

SCAMP Evaluation, by Howard Rice

Well-known small boat adventurer Howard Rice takes SCA magazine's little cruiser out for an overnight boat test and reports back to them. Thanks to Joshua Colvin of 'Small Craft Advisor' for permission to use the text and photographs, and to the author for his appreciation of our 'Dinghy Cruising' and his willingness to allow us to reprint his feature.

It has oft been said that the man who conjures up a completely new approach to whatever the rest of us are thinking or doing either blesses us (and we in turn bless him) or he is labeled a fool. Another word for this is innovation. Over the last few years I have had the pleasure of communicating on a relatively frequent basis with Josh Colvin of SCA magazine. As way leads on to way so began my introduction to, and recent test sail of, the Small Craft Advisor Magazine Project or SCAMP.

By any measure Scamp is an innovative, purpose-designed cruising dinghy. At 11ft 11ins and nearly 400 or so pounds I would term her a semi-displacement dinghy, due to her weight and optional-use water ballast system. From the nose of her unique pram bow to the tip of her superb foil rudder blade, SCAMP is the embodiment of what I refer to as 'F Squared design', or sweet form equaling superior function.

Josh would be the embodiment of the man I mention in the statement above as it is he and his partner in SCA who gathered and heeded much informed expert opinion and developed the design brief for SCAMP, which John Welsford then drew. I believe these men should be praised for starting and ending with common sense, safety and simplicity as the rule in this creation of a package of innovations. Others, including Kees Prins, collaborated on the final design and building. She is a team effort and in spite of many minds in the design mix, not a design by committee. It is said that a committee setting out to design a horse often comes up with a camel. SCAMP is no camel although she can certainly carry a load like one.

Throughout a rather eclectic sailing career I have come to focus on the development and use of ever smaller and smaller bluewater-capable sailing boats. Thoughtfully designed and prepared cruising dinghies are far more capable than most sailors can imagine. The SCA magazine creed of 'The smaller the boat, the bigger the adventure' has been the most consistent of mantras throughout my life afloat. However, I am always puzzled that so few boats have been purposely developed within the dinghy cruising/daysailing genre. It seems the open-boat cruiser/daysailer offers many advantages over both larger and smaller boats.

On first view of the SCAMP design concept last fall, I saw a potential base from which I might develop my next adventure dinghy cruiser. For several years I have been collaborating with a naval architect in the development of my ideal offshore minicruiser, with a 'similar yet different' approach from SCAMP. This collaboration was focused on a design solution for a particular bluewater cruise I have had on my to-do list for far too long. SCAMP caught my attention as it has with a number of sailors, so I thought it time to see it first hand.

Josh and builder/collaborator Kees Prins of the Northwest Maritime Center had logged just shy of three hours in the boat as winter was hard upon them.

SCAMP was then tucked away in the Northwest Maritime Center where she'd been built, awaiting chirping birds, new buds and balmy breezes. The early sailing results had looked promising.

Joshua and Craig's SCAMP design criteria:

'Our own youthful dreams often featured small boats in starring roles. Aboard these simple, stalwart little vessels we'd venture across nebulous bodies of water in search of distant wild shorelines or uncharted islands. We'd land, hike into the interior, and make camp. But always our boats offered refuge from any threat, including summer storms, which we'd wait out beneath our boom tents.

'At night we'd read sea stories by oil lantern and sleep under a blanket of stars. Curiously, never once did these visions include negative images of wrestling with a heavy mast and complex rigging, fussing with a smelly, recalcitrant outboard, or being held offshore by our boat's draft. And even when we pictured the afternoon breeze kicking up whitecaps, never once did the vision include a chilly capsize.

'It was the dream of returning to those simple pleasures that inspired thoughts of SCAMP. That and a persistent desire to go over there—that place we often see but are unable to reach. It seems to happen on every cruise. Never mind that we're usually sailing the smallest boat around for miles, we always come upon some ultra-shallow lagoon or serpentine tidal stream that disappears into the reeds, trees and rushes.

'To get in there—to really commune with nature—a boat needs to be light, shallow and easily propelled—and preferably flat-bottomed in case we decide to stay right though the ebb.'

