

Dennis T/S 500

Still one of the most inexpensive, ready-to-go-and-have-fun trailer yachts on the market, the Dennis TS500 is proving to be very popular as a first boat buy- or a trailer yacht for families weary of being tied to the one harbour with their fixed keel yachts.

One of the most strident complaints heard from ship lovers the world over is that the ship has become a utility thing and is no longer a thing of beauty. They point to the huge slab sided container ships completely lacking in sheer- indeed, sometimes carrying reverse sheer- and with "chopped off" transoms and high-rise blocks of accommodation struggling to obtain foreword vision over the stacks of container boxes mounted on the full-length foredeck.

Compare this, they say with the delicate curves of sheer on the old windjammers. The graceful clipper bows, the characteristic counter stern, and of course the magical cloud

of canvas reaching high over the decks. Even the early steamers had their character too, with their "salt-caked smoke stack" and severe lines. But beauty has given way to practical use and the designer lays down his ship's lines these days to please the ship owner's pocket rather than his eye.

What, you may say, has this got to do with the test on a new trailer sailer? Well quite a lot for the TS500, a product of Dennis Yachts in Melbourne, follows exactly the trends described above. She is not a pretty yacht. Even the designer could not have called her pretty, but she is practical-very practical. Abandoning any pretensions to turn out a

trailer sailer that will win awards for beauty of the line, Dennis Yachts have produced a boat that will provide a lot of fun for practical families who want to spend their holidays "mucking about "on the water.

One reason why the TS500 is designed this way is to obtain as much room as possible. In only 16ft of boat (16ft 5in to be precise) you have little latitude for attractive sheer lines if you are going to get reasonable room inside the boat. The topsides must be high and the deck layout practical or you will wind up on your hands and knees trying to get through the cabin doorway.

The high topsides of the TS500 have a dual purpose.

Apart from creating more headroom inside the cabin, they also keep the water outside the hull when the boat is heeled—a most important factor in all boats, but in trailer sailer's more so than others, because of their low ballast ratio. The argument in favour of low topsides and a high cabin to achieve headroom does not work because the cockpit becomes vulnerable to swamping at moderate angles of heel, and high topsides plus a cabin raised well above deck level would distort the boat out of all reasonable proportions.

At A Glance

LOA.....	5m
LWL.....	
Beam.....	2.16m
Draft.....	25m
Displacement....	362.9kg
Ballast.....	45.4+72.5kg
Berths.....	4
Mainsail Area....	88sq ft
Jib Area.....	53sq ft

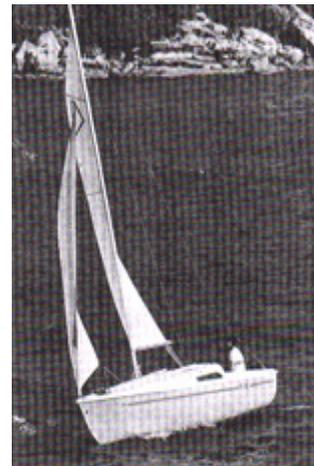
So Dennis Yachts have gone about the problem in the most sensible way with high topsides and a slightly raised, but flat foredeck.

The cockpit is thusly well above water level. Even when the boat is heeled, and there is surprisingly good height

in the main part of the cabin, sufficient to prevent anyone having an uncomfortable weekend living aboard while at the same time permitting inbuilt floatation beneath the cabin floor. Once again in only 16ft 5in of boat, this is a very good design feature. She is a beamy 7ft which again gives her more room, and the large cabin doorway and two small side windows make the interior light and airy, all of which adds up to a very neat and roomy family boat in which mum, dad, and a couple of kids could quite happily spend a holiday without getting in one another's hair. And since undoubtable there will be the odd visitor, the cockpit also is roomy with seating for six at a push, or four with ample room to move. Indeed bearing in mind that 16ft is literally dingy size, this little trailer sailer never ceases to surprise in the amount of room she has both above and below decks.

The hull, as mentioned has high topsides which flare away from a moderately raked stem and rounded forefoot to beamy

proportions in the quarters.



The bilges round under from a fairly fine entry to virtually a flat bottom towards the transom, but with a neatly faired off skeg right aft to run the boat evenly up onto a trailer. An overlapping deck mould is turned under at the bond to form a fender or rubbing strake which doubled as a hand grip when holding her on the ramp or beach. This is a good innovation since the smooth fiberglass hull would otherwise be very difficult to grip and the turn of the deck offers nothing to grab hold of.

The transom is flat and reinforced with heavy gauge ply to take a motor.

Because of the high topsides, the tiller is led in through a cut out hole in the transom

and the rudder externally mounted dingy style, for ease of detachment when trailering.

There was no motor on the test boat, but a small 2hp would be all that is needed to get her home in a flat calm, or motor up to windless creeks or corners. A bracket can easily be mounted to take this motor.



