



The New Cormorant

Twelve by two by two... Two new 12' (3.7m) sailing dinghies which come as pre-cut plywood kits and two of Water Craft's reviewers try them out. First, Judy Brickhill sails a re-designed dayboat.

It happens in every field: the new becomes old and the old becomes new. First there was York, then, hundreds of years later, there was New York. The timescale for boats may be a bit different but the principle's the same - when you've got a good foundation you can develop it, whether it's a city or a boat design. So first there was a Cormorant and now, 25 years on, there's a New Cormorant.

The original Cormorant was designed in 1983 by Roger Dongray as part of the Cornish Crabbers range of traditional-looking GRP sailing craft. It was a popular little multi-chine craft, simply rigged with a single lugsail and was produced for many years. There are many still sailing, a tribute to its success and its production was dropped eventually only because of the relatively high construction costs because it involved several GRP mouldings.

Having taken a long, hard look at the design, Roger decided that, with some modifications, the Cormorant should be made available again as a home-build kit. And so the New Cormorant was born of a thorough makeover of the old, though Roger told me that there are 'old' Cormorant owners who don't consider that she needed one!

Her dimensions are almost the same: beam of 5'5" (1.65m), draft of 7" (175mm) with the centreboard up, 3' (0.9m) with it fully down. The length on deck is still 12'3" (3.73m) but she now sports a short bowsprit and 10 square feet (0.93m²) more sail area in the shape of a jib. She still has three wide lapstrake planks each side but her hull shape has been subtly altered and she has a finer entry, enhancing her windward performance still further. Her cockpit has been greatly enlarged by reducing the length of the foredeck, which has the added advantage of creating easy access to the stowage space in the bows.

Most parts come ready to slot together...

The New Cormorant is specifically designed for amateur construction and she can be built in the space of a single garage using basic DIY tools and the comprehensive building manual. Virtually all materials needed to finish the boat are included in the hull kit, from the timber to the epoxy resin and dispensing pumps, with the exception of the recommended two-part polyurethane paint and the polystyrene for buoyancy, while the building jig can be fashioned out of the shipping box. Most parts come ready to slot together, using precut Robbins

NEW CORMORANT SPECIFICATION

LOA: 12'3" (3.73m)

Beam: 5'5" (1.65m)

Draft – board raised: 7" (175mm)

board lowered: 3' (0.9m)

Trailing weight inc trailer: 400lbs (181kg)

Sail area: 100 square feet (9.29m²)

Elite plywood, with 3/8" (9mm) for the spine, bulkheads and transom and 1/4" (6mm) for the wide planks and decks. Also included are lengths of Douglas fir for the stringers, keel band, gunwales and spars; ash for the laminated stem and tiller.

Rob Rainsford of Seashell Boats who produces the kit estimates that, working weekends and odd hours, it takes between 100 and 120 hours to get the hull to a stage ready for painting. Her construction is straightforward and strong, with four buoyancy tanks built in under the sidedecks as a kind of polystyrene-filled double skin to the cockpit. This gives an impressive 520 lbs (236kgs) of flotation, as Rob and Roger found out during the capsizing test when the boat refused to take on more than a few cupfuls of water after being wrestled, unwilling, onto her side.

Up forward, the bowsprit is secured on the foredeck to a samson post, with the mast stepped just aft, the well-cambered deck curving around to continue as side decks right to the stern. The aft deck is actually a custom built, lockable, outboard motor locker and is at the same level as the single boards of western red cedar which make up side benches that span the space between the aft locker and the midships thwart. This supports the end of the centreboard case and provides a framework within the cockpit space for a sleeping platform above the bottom boards; minimal perhaps but adequate for any small, budding Swallows or Amazons.

A characteristic of Roger's designs is his meticulous attention to details that make life or sailing – the same thing, really, in my opinion – that little bit easier and better organised. For example, the full length oars are stowed alongside the centreboard casing, set flush with the cockpit sole boards with their blades slotting into notches in the forward bulkhead. They are secure and completely out of the way of the crew's feet and yet can be quickly and easily extracted when needed, even when afloat. There is also provision for a sculling oar over the transom, not often seen these days but an incredibly useful skill in confined conditions or should you lose an oar or the outboard breaks down. The transom has a concave curve to accommodate the sculling rowlock pad and the outboard engine as well as to







At last! A sailing dinghy with provision for sculling. All photographs by Peter Chesworth

ensure that the tiller fits easily under the rope mainsheet horse attached to eyes on each quarter. The drop-bladed rudder is transom hung with aluminium pintles and gudgeons.

The sailing kit, which you can purchase separately, is as comprehensive as the building kit. It includes all the stainless steel fittings, from the bowsprit end to the masthead, the shrouds, turnbuckles and stay adjusters, all running rigging and sheets, cleats, fairleads, eyebolts, shackles, every last item down to the lockable catch for the aft locker and the turn button that secures the cockpit sole boards. The New Cormorant has a useful sail area of 100 square feet (9.29m²) in her gunter mainsail and small furling jib, made by SKB Sails complete with reef points and the Cormorant insignia.

The musical chuckle of water in the lands...

There was sunshine but very little wind the morning I went over to Mylor Harbour for the test sail but, as so often happens, it gradually started to fill in, funnelling gently through Restronguet Creek into Carrick Roads. The Falmouth working boats were out in force, dredging for oysters under sail and though they were moving slowly, their sails were at least beginning to draw. With all spars and rigging fitted inside the boat for towing, Roger's new, updated Cormorant made a very neat package on her trailer and within half an hour of Rob backing the trailer down the slipway, she had been transformed into a pretty, appealing little craft looking just the job for a day's play on the water.

We were hard on the wind when slipping away from the pontoon but she made virtually no leeway, despite the tide ebbing past the entrance. There wasn't much of a breeze but then she didn't seem to need much to get her going and we were soon out with the oyster boats, accompanied by the

musical chuckle of the water slapping in the lands as the hull slid over the wavelets of the bay.

It's not only time that flies by when you're having fun, but distance too and though we were only out for an hour or two in pretty light winds, we managed to see quite a bit of Carrick Roads while putting her through her manoeuvring paces. On the way back in, we furled the jib to see how she performed under the main alone. I found that, though she lost some speed, she tacked and gybed as readily as ever and with that finer entry as compensation for the lack of headsail, her forefoot had enough purchase on the water to be able to keep up to weather with only negligible lee helm.

Before I handed her over to Roger and his wife Irene, who had been waiting patiently for her turn, I checked out the oars and, yes, they are indeed easy to extract, especially as the hull is so stable and she is a pleasure to row and to scull. I have to confess that I didn't attempt the outboard. I felt I could take the experts word for it that it does what it says on the label!

All in all I found her an extremely enjoyable little vessel, easy and comfortable to sail. Prices for the new Cormorant start from a modest £1950 which I feel is really good value since it comes with the 'Added Value' of the considerable personal satisfaction of building your own boat. The only thing I would venture to take issue with is her rather cumbersome name as I have a feeling that a lot of people are going to be talking about her. *Phalacrocorax novus* doesn't exactly roll off the tongue either but then, what do you call a Cormorant with a face lift?

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