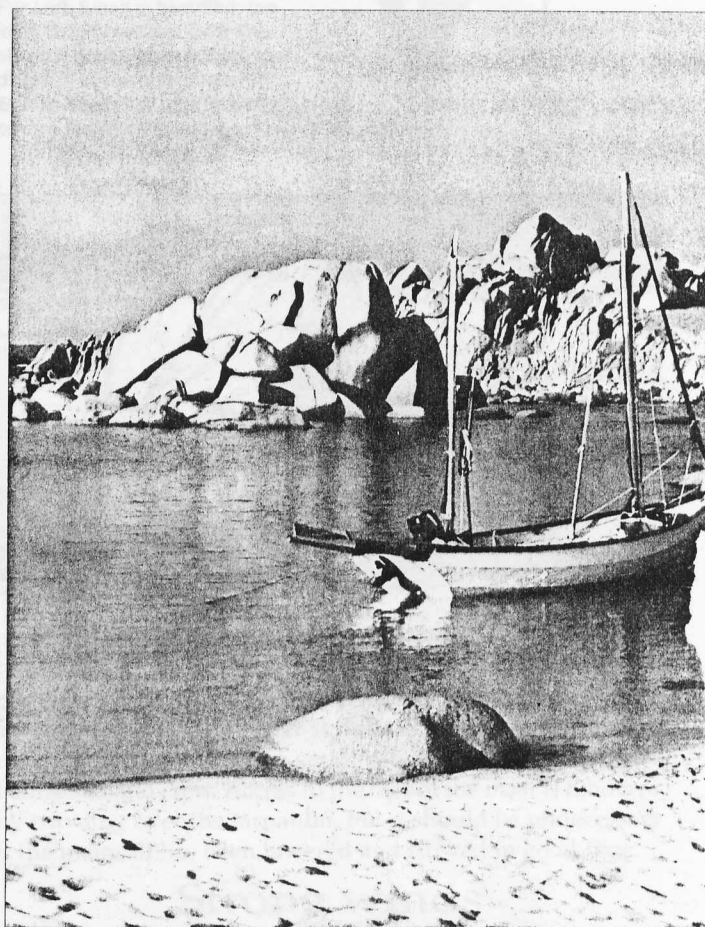


'The amount of adventure you get is in inverse proportion to the size of craft you're

Long-legge



DOES ONE HAVE TO BE MAD to swap a hefty Westerly 33 to go cruising in an 18ft (5.5m) open boat? It certainly helps, but I want to argue that less is more in this case. In fact I believe that anyone who has had the experience of both kinds of sailing will probably come to the same conclusion as we did: small is beautiful.

Over the last five years my wife and I have cruised in our sea-going dinghy from the south of Corsica to the fjords of Norway. Our Westerly cruiser, when based in Devon, only allowed us to go from Brittany to the south coast of England.

Flexibility, versatility and simplicity are the key words for open cruising. With a good trailer and an average-sized car, the range of potential cruises becomes virtually limitless. Our plans for future sailing holidays include the Hebrides and the Greek islands — impossible to achieve with our Westerly. Access to a wider range of unspoiled cruising areas comes from the shallow draught, and shallow anchorages are quiet and free. A dinghy can be rowed to the beach or into harbour, motored against a strong current or pushed by the faintest breeze, and experience has proved it can resist strong winds, provided it is the right kind of craft, handled properly.

Accommodation is just as varied. One can either drag the boat up the beach and set up the tent and spend the night afloat in a sheltered spot, or resort to a marina. Another possibility is to combine with a camper or a B&B ashore.

Simplicity: it's difficult to beat a dinghy for cheap, easy wintering and straightforward maintenance. Handling the boat afloat or on its trailer is child's play. Most of the constraints of sailing a bigger boat disappear instantly; if we are in harbour we pay small dues. In any case, most nights on board are spent free, in secluded and sheltered spots far from the hurly burly, but forbidden to boats drawing more than ten inches (255mm).

