

Nineteen Years with an Enterprise, by Steve Bradwell

In which Steve tells us about the boat that appears all the time in in South Coast rally reports – and seemingly has never been graced with a name ...

Nineteen years should be long enough to get to know a boat pretty well. It does mean that my experience with similar boats is a bit limited, but with that in mind I will try to be as objective as I can, despite my affection for the International Enterprise.

I bought Enterprise 12240 from the brother of a work colleague. I paid £200. I had offered the asking price of £250 but the owner knocked me down!

It's a wooden boat using buoyancy bags, and according to a plate on the transom was built by Bell Woodworking, although Bell also supplied kits of parts for home build.

Designed by Jack Holt and first launched in 1956 the Enterprise is a popular club racer, which excels in light wind tactical lake sailing. It is one of the most numerous classes in the UK and around the world. Club racing is what most do but it was also intended as a family cruising and a 'general purpose' boat. For this use cruising sails were designed. These have a total sail area of 7.43 sq m / 80 sq ft. Racing sails are 10.5 sq m / 113 sq ft. Spinnakers and trapeze are not permitted by class rules, keeping things relatively simple. Cruising sails are rarely seen, at least by me.

As a popular racing boat people don't usually question its sailing ability for cruising. The real question is stability. How stable is it?

For single-handed sailing, which is what most of us do most of the time, the racing sails are unnecessarily large. Unnecessary because the Enterprise is a light, easily-driven boat that will perform well with its cruising sails. I would recommend using the cruising main as opposed to relying on reefing the larger sail because sooner or later it will catch you out, particularly downwind. You will also get better head clearance and all round vision.

Having both side and foredecks, plus a reasonably high freeboard, I have no concerns about the basic seaworthiness of my Enterprise. It seems to cope well enough with rough conditions. A point comes in strong winds when a build-up of spray may make it necessary to heave-to in order to bail. I removed the floor-mounted bailers from my boat (they let in more water than out) but in theory they would be useful.

Stepping into an Enterprise will cause it to tip a bit more than a boat with a more box-like cross section, for example, a GP14. The more flared-out sides of the Enterprise have the effect of increasing stability when heeled, as opposed to the reducing stability of boats with more initial stability. So it's a trade-off, but one which might give the Enterprise sailor a chance to recover the situation if things go wrong.

At first it bothered me that the boat did not stay completely flat when I was lying in my bunk. I would pile heavy gear and water containers on the opposite bench seat. I've learnt to ignore this slight heel. It doesn't appear to effect stability at anchor.

Sleeping can be arranged for two but is far more



practical for one. Bed boards can be used to fill in between centreboard case and bench seat. There are no floorboards in an Enterprise, which contributes to their light weight, so you will need to make up bed boards.

One aspect of stability that does require care is downwind sailing. Carrying too much mainsail can lead to broaching. This can occur if following seas cause the rudder to temporarily lose grip. The best approach in winds of force 5 and above is to run under jib alone. I always carry a full size jib along with the very small cruising jib. The larger jib gives controlled downwind sailing while still allowing limited upwind sailing and tacking, which is not possible with the smaller sail.

On one occasion sailing across Christchurch Bay I used a 30-metre anchor line, trailed behind and



attached in a large loop to either side of the transom to slow the boat. Even sailing on the jib alone the Enterprise was planing and tending to catch and surf down the front of waves, which felt unsafe. Trailing the anchor line slowed the boat to a safe speed and added directional stability. At last I could relax; it had been a nerve-racking ride. Wind was force 6-7 as I sailed through the Hurst narrows. As I turned north and headed into Keyhaven I found I could not tack through the wind in the strong conditions without the mainsail, something it will usually do. While flapping, the jib was torn apart by the wind.

Two other incidents may illustrate something about the qualities of the Enterprise.

The first was being swamped at East Winner, the bar at Langstone Harbour. This was the result of bad seamanship. Although over half a mile from the Hayling Island shore I was not clear of the Winner and I found myself surrounded by steep, breaking waves, which were soon breaking into the boat.

Water was above the centreboard case and coming in faster than I could bail it out. I was in trouble and looked around for help. This was the only time I have ever thought I would happily accept rescue. There was no-one in sight and the light was fading. Although completely flooded, the Enterprise remained upright and stable and showed no sign of wanting to capsize. Perhaps a benefit of the under seat air bags along both sides.

I turned my attention to the large transom flaps. I had never used them before. They were sealed with waterproof gaffer tape to stop water leaking in when working at the stern. I tore off the tape and pushed the flaps open. Sheeting in the main and sitting well back the bow lifted and the Enterprise surged to the surface like a

surfacing submarine! Huge amounts of water were flowing out of the transom flaps. I was saved! I retraced my path off the Winner and back out to sea to enter Langstone properly.

