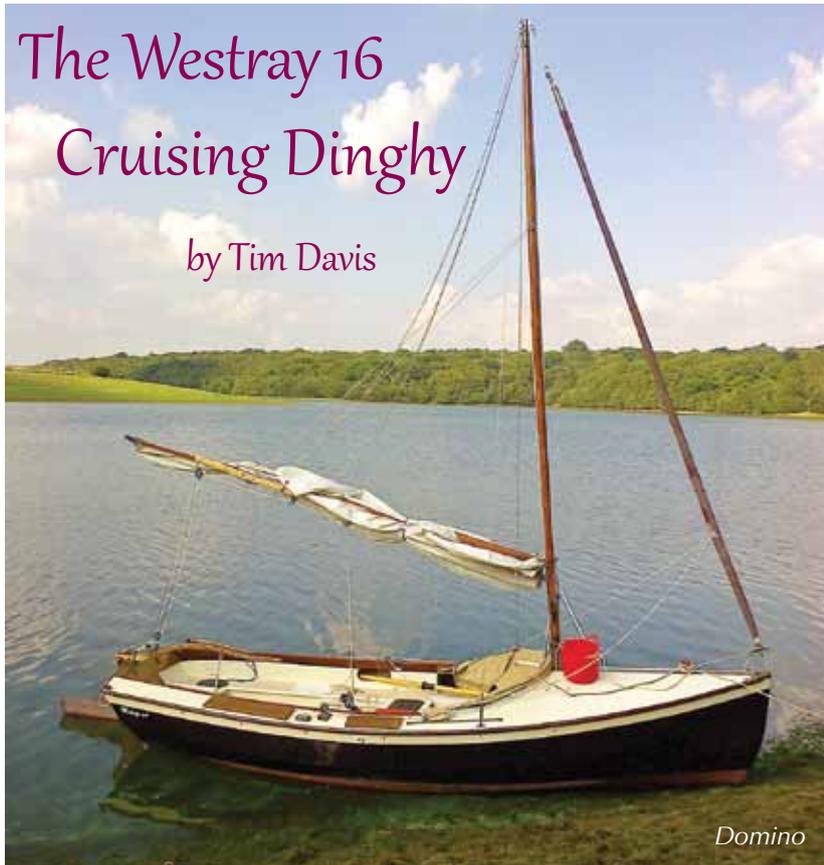


The Westray 16 Cruising Dinghy

by Tim Davis



In search of the perfect boat

I HAVE ALWAYS ENJOYED reading about other people's boats, both past and present, and what it is that makes them so endearing – or not, as the case might be.

My own experiences have been restricted to small trailer sailers and the slightly heavier breed of dayboats. A couple of Skipper 17s, a Drascombe Dabber and a couple of Hawk 20s, among others, but although each boat had its good points there was always something that made me want to try an alternative.

The Hawk 20 is a fantastic sailing vessel, but even after fitting rowlocks and a pair of gigantic oars I found rowing exceedingly difficult and was always reticent leaving a mooring with only an engine as my real alternative to sail. The Drascombe was tricky to sleep on and a little uncomfortable for longer journeys, and so on...

It was after looking at a Bayraider 20 in Norfolk (beautiful craft but with the self-draining cockpit I felt as if I was sitting on a child's seat with my knees under my chin)

that purely by chance we stopped off at Peter Clark's boatyard at West Mersea, while on our way home, to look at a Westray 16 I had previously seen for sale and had thought might be worth a look.

How fortuitous this was, as immediately I realised that all my ideas of what I thought I wanted in a cruising dinghy were sitting here in front of me: deep cockpit (for a dinghy at least), raised foredeck with enough room to sleep under and turn over, three-quarter-decked with comfortable sitting, in or out, and all within a feasible weight balance for daysailing. There were no rowlocks, but with solid side decks I could see no issue in fitting them, and there was no trailer. I have, however, always preferred to buy my boats without the trailer and pay less as a result. That way I can source the trailer myself and be more relaxed about the distances spent on the motorway.