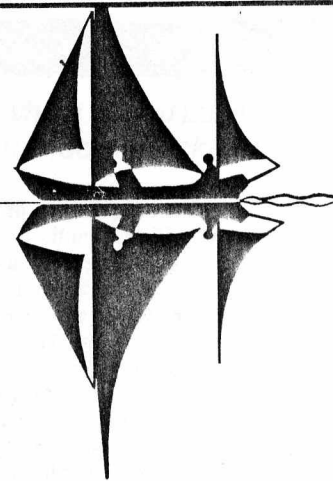
What are the drawbacks then? Lack of comfort? True to a

certain extent — one tends to get rather wet in a small boat — but modern equipment and a well-organised boat help to alleviate the discomfort. In severe cases, in the Scillies for example, we resort to a B&B, which means a hot shower and a dry bed. But most of the time, even for 50-somethings like us, lack of comfort while cruising is not a real problem. In fact the paradox is that many nights in our tent on board are quieter and more comfortable than in a noisy marina. And being seasick on a dinghy is practically unheard of. In fact, and this may be the most important point, I believe that in a small open boat one establishes a closer relationship with the elements; I used to feel protected by the Westerly's high freeboard, but it was also isolating me from the wind and salt water waves.

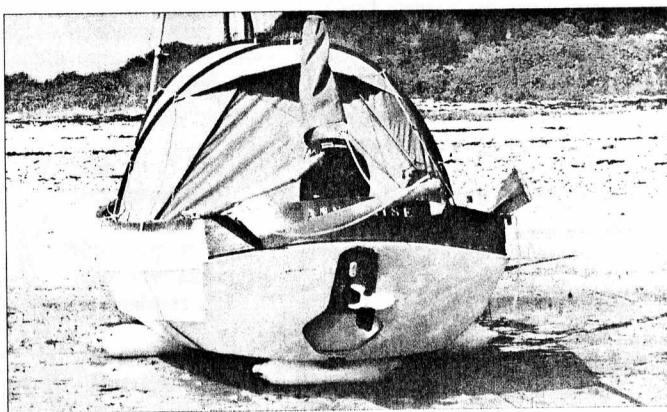
Ultimate sailor

We loved the Westerly, but with all her equipment she was complicated. I'm often struck by conversations of yachtsmen who talk more like technicians than lovers of the sea. Most of the sophisticated systems on a modern boat tend to eliminate any potentially disturbing effects of the elements. The ultimate sailor will spend his time sailing in his slippers, gawking at his computer screen — the age of Virtual Sailing is on its way. I believe messing about in boats should remain a game, helping to fos

d lugger



Far Left: Small is beautiful; the ideal dinghy cruiser. Left: The shallow draft allows access to a diversity of upspoilt shelters. Below: Ready for bed: The tent covers the whole cockpit.



paulin, stretched taut by shock-cord loops to hooks on deck (the multi-purpose tarpaulin is used as a full-size cockpit cover or as a sun awning). At sea the idea is to limit the amount of spray; the water is deflected to the side benches into the scuppers. Only a small cockpit aft is left open for helmsman and crew. Access to the foot of the mast is hindered by crawling over the tarpaulin, but it should be unnecessary if the mainsail has been lowered and stowed in good time.

Strong winds

We have cruised with the platform and tent arrangement for as long as three weeks. It takes about 40 minutes to set up the tent, rig the platform, inflate the air-bed and prepare the bedding. The tent is designed to resist strong winds. Absence of condensation in the cotton inner tent, good ventilation and mosquito nets make it very comfortable. It covers the whole cockpit, from mast to mast, with a funnel to take the main mast. It can also be used ashore and it dries very quickly. The only negative point is a tendency to flap noisily in high winds. The obvious solution is to look for sheltered anchorages.

As we became more experienced, we realised that strict storage organisation is even more essential than on a big cruiser. Keeping the boat shipshape makes life easier and safer. The plan illustrated on p62 has evolved over the years; we applied it cruising the Hardanger fjord in Norway and I used it single-handed on the North coast of Brittany.

Drascombes have buoyancy already, but we added four individual life rafts (required by French regulations) and three large fenders; they give extra buoyancy to compensate for the weight of the engine and cruising gear stacked in the aft locker. Tests show the swamped boat could take the weight of two crew members. Emptying the boat with two large buckets was a realistic solution, provided the top of the centreboard slot

in us a sense of wonder, or enjoyment of simple things and of adventure. And let's face it, the amount of adventure you get is usually in inverse proportion to the size of craft you're sailing.

