

Quetzal's Conversion to Junk Rig

by David Hall



ONCE THE IDEA took hold I was far too excited about it and had a few sleepless nights as a result. I told myself to calm down and look at it more objectively. But then the more I looked at the idea in a 'serious' light the more I realised that I really had to go ahead, and then I became excited all over again.

I had been in touch with a group of people who called themselves 'junkies' and I knew I was addicted!

Looking back now I see there were several starting points. One of them was perhaps a conversation I had with Bernard Harman at the Coniston 'Softies' meet at the end of last season. Bernard recommended a book then ended up sending me his copy, which was very kind. This led to me working out my CLR.

At the end of the 2016 season I had used my boat very little and felt that perhaps I was losing interest in her. Each time I considered getting another boat, however, I realised that I was actually quite happy with her. A Westerly NIMROD is seaworthy, strongly built, has a cabin and a self-draining cockpit, so why would I wish to change her? Then I realised that I could actually make a big change, learn a lot along the way and give her a new

(Above) The oar now substitutes for the boom of the old rig and supports the tent
(Below) All squared away, sail raised and ready to go





Substantial tabernacle to support the longer mast

lease of life by converting her to Junk Rig.

Joining the Junk Rig Association (JRA) was a very significant starting point. The website is very well organised and established members are very welcoming and eager to help with everything, including tips on how to use the website. New members are invited to introduce themselves and to answer simple questions about sailing experience, ambitions, willingness to share information / experience and join in with events. There is a Beginner's Guide and very soon I received emails of welcome from committee members and others – some from the other side of the world. I do not consider myself as very competent when it comes to scientific or technical understanding but I was very much drawn into the DIY culture and reassured that there was a lot of expertise out there and people so willing to help. JRA members have clearly found a good balance between experimenting with their rigs and knowing what they are doing.

So I cut and pasted a rig I liked the look of onto a plan of my boat and without going into any technical details just asked the question what about this then? The experienced JRA members responded straight away. No, it would not work very well but they

suggested better sail plan options. I asked further questions which were usually responded to very quickly, and another newcomer, Jami from Finland, was also converting a trailer sailer so we watched and encouraged each other.

The person who advised and helped me the most throughout the conversion was David Tyler. David's past voyages under junk sails are quite remarkable. He has also had a long-term involvement with the JRA and luckily for me he lives just up the road (well, about

an hour away) here in Cumbria.

He invited me to go and see his boat, gave me detailed instructions and technical drawings for making my battens but also designed my sail plan. He advised me also where to re-position my new mast and then offered to make the sail for me! So with all this, plus more support from my friend Richard Oates, a couple of local boatbuilders at my sailing club and also encouragement from Peter Truelove and other friends, I really had no reasons at all not to just get on with it. Eeek!

For the benefit of those who have not looked into the phenomenon of Junk Rig – you have to have an unstayed mast, lazyjacks, a mainsheet that attaches to several places (via 'sheet spans') on the leech of the sail and a few extra strings to control the set of the sail.

A new vocabulary emerges: many kinds of parrels, the bundle, the partners, the mast lift ... all to make discussions on various adjustments possible, but I will not get too technical here. Almost everyone in the JRA has a copy of *Practical Junk Rig* by Hasler and MacLeod which serves as a very useful reference. However, since that book was written there have been considerable advances in the rig and converted boats



are now sailing much closer to the wind thanks to a better understanding of cambered sail panels. It would seem that you really can now have your cake and eat it because after conversion you can end up with a boat that is not only safer, easier to repair and easier to sail but also faster and able to sail as close to the wind as the Bermudan rig. The rig is low tension, easy to sail and so easy to reef or de-reef while afloat – just drop the sail and it folds itself up in the lazy jacks.

So, having bravely cut a square hole in my cabin top, inserted my tabernacle, made a new mast with a tapered wooden top, and finally put it all together, I was ready for the re-launch on Windermere.

Within a few yards from the jetty I had the feeling that maybe the whole project had been a waste of time! Too much lee helm, the boat bearing away and not possible to tack. Then I realised that if I just tightened my tack parrel the whole sail would swing back a bit. I quickly adjusted it and found that I then had a balanced helm. While sailing upwind I was overtaken by a 36ft keelboat so I lined myself up behind it to see if I could sail the same course – as close to the wind? Well, I thought I could. I then looked behind and saw Frank and Margaret Dearden sailing towards me to congratulate me and have a chat. We sailed back north together so I could ask them what she looked like from their viewpoint. The next time I took her out was with David Tyler, who came over to see his sail in action and to advise on further adjustments.

I have not yet sailed her on the sea and I am still trying to get rid of some creases in my mid-sail area, but I am very much enjoying the easy adjustment and control of sail area.

After a very blustery weekend on the lake I suggested to the sailing secretary of the RWYC (Royal Windermere Yacht Club) that the Flying Fifteen fleet should convert to junk rig to avoid further knock-downs during races, but so far no-one has embraced the idea. I can now do things like sail onto the jetty with the wind behind me, knowing that well before I glide alongside the sail will be completely down and neatly folded. What is not so easy, and I am working now on making it better, is getting the mast up and down on my own. It is longer and heavier than I would like it to be and my old boom crutch is not high enough in the stern to lay the mast horizontally before I raise it.

Perhaps my best sailing day this year was with my grand-



daughter, Maggie, aged 3. This was her first sailing trip and as expected, just getting used to the motion of the boat, the ducks, the ferry and other distracting things. In my important role as ‘Captain Grandpa’ I was able to make the sailing as gentle or as exciting as I wanted it to be while Maggie had a go at ‘fishing’ – throwing all the rope ends over the side to see if she could catch something – then going into the cabin to explore what was in there.

While sailing back into Bowness Bay we were overtaken by one of the cruise boats. The Captain commented, through the amplifier to the mostly Chinese tourists on board, on my unusual junk rig as he went past and afterwards I wondered if it was Paul?

I was worried that my much loved boom tent would need to be altered or re-made now that I have no boom to hang it on, but in advance of my trip to Ullswater I came up with the simple solution of stringing up an oar under my ‘bundle’, which was just the right length and has now been tried and tested. So now it’s all done and I can continue to enjoy sailing her with perhaps just a bit of on-going tweaking – but maybe we all do a bit of that, whatever rig we sail. *DH*

(Left) *Quetzal* on Ullswater