My design criteria for the new micro-cruiser I have been planning: 'An open bluewater-capable moderate displacement dinghy under 12 feet LOA based on ultimate simplicity in all regards. It has to be manageable by one person at sea and on land, capable of sleeping one or two, easy to launch and retrieve, shallow draft, balanced helm, water-ballasted, a simple strike-and-stow rig, self-rescue capable, self-bailing cockpit, self-steering capable, able to sail where she looks with ease and in windspeeds up to 35 knots, responsive steering (for close-quarter maneuvering and exploring), dry to sail, comfortable to sleep aboard in all conditions, cuddy cabin (not enclosed), storage that is easy to access and doubles as flotation, easy to row—in short not a tippy drama queen demanding attention at all times.'

I was curious to see whether SCAMP would meet both sets of criteria.

Howard Rice lives and works in Pohnpei, Micronesia. He also maintains a home office in Kanazawa Japan and a home/boat shop in the northern woods near Harbor Springs, Michigan. As a recently retired college professor he has founded a new company, Lookfar International, which focuses on global sustainable development projects, and small boat experiential education and design, including the innovation of small boat cruising systems. In actuality he likes to refer to himself as 'a hopeless small boat sailor and adventurer'. He is currently developing a US-based Small Boat Skills Academy for start up in 2012.

In 1989-90 he spent three and a half months solo in Tierra del Fuego and sailed and paddled a Klepper folding canoe around Cape Horn. According to the Armada de Chile naval records he is the only person to have solo paddled/sailed east to west and west to east, doubling the Cape. They awarded him a certificate of merit commemorating the feat at Puerto Williams, Chile on March 11, 1990. His route took him down the Beagle Channel and through the Wollaston Islands to Hornos Island and back as far west as Timbales in the western Beagle Channel. He was prey to three months of high winds and heavy seas, two capsizes and an injury that required medical attention in Argentina.

He has raced both one-design and offshore sailing classes. He has made numerous open ocean voyages in small boats, including sailing canoes and cruising dinghies. He has been a member of the IOC, IYRU, and the US Olympic Sailing Committee, and he was the former US One Design Class Director for the Mistral Class. He has officiated at numerous World, US National, Caribbean, European and other sailing championships, including the Olympic games. Howard Rice can be reached at ilookfar@gmail.com

Trip Report and Assessment of Scamp

I live and work between Micronesia and Japan and knew work would have me stateside in December, so I routed through Seattle before heading east. I e-mailed Josh that I hoped to come by Port Townsend to simply take a look at SCAMP and talk over the design. Actually, I longed to sail her but had decided

not to ask out of respect, as Josh and I had never met in person and SCAMP was his newly-minted boat.

The visit was also fulfillment of a long-held desire to return to one of America's sailing centers and to visit with longtime friend Russell Brown, owner of PT Watercraft and a fellow multihull and small-boat enthusiast. After a flurry of e-mails Josh not only offered SCAMP to me for any sailing purpose I might dream up but was also incredibly thoughtful in offering to organize gear for my test cruise. Given the predicted snow and potential temperatures in the teens, plus the inability to get a hold of my winter sailing and mountaineering gear, I was very happy and very appreciative of his generous offer. I boarded a plane in Pohnpei wearing short sleeves and sandals, eagerly anticipating a chance to sail in the cold. I arrived in Port Townsend late in the day on 12/28, tropically thin-blooded, jetlagged and shivering under gray winter skies as snow came down, darkness was setting in, and the wind had blown all but the heartiest strollers off the main shopping street.

I poked through town in my rental car, finally finding the Northwest Maritime Center, a beautiful new facility located at the head of the harbor. As it was late in the day the Center was closing, so I phoned Russell and within minutes he and his wife Ashlyn were leading me to their cozy wood-fired home deep in the woods. During dinner we caught up on too many years apart, boats, life stories and the question, 'So Howard what are you doing here?'

'SCAMP cruise and assessment,' I replied.

Both Russell and Ashlyn seemed a bit taken back by this due to the low temperatures and weather. I am quite comfortable in such conditions and was eagerly awaiting the challenges ahead. Cold and windy is my thing as much as warm and tropical. During the night at Russell's we were awakened by a pounding hail/ice storm. The storm woke me at 3am and I could not sleep again. Oh the joys of globe-trotting jet lag. I was itching to get hand on helm and sail.