After this honest plea for open-dinghy cruising, you might be interested in how we adapted our Drascombe Lugger for cruising, and why we chose this seaworthy boat in the first place. A dinghy straight out of the yard requires additional equipment to make her safe for reasonably comfortable cruising. All our homespun, inexpensive modifications have been developed over the years, as our experience grew.

Sleeping on wet floorboards wedged in the tiny space beside the centreboard case didn't appeal to us. Hence the idea of a raised platform, comprising seven hefty thwarts, from the aft end of the centreboard case to the main mast. They rest on two strong iroko supports fixed along the walls of the side lockers so that they are flush with the side benches. They are held in position by a quick-release shock cord system. When sailing, two thwarts stay in position, providing a chart/picnic table or rowing benches. The other five are stacked either side of the centreboard case, held by shock cord. In harbour, the full platform provides a wide base for the tent and double air-bed.

For heavy weather conditions, I can rig a reduced platform of six thwarts covered with a strong waterproof tar-

Where it all goes

Cruising thousands of miles in a Jean Louis Grenier gives

Drascombe Lugger the question arises: where do you put everything? us a guided tour of his small, but perfectly-packed vessel

Mooring:

10lb (4.5kg) CQR anchor, 20ft (6m) of chain & three 32ft (10m) long warps

Watertight bin 1:

Polar fur, camera, Maglite torch, books, toilet paper, spare flares

Watertight bin 2:

Sleeping bags & pyjamas

Hauling block and tackle system

Spinnaker

No.1 jib

Stays'l

Storm jib

Two large watertight clothes bags

3 litres water
1 litre wine

Two folding plastic beach seats (under thwart)

Watertight picnic box (cutlery tissues, emergency whiskey flask etc.)

5 litres water under floorboards in plastic bottles

Net pocket:

Hand-bearing compass, binoculars, small torch

Compass:

Lit by waterproof mini torch fixed above in cubby-hole

5 litres water in flat plastic container under floorboards

Spare charts vertical in folder behind locker door

Four mini-liferafts standing on edge

Mooring:

Danforth anchor & 20ft (6m) of chain (under floorboards)

Mast thwart (with six belaying pins): mizzen mast white light and foghorn in clamps underneath

Plastic netting sheet bin: all spare ropes, halyards, parrel beads, furling ties on top

130ft (40m) of 8mm rope

Shoes in waterproof bags & plastic sheet

Dustbin (plastic carrier bag)

Multi-purpose (deck cover, awning, groundsheet, etc)

Tent Platform: Five thwarts held by shock cord

Five small fenders

Five bottles of wine under floorboards

Safety harness

Five rowlocks

Emergency box (flares, tools, wooden plugs, mirror, whistle)

'Topoplastic' chart table held with shock cord around the thwarts with protractor & pencils

Net pocket: Shock cords (automatic pilot), hats, sunglasses, swimming trunks & goggles

Four stretchers (for rowing)

130ft (40m) of 8mm rope

Three large fenders (used as rollers)

Cockpit pump

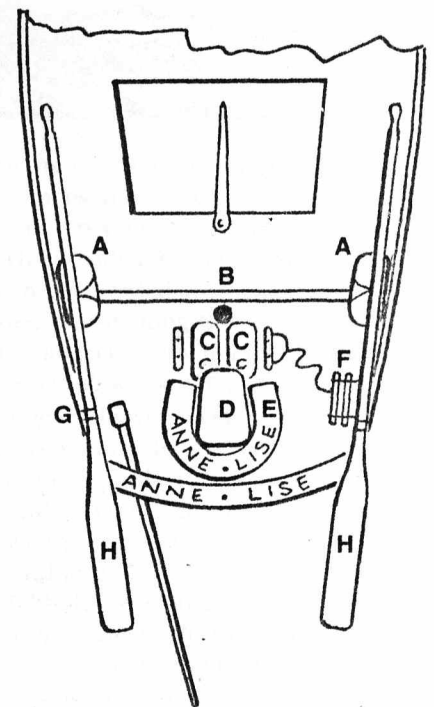
Three plastic buckets (mask & snorkel, scoop, spare pump handles)

Key to aft deck plan (below)

- A Two self-inflating lifejackets in waterproof bags with names on bags
- B Main sheet horse
- C Two 5-litre cans of petrol
- D One can of 2-stroke oil
- E Nozzles in waterproof bag
- F 5hp Yamaha
- G Horseshoe buoy
- H Quick release four-rung swimming ladder permanently attached
- I Quick release shock-cord system for oar
- J Two 10ft (3m) oars

