

SOLUTION



PHOTO: JEREMY EVANS

There's a brand new singlehander on the market, hoping to provide a high performance option for inland sailors. **Jeremy Evans** took one out for a blast...

It sure was windy. During our two hour test sail, winds in Chichester Harbour averaged 25-30 knots with a top gust of 38 knots just past midday. But it was a beautiful day to be on the water with clouds racing across the sky and bursts of sparkling sun.

It might not have been ideal conditions to try a new boat launched at the Dinghy Show just three weeks earlier, but it was loads of fun despite some

capsizes in surprisingly icy water. Here's how we got on with the all-new Red Eye Solution singlehander.

Development and design

Kevin Clark and Andrew Elliott are first and foremost keen club sailors who've put in some time at national events. Kevin served his apprenticeship with Camper & Nicholson and worked on yachts for 20 years, while building

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Above The Solution rig handles the conditions well and the hiking position is comfortable.

racing dinghies as a hobby. He's raced all kinds – Streaker, Contender, Comet, International Moth, and Laser 2 to name but a few – spending the past few years in the Phantom. Andrew Elliott is another great Phantom enthusiast, Blaze racer and bespoke sailmaker for a whole raft of classes. Between them, they've come up with the Solution.

So, is there room for yet another singlehander on the market? The Solution was conceived as a singlehander for sailors who want more sparkling performance than traditional classes provide, but would find the Phantom too much of a handful due to its large sail size and do not want to go full-on with a Musto Skiff or RS700. The brief was to provide fast and exciting sailing that's manageable for sailors in the 65-85kg weight range, with the Phantom providing a benchmark for performance and style.

Andrew Elliott points out that many dinghy enthusiasts sail on inland waters in predominantly light winds, find spinnakers a hassle, and designs with minimal stability prove too much of a learning curve for the average sailor. Enter the Solution, with they aim to steadily build up as a brand new class.

It will not happen overnight. Part of the attraction of the Solution is that every boat will be built by Kevin, using epoxy vacuum-bagged construction to provide light weight, stiffness and a long competitive life. With a production capacity of around 30 boats a year and only spars (Superspar M7), rudder stock and tiller (SeaSure), and fittings made by outside suppliers, they can maintain hands-on quality control. One-design hull, rig and foils will ensure costs can be kept close to the current ready-to-race minimum of just over £4,000. However, considerable freedom will be allowed in terms of fittings to suit individual preferences.

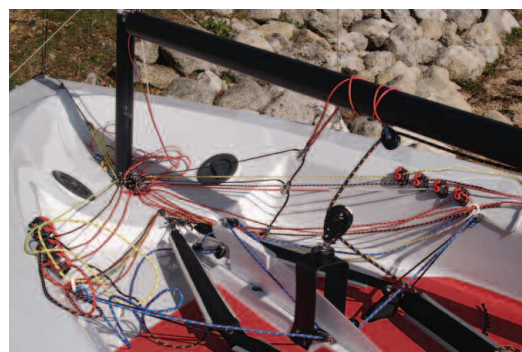
Kevin and Andrew believe that most modern singlehanders have achieved excellent high speed performance through fairly long hulls and relatively flat rocker, at the expense of manoeuvrability and light wind sailing. The ability of a boat to accelerate in gusts and tack on shifts is invaluable for racing inland. The Solution tackles this by being light, short and having enough rocker to turn quickly and roll tack fast, with a tall high aspect rig providing good upwind ability in variable conditions. Rocker does not equate with ultimate boatspeed, but the Solution



PHOTO JEREMY EVANS

Far right All control lines are led to the side decks in easy reach.

Right The Solution floats quite high in a capsize.



balances this by being lightweight, with particularly wide beam and a large planing area to maximise rig power. The hard chine hull shape provides stability at speed, also reducing the dreaded tendency to roll downwind.

Rig and layout

The Solution rig reflects four years of development in Phantoms, and the 3D shape of the Solution's laminate sail is taken directly from the Red Eye Phantom, with a rig plan that follows modern thinking – high aspect ratio with short boom and high clew, giving space in the cockpit and keeping the boom well clear of the water when reaching in breezy conditions. Andrew says that a high aspect rig performs better than a classic low aspect rig of the same size when there is airflow across the sail, but has a slight disadvantage running dead downwind.