The Westray 16 originates from the Highlander 16 which was designed by Paul Fisher. The freeboard was increased by Paul Stent of PJS Boats (some in wood, the rest in GRP hulls with wood interior) and the Westray was

created. I have been fortunate enough to chat with Paul and so glean an enormous amount of information, directly from the man who built *Domino*, a tremendous privilege and of great help.

Basically I only needed to adapt those elements that suited me personally, such as the rowlocks and oars (there already being an engine well), a centre mainsheet control system and a taller more commodious sprayhood (the track round the front of the cockpit was already an integral feature).

This new larger adaption was intended to create a folding cabin rather than a sprayhood, which has proved itself magnificently. To be able to anchor and then within a mere few minutes be comfortably sheltered inside your own canvas cabin is indeed a luxury!

The trailer took a little bit more thought as I had originally envisaged a swing beam cradle type, the all-up weight of the boat being in the order of 770lbs, but with a very deep aft skeg and a fairly straight stem this just wasn't feasible in practice, working only on steepish slipways.

I didn't want to be limited with launch sites and as the original Westrays were fitted on combi units I decided to follow suit, which has proved highly successful. Modern advancement in all types of trailer engineering has not overlooked the combination trolley and trailer system, and once balanced it has proved to work highly efficiently.

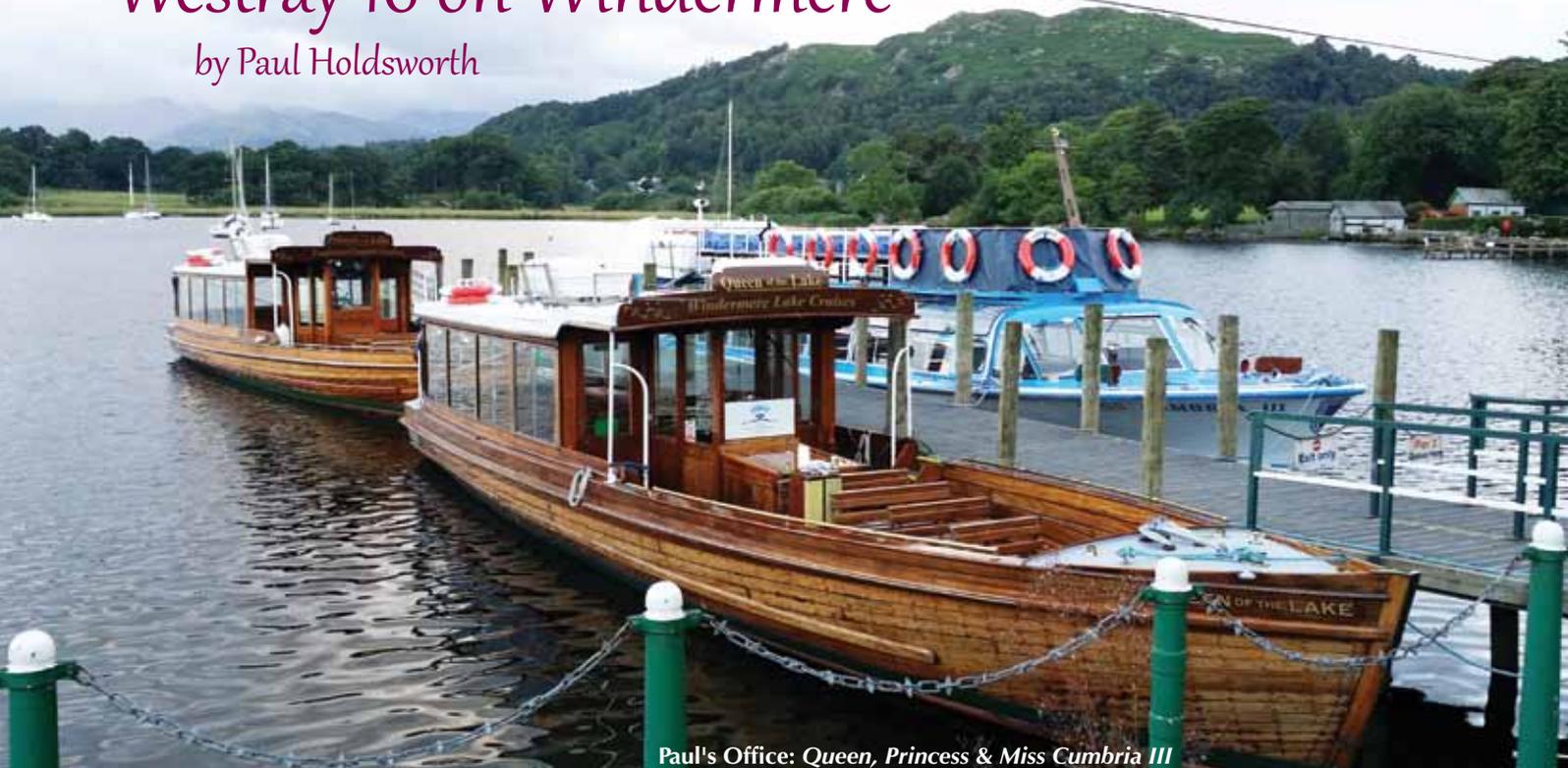
Domino has proved to be a real joy to sail, with gunter spars and roller reefing jib, and is comfortable to cruise in and exceedingly homely at anchor.