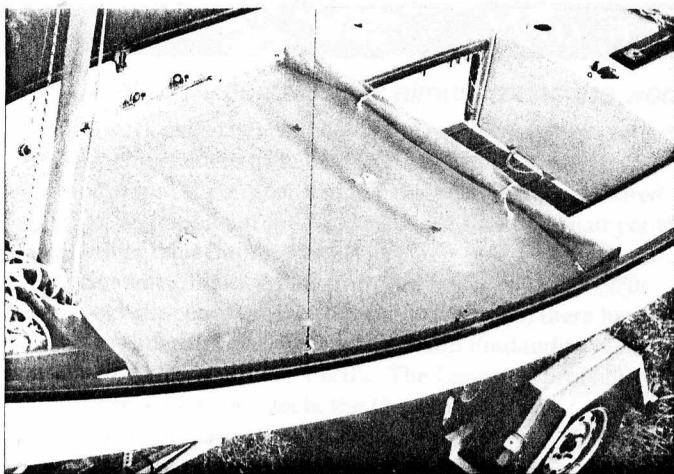
Note: All equipment is attached by means of quick-release shock cord systems. Foam buoyancy volumes are also attached under all side benches.

The starboard side is kept free for easy access forward. On port tack one can also crawl over clothes bags when heeling too far

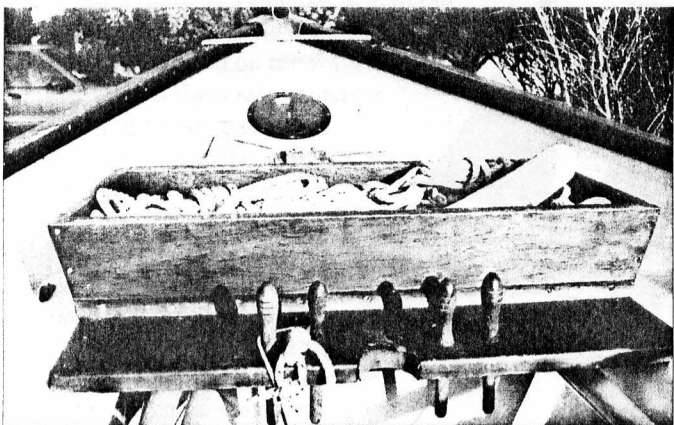


Key to stern locker boxes (main plan)

- Box 1: Sundry spares, drawing & painting materials
- Box 2: Breakfast small camping gas stove
- Box 3: Radio-VHF, GPS, ship's papers
- Box 4 & 5: Fresh food, tins, gas containers
- Box 6: Electrics, navigation lights, batteries
- Box 7: Spare tools, tins
- Box C: Large plastic crate: tent, Lilo, inflater, inflatable pillows
- On top of boxes: Oilskins, spare life belts, swimming towels



Left: A waterproof tarpaulin can be fitted over a platform of six thwarts, reducing the amount of water intake caused by the spray in heavy weather conditions.
Below left: Forward of the mast is a specially fitted open stowage



box containing the mooring warps, CQR anchor and chain.
Below right: Using the three large fenders as rollers, two people can easily pull the fully-loaded boat up onto a beach — or one person with a block and tackle.



was sealed by a home-made fixture always at hand in case of an emergency. Warps, anchor and chain can be readied within seconds, particularly when sailing single-handed. So on our dinghy they live forward of the mast in a strong, specially constructed open box, which has the additional advantage of keeping mud and weeds out of the cockpit.

The Drascombe Lugger is definitely under-canvassed, which is a plus in windy areas. In light airs, however, we felt the need for more sail area. Hence the bowsprit, which is easily rigged. The wooden jaws encircle the mast and the spar runs over the stemhead, held by the bow roller, protruding by 3ft 3in (1m). A 24sqft (2.25m²) light weather flying jib is hoisted on a separate halyard. A 40sqft (3.75m²) mizzen staysail can also be set in seconds since it is permanently rolled on itself along the mizzen mast.

