

Musto Performance Skiff

A singlehanded all-out performance skiff with spinnaker, the Musto Performance Skiff threatens to terrify shrinking violets... but delight those who demand a challenge. We let former Olympic 49er campaigner and Laser 5000 master, **Ian Budgen**, loose on the MPS. **Peter Bentley** reports...



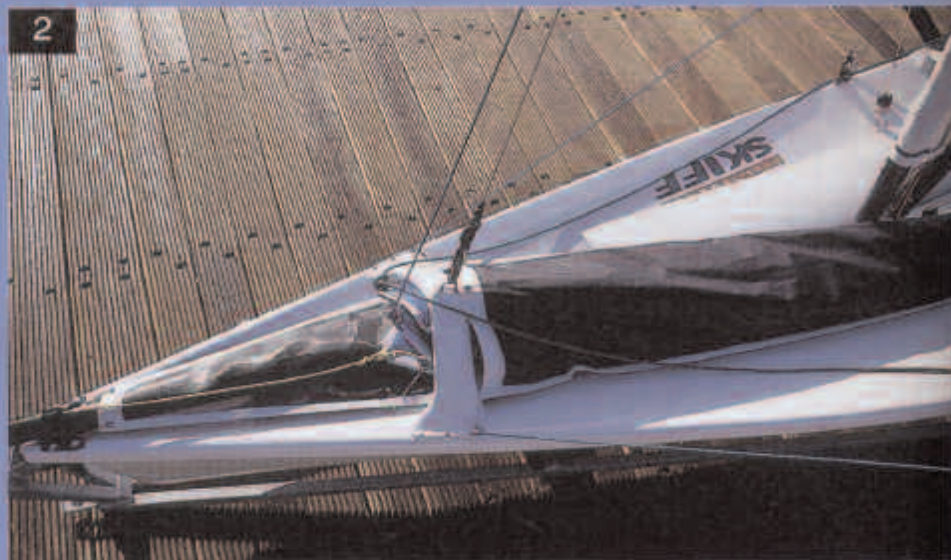
Rigging and launching

Rigging the MPS was simple. The racks pull out from inside the hull bringing the kicker and cunningham control lines with them, together with the trapeze wire elastics. Locking the racks in place takes a matter of seconds with the pin-and-elastic retaining system. The two mast sections easily unfold with all the rigging

attached, and they slot together without the help of tools.

Stepping the mast looked a difficult singlehanded job at first, but with a bit of planning it can be accomplished without assistance. The trick is to stand the mast on the step and then slot the lowers in before moving forward to loosely attach the forestay. The mast will now stand

Our test MPS arrived the right way up complete with trolley on the roof of a car. It took three of us to lift her down so we *could* have concluded that she was a heavy beast. Further inquiries, however, revealed that the trolley probably weighed more than the boat; with a hull weight of just 55kg she can be car-topped quite reasonably.



1. The mainsail hoists easily and the halyard tucks away inside the wrap-around sail extension at the foot; 2. Loading the spinnaker into the chute and rigging the sheets, halyard and retrieval lines proved simple enough.

happily on its own while the shrouds and trapeze wires are fitted. Rake is adjusted via hole-plate adjusters and fast-pins; tension is adjusted via a simple lashing on the forestay.

On our test boat, both the gooseneck and kicker lever fittings on the boom appeared to be slightly out of adjustment with badly-fitting pins and bolts holding it all together. Dave Hall from Ovington Boats says these problems have been resolved on the latest production versions.

Loading the spinnaker into the chute and rigging the sheets, halyard and

retrieval lines proved simple enough. The mainsail hoists easily and the halyard tucks away inside the wrap-around sail extension at the foot. On our test boat, the 2:1 halyard was secured by a small jam-cleat which looked a bit suspect as far as holding the load on a windy day was concerned.

Getting off the beach was easy with both the rudder and centreboard dropping down their respective slots correctly. Adequate, if not ample, stability made climbing aboard possible either over the transom or between the wing and the hull.

Sailing

Upwind, the MPS is well balanced and light on the helm. Unsurprisingly, the flat hull-form with minimal rocker requires large crew weight movements to establish correct fore and aft trim – Ian was at or forward of the rack in the light air. As the breeze picks up the weight has to be moved slowly aft.

The high aspect ratio mainsail is very sensitive to small changes in sheet tension. In eight-10 knots of wind, Ian remarked that the sheet loads seemed quite high. In practice the loads may not get much heavier as the wind builds, because an increasing portion of the leech load will then be carried by the kicker, with the mainsheet reverting to a sail angle control. But make no mistake, this is a big powerful rig. Ian, at 77kg, was fully powered up and flat wiring in just eight knots of wind with the MPS effortlessly planing upwind in true skiff style.

Tacking the MPS in light and medium conditions didn't cause any fuss. In flat water and light airs, the boat can be spun round gently with plenty of time to unhook, walk across and hook on again. In more breeze and a short chop, one suspects it would be an altogether different matter. A brisk and determined tack would be required to get the bow (of what is after all a very light boat) through the wind. Used as he is to the 49er's solid wings, Ian did feel that the open racks of the MPS would take some getting used to, making the run from one side to the other slightly less certain.