The other incident perhaps demonstrates the strength of a 40-year plus old wooden Enterprise. (When will the original glue fail?)

I ran my boat up the beach as a last resort when I was caught out by gale force winds in Beaulieu river mouth. The unexpected weather made national news when a whole fleet of racing dinghies capsized in Portland Harbour and had to be rescued.

I had sailed out to the river mouth to check conditions before committing myself to the Solent. It was a downwind run and I was using a well-reefed main with no jib (the Enterprise will sail faultlessly without its jib, although obviously it is faster with it).

In the rising wind I decided to stay in the Beaulieu but by this time the wind had risen and although I had no trouble tacking back and forth across the river I could make no progress to windward (if you're sailing out to 'have a look', make sure you can get back!)

Unable to cope with any more sail, a limitation of a small unballasted boat, I made the decision to beach.

When I hit the beach, waves broke into the cockpit before I had time to pull the bow around into them. With the boat heavy with water, and, as I later found, sand, I could only watch helplessly as my boat was pounded, sure in my mind that it was only a matter of time before it broke up.

My boat was saved by the arrival of four workers who had been building a swimming pool in the





garden of the large house, part of which, apparently, was the private beach I had landed on. Between the five of us we pulled the incredibly heavy boat backwards clear of the breakers. I still don't know why we didn't pull the transom off the boat. It had taken a great

deal of punishment yet I found the only damage had been to its paint.

I recommend the Enterprise as a cruising dinghy and find it safe, stable and above all, capable. You will usually be one of the first boats to arrive at a venue (you won't want to be last to arrive all the time will you?). I should say that it is a boat that needs a bit of experience to sail safely.

For Solent rallies a starting point for an easily launched boat can usually be found that will give you the best chance of reaching a rally, on the Isle of Wight for example, without the frustration of battling wind and tide because you have a heavy boat that can only be launched and recovered with a car on a concrete ramp.

Your home waters are bound to affect your choice of boat, but in my experience very little sailing will be lost because your boat is too light. You may find you do a lot more. **SB**

Gippsland Lakes Cruise, by John Little

An Australian cruise. John Little takes Jess, his 'Salty Heaven' cat yawl into the Gippsland Lakes and reports back from an area of stark beauty, home to possums, black swans, wallabies & Eastern Australian grey kangaroos.

The Gippsland Lakes is a series of three adjoining lakes which run for about 40 nautical miles parallel to the coastline in Victoria, Australia. In places the land separating the lakes from Bass Strait is only a few hundred yards wide. The lakes run roughly northeast – southwest. The eastern end is sparsely developed. There's the fishing port of Lakes Entrance just inside the entrance to Bass Strait, then a couple of small settlements which only just qualify as towns. As you continue west, signs of civilisation disappear, giving way to flat windswept country.

The weather changes here can be sudden. The fronts invariably arrive from the southwest, funnelling down the shallow lakes and whipping up a vicious chop. It does not do to be caught against the shore in these conditions, but safe anchorages are by no means plentiful. It's barren, harshly beautiful and slightly intimidating. In March this year I went there with my little boat, *Jess*, with the intention of sailing from one end to the other and returning.

I've written about *Jess* in 'Dinghy Cruising' before. But to recap: she's a 17ft cat yawl from the board of Australian designer Mikey Floyd. He calls these open boats 'Salty Heavens'. They are fun to take out for a day-sail single-handed and they can carry a good load of camping gear, or passengers if required. A Salty Heaven will operate safely in winds up to 30 knots, provided she's rigged right and sailed carefully. I've owned *Jess* for about ten years now and she has not yet lost her allure.

Lakes Entrance has a well-maintained launching ramp, but I did not fancy abandoning the car and trailer in that busy town for a week or more. Four miles west is a place called Nungurner. Not a 'place place', with shops and people, but more a mark

on the map. You descend down a winding road to a dead end. There are a couple of neglected-looking jetties to which are tied a few down-at-heel boats. The only people in sight when I arrived were a couple of weatherbeaten-looking characters manoeuvring a battered aluminium boat onto a trailer. They looked at *Jess*, with her smart black paint and varnish, with incomprehension. They towed their boat up the ramp and, as I was rigging up, began cleaning a couple of good-sized flathead. Not a word was spoken.

I had been unable to find detailed navigational charts of the Gippsland Lakes. The best I could come up with was something called a 'Grid Chart' which had been prepared by the Volunteer Coast Guard at