

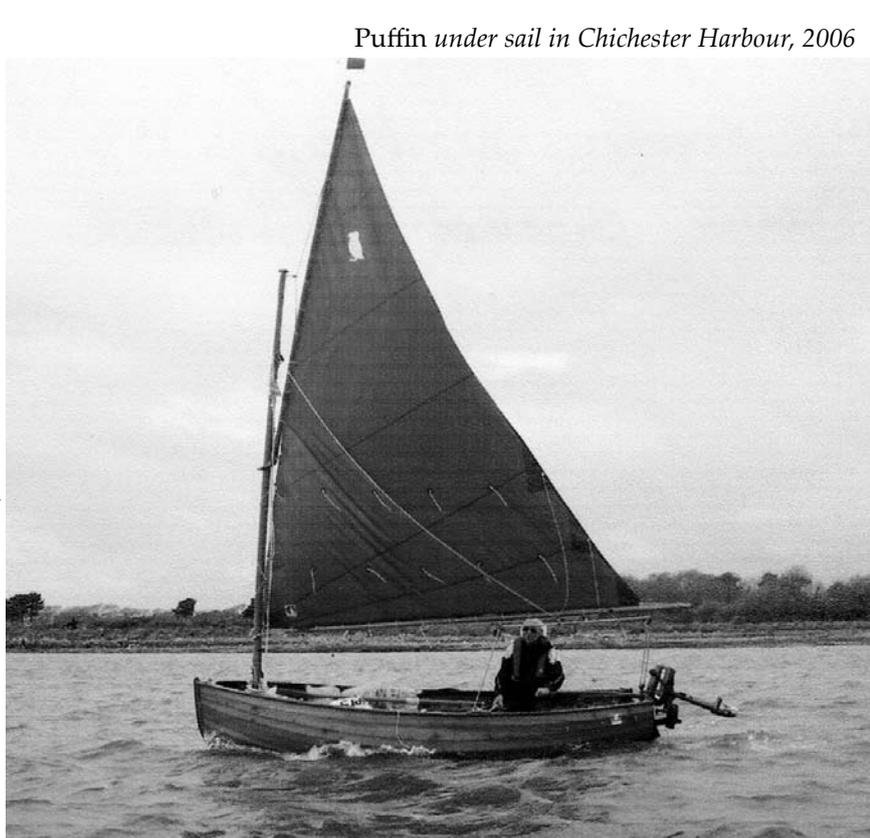
# Puffin, a 13ft Cat-Rigged Dinghy

Colin Bell

*An evaluation of a 13 ft cat-rigged wooden clinker dinghy, built by David Moss in 1985.*

**H**aving owned some twelve different sailing dinghies and cruisers over my lifetime and now having entered the seventies age group, I was looking for a stable, easy to rig, sail and launch sailing dinghy. She had to be big enough to sleep in and suitable for my grandchildren to learn to sail in, after they have read all the Arthur Ransome books.

I heard that David Moss the specialist wooden boat builder was doing some work on a dinghy which when finished might be on the market. This dinghy had been built by him in 1985 for an engineer who subsequently was sent to Australia to work. He took the boat with him in a container, but he never found the time to sail her, and after some twelve years brought her back to the UK. However, she had dried out a little in the container, and David was replacing a few cracked planks in her hull at his workshop near Fleetwood. So the clinker dinghy became mine, a proper little Swallows and Amazons boat she is. She was designed by John Leather as a 14ft dinghy, but David reduced her to 13ft to lower the purchase price, although he kept the beam at five feet. To me she just had the shape of a puffin, so that is what I called her.



*Puffin under sail in Chichester Harbour, 2006*

The rig is very similar to Andrew Wolstenhome's little 11ft Coot dinghy. The single eighty sq ft sail is set on a high peaked gaff and boom, on a mast stepped right forward. The mast is stepped through a gunwale-level clamp and is strong enough to do without all standing rigging, although I do sometimes wonder, with full sail up in a strong wind and everything is creaking and groaning. The sail plan has a topping lift to keep the sail tidy and under control when it is being raised or lowered. This is a very worthwhile feature and it also allows the sail to be scandalised quickly if needed. I have since had a second row of reefing points put in the sail, which means that I have to lower the gaff to move the main halyard onto a ring further up the gaff. This reduces the weight aloft and also reduces the 80 square feet of sail area to 42 square feet. This second reef was needed when I was reaching down the Menai Straits in very blustery conditions with John Hughes last year.

The hull is clinker built, larch on oak ribs, with mahogany centreboard trunk, thwarts and stern board. The floor boards are made of larch. All the woodwork is oiled for protection and easy maintenance. The rudder blade and centreboard are of galvanized mild steel. This, together with the beam of 5ft, make up a very stable little dinghy which weighs about 300lb and will float in eight inches of water for launching. For dinghy cruising I have a plywood food box and cool box, which sit either side of the centreboard case in front of the thwart. These boxes are also used as a chart table when on passage-making trips. Under the thwart are two five-litre water canisters, another food box which is made up of three washing up bowls, one being the lid and this is used for washing up. There is also a small Porta-Potti for use when sailing in the Lake District or Norfolk Broads. At the sides of my wooden boxes there are a flat gas-stove and a Colman dual fuel light. Each end of the thwart is a steering compass mounted well away from the steel

centreboard and easy to see from the helm position. Under the stern thwart is a panic box containing flares, mobile phone, VHF, GPS, horn etc; spare outboard fuel can, warps and a large hand bailer.

A small outboard motor is mounted on a bracket off the transom and is out of the way when sailing. The anchor chain and warp are in a bucket at the bow in front of the mast and my clothes, sleeping bag and pillow are in two plastic drums under the side benches, adding some extra buoyancy to the four large airbags fitted down either side of the hull. My bed is made up on two flat planks extending the starboard side bench and making up a platform for my Thermarest airbed and pillow. My crew sleep on the floorboards behind the mast by letting down one of the buoyancy bags. I'm told that it's quite comfortable. I have designed, cut out and had made up, a full length hooped tent, using fibreglass tent poles inside small bore plastic water pipe to support it under the boom. However, this tent proved to be too bulky and made the boat yaw from side to side at anchor in any wind. I was also informed that when it was erected on the trailer it looked just like a gypsy caravan. That did it!

The Mk II tent is much better as it is tapered under the boom and gaff towards the boom. It has a door in the rear side panel for easy access from beach or pontoon. The boom and gaff rest on a rear support pole and the oars are strapped each side of these at night to keep the inside of the tent clear. They say never make a tent out of green canvas as it makes the inside very dark and the faces of the crew look ill. I chose green on purpose so as to make the boat blend in with the river banks and mud flats. This tent forms a semi-circle behind the mast when not erected and from this position it is quickly erected when I have anchored for the night, especially when it's raining. I am now building a new road trailer with 10-inch Mini wheels, a winch and boat rollers to make the launching and recovery much easier and I hope with no blow-outs on the motorway.

My next project is to make a mast-up boat cover that can be rolled forwards from the transom so as to form a spray deck from bow to midships when the going gets choppy. *Puffin* is all that I hoped for and sails and rows well. However she does not point quite as high as a dinghy with a jib. The tent is big enough to entertain four or five people for a chin-wag or a cup of tea when it's raining, and with the Colman lamp for heat and light it's very cosy. My grandchildren enjoy sailing in *Puffin* and it won't be long before I have to ask for her back to come on DCA weekends. **CB**