After a morning of yawning, coffee and breakfast with Ashlyn and Russell, I met Josh and the Maritime Center folks for the first time. I also met SCAMP, and I liked what I saw. She had been impeccably and soundly built by the Center, and I knew the first fail-safe hurdle of my 'Go, no-go' filter had been passed.

Whenever I sally forth onto the water anywhere in the world I assess the situation using this simple base criteria. All subsequent planning emanates from identification of the overall conditions I will face. Once I determine the base condition I then look at wind strength, and for me the more the merrier. Boat and gear come next. If all looks good then I go.

My simple situation analysis looks like this:

- Condition #1: cold water / cold air:

deadly and must be prepared for thoughtfully.

- Condition #2: cold water / warm air:

potentially deadly and must be prepared for carefully.

- Condition #3: warm water / cold air:

again dangerous, preparation essential.

- Condition #4: warm water / warm air:

time is on my side, preparation easier.

I was about to set forth in a new, barely tested boat in the most dangerous circumstance, Condition #1. Careful preparation was first and foremost in my mind and in the minds of my new friends at the Maritime Center. A crew of folks set forth preparing SCAMP and helping me to gear up. It was a fine lighthearted team effort; hats off to the Northwest Maritime Center. On top of Condition #1 it appeared I would have some real wind. I was eagerly anticipating the opportunity and knew with the wind chill factor I could be facing temperatures down to ten or so degrees Fahrenheit. Outside it was bone-chillingly cold for this island boy.

I was also very aware that the clothing I had at hand was not adequate for a capsized and I would have virtually no chance of surviving due to the cold. But I was confident in my skills, and planned to go forth in stages before committing to crossing to Kilisut Harbor and Mystery Bay. I always treat such forays out in adverse conditions by thinking like I am attempting to summit a mountain peak. Mountain climbers know about the adverse-condition mindset and that the descent is usually the killer. Not to sound dramatic but this is exactly how I analyzed the cold/cold situation I faced in spite of planning a short overnight. I think a few eyes rolled in wonderment at my desire to sail in such conditions, but everyone soldiered on and by mid afternoon SCAMP was loaded and pulled to the launch ramp.

The sun was setting red behind the snow-covered mountains as I set out. In my mind the conditions were perfect for a real SCAMP shakedown. As if by providence the snow ceased just before I pushed off and the sun popped out for a snappy cold light-air start. The scene was magical and the task at hand exciting.

Sailing SCAMP

After a simple and efficient launch and filling of the water ballast system I set out downwind

under sail in light to medium air at 0330h. The water ballast system is hardly a system, because it is the ultimate in simplicity and efficiency. I did not have the chance to sail SCAMP without water ballast but I can say she feels solid and predictable with it. I am sold on the SCAMP ballast system, as once filled it is forgotten and requires no attention. The system puts 175 pounds of weight down deep in the hull and standing in SCAMP feels very much like standing on land or a much bigger boat. During my time on SCAMP I could not get my head around the fact that she is under twelve feet LOA. She is the largest small dinghy I have sailed to date.

Russell rowed out alongside me in one of his sleek new nesting (take-apart) dinghies and we chatted on the water, sharing SCAMP observations. I did an initial assessment: spinning her on a dime, gibing, tacking, sailing backwards, sitting to weather, leeward and moving around the boat



Howard's morale-boosting coffee grinder in use on board SCAMP

as much as possible. I was impressed at how nimble yet powerful she felt. She did everything I desired in my initial 'go, no-go' assessment. At one point I lay flat on her cockpit sole and sailed by blind feel, autopilot mode with one finger on the tiller. She tracked perfectly as if on rails.

I joked across the water to Russell, 'OK, and no more stupid dog tricks. It's time to go.'

We laughed a belly-full and I began to sail away as he headed back to shore. I had the confidence that she was 'right,' and so we separated and I set forth to cross to Kilisut Harbor and Mystery Bay.

Offshore a bit I had eight to ten knots of air and SCAMP sailed beautifully, with a balanced helm and a very impressive turn of speed. By nature I am a bit hard to impress with new boats, but every once in a while the helm of one ends up in my hand. This day I had one in hand and it felt very good. I felt confident because SCAMP felt solid.

