

The West Wight Potter, by Bruce Longstaff

Ted Jones emailed me recently to ask why we have not published something on this boat in our pages, despite having twelve WW Potter owners in the DCA. He went on: 'I've always admired the West Wight Potter. Perhaps it's the jaunty lines. Perhaps it's the apparent ease of keeping it ashore, trailing it to the coast, launching and rigging it. But whatever it's attractions, I've neither owned nor sailed in one. And when PBO gave them extensive coverage a few months ago, I looked out all the info I had on them again. Next, I looked back through Bulletins, to see how many articles I could find about their sailing qualities – in coastal waters rather than lakes – and couldn't find any.'

Ted had a lot of very specific questions to ask, so I bundled them up and sent them out to the Potter owners. Bruce replied quickly and positively, and his review, prefaced by the rest of Ted's questions, is printed below. –Ed

Ted:

'– For example, how much can you stow aboard? The cabin looks as if it's all bunks with no foot well (so sitting inside on the bunks means 'knees under chin' position?) and very little stowage, so where do clothing, food, water and sleeping bags actually go?

Is there room for a Porta-Potti? Or is it bucket and chuck it only?

And where does the bucket stow?

From the PBO pictures there doesn't look much room even for that. How about cooking aboard? Where does the cooker stow, and can it be used when underway?

On wet or wind-bound days, can you 'live' in the cabin or are you only able to sit properly in the cockpit, courtesy of a boom tent?

There are so many questions like this. On paper, it looks like the ideal DCA boat. Surely someone should be able to write eloquently about them?' TJ

The West Wight Potter has a history of getting on for fifty years. The first design was based on the two features of being able to tow with a mini – the 850cc BMC product which appeared in 1959 - and to be launched over a beach. The designer was Stanley Smith FRGS, an Isle of Wight boat builder.

Pictured is an original boat, #72, on an original trailer, owned by Gordon Smith in Dorset. You can see the hard chine and the curiously set forward end of the cabin, designed to keep water away from the cockpit. Noticeable too is the sinusoidal curve of the gunwale. This helps the hull deal with following seas. Dimensions were about 14 feet overall with a draught of only a few inches. This hull has the original feature of a lift-off cabin top giving the benefit of an open boat. Coach bolts hold the top in place.



Photograph: Bruce Longstaff

Over the next few years there were several builders in Great Britain leading to a couple hundred boats including further versions built in GRP by different people. Add to that perhaps two thousand 14 and 15 footers in the USA by HMS Marine, and some US craft called WW Potter at 18 and 19 feet overall which had a completely different hull form. Various rigs were used; lug, Gunter, Bermudan and a few have been altered to junk rig. Designs have been allocated letters, B, C, D and NOVA [all GRP] and, as far as I know, apart from the AX, only one other wooden type, labelled E. This last only led to a very few hulls. In the early 1990s, Martin Pook developed the AX Potter, taking the lines from an original. This was built in epoxy-resined Finnish Birch ply. It is slightly longer and wider than the originals, drawing 7 inches with the plate raised.

My boat, *Ursa Minor* is pictured below. She is just

As we all do, I have added things – navigation lights, air vent forward, harness clip-ons, a folding step on the transom just above the water line, a 4 hp long shaft outboard on a pantograph, a ‘tiller damper’ and a ‘lunch’ anchor, a boom tent using one square 6 x 4 ft eyelet-ed square of plastic sheeting from a well-known motor store secured with elastic straps. She lives on a road trailer at home. The mast sits on top of the cabin with a crutch on the trailer towbar and the boom stows inside the cabin. Rigging is easily (and better) done singlehanded from the cockpit. It is quite easy to drop the mast for passage under bridges.

I have had many adventures on all kinds of waters in Southern England, Solent, Chichester, Poole, Tamar, Helford, South Hams and Norfolk Broads. The fairly solid design has seen me through various ‘moments of concern’ though performance could



over 15 feet LOA, with a beam of 5 ft 6 in. Weight is around 650 lbs/296 kilos unladen.

Many Potterers camp aboard, either on the trailer when ashore or afloat. There is room for two bed spaces. Stowage in the GRP boats is not as great as in the AX which has five cockpit lockers. I keep only light items in those lockers when under way; Potters sail better with weight forward. Headroom is probably about 4 ft 6 in at the cabin entrance. Use can be made of netting or hook stowage secured to various parts of the structure. Mine arrived with the entire cabin lined in carpet which has proved durable. I installed a PORT-POTTI in the cabin. It is demountable and backs on to the main bulkhead just inside the cabin doorway. The boat is Bermudarigged with a roller foresail and a ghosting genoa. A steel lifting centre plate is present on all WW Potters.

never be described as snappy. Stanley Smith said that his designs were for maximum stability and that the boat ought not to be allowed to heel more than 10 degrees. He did sail a Potter on delivery to Sweden from Yarmouth in October 1965, which included a five-day F9 gale, going ashore at Jutland, recovering and continuing a few days later. His first epic was a 44-day Atlantic crossing in a twenty-foot boat, built with his brother in a church basement, from Newfoundland in 1949.