Selden-Proctor together with Hyde Sails, Devoti Sailing and the team from Ovington Boats have obviously been very thorough in developing the mast sail combination. The outcome is a responsive and easily handled rig that seems to offer a good balance between holding the leech



The rig is responsive and easily handled.

Technical details

Designer:

Dr. Joachim Harpprecht

Boat builders

and UK sales:

Ovington Boats

Project

development

and Worldwide

sales: Devoti

Sailing Ltd

Class and

events

sponsor: Musto

Spars: Selden

Proctor

Sails: Hyde

CE legislation:

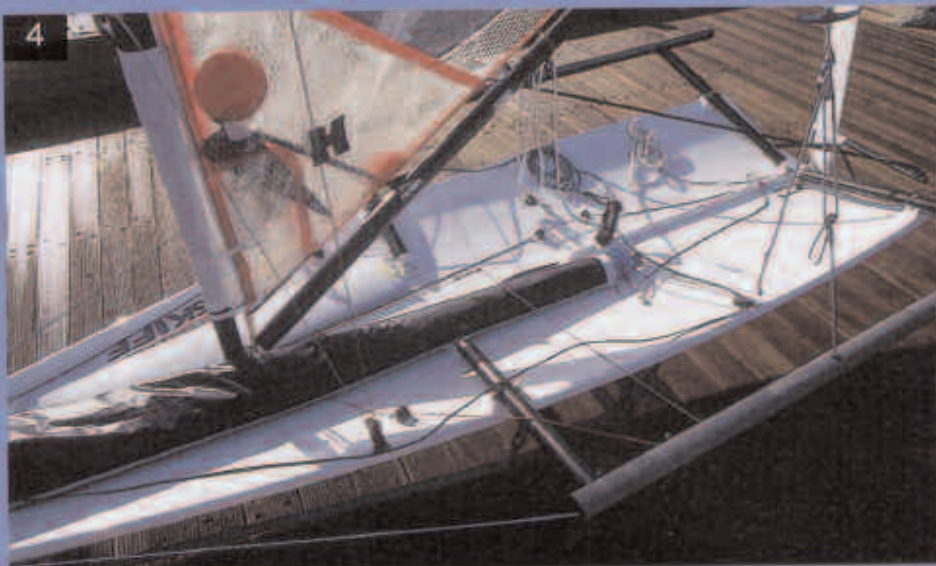
Fully compliant

with the latest

European

legislation

MPS MPS MPS



3, The rudder arrangement made getting off the leech easy; 4, The deck layout is very clean and uncluttered. The hull follows the 49er's construction in almost every detail.

up for power and allowing the top of the sail to open in gusts. Its performance in stronger winds remains to be seen.

Similarly, the MPS proved easy to sail in flat water but Ian reckoned it could be somewhat more of a handful in big waves. Like the 49er, it seems that sea state, rather than absolute wind strength, will set the limits.

Up to this point, two hands had been more than adequate. Turning to go downwind it seemed this might prove a different story! The bear away in 10 knots is pretty simple; there's plenty of rudder authority and enough righting moment to keep the boat on her feet. In a bigger breeze this might be totally different.

Once round the corner and pointing in the right direction, it really did seem that three hands were needed to get the spinnaker up. With just a simple halyard running through a cleat, two hands are required to hoist the sail, another to steer (and preferably one for the mainsheet). In practice, one has either to cleat the main or drop the tiller and steer with a foot (you need exceptional balance for this). The problem is exacerbated by the very thin halyard that makes pulling

the kite out of the chute tricky.

Once the kite is up, the fun begins. The main is sheeted into an angle appropriate for the wind strength. From there on it is real 'apparent wind' sailing: down in the gusts, up in the lulls. The primary sail control becomes the spinnaker sheet; small adjustments to the main are required for changes in wind strength or course. Wisely, Hyde has made a very forgiving spinnaker which allows the luff to roll a long way in before it collapses. It could still be hard work with a few other boats around all trying to pinch your wind!

Gybing requires careful co-ordination but is not as tricky as might be expected. The spinnaker is quite short on the foot with a relatively long pole. As a result there is not as much sheet to run out as might be expected and the kite blows through the gap quite easily. Holt auto-ratchet blocks help things on their way. Steering and balance are every bit as precise downwind as they are upwind, with lee-helm increasing steadily as the boat heats up onto a reach.

As with any true apparent-wind boat, the skill in getting round the track quickly is picking the angles. In light conditions,

the big question was whether to heat it up enough to get out on the wire and get the boat planing – with the penalty of plenty of extra distance – or to settle down more sedately, sailing deeper but slower. To an extent, the boat sends the helmsman quite clear messages; changes in speed and angle are easy to feel.

Getting the spinnaker down causes the same problems as getting it up, only this time you really need four hands – one for the mainsheet, one for the tiller one for the downhaul line and, finally, one to uncleat the halyard. Given that the mainsheet can be cleated-off, three hands are still required. In practice, you have to run deep to unload the rig and dump the kite then very swiftly grab the downhaul line. Sail too deep or pull the downhaul too late and it could be time for fishing and an early bath.

