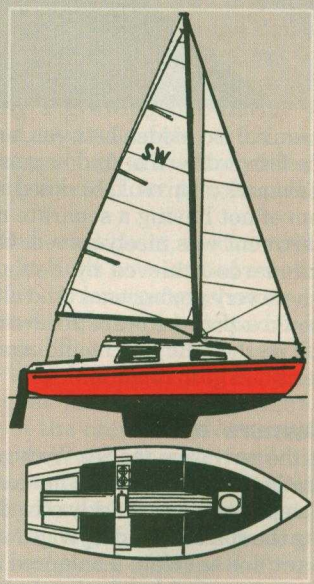


BUYING SECONDHAND



SEA WYCH	
LOA	19ft 0in
LWL	16ft 0in
Beam	7ft 0in
Draft2ft 1in
Headroom	4ft 6in
Displacement	1,650 lb
Ballast	720 lb
Sail Area	172 sq ft
Construction	GRP hull, deck and interior mouldings, timber and plywood joinery
Designer	John Sadler
Builder	Sadler & Sons



Pocket Cruiser for Around Two Grand

If you want a compact, economical, secondhand sailboat for coastal cruising and ditch crawling, the Sea Wych could well fit the bill
— says Dave Greenwell

Those who started sailing small sailboats during the 1970s will doubtless remember with some affection the little compact cruisers that typify that era. A good example is the Sea Wych, a 19 footer designed by John Sadler, a civil engineer, and built by Sadler & Sons of Bicester. Over 650 were

produced between 1969 and 1984. The moulds still exist but are no longer in use. But the class still flourishes with an owners' association boasting around 200 members. They hold rallies and meetings, and produce a very lively journal. And Sea Wyches still regularly appear for sale, priced from around £2,000 up to £4,000 for a really good one.

With that in mind I contacted the Sea Wych Owners' Association who put me in touch with Peter and Lena Hubbard who still sail their Sea Wych, *Emma*, which they built together in their garage about 17 years ago. They kindly invited me along to see her for myself, and to demonstrate how well she has stood the test of time, and how she could still provide just as much fun now as they did when we were young.

Emma typifies the way in which the majority of Sea Wyches were built — by amateurs, each with different ideas and attention to detail. The

result is that Sea Wyches are not all the same.

From a bare hull

Peter and Lena took delivery of *Emma* in the form of separate hull and deck mouldings. Like most GRP boats of that time, she was laid up with 1.5oz/sq ft chopped strand mat. She had a total of 9oz/sq ft below the waterline, decreasing to 6oz/sq ft in the topsides. These weights were doubled in areas of high stress such as the stem and keel roots.

Their first major task was to bond the hull and deck mouldings. This they still remember with vivid clarity — it takes quite a while to grow back hair that's been chopped off because of hardened blobs of polyester resin. But the job was done well. The two moulding were bedded on a layer of wet glass and resin and then bolted together at 6 inch intervals.

They then attacked the fitting out but, instead of following the recommendations to make her open planned, they extended the midships half bulkheads to provide more privacy in the forward sleeping area. And where the plans suggested using half-inch timber surrounds to the companionway, they used one inch just for luck. They openly admit that they were building a cruising yacht rather than a speed

machine. They also modified the rig — replacing the swept-back spreaders with straight ones and adding an extra pair of shrouds.

The overall effect is pleasing. She looks very well built — the epitome of a stout hearted little coastal cruiser that could stick up for herself if the going gets rough. Her appearance has been enhanced by a nicely made spray hood protecting the companionway, and a pair of dodgers that make her 5-foot long self-draining cockpit very snug.

Domestic arrangements are understandably simple. The galley comprises a worktop, sink and cooker, and extends across the boat at the after end of the cabin. It may be basic but it was certainly sufficient for Lena to keep the three of us well supplied with copious cups of tea and an excellent picnic lunch of hot soup and other good things.

Toilet facilities comprised a



HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU PAY?

Emma isn't for sale at the time of writing, but there were five other Sea Wyches being offered through the Sea Wych Owner's Association, ranging in price from £2950 up to £4,295. For information contact Roy Sallabank, Editor of the SWOA Magazine, 6 Henley Lodge, Yatton Nr. Bristol BS19 4JQ. Tel or Fax: (01934) 832728.



The snug little cabin is the area where most builders exercise most imagination.

chemical loo hidden between, and beneath the forward berths. And because this area of *Emma's* cabin could be closed off, the problem of not having a separate heads compartment was nicely solved. Overall, the standards achieved by Peter and Lena where very professional. And although one would expect the years to have taken some toll on the GRP, the mouldings seemed to be still in good condition.

Owners' mods

In the early days, the Sea Wych gained a reputation for weather helm in heavy weather. The problem was quickly solved by extending the rudder's leading edge forward of its pivot line to create a balanced area. Peter made this mod, but freely admits to having overdid it a bit. The result, as I was to discover, is a rather weak feel to the helm – but more of that later. The other peculiarity that everyone remembers about the Sea Wych is her bilge keels which look very inefficient. And, as far as weight distribution is concerned, they are too far forward to allow her to dry out safely without a support under the transom. The other consideration is when she's brought ashore for the winter, she must be stored mast-down and provided with extra shores. But in the sixteen years the Hubbards have been sailing *Emma*, the keels have never created any problems.