I made Rat Island and the channel by dark and realized I would be pressing my luck to sail to Mystery Bay as the wind was rising, the temperatures plummeting, and I was bucking the tail end of an ebb tide. SCAMP drove through the cut and shallows like she had an engine. I



loved it! I was deep into my element in a boat that on first blush was delivering. Little did I know that quite a night of adventure lay ahead, as behind me the northwest wind began to build.

In pitch black I sailed SCAMP into a relatively calm spot near shore to Indian Island just inside the channel as the wind strengthened, blowing at 10-12 knots. The anchorage was by no means ideal but would work if conditions stayed about the same. I played out the anchor through a jury-rigged anchor setup, as SCAMP is a development boat in process, and some of her systems are not yet in place. She swung to as the hook hardened in. I set up a simple hardware store brown polytarp as an onboard tent and proceeded to heat up smoked salmon soup and toasted panini over the stove flame. The stove gave the cuddy a homey feel and I felt safe, stable, secure and wondering what the night would bring. By 1900h I was tucked into a toasty nest with my head and upper torso within the cuddy cabin and the full cockpit tented in, reading TE Lawrence's 'The Seven Pillars of Wisdom'.

At about 1930h I heard a strange sound to weather and slipped out of the sleeping bags. I poked a cold nose forward over the top of the cuddy and peered into the pitch-black, star-filled night. The cold wind smacked my forehead like a hard slap. I was glad I had an anchor down and dinner done. The wind was building quickly. Josh told me the next day that conditions had deteriorated and a small craft warning had been posted. I experienced a night of Force 6 touching the low end of Force 7.

SCAMP danced back and forth with the tarp tent whipping, flogging and beating itself to potential shreds. I crawled back out into the cockpit and tucked it in several times. Finally it settled into an

annoying flapping roar. So it goes. The cold was bitter but very invigorating. Back under the cuddy I waited as the sea state turned to frothing white caps. SCAMP's ample high forward sheer meant I was dry as a bone. The cuddy made all the difference for warmth but finally after an hour of listening and occasional visual checks forward, I knew I was possibly in for an all-night building blow and my anchorage was far too exposed for comfort. I decided to pack gear, strike the tent, haul up the anchor and row downwind to find a safer anchorage. Packing gear was the simplest I have experienced on any small boat as Scamp has more accessible dry storage than I could fathom. I simply stuffed gear away in the forward hatches (inside the cuddy), sans dry bags.

All of this striking and scrambling went off quite well except for the temporary rowing setup. As mentioned, SCAMP is a prototype still under development and the rowing setup was a temporary fix expediently done to get her on the water last November. The oars were too short and not properly set up. Even in the strong oscillating gusts SCAMP tracked very well in spite of the short oars. I set out with the centerboard down about six inches but ended up lifting it all the way as the twin skegs kept her on track. Numerous times the wind and the awkward angle lifted an oar out of the lock, and twice I lost one overboard, which was not a good thing given the conditions. Both times I was able to make a last-ditch grab retrieval but each time I had wet hands in freezing conditions. This became a problem, as I had to immediately bury my hands under my life jacket and try to get them warm, dry and functional before putting my gloves back on.

Finally I had her behind a small point and had the hook down, playing out all 150 feet of rode for peace of mind. I was offered several anchor options when

setting up and I chose a Danforth 13 plus chain and ample rode.

The tarp went up in a flapping fight and once again I tucked in for a read and a fantastic night's sleep. SCAMP swung on her pin as the ice-cold wind blew in great gusty waves outside. Several times I was up to peer out of her portholes to check conditions and bearings to shore. It was downright nasty. I was toasty warm due to the cuddy windbreak and I slept confidently and soundly.

I was awakened at 0400h by a mix of jet lag and calm. It was bitter cold and I lingered in my nest beneath the cuddy savoring the great experience I was having. SCAMP felt like a genuine cruising boat, solid, stable, quiet, roomy and warm. The cuddy cabin was nothing short of perfect. I do not like tiny cabins on tiny boats. They are impractical and in my mind dangerous if one has to execute a fast exit. Gear often ends up a mess and hard to get to. SCAMP's cuddy and watertight storage compartments were spot on. I told Josh that if SCAMP had been designed with a closed cabin I would not have been interested.

