

GETTING TO KNOW *TESSA*

by *Elizabeth Baker*

or - Cruising in a cormorant

Vital statistics: 12' 6" x 5' 8", double chine, cat rigged, single gaff sail 88 sq. ft. Weight 350 lbs. Unstayed mast.

Lying in my sleeping bag in *Tessa*, listening to the rain drumming on the roof of my tent, I was thinking how nice it was to be warm and dry. In the light of the hurricane lamp as it swung lazily from the boom, I counted the features incorporated into the Cormorant which makes it such a comfortable boat for cruising. Number one on this wet night was the cockpit coaming, which prevents rain which lands on the decks from running inside the boat and onto my bedding.

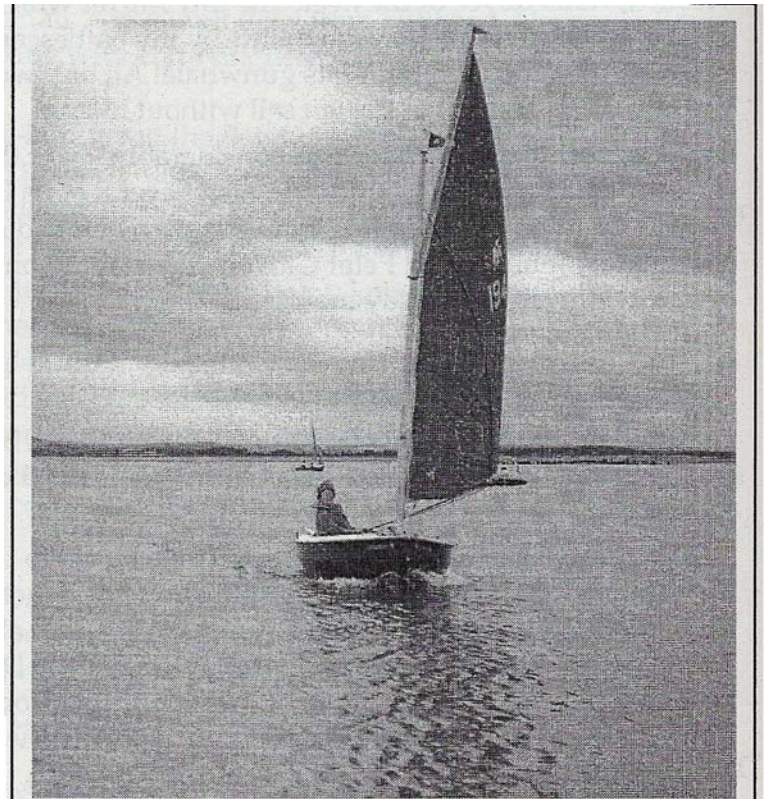
The wide side benches encasing the buoyancy are also very useful. How many twelve footers are there in which two people can comfortably lie full length and sunbathe whilst waiting for the tide to turn?

Another feature which attracted me to the boat is the way the floorboards can be raised to deck level, providing a wide bunk for sleeping on. Sometimes, though, after an exhausting day when I'm too tired to perform even this simple manoeuvre, I can simply rig the tent and 'crash-out' on the side bench, and sleep soundly on this till morning. This also minimizes manoeuvres if an early start is required.

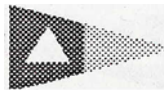
Tessa is a miniature half-decker really, and the large foredeck provides plenty of stowage space, although I find a long-handled hook necessary to retrieve items which get pushed too far forward to reach. The deck is sturdy and stable enough to stand on, either to walk ashore or to lower the mast.

An unusual feature is the centreboard, which is raised through the foredeck and is almost clear of the cockpit. Any spray landing on the deck which doesn't run over the side can drain away down the slot. The centreboard is wooden and, because of its forward position, as well as that of the rigging, it is **not** wise to replace it with a metal one, as this could upset the trim and make the boat unstable.

To increase stowage and distribute the weight more evenly about the boat, I have had a large stowage hatch inserted into the stern buoyancy. In here I keep those small, easy to lose items which I might need in a hurry; First Aid kit, torch, camera, compass, radio, etc.

