

More than meets the eye

The Hurley 20 is less well known than her bigger sister, the 22, but she's one to consider if you want a small, capable and inexpensive twin-keeler with ocean sailing pedigree – as David Harding reports

For a newcomer to the world of cruising under sail, some of the promotional literature produced by builders of small boats in the 1960s might come as a bit of a shock.

Take the Hurley 20 brochure as an example. It boasts of 'ample room for the whole family,' before going on to state that 'pulpit, lifelines and pushpit can be easily fitted for the offshore yachtsman.'

Whole family? Offshore yachtsman? Are we really talking about a boat just 6.1m (20ft) long? Indeed we are, and that shows just how much people's perceptions and expectations have changed in a single generation.

Back in the 1960s, dad, mum and two kids really did go cruising on 20ft boats. They had no pressurised water, standing headroom or separate heads; no roller-reefing headsail, no push-button navigation of any kind and, more often than not, no confidence that the engine would start when they wanted it.

The Hurley 20 was just the sort of boat they would have been sailing. Designed by Ian Anderson and built by Hurley Marine in Plymouth, she fitted in between the Hurley 18 and 22 and was typical of the small, British-built twin-keeler that gave many families their first taste of cruising in a 'proper' yacht.

Today's buyers with the necessary wherewithal are more likely to be wooed by a brand-new 35-footer laden with all the comforts of home and sold with a charter management package to help offset the berthing fees. But we shouldn't forget the pleasure to be derived at infinitely lower cost from boats like the Hurley.

If, like Alun Gwernan-Jones, you find one for £2,200 and keep it on a swinging mooring that costs £150 a year, the financial side isn't a major obstacle. Alun, who sails from Starcross on the River Exe, was inspired to offer his boat for testing after reading about Sarah Paris's £2,000 Sea Wych in PBO 452.

'Noggin is a bilge-keel version,' he wrote, 'with an outboard engine, stretched sails and faded gel coat, but she's all mine, and of the type that your readers might consider if they are in the market for a budget mini-cruiser that's well-mannered and versatile.'

Since the test on a Hurley 20 I'd had lined up several years ago never happened, I was delighted to accept Alun's offer.

A different perspective

Today's boats in this size range are rarely designed for cruising the way the Hurley was: most are trailer-sailers, intended for day-sailing or weekending, whereas the Hurley 20 is more of a scaled-down yacht and even has an Atlantic crossing to her credit.

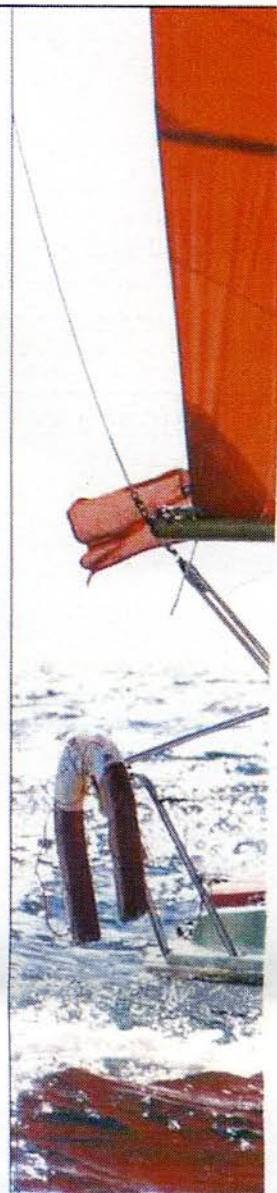
Reflecting the style of the day, she has much lower freeboard than you would find on a modern 20-footer. She also has an inboard rudder and a masthead rig.

Another characteristic that dates her is the hull shape, with its broad shoulders and the point of maximum beam at mid-length. Add plenty of bow overhang, a counter stern and a pair of low aspect-ratio bilge keels (she was offered as a fin-keeler, but twins were the most popular option) and you know that she's going to be a world apart from anything designed in recent years.

Given her shape, I was particularly interested to see how she sailed. Her shallow draught didn't bode well in my mind, and neither did Alun's admission that the sails were past their prime. They were, in fact, the Hurley's 1968 originals, though since then Alun has had a new mainsail made.

As luck would have it, the conditions at the mouth of the River Exe were ideal for finding what the little Hurley was made of: we were greeted by a lumpy sea, a south-westerly Force 5 with a forecast of more to come, and several larger yachts heading for home.

Not wanting to nurse the boat





PRICE
from
£2,000 -
£3,000

unnecessarily, we set full main and the standard headsail (the only one apart from the storm jib). I'd noted as we motored down the river, propelled at a good lick by Alun's new 6hp Yamaha four-stroke outboard, that the rig was a little slack all round and that lack of tension in the forward lowers in particular was allowing some reverse bend into the mast. Still, time and tide didn't allow us to make any adjustments, so it was a matter of pressing on and making the best of what we had.