The boat rows superbly, held steady on course by that sizeable skeg, the oars kept either inside and under the foredeck for sea sailing or on the substantial side decks for immediate deployment in harbour. There is an abundance of watertight lockers for stowage and an easy comfortable berth for sleeping.

This just about sums up my requirements for a cruising dinghy; all I need now is the weather to go with it. TD

Westray 16 on Windermere

by Paul Holdsworth



Paul's Office: Queen, Princess & Miss Cumbria III

Paul Holdsworth – Windermere Lake Cruises Skipper – began to combine business with pleasure when he exchanged his Laser for a Westray 16 and started camping in his office ...

I SPEND OVER A thousand hours each year sailing on Windermere, but until this summer I had never slept aboard *Ellen L*, my Westray 16 cruising dinghy. It was time to set that right.

Now before you turn the page, assuming the author is a fantasist, let me explain that monstrous sailing claim – 1,000 plus hours a year? Really?

For the past few years I've been a skipper for Windermere Lake Cruises and every working day is spent at the helm of one of its passenger vessels. To be paid a wage to pilot classic launches listed in the National Historic Ships Register still feels like an enormous privilege, if not a downright liberty.

To qualify as a boatmaster I have to know every bay and headland (*wyke* and *nab* in local dialect). I've learnt about the wonderful history of the lake for my commentaries, and I get to enjoy the wildlife and the fantastic Lakeland scenery. But I also work long and late in high season which, for a dinghy racer, makes getting to club race nights on time very difficult. So this year I sold my Laser and bought a Westray

16. No more racing, but a steep dinghy-cruising learning curve confronted me.

While daysailing *Ellen L* to become acquainted with her, I became increasingly daunted by tales of channel crossings, capsizes, navigational conundrums and endless inventories in the small dinghy-cruising library I had accumulated – this was much more complicated than bashing round the racing marks. There's a real challenge to encouraging dinghy cruising – it is a fundamentally simple activity, but how-to guides tend to address the full range of possibilities, and so make for intimidating reading to newcomers like me.

I was fortunate that my Westray 16 was in great condition and well equipped, complete with an immaculate boat tent and, after years of cycle-camping, I already had lots of useable lightweight camping gear. I really had to stop researching and just get on with it. I decided to simply sail on Windermere and spend a single night tied up at a wooden jetty, to keep the unknowns to a minimum, and make any necessary retreat

straightforward.

This may all sound ludicrously cautious, but the mental adjustment needed to view a dinghy as something to cruise, sleep and eat in, rather than to race, was significant. The nearest thing to a Westray I'd sailed was a racing *Enterprise* – in comparison a light, fast, wet and tippy two-hander. I'd already had to unravel the complexities of rigging and reefing a high-peaked gunter rig (Roger Barnes's excellent book was invaluable), had been reassured by the stability of a 60lb metal centreplate and the dryness of high freeboard, side decks, coamings and pramhood, and discovered that the boat was set up nicely for singlehanded. But my mind was cluttered with questions that would only be answered by doing, not reading. I had to stop procrastinating and get started.