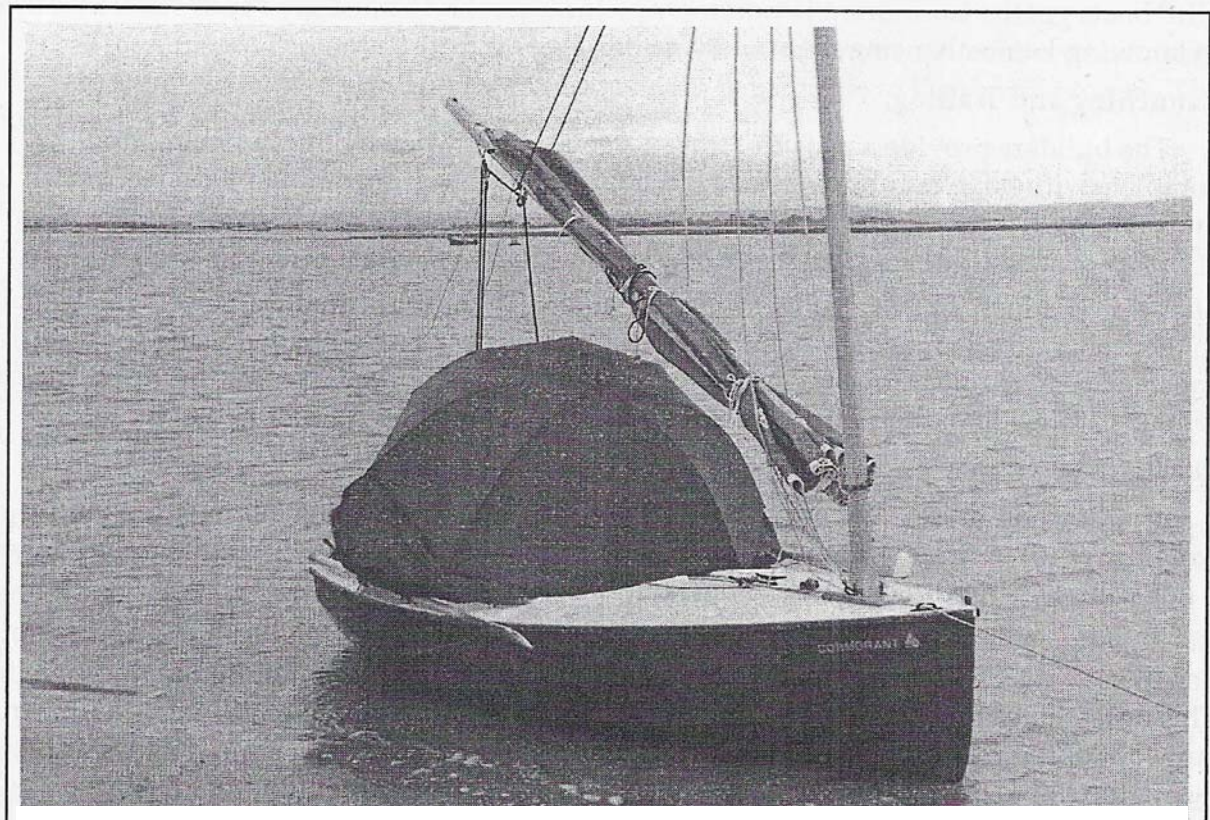


Beneath the foredeck to starboard is a fixing point for the outboard motor when not in use.



What of her performance? For single-handed sailing I find her ideal. Her single gaff sail, positioned well forward, gives excellent windward performance, and down-wind, without the restriction of shrouds, the sail can be freed right off giving a good angle to the wind. In strong winds with too much sail, though, she does develop heavy weather helm. I take this as a warning that it's time to reef.

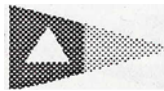
After my first season, I had a second row of reef points added, and would recommend anyone using a Cormorant for cruising to do the same. The second reef reduces the sail by two thirds and enables me to cope in the worst conditions I'm likely to want to be out in. This has given me much more confidence if setting-off in marginal conditions. Other Cormorant owners to whom I have spoken can't see the need for a second reef, but they are usually people who day-sail on reservoirs with a crew.



The Instant Cuddy

Some think the Cormorant slow, and in very light winds she is, but in anything upwards of a F3 she's plenty fast enough for me, and stable with it.

In normal Summer weather *Tessa* is a very dry boat. This was amply demonstrated when Len Wingfield in his 'Leader' and I both sailed from Chichester to the Isle of Wight and arrived within ten minutes of each other. Len's bottom boards were sloshing with water (and that was BEFORE he sat his boat on a rock!), but *Tessa* was as dry as when I'd set off. Down wind she is always dry, but beating against a F5 in a chop things do get very wet, and I recommend watertight bags for all equipment.