As with the halyard (it is the same piece of rope), the downhaul was too thin for Ian's liking. He felt that the addition of a 'pump' system for both the halyard and the downhaul would simplify the operation at the expense of a more complex layout. More experience in the boat may provide a simple answer.

Copsize recovery is easy enough, with enough space between the rocks and hull to scramble through as the boat comes up.



Capsize

Capsizing holds no horrors, though the combination of high speed and wide racks gives plenty of scope for a well launched skipper if you get it really wrong. Recovery was easy enough; there is enough space between the racks and the hull to scramble through as the boat comes up.

Construction and fittings

As might be expected from one of Britain's premier performance dinghy builders, it is hard to find much to fault in the construction or fit-out. The hull is extremely simple and follows the 49er's construction in almost every detail. The main structure is glass and epoxy resin over a foam core with carbon reinforcement in the highly stressed area between the shrouds. Construction is the usual high Ovington quality and, provided it is well looked after, there seems no reason to suppose a hard-sailed boat will not last well.

The fittings come from a variety of sources and everything seems to be of a size and type well suited to its application. The mainsheet cleats on a swivel jammer in the centre of the boat while the cunningham runs out to the ends of the racks with a fly-away elastic inside the tubes. The kicker is somewhat unusual; like the main, it also cleats to a small swivel jammer in the middle of the boat, just aft of the mast. However, the control line has two tails (ends), each of which is tied off in the middle of the rack bar. There is enough slack on each side to allow adjustments from the opposite side.

The rig is all-carbon from the newly-installed automated production facility at Selden-Proctor. The mast is a carefully engineered design, consisting of a parallel lower section and tapered topmast, permanently joined just above the hounds. In order to facilitate easy transportation, the mast is divided into two demountable sections just above the spreaders with a sleeved joint allowing quick assembly and disconnection.

Once separated into two pieces, each

section fits inside the hull for easy transport, making car-topping the MPS a real possibility. Each section is itself constructed from two parts, with a structural carbon tube at the front bonded to a plastic sail-track at the back. Fittings are all stainless steel or aluminium, conventionally riveted in place. Manufactured using a fully automated process, the masts should be extremely consistent in construction and properties – they looked to be designed and built to very high standards.

Conclusion

All in all, the MPS is a challenging but far from impossible boat to sail. In light winds it seems quite manageable and (given some experience of this type of boat) there seems nothing to indicate that it would become too difficult in a blow. As always, the greater the challenge, the greater the rewards when you get it right.

Even in 10 knots of breeze, Ian was very much of the opinion that this was not a boat for the faint-hearted. Experience of a high performance twin trapeze doublehander is probably a prerequisite for sailing the MPS – or at least a willingness to do a lot of swimming while you figure it all out. It goes without saying that prospective sailors will need a good sense of timing and balance. However, the rewards for mastering it all are worth pursuing.

A fledgling race circuit is already pencilled in to the calendar, running at first alongside the existing 49er and B14 regattas. Ian reckoned, 'it would be really good fun to race as you have got far too much to do and not nearly enough hands to do it.'

There are now over 20 boats to supply in the UK plus a batch of 20 to go out to Europe to satisfy orders in Italy, Austria, Switzerland, France and Germany. A whole generation of sailors are now attuned to sailing high performance twin-trapeze doublehanders, so there will be no shortage of people able to sail her. With the MPS, the boundaries of sailing have been moved forward once again.

answerBack by Ovington Boats and Devoti Sailing

We would like to thank Peter and Ian for organising a summer's day in the middle of February, and for a great boat test. It is always a joy to watch someone enjoying sailing our new boat.

The Musto Performance Skiff is an out-and-out singlehanded skiff. The hull, rig and fittings' layout have been tested by many top sailors for more than a year to achieve a boat that is not only very fast, but seaworthy. The collaboration between Dave Ovington, Luca Devoti, Tim Taviner and Dave Hall has made the boat the success it is, winning every race at the ISAF singlehanded trials in Quiberon.

In strong winds the developed rig responds superbly to allow the mainsail to blade off and depower, while the hull shape allows sailing in big seas.

Regarding the spinnaker halyard, we found the simple system we use trouble free, preferred by most sailors, and safe after a capsize or in an extreme situation. It is a singlehander and you always want to get back home! We use a 4mm halyard, but rope diameters are free.

We wish to thank Joachim Harpprecht, past European champion in the Contender class, Gabriel Wicke current Contender world champion, the Bruni Brothers that led the 49er world ranking last year and all the other great sailors who have helped develop the boat. Go sailing and enjoy it.

MPS Specifications

Loa:	4.55m
Beam:	1.35m, 2.35m with racks
Hull weight:	55kg
All up weight:	80kg
Sail area:	main: 11.5sq m
	gennaker: 15.5sq m

Price on the water inc VAT: £6,450

UK enquiries: Ovington Boats
Tel: 07071 293949
E-mail: niners@ovingtonboats.co.uk

International enquiries: Devoti Sailing
Tel: 01621 782603
E-mail: sales@devoti.co.uk