The deck is molded as one piece, as described, bonds to the hull is turned over-gunwale which is strong and should give no problems structurally speaking. From the bow, the foredeck slopes gently upwards to the break of the cockpit, about 5/8in of the way aft and runs right out to the side of the boat, being turned over to virtually form an extension of the hull sides above the rubbing strake. This gives the deck the full width of the boat and also provides a space for windows on the either side of the hull. The cockpit coamings are

low, but adequate, and slope away to almost flush with the transom.

A fairly heavy rig is employed consisting of fore and backstays, upper and lower shrouds and crosstrees. However from a safety point of view, a well rigged mast means a mast that is likely to stay up through thick and thin, and since uppers and lowers are fitted to the same chain plate the extra rigging does not create any problems in raising and lowering the mast, this is indeed a good feature on the 500. The forestay is secured to the bow plate. And the bridle from each corner of the transom takes care of the backstay.

Sheeting points for the single jib are mounted on a curved track on the deck while the main sheet is mounted on the floor of the cockpit. Since this boat is not intended to be a high performance racer, I feel the mainsheet could have been mounted elsewhere as it tends to be clumsy in it's present position among the feet of everyone in the cockpit. Likewise the halyards are secured at the foot of the mast, where both for safety

and convenience, and a little extra cost, they could have been led back to the cockpit. Standing on the foredeck attempting to secure halyards could be a dicey business in a squally wind.

Launching the TS500 provides the greatest surprise of the day. The manufacturer claims she has a draft of 10in with the centerboard up, but I would be prepared to swear she floated off the trailer in about 6in. Undoubtedly the easiest trailer sailor I have ever launched or retrieved, his boat makes life very easy for the harassed Dad who has Mum and maybe a couple of small kids, to get the boat on and off the trailer. Full marks on this score. Similarly, running her up the beach is easy since the light draft permits the bow to be grounded virtually on dry sand. These are important considerations for families on a boating holiday, and much of the fun can be spoiled by the need for heavy pulling and pushing, or conscripting outside assistance each time sailing is over and the boat is taken ashore.

The day of the test was fine with a strong, gusty westerly and a good chop running – ideal conditions for testing a trailer sailor providing you have your lifejacket on! Initially I thought the boat to be excessively tender, and indeed she *is* very tender when stationary with the plate up. Anyone moving around the foredecks causes her to heel excessively, hence my comment about leading the halyards aft to the cockpit. For this reason I was a little hesitant about taking her out into a stiff blow, but since this was a test and we believe in testing in all conditions, out we has to go.

That's the second surprise came. For despite the tenderness of the boat in at the beach and the indications that she would be vary unstable in a breeze, in fact, try as we may, there was no way we could tip her over, or even dip the cockpit coamings under. She is still tender initially, but once heeled the buoyant factor of the round bilge and her good beam stiffen her up well and, as mentioned, there was no way we could fill the cockpit

even in 18-20 knot gusts.



Of course, the buoyancy of the bilge area was not the sole factor in keeping her upright. For this boat, like most fin keeled designs, rounds up hard in a fresh squall. In fact the boat herself acts a safety valve, an as soon as she is overpowered, she rounds up into the wind hard, thus spilling the sails and coming upright quickly. At times this action was excessive and for this reason there is no way this boat could be raced on a hard day \. But from a safety point of view, it is important because it means that an amateur or inexperienced skipper, caught unaware by a knockdown squall will not capsize the boat – she will round up and spill the wind before she is far enough over to swamp.

This is perhaps not over-good design,

since rounding up to this extent can cause problems, particularly if she gets back winded. However it is a good safety factor especially as mentioned, with inexperienced skippers who hang onto the main sheet grimly through thick and thin. Sufficient to say that both single handed and two up, we rode out those savage westerly gusts with never a moment when the boat looked like going over. Making progress into the wind would be difficult under such conditions, but since this is not indeed to be a racing boat , but a boat for family pleasure , safety is a more important factor than performance. On other points of sailing she handled well and responded easily to the tiller. Off the wind and with the centerboard up she really flew, leaving a happy wash bubbling away astern. Another good feature from the family point of view, is the ease with which the centerboard can be raised or lowered. So many trailer sailors require hydraulic pressure or geared winches to raise and lower the plate, but a small tackle mounted

out of the way in the cabin roof and requiring only one child power to pull or release, takes care of the 160lbs of the TS 500's plate.

The interior of the boat has a floor, which is sectioned off to form bunk areas, and nothing else. At first it looks a little bare, but when you come to think of it, such an arrangement makes for an awful lot of space in such a small boat, and bunks are quickly made up by inflating LIOLo's and throwing down sleeping bags.

Dads who like a few more trimmings, well there is all the space in the world to get working with a hammer and nails and fit the boat out as you happen to want it fitted out. Provided of course you don't hammer nails through the side of the boat or into the buoyancy under the floor!

Summing up, then, the TS 500's as mentioned, is a utilitarian little trailer sailor with a great deal of attraction for families. And price-wised she is very competitive at \$3395 all up.

You wouldn't take this boat offshore. Neither would you race her as she stands, unless

it was against other TS 500's. But in terms of having a lot of holiday fun without the hassle of a heavy boat to get on and off the trailer, or drag up a beach, she has it all going for her.