I left Bowness Bay on a sunny late afternoon in July with a dry mouth, into a F2 northwesterly, backing F4. I kept well over to the eastern shore for the stronger, steadier breeze away from the fluky winds beneath Claife Heights.

Immediately I started to learn: the boat has a 3.3hp two stroke



outboard in a well, which had annoyingly dragged in my wake on day sails. Now, with the extra kit on board (including anchor and chain), the bows dug in a bit and the prop was clear of the water. Of course, *Ellen L* was designed to carry a load! More surprising was how her motion was improved on a beat: no more slapping and slamming, she carved through the water as if I had a crew well forward.

The difference between working and playing on Windermere is always striking. The lake becomes much bigger at 3 knots sailing rather than 9 knots under power, and when sailing I don't have access to Windermere Lakes Cruises' private VHF channel. The absence of chatter that accompanies my working day is always very strange – like viewing my approaching colleagues in their commercial passenger vessels in black and white, rather than in colour. As qualified boatmasters they know what they're doing, but they also know my sail number and rather expect me to accommodate them, whatever the byelaws might say! (Rest assured, our skippers are unfailingly considerate to all sailors on the lake).

Bowness Bay is sometimes like Piccadilly Circus; it certainly helps that I know the cruise boat timetable by



Top: Berthed at Waterhead, Wetherlam behind
Bottom: Snug and well-made pramhood and tent

heart, to reduce potential conflicts.

I arrived at Waterhead, snug beneath the Fairfield Horseshoe at the northern end of Windermere, just as my colleagues were ending their working day. I tied up at one of our private, secure jetties, had a cup of tea with, and endured a gentle ribbing from, my workmates, and set about pitching the boat tent.

The acrylic canvas tailor-made boat tent is light, airy, roomy and quick to pitch. The pramhood is up in a second, and I have the option of zipping a closure directly on to the back of the hood to create a snug two berth sleeping area, or a full length boom tent. I went for the latter, and discovered the roomy delights of dinghy cruising, compared with lightweight cycle-camping. *Ellen L* has forward bottom boards that can be raised level with the side tanks, creating two very comfortable six foot plus berths. After a cup of tea on the Trangia, I had fishcake and chips from Waterhead Chippie followed by a beer or two at the youth hostel next door.

Just before nightfall I spotted not one, but two Ospreys overhead. Spending so much time on the lake, I do get to see all sorts of rarities – just the week before a juvenile gannet had spent a couple of days on the lake, lost or blown off course. It even put on a display of diving for us, but Ospreys? Two of them?

Another confession – these Ospreys were mechanical. The Lake District is used for military training flights, and these were Boeing V22 Ospreys: weird tiltrotor aircraft. Still, they were genuine novelties, much like the four Warthogs (A10 Thunderbolts) that visited a week later...

Sleeping aboard was comfortable and unremarkable. Perhaps not surprisingly I was awoken in the wee small hours by dreams of revellers tinkering with mooring lines, even calling out to the imaginary miscreants before realising my error. The single skin tent was heavy with dew and condensation in the perfect, still morning, but with plenty of headroom it was easy to leave untouched, and soon dried out in the brilliant sunshine.

A sail back to Bowness in a F2 was accompanied by greylag geese showing off their new flight feathers; the lazy, flapping flypast of a heron and yet more current affairs surprises with details of a seismic cabinet reshuffle on BBC Radio Four – another odd disconnect.

I've since tried overnighting at anchor in the lee of the western shore, just south of Wray Castle, which was even more idyllic, and now feel the purchase of a DCA burgee would not be overly presumptuous.

If you're dithering, as I was a short while ago, can I urge you to keep it modest and simple, but get started as soon as you dare? I don't regret it, and neither will you. *PH*