At first light I braved up, dressed, got the tent down, packed camping gear into dry bags, stowed them and set up for breakfast. It was very cold and removing a glove was a painful experience. Necessities were accomplished with the small bucket I had on board and soon I was gloves-off heating my hands on Russell's stove. I proceeded to roast delicious organic green Columbian Supremo coffee beans, grinding them hot off the stove. I then frothed up some milk and enjoyed a steaming hot foamy latte with Ashlyn's homemade cornbread toasted

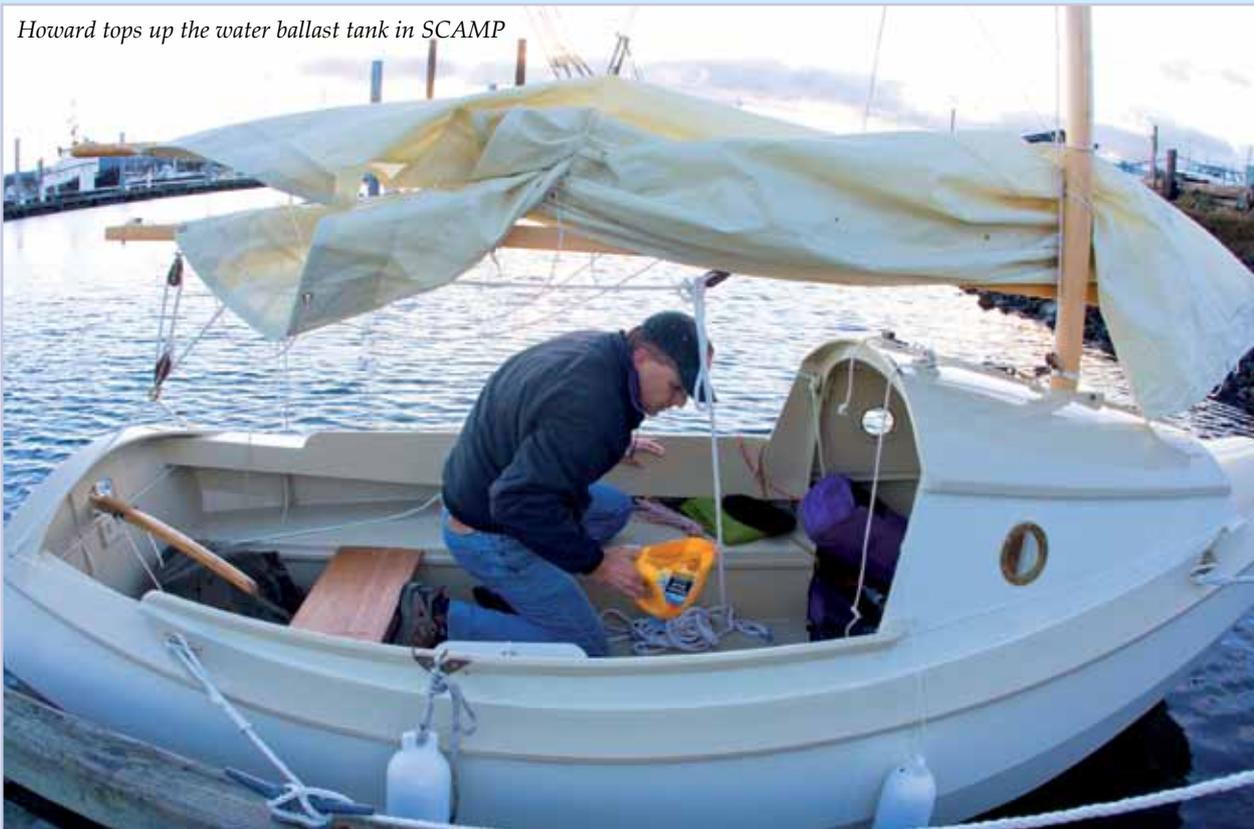
over the stove. Coffee roasting is a ritual I practice at home, on small boats or high in the mountains. The process and fragrant smoke from roasting is a pre-dawn physical and psychological warm-up ritual. Spell this dinghy cruising heaven!

Soon I broke the spell as the wind was building and I itched for the day of sailing ahead. I raised the lugsail, which at 100 square feet with two reef options is a solid rig choice for SCAMP and proceeded to up anchor. Hauling anchor with the full rig up was an effortless event and completely controllable, again no drama queen in her genes or in the rig's.