We've increased the sail area by half, and under full canvas our five-sailed mini-clipper simply tears along on a beam reach. Because of the loose-footed sails, made to avoid any danger to heads from a gybing boom, she will only sail 45 degrees to the wind — any closer is useless. For downwind sailing an old 470 dinghy spinnaker can be hoisted from a block halfway up the gaff, though it should only be used in very light winds, particularly when single-handed. The point in increasing the sail area is for fun and safety: a sluggish boat is boring and more exposed to potential bad weather.

The last addition has been a 13sqft (1.25m²) storm jib, which have practised hoisting with collars of parrel beads sliding long the tightly-rolled No 1 jib. I have never tried it in a real 'ow, but I believe that under storm jib and half-rolled mizzen e could survive a Force 7-8, sea conditions permitting.

*'Messing about in boats
should remain a game,
helping to foster in us a sense
of wonder, or enjoyment of
simple things and of
adventure'*

To drag the boat up the beach, we have four large blocks, 98ft (30m) and 328ft (100m) warps and three large fenders. Using the fenders as rollers, two people can easily pull the fully-loaded boat up the beach, provided it's not too steep. In Corsica it allowed us to stop on unprotected beaches. At Hope Cove, during a single-handed cruise along the south-west coast of England, I managed (with some help) to pull the boat out of reach of the sea, as a serious blow was forecast. Pushing the boat back into the water is generally very easy.

To keep charts dry and protected, a Plastimo 'Topoplastic' folder is permanently attached by shock cord to the two thwarts acting as a multi-purpose table. Charts are constantly available for consultation, and are folded beforehand to cover the navigation area. I have found it useful to draw a grid on all the charts. I draw a line for every other minute of latitude and longitude with the corresponding figures all over the sheet. It makes navigation with a GPS much easier on a rather fidgety boat.

Our hand-held GPS, waterproof portable VHF and transistor radio fit in a plastic ice-cream container immediately accessible to the helmsman. Binoculars, hand-bearing compass and small torch live in the net on the port side of the cockpit. A fixed compass lit by a tiny torch finds shelter in the niche at the aft end of the centreboard case. Red and green battery operated lights can be hoisted to the top of the main mast with the spare jib halyard. They are held in just about the correct position at the masthead by jaws sliding along the forestay. A white stern light can be fixed on the top of the mizzen mast.

Four other modifications spring to mind. From the start I

Why a Drascombe?

Webb Chiles sailed his almost round the world. So what makes the Drascombe so seaworthy?

WHEN WE CRUISED Britain in our Westerly we often noticed these impertinent little boats, often far offshore in brisk conditions. Their most striking characteristics were three comma-shaped tan sails and pleasant sheer. We had yet to discover their impressive history.

○ **Seaworthiness** Apart from Webb Chiles in the 1970s (an almost-completed round-the-world trip), there have been numerous long voyages, eg from England to New Zealand and across the Pacific. The Lugger is probably the most seaworthy model in the Drascombe range.

The main reason for this seaworthiness is in the shape of the hull which follows the dory principle, where the hard chine makes the boat act like a ping-pong ball on the waves, rising with them rather than offering resistance. When he designed the boat in 1967 John Watkinson obviously had the dory in mind.

○ **Unsinkability** I have tested this myself. After capsizing, the boat will float upright. With all its cruising gear and a crew of two on board there will still be 4in (100mm) of freeboard. This is why Chiles came back alive.

○ **Size** The Lugger's 18ft (5.7m) is fine for cruising with a crew of two and all the equipment. It could be one foot longer, though. At 750lb (340kg) it's light enough to be launched, rowed and rigged single-handed. It can be beached by two with a block and tackle and large fenders, and is easily towed by a car.

○ **Draught** The boat is very shallow: 10in (250mm) with plate up and rudder completely out when approaching shore. It also sits flat (essential for comfortable nights).

asked for two sets of rowlocks and 10ft (3m) long oars, vital in calms or for sculling clear of danger. A simple knotted shock cord 'automatic pilot' allows the boat to steer itself for long periods at a time, particularly when close-hauled. This is an absolutely essential feature when single-handed. Because of the steering effect of the mizzen she is extremely stable on course, I can even have a snack or a snooze while she sails herself, and this is unusual for a dinghy.

