



Classic Boat Test Kittiwake 16

When *Jeff Howlett* went to Southampton to review the Kittiwake 14 Classic and Kittiwake 16, even a bout of flu couldn't dampen his enthusiasm for these lively camping boats. *Photographs by Ray Little*



The quality of the Kittiwake range gives clinker GRP a good name

The 16, seen here with one reef in the main, taking the hard gusts in her stride



The day didn't start well. We were an hour late and lost in the back streets of Southampton; don't they believe in signposts in this neck of the woods? To add to that there were ominous grey skies scowling over the River Itchen, and the flu bug rampaging through me was about to ease into overdrive.

I was sorely in need of cheering up. And when, more by luck than design, we finally found the slipway near Ocean Village, there she was: the blue and cream jaunty lines of the Kittiwake 16 I had come to test sail. As an added bonus, boatbuilder Roger Wilkinson's dog Lottie scampered around me in welcome. I began to feel better.

Roger has been catching the eye of boat-show aficionados with his Kittiwake range for over 15 years and the 16-footer is the latest in the range, filling the gap between his 14ft (4.4m) open dayboat and the 20ft (6.3m) pocket cruiser (see CB164).

Roger is a man with a passion for tradition... and gaffs. He's willing to supply the Kittiwake 16 as a sloop, cutter or yawl – so long as it's gaff.

The 16's simulated-clinker hull is reminiscent of a racing dinghy from the early 1900s: the fine entry of her plumb stem runs away to a full midship sections and a well-rockered keel. I was not surprised when Roger told me that the donor hull was a Hurst Castle One-Design, a racing class of the 1930s.

The construction – which is carried out by Roger in what he describes as a "cow shed" in Macclesfield, Cheshire – is a pleasing mix of glassfibre and timber.

The moulding is of high quality and very fair. Gunwales are of three-piece mahogany section with added mahogany rowlock swells and mounted foresail jammers. The thwarts and benches are of solid mahogany with mahogany knees to spread out the stresses. Fittings and deckware are in bronze.

She is three-quarter decked in epoxy-sheathed ply, leaving a very roomy cockpit. The cockpit floor has slatted floorboards and can – as the 16 is intended to be a cruiser flexible enough to sleep onboard – accommodate two horizontal adults. In

addition, the forward parts of the floor lift up to make two comfortable berths that extend under the foredeck.

There is a pull-up cuddy on a folding frame that makes an ideal cabin when camping. It can also be used while sailing, providing useful shelter when the weather is bad. When not in use, it folds neatly away around the forward coaming.

There is also an aft extension that zips on to the cuddy, making overnight stops completely weatherproof and useful if the boat is left unattended on a mooring.

Buoyancy tanks, which can be converted into lockers with sealed hatches, run fore and aft beneath the side benches. Stowage space beneath the berths and side decks, is generous. Under the aft deck there is a useful shelf and space below to tuck away the petrol tank for the outboard engine. Oars are stowed securely beneath the rear side benches.

The centreplate is of 10mm galvanised steel and is housed inside a glassfibre envelope, which is integral to the hull moulding. A nice touch is that this is clad in timber.

The masts and spars are of Columbian pine, the boom and gaff jaws of leathered iroko. Usefully, all spars stow inside the length of the boat when trailing, and the sails can be left attached.

The sails, by Mouse Sails, come in tan or cream Soz Terylene, with two sets of reefing points on the main. The headsails are on a Wykeham Martin furling drum and swivel; the mizzen is easily furled around its mast.

Under sail

Although there are seven spars – the mizzen mast, its boom and bumkin, the main mast and its boom, the gaff yard, and the bowsprit – rigging is straightforward and takes about 15 minutes. Roger has gone a long way towards simplifying the task by designing a set-up whereby the fixed spars all fit into place easily.

Launching was also easy and without drama. The Kittiwake floats in about 12in (300mm) of water with the plate up and rudder blade hinged up and back, so there's little chance of water finding its way over the top of your wellies.