So far as I have been able to find out, the plans for Potters have never been offered for home-build. As a postscript there is the Brazilian Potter. Martin Pook’s design is the basis (see page 63). A web search will produce many references. **BL**

(Note also the short piece 'Best in Show', by Duncan Gilchrist, Winter 2007, B197:48, in which he praises the build quality of the Potter sold by the British dealership The Leisure Boat Company, Falmouth, TR11 3YL. Phone: 0845 257 8243, email: info@theleisureboatcompany.co.uk. The boat is built and fitted out to a very high standard in California –Ed)

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Graham Perry was approached but did not have the time to write anything on the Potter, as he was putting together an article for us on sailing from Walney Island to Glasson Dock (see pp 63-66). However, he did supply me with a boatload of information, two items from which I attach below. I've no idea whether Bob Lomas is still Secretary of the WWP Association (so no contact details given), but here is a leaflet he produced for members – a while back, I think, as Brian and Kate McClellan moved on from Watermouse a long time ago! After that there are words about the design from the great man himself, Stanley Smith. Graham also supplied me with the full text of SS's immortal trip to Sweden in 1965 (calling in at a harbour we visited last year on our Swedish cruise, I now notice). Too long for this issue, I'm afraid, but soon, perhaps ... –Ed

The West Wight Potter, by Bob Lomas

The 'West Wight Potter', a boat that originated in a western corner of the Isle of Wight, in which one could 'potter', was designed and originally built by third generation boatbuilder and designer, Stanley Smith, who, in the early fifties, made fame by twice sailing the Atlantic in another of his small boat designs – the second time to celebrate the Festival of Britain in 1951.

Stanley Smith's criteria for the Potter was a boat that could be easily towed by a Morris Minor, could be stored in the garage, and would be seaworthy enough to take any seas the Solent had to offer. In his design the latter was more than adequately catered for, as proved when he sailed one of his early Potters from the Isle of Wight to its new owner in the north of Sweden, crossing the North Sea in gale force winds one cold October.

Since then, Potters have sailed the Pacific Ocean and the rough seas around Alaska.

The original Potters were made of wood. Later models, the 'B', 'C' and 'D' types, were in GRP. About three hundred Potters were built in the UK – production ceased in the late nineteen-eighties. In the USA some fifteen hundred have been produced.

The West Wight Potter Association was formed in February, 1995, and within a year had over sixty members. Some members have had their Potters over twenty years, and some have had several Potters, other boats having been tried, only to be replaced with another Potter.

The Veteran of the Fleet is *Watermouse*, No.3, a wooden boat owned by Mr. & Mrs. Brian McClellan. Over the past twenty years the McClellans have trailed and sailed *Watermouse* many hundreds of miles to venues throughout Britain.

The West Wight Potter can be compared to no other boat. She is quite unique – a very versatile and very personal little craft that will take her owner safely across a marshy lake or an ocean, and between voyages can rest on the drive or on the lawn.

She is admired and respected by experienced sailors: what boat could be cheaper to run? What boat could be more fun to sail?

The West Wight Potter Association is as simple and unassuming as the boat itself. The Association was founded in a Sussex kitchen in February, 1995, and by the end of its first year had attracted a membership of about 70 very nice people who admire and favour the Potter and, in order to communicate with like-minded souls, are happy to put their names on a membership list.

There are no Officers as such, only a co-ordinator who assumes the role of general secretary, having founded the Association. In this regard, each member may call himself president or chairman to lift his spirits on days when the weather is too inclement to sail his Potter; this automatically limits all such members from over-indulging in delusions of grandeur.

Approximately four times a year a Newsletter is sent to members who wish to receive one, for which there is a nominal charge; otherwise membership is free, but donations are always acceptable.

Broadly speaking, these are the Rules of the Association, which have been drawn up with very little consideration in order to make them as democratic as possible.

It has been learned from good authority, (mainly those involved), that Potterers tend to contact one another through the membership list, and meet up on occasions either to put liquid under them, or in them, or both.

Within the Association, ideas are freely exchanged, and for those proud to show the flag, pennants and badges are available.

You do not have to own a Potter to be a member of the Association; we are particularly interested in recruiting members who own large and luxurious yachts, to which we can tie up for parties before sailing back to the peace and tranquillity of a mud creek! **BL**