Most boats sail better in building wind with a reef in and SCAMP is no exception. I am making recommendations to Josh and Kees on a better reefing and rig setup but all in all the rig is excellent and beautiful to look at (SCAMP's spars are stiff and light). Reefing underway given the present setup would be problematic. I sailed for miles beating directly to weather in gusty whitecap conditions and did not miss a tack, nor did I ever feel unstable or overpowered. SCAMP could be sailed with one or two fingers and I free-handed the mainsheet, feathering her to weather and sailing dryly over breaking waves.

It was very cold. I did not chance taking a glove off to consult the GPS but believe I had her up between five and six knots when reaching out of Mystery Bay and between four and five beating. I recognize this might seem high and I may be slightly off but not by much. My wind chill calculations had the temperature again at about ten degrees Fahrenheit and I elected

Howard tops up the water ballast tank in SCAMP



not to remove a glove for photos. I missed some dramatic sailing shots; it was just too dicey.

I had a great romping sail of long tacks to weather across open water to Port Townsend finally ending the day in ghosting conditions in the lee along the storefronts of town as the second day's sun set blazing red behind snow-capped peaks. I did not want to come back. For those who wonder about her pram bow I can tell you (as a sailor with many miles under the hull of a tiny pram-bowed Mirror) that SCAMP excels with her pram bow, and in my book looks all the better for it. It is no issue in either light or heavy air and is what gives SCAMP her ample volume forward and so much living space. The SCAMP sailor must realize that she is 11ft 11ins and pack her accordingly. I suggest packing light gear forward and heavier gear center to slightly aft to set up level trim. Given her massive storage and flotation one must be careful not to overdo it. Pack on a diet as with any boat and she and you will be all the happier for it. Small dinghies, even those as full and ample as SCAMP, are weight-sensitive.

SCAMP also sails herself in the light stuff. I took hands off the mainsheet and stood with the tiller between my knees or sat comfortably perched on her transom, awestruck at the gorgeous sunset playing itself out over snow-capped mountains. This was a very fitting end to a fantastic mini-cruise. I was salt-encrusted and happy as I spied Josh and friends waiting at the ramp. In the confines of the harbor the breeze died to zero and with one oar I easily sculled her to the dock. There was a flurry of discussion and questions and in a very few minutes we were trailering her through town back to the Maritime Center.

The SCAMP I sailed is a work in progress and I will not fault her for not having all systems figured out or applied. In fact I hope to be involved in the development of SCAMP from here forward. I judged her on her sailing and handling attributes, realizing she is not yet fully set up. I am looking forward to

seeing the many solutions SCAMP sailors come up with for on-board systems, tents, etc.

My suggestion is don't get too complicated; stick with the design criterion of simplicity at every turn. SCAMP offers a very interesting set of attributes which make her an ideal family daysailer and at the same time a potential blue water minicruiser if thoughtfully set up. In my book, based on the little I sailed her, I say SCAMP gets very close to a perfect ten across the board. Well done folks!

- To the reader, please note that my observations were quite limited due to time. I did not conduct a capsizing test but will be doing so with Josh and others soon. I am also hoping to take her out in at least Force 8 and heave-to in order to learn more. Heaving-to is often not understood or practiced by small-boat sailors. My hunch is that she will do what needs to be done and will be able to keep sailors safe at sea or off a lee shore in a real blow.

- I also did not load SCAMP with gear or sail her without water ballast, as again time was short and the conditions I sailed in called for ballast. In light conditions she will be even faster without ballast. I did however purposely sail her very hard, tacked her and gibed her hard and fortunately had a wide range of conditions from zephyr to the low end of Force 7 to do so.

- I also freely admit that I knowingly set out in winter conditions with marginal exposure clothing and am not recommending the same to others. In addition I broke a personal cruising rule sailing the downwind leg first, leaving a long windy beat for the return. I am no small-boat cowboy but actually quite methodical in my approach. Had SCAMP not impressed me up front I would have declined the offer to sail. Thank-you's all around to Josh Colvin, the Northwest Maritime Center staff and friends Russell and Ashlyn.

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(Below) Howard sets out in SCAMP