Stopping for a quick brew-up is easy too, as the gaff sail (usually) furls neatly into the topping lift well above head height, to be secured with a couple of ties, and the billy can be on the stove within five minutes. In my Mayfly I'd spend half-an-hour furling the sail before I could think about refreshment.

For shelter during daytime halts, I use the same fishing umbrella I had in my Mayfly which fits the Cormorant equally well. It is positioned forward, facing the wind, and has fastenings to the deck, with an extra piece of fabric sewn each side to fill the gap between broilley and deck. This can turn a chilly day into a warm one. I sat all afternoon under it once, reading happily, while sheltering from heavy rain.

Camping:

There is a standard tent available, but this attaches round the cockpit coaming and doesn't appear to have adequate headroom for adults. I would not recommend it for serious cruising. I use my old 'Mayfly' tent which extends beyond the gunwale, and plastic curtain track hoops increase the headroom even further and also assist in repelling the rain.

Capsizing:

I did capsize once - in sheltered water while being swept onto crowded moorings by a spring ebb in a F7, with the main sheet caught round the outboard. Yes, she was hard to right, especially with the mast stuck in the mud, but this was no surprise, and its worth remembering before venturing onto open water that things can go wrong, and the more stable the boat, the harder it will be to right if it does turn over.

Why Fibreglass?

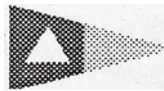
I'd prefer a wooden boat, but living alone and working full-time, I can't find time for the necessary maintenance. Fibreglass needs less attention and means I can be sailing in April. As GRP boats go, the Cormorant is extremely picturesque, and I must say I gain some satisfaction in knowing I am enhancing the scenery, rather than detracting from it.

Launching and Trailing:

The builders provide a choice of trailer, a combi-unit whereby the launching trolley, complete with boat, clamps over the road trailer, or a heavier road trailer with recovery winch and jockey wheel. I chose the former because, being female I suppose, I don't like the idea of having to grease the bearings after every launch. I have a gadget called a 'sand ball' which is actually a wheel which attaches to the front of the launching trolley. With this I can recover single-handed using the electric capstan at my regular launching site, or elsewhere with a long rope from the car bumper. The car remains at the top of the slope to avoid the risk of bogging-down on a rising tide.

Disadvantages:

The Cormorant is heavy, and sometimes I have difficulty heaving her over the lumpy grass from her berth to firmer ground. Here there is no room for a car, so I 'walk' the trailer out using a house brick behind each wheel. Slow - but it works!



Rowing against a headwind is hard work, and in strong winds almost impossible. Sometimes I have to remove the sail and spars from the mast and poke them beneath the foredeck to reduce windage. This necessitates unlacing the sail from the mast. The resulting lump of rigging is awkward to stow out of the way of the oars. However, an outboard can help here. Time can be saved by not lacing the sail to the mast. The boat will handle well enough without the lacing, but the sail doesn't furl so neatly and the resulting bight usually falls in the water.

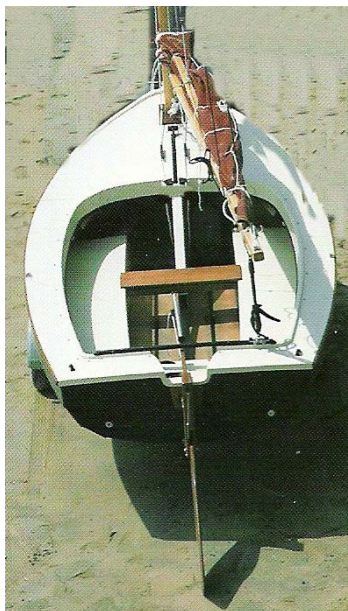
The mast is bigger and heavier than I'd expected; I find it quite difficult to raise from ground level, even though I am reasonably tall (5' 8'). It has to be moved, vertical, across the deck to the hole through which it drops to a slot near the floor. With mast at deck level and my feet on the ground, I have to hold it very near the foot, and I'm scared of dropping it, but the whole process only takes a couple of seconds. It is actually easier to stand on the deck, which is as stable as the Arc Royal, even when afloat, and I can then grip it higher up and keep a better balance. Once the mast is up, however, the job is done - there is no messing about with tangled shrouds.

If anyone reading this Cormorant, they are a suitable date can be chat on 01323 842 7 pm). I'm not selling

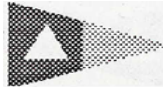


is contemplating buying a welcome to a trial sail in *Tessa* if arranged, or just ring me for a 124 (week-day evenings after her though!