Auxiliary power

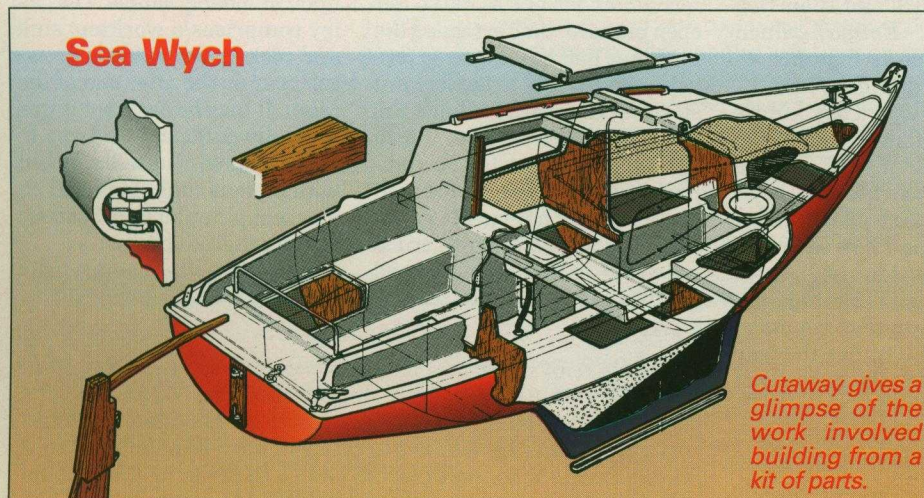
Like *Emma*, most Sea Wyches were out-

board motor powered but there are examples where owners have fitted small inboard engines. Certainly, an inboard enables the boat to be motor-sailed more readily but the outboard installation aboard *Emma* worked

HOW MIGHT SHE SURVEY?

The construction of smallish yachts almost inevitably calls for lighter than average mouldings, so the possibility of stress crazing to the laminate always exists – especially around pulpit feet and stanchion bases. Another area that should be checked is the tight turn to both hull and deck mouldings above and below the gunwhale flanges (usually hidden by the extruded rub-rail). Here a concentration of stresses can also promote crazing. Most original Sea Wyches have their windows mounted in windscreen type rubber extrusions which by now will probably have perished and shrunk back, leaving the windows insecure and possibly leaking. This arrangement was never a wonderful idea, and anyone facing the task of replacement might consider simply bolting the new ones directly to the cabin sides, bedding them on a suitable silicone or polyurethane sealant.

Andrew Simpson.



perfectly well and 5hp seems to be more than adequate. *Emma* does have an adjustable-height transom bracket, however, giving valuable control over the depth of the propeller. This feature is particularly useful when someone has to go forward to man a bow line because weight on the fore deck affects fore-and-aft trim. But, on balance, I would stick with the original recommendation of a transom-mounted outboard which works well, gives good manoeuvrability and could be turned to give added steerage at low speeds.

How does she sail?

The day I visited Gosport to sail aboard *Emma*, there was a threat of rain and the wind was brisk and squally. I had heard that the well rockered, rounded hull lines of the Sea Wych give her the sailing qualities of a large dinghy. But I suppose it all depends what's meant by 'large dinghy feel'. Obviously you would not expect to be able to leap onto her side deck without inducing some heel, and with three adults aboard, everyone suddenly moving to the same side has an immediate effect! But, for her size, I felt that she was perfectly steady and predictable.

We started out with a reefed main and jib. She handled well, tacking confidently, gybing without fuss, and generally behaving herself in what can only be described as confused conditions. But in the gusts she was being a little over pressed and Peter suggested that we drop the mainsail completely and sail under headsail alone.

There was a lot of south in the wind and the sea beyond the harbour didn't look at all inviting, so we plotted a course up the harbour, which is far more interesting anyway. With the wind on our quarter, she creamed along, enjoying every moment. However, turning to windward created the real test. Could she tack against wind and tide just under headsail alone and without lee helm?

I needn't have worried. She tacked around as easily as if under full sail, and made surprisingly good progress to windward. As already mentioned, her rudder had been modified to include a balanced area forward of its pivot. This produced an exceedingly light helm – some would say too light – yet she steered accurately with no sign of lee helm. There's no doubt that it is a mod worth doing and it's just one of many good ideas included in a little book produced by Roy Sallabank (tel: 01934-832728) of the SWOA, covering owners' modifications.

It had been an excellent sail and I was left in no doubt that you don't need to spend a fortune to go sailing in a small, well found yacht.

THE SEA WYCH ROAD SHOW

Anyone wanting to find out more about Sea Wyches is invited along to the Sea Wych Road Show to be held in Ambrosden Village Hall, near Bicester (close to Junction 9 on the M40) on Sunday 12th May from 2 to 6pm, where a Sea Wych will be on show. Further information from Eric Melia (018692-53649) or Roy Sallabank (01934-832728).