A wedge, made of Perspex and foam, always at hand, seals the top of the centreboard case, avoiding sloshing in choppy seas and allowing a swamped boat to be emptied. Epic Drascombe sailor Webb Chiles couldn't find his special sponge after capsizing and sat in water for days, waiting for the seas to calm. Finally, a quick-release plastic folding swimming ladder is permanently attached to the aft deck.

After thousands of miles, our spars and equipment look almost new. From the old cloths we used to prevent things from getting chafed, we have now advanced to using a set of

○ **Versatility** The design allows for all kinds of sailing, from ocean crossing (not for me, thank you) to exploring rivers. It's a good rowing boat if equipped with a double set of the right oars, and a reasonable sailer, if undercanvassed. The excellent engine well drags no water even in heavy seas, and a 5hp outboard gives 60 miles autonomy with only two 5-litre cans on board. Her vast cockpit can accommodate five adults on day trips or two cruising with complete gear. Perfect single-handed.

○ **Easy sail-handling** Small, safe loose-footed sails allow instant reduction of sail area — a great asset for cruising alone. The yawl rig provides good stability on course.

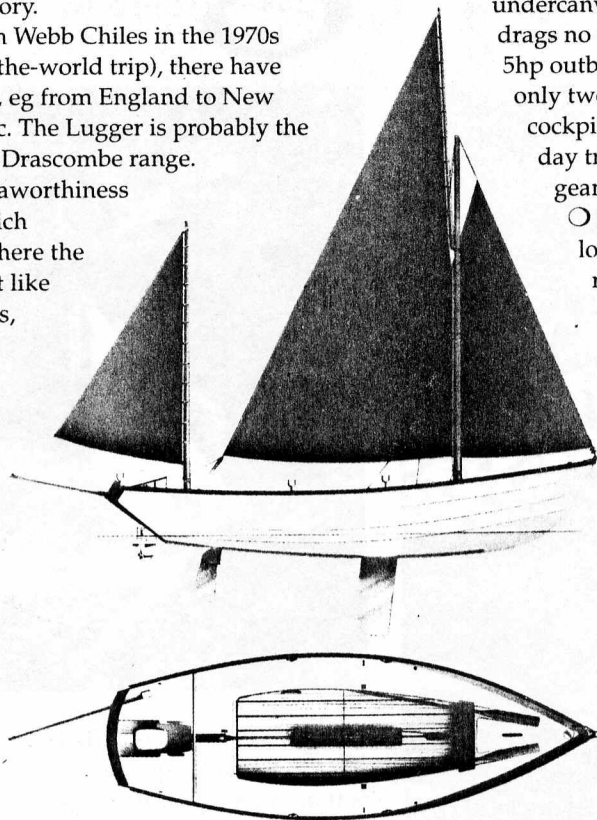
○ **Comfort** A reasonably dry and comfortable boat for its size, due to the high bow, the hull chines deflecting water and the central position of helmsman and crew.

○ **Simplicity** No fancy gadgets. Just bits of wood and string, easy to repair.

○ **Sturdy construction** The rudder on most dinghies is a light, vulnerable transom-hung affair. The Drascombe's is a heavy steel stock and blade in a slot designed as a

separate well, forward of the mizzen mast. It is extremely strong if handled properly, and doesn't come out of the water if the boat is heeling over, so it remains easy to steer at all times. It's true that sailing in shallows is not very convenient, but there are alternatives: rowing, sculling or motoring the boat to the shore with the rudder out.

○ **Beauty** Probably the most important point. Although made of glassfibre, she looks like a classic boat. Her lines are elegant. She is not just another sailing machine.



insulating foam tubes cut to size with colour-coded tags for easy identification. Packing before travelling used to be long, boring and fairly inefficient. It's much quicker now, if you can remember the code.

As it is then, this kind of cruising gives us a lot of satisfaction. I used to think that one day I would try to buy a large cruiser again. Having experienced the simple, varied, ecological joys of open dinghy cruising, I'm not so sure. If I had the money I'd prefer to spend it on commissioning the 'ultimate' cruising dinghy, with a slightly larger hull and integrating and improving the various additions I have tried to work out in an amateur way here.

Further reading: Open Boat Across the Pacific and The Ocean Waits, by Webb Chiles. Details about the Drascombe Luggers Association (see 'Useful Addresses' p89)

Coming soon: Jean Louis Grenier practises what he preaches by taking his Lugger to Corsica, Norway and the Isles of Scilly.