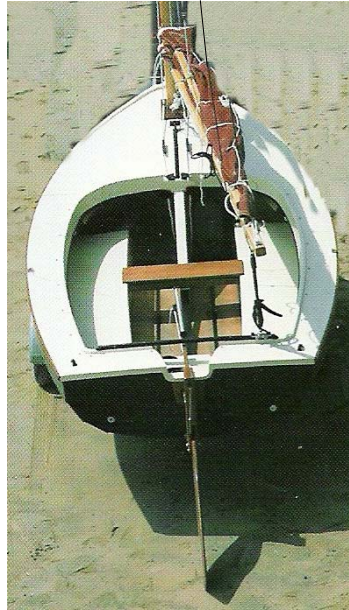
Phalacrocorax carbo



The above article was originally published in DCA Bulletin No. 165 in December 1999.



Instant cuddy



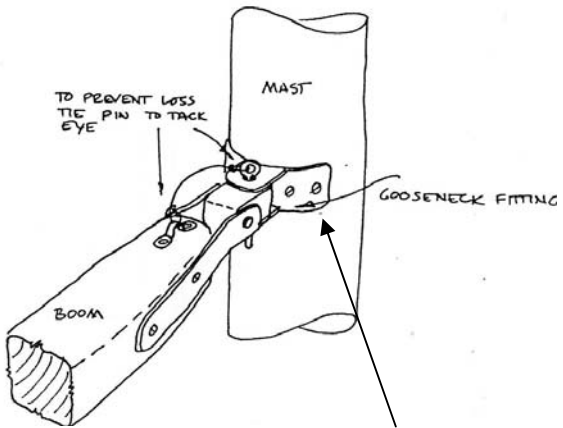
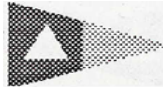
First reef tied-in



Easy enough to row in light winds



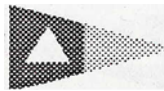
The over-long boom crutch is useful for draining wet wellies



Original gooseneck fitting – four long screws met at centre of mast



New gooseneck arrangement



Appendix

Problems

It will be apparent from the photos that not all my sailing has gone smoothly since this article was written.

The mast broke about three years ago. The gooseneck fitting, was attached to the mast by four “1¼” screws. After taking this off in order to varnish underneath, I couldn’t get the final screw tight and over the season the whole lot worked loose. When the mast went overboard the reason was obvious – the points of the screws came together at the centre of the mast and the last one couldn’t be tightened because it was butting against the points of the others at the centre of the mast. Having worked loose, all four screws were quietly sawing their way through the mast as I sailed – effectively reducing its thickness from 4” dia. to 2”. Reluctant to have anything else screwed on at such a vulnerable point, I asked the boat-builder who repaired the mast to replace this fitting with a crab claw arrangement, and this works well, but does need a piece of leather to protect the mast from chafe.

Over the years I had heard occasional ominous cracking sounds while sailing, but after making sure the mast was still up and no water pouring into the boat, I ceased to worry. One day, however, while sailing with my brother in a F6, we both heard another of these cracks and, again, at first, nothing else occurred. Half-an-hour later, though, I thought the mast had broken again when it suddenly toppled forward over bow. But it wasn’t the mast this time, but the step, down near the floor beneath the foredeck. Back at base we investigated and found the step had been attached to its base by four tiny stainless steel screws, all of which had sheared. I suppose each time one broke would have been when I heard one of those cracking sounds, and I must have been sailing for months with this fitting hanging by a single screw. It was that F6 which finally broke it. The step itself was just a plywood frame, so I added a floor to give it more strength, and re-attached it with thicker screws and a lavish coating of epoxy resin.

Problem No. 3 I am still trying to solve. There had always been a slight leak into the stern buoyancy/locker which I eventually traced to the rudder pintle fitting. This has got worse over the years until I can no longer keep anything dry in that locker. Two years ago I removed the pintle, cleaned-off the old sealant and re-attached with a generous coating of *Sealastic*. This didn’t completely solve the problem, but it made a vast improvement. Now, however, it is as bad as ever. I must do the job again, but this time I will take the bolts through a piece of wood on the inside of the transom in the hope that when this gets damp it will swell enough to seal the leak – as happens when a clinker boat is *taking-up*.

Finally – since writing the original article, Cornish Crabbers have sadly stopped building the “Cormorant” and also, I believe, the rest of the Crabber range, but “Cormorants” can still be found on the second-hand market. Cornish Crabbers inform me that they still act as agents for second-hand Cormorants, but you might find a cheaper one on the open market.

Liz Baker
12 November 2005