all-up weight including trailer of half a ton, she can be trailed by most family cars.

LOA		18ft 9in (5.72m)
LWL		15ft (4.57m)
Beam		6ft 3in (1.9m)
Draft	centreplate up	10in (0.25m)
	centreplate down	4ft (1.22m)
Weight		748lb (340kg)
Sail area		132sqft (12.26sqm)
Price (ready to sail) inc VAT		£7945



BUILDERS: McNulty Boats Sales, 72 Roman Way, Honiton, Devon, EX14 8PT. Tel/Fax: (01404) 41555