

Pathfinder



a really
capable
open
cruising
boat

by JOHN WELSFORD

Pathfinder is one of those jobs that took absolutely years.. I drew her when I'd been sailing various of my Navigator designs for a while, then had enjoyed a year in a smaller boat. The Navigator was a 15ft beach cruiser and I'd been sleeping ashore in a tent while enjoying the speed and range of the little yawl. My later Houdini design with her shorter waterline length is a bit slower but her internal layout made her a good boat to sleep aboard. Covered over with a Polytarp tent that took all of two hours to make, she was comfortable and plenty roomy for one or two people and sleeping aboard made some anchorages much easier to stay in.

WANTED to bring the two features together in a really serious cruising dinghy. I needed Navigator's speed and the split rig that had proven so seaworthy and versatile combined with Houdini's accommodation and internal space so I sat down and drew a series of proposals which looked at different ways of achieving those.

Here are the results.

A long and powerful lightweight hull with enough enclosed buoyancy to float her high if the unthinkable

were to happen. Space to burn with room for up to eight for a short jaunt or to sleep two adults in fair comfort. Room for a tall person to stretch legs, but light enough and rigged for a singlehander when someone wants peace and solitude.

Easy to build? Paul Groom built this one, his second ever effort at boatbuilding and he's done a lovely job in only 10 months. There are no special tools or skills beyond basic woodworking required, and nothing is so complex that it would require an expert to oversee the job. To help those who might need encouragement or advice we have a JW Boatbuilders support forum at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/jwbuilders> to provide a meeting place for builders.

This is not a small boat so she's not a small project but I would estimate that she would take me around 250 hours, I'm a fairly well equipped and experienced amateur builder so you can compare your own resources and adjust that figure as needed.

I had thought over the internal layout and drawn up several different versions, and this one, with a conventional seating arrangement aft and a raised flat self draining floor from the centre thwart to the forward bulkhead giving 6ft 6in of clear space seemed to work best.

Pathfinder uses the same well proven building system of lapstrake ply over stringers and frames



with the interior creating an egg crate structure of extreme rigidity and strength with light weight.

I've put the outboard 'inboard' in a well right aft on the port side. A 3/5hp motor should be more than enough and it is nice to have it inside the boat where it is less likely to come to harm, and where it does not intrude upon the graceful lines of the hull.

With the space underneath the forward sleeping deck sealed off along with the seats to give buoyancy the boat will float high enough to bail if swamped, and the distribution of the buoyancy means that if fully inverted she can be rolled back up by the weight of one person on the gunwale. Upright she should be stable enough for the crew to scramble in over the side and stand up while bailing. Not the nicest thought but a designer has to plan for the worst and hope for the best.

Cruising dinghies carry a lot of gear, and there is a heap of enclosed storage in this boat, about over a cubic metre of it behind watertight hatches into the seat and underfloor spaces and the big locker under the foredeck. I use the round 'O' ring sealed inspection ports as hatches, it is amazing what you can stow away through an 8 inch one.

Speed? she planes freely under the right circumstances, the lightly loaded powerful hull is long enough to have very easy lines as well as great stability. The big rig will power her well, I myself would prefer the yawl with the ability to self steer and having many options as to how to shorten sail in a blow, and very fast on a reach but the sloop would have the legs on her both upwind and directly downwind with that big main really driving her along.

So far (June 04) there are 35 people building Pathfinders, it looks as though we will have several examples of each rig, and a number of

them have formed an informal internet builder's group, helping and supporting each other and all looking forward to exchanging cruising stories when the times comes!.

Navigator owners have completed some extraordinary voyages in their craft (see David Perillo's site at www.openboat.co.nz and marvel at his story of cruising in the Yasawa Group in Fiji) and this boat should have even more ability to cover long distances. I hope to borrow one to do some voyaging of my own, the sooner the better. ■

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Pathfinder

LOA		5.250m 17'4"
Beam		1.950m 6'5"
Sail area Sloop		15.1sqm 162sqft
Sail area Yawl		15.05sqm 161sqft
Weight (est) rigged with motor		190kg 420lbs

Plans cost \$250.00 from Ross Lillistone

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