In the event, *Noggin* did herself proud. As I was taking photographs from the RIB, kindly provided by Starcross Yacht Club, I noticed that the boat was making an appreciable amount of leeway, but that turned out to be principally due to an over-sheeted mainsail.

A relatively chunky, shallow-draught little boat like the Hurley has a limited capacity to convert sideways force into forward motion, so it's important not to strap the boom in too tight. Once the kicker was tensioned as much as possible to remove some of the excessive twist from the sail, the boom was eased outboard of the quarter and a few more tweaks had been made, the boat bounded along in surprisingly sprightly fashion.

She clocked up 3.5-4 knots on the wind while making much less leeway, heeling at a comfortable angle and staying notably light on the helm. Our tacking angle was a respectable 90° and, considering the conditions, we stayed pretty dry. Just as impressive was the way she coped with the steep seas: boats with such bluff entries tend to be

brought up short in conditions like that. Either the crests were just the right distance apart for her 4.9m (16ft) waterline, or we were carrying enough sail to drive her through waves that would otherwise have been more of a nuisance. Perhaps it was a bit of both.

Obedience all round

By the time we came to turn downwind, the breeze had done what it was forecast to do and picked up to a good 22 knots. But before enjoying the fruits of our hard-won mile-and-a-half of windward distance, and turning around to reach back the way we had come, we hove to and found that the little Hurley lay beam-on to the seas and drifted quietly sideways. No complaints there.

Then it was time to have some

ABOVE AND LEFT
Taking the rough:
the Hurley 20
coped well in
brisk conditions



▲ The outboard fits in the transom well and hinges up under sail – here we're motor-sailing

out the engine itself and took off the prop, leaving the shaft in place. Economy of removal being a priority, he left the exhaust outlet in the transom too, simply cutting off and bunging up the pipe on the inside.

Noggin was then powered by a 4hp two-stroke outboard until Alun switched it for the long-shaft four-stroke Yamaha with remote controls

in the cockpit and more than enough power to cope with conditions on the Exe. Its principal drawback is that it makes the boat rather stern-heavy.

Another structural job came to light just before Alun was about to go for his first sail. Realising the rigging was too slack, he had started to wind on a little tension when the chainplate of the starboard lower shroud pulled out of the deck. Like the rest of them, the plate was bolted through a block of timber bonded inside the hull, and the bolts had failed. The sensible course of action seemed to be to replace the bolts in all the chainplates – some of which sheered as they were being removed – and, for good measure, to renew the standing rigging at the same time.

Now that the rig, rudder and engine have been sorted, *Noggin* looks set to give Alun and his family good service. All the same, doing the work made him realise that you need to be prepared to spend a little time and money on a boat like this. 'That's why there's a 'P' in PBO!' he observed.

In terms of living and stowage space, both above and below decks, the Hurley 20 offers pretty much what you would expect. In the cockpit, where there's enough room for three people – four at a pinch – you find a locker under each seat, a lazarette in the stern and a hatch in the sole that used to give access to the engine. Alun now keeps the inflatable's Seagull down there, getting it out by removing the companionway steps.

The dinghy itself is stowed in the forecabin, where lifting the head of the V-berth reveals a sea toilet. A bucket and chuck-it arrangement has so far been used in preference.

In the main cabin are two berths, both 2.24m (7ft 4in) long and with 1m (3ft 3in) of sitting headroom above them. The stowage beneath extends down into the after section of the encapsulated bilge keels; their forward part contains the ballast.

Space for a cooker is provided to port abaft the main bulkhead.

Full circle

It's refreshing to find that a boat like the Hurley 20 can give the same pleasure to dad, mum and two (or three) kids now as it did 40 years ago. If you're prepared to put some effort and cash into getting it ship-shape, you'll end up with a tough little family cruiser for less than the cost of a new Laser dinghy or a modest second-hand car. It's still a great way to get afloat.



Other boats to look at



Kingfisher 20

PRICE GUIDE: £2,000-£3,000

With a round-the-world voyage and at least one Atlantic crossing to her credit, this robust little boat has a surprisingly roomy interior and an effective outboard well. With a modified stern, she later became the 20 Plus.



Pandora

PRICE GUIDE: £2,000-£5,500

Van de Stadt's slim-hulled classic started life in the 1960s and appeared in several guises with changes to the hull, rig, keel and rudder. The Pandora is quick and well mannered, but not particularly spacious below decks.



Leisure 20

PRICE GUIDE: £3,500-£6,000

You will pay more for a Leisure than for the Kingfisher or Pandora because she's both newer and roomier. She's also an appreciably better performer for her size than the rather pedestrian Leisure 22 and the slightly sharper 23.



ABOVE Now that the original Stuart Turner 5hp petrol inboard has been removed, the space behind the companionway steps is used for stowage

LEFT With no interior liners, the accommodation looks a little bare but the structure is easy to reach