The Solution might have saved a little weight and looked even more cool with a carbon mast, but Kevin has three good reasons why sealed aluminium is better. There can be supply problems with carbon masts, they don't like being stuck in the mud and more than anything, carbon would give the Solution a whopping £700 price hike! The boom looks huge, but you need that circumference with monster load from the 16:1 kicker.

The helm has five controls to harness the power of the superb-looking Kevlar sail. Andrew ran into initial problems with a conventional centre mainsheet. To get acceptable sheet loads, the bridle had to be positioned well aft on the centreboard case. But because the boat is short with rocker, the crew has to sit well forward in light winds. This meant every tack required a trip round the back of the mainsheet. They solved the problem by using a transom-mounted horse, which allows the mainsheet take-off to be much further forward. This could be taken to the extreme of sheeting the main straight off the boom 'skiff style', completely clearing the centre of the cockpit. The Solution free fit-out formula would allow this kind of variation.

Ranged on the side decks are four control lines for rig tension, cunningham, outhaul and kicker. Our boat was fitted with fully adjustable 16:1 rig tension, allowing the rig to be pulled upright offwind, or raked back with full kicker to take maximum power out of the sail.

Rigging and launching

The Solution looked superb, both on and off the water. Rigging from the trailer is straightforward, and the mast is easily light enough to get up or down singlehanded.

The Solution has low freeboard at the back, so it's easy to step on board. It is very stable at rest with that wide transom and the cockpit is so uncluttered that it's easy to move around. The Solution cockpit has also been given the 'red carpet' treatment, with scarlet Progrid providing a really stylish and extremely practical finish.

Leaving the beach is very simple, not least because with widespread chines the Solution shows little inclination to roll before you get the centreboard down. The rudder pulls down smoothly and locks off on the side of the tiller. The centreboard also pulls down easily, with control lines either side of the cockpit. Kevin felt



Left The laminate Kevlar sail reflects Red Eye's development of Phantom sails.

the case needed more padding to hold the board down, but I experienced no problems with it riding up despite hitting close to warp speed.

Sailing

It was really too windy to conclusively test a boat. But it was great to feel how well Solution managed the conditions with its very impressive rig – totally stable and controllable in Force 6-7, with the kind of effortless drive you get from a top performing windsurfer sail. Apart from personal ability, whether you survive and enjoy such conditions comes down to the design and controls of the boat.

That cockpit has perfect grip and with nothing in the way of your feet you feel in control. Side decks are wide, comfortable and ergonomic with great padded footstraps. I found the tiller extension too long for conditions when I wanted to move back in the boat, but owners can cut the length for personal preference. We also had occasional spurts of water up through the centreboard case. This is a strong wind problem with shallow centreboard cases that lie flush with a double bottom. Kevin says he can reduce it with more Mylar overlap on the gasket, but this is not a big issue – any water that comes into the cockpit disappears immediately through the transom.

The Solution certainly felt quick offwind. While sailing on a deep reach, the RIB was following at average 12 knots with a burst of 15. At that speed it felt very stable and comfortable while providing a great fun ride, with superlight sheet loads and total control of the sail. Which was why I went for a gybe, rather than the sensible solution of rounding up to windward.

It takes practice to gybe any dinghy in a blow, but the Solution felt so smooth and quick I assumed it would just power round. A strop to pull the mainsail across would have helped at the critical moment, when I suddenly realised I'd made the wrong choice and committed the cardinal sin of attempting to bottle out!

So, what is the Solution like to capsize? First, it's easy to hop over the side and stay dry. Second, it's



PHOTO: JEREMY EVANS

fairly easy to pull back up and climb into the cockpit. If you fall off the hull it does float quite high, but it's not difficult to get back on again.

The verdict

We did not get a chance to sail the Solution in average winds, which for most folk is probably Force 2-3 with occasional doses of 4. A light hull with a tall and fairly large rig should provide the necessary power, while the Solution combines easy turns with impressive stability.

This is a beautifully turned out boat and the price seems very reasonable for such a very smart piece of kit. It will surely be rewarding to sail without needing to be super-fit, or as Kevin says 'You don't need to hike like a loony!' Only time will tell how the Solution fares against all the singlehanded competition, but the two guys behind it are clearly determined to carve a niche. ■

Above The Solution proved to be fun, stable and quick offwind.

Thanks to Cobnor Activities Centre (CAC) for providing facilities for this test. CAC runs residential and non-residential sailing courses and activities in Chichester Harbour. For details visit: www.cobnor.com

SOLUTION specifications

DESIGN: Kevin Clark & Andrew Elliott in 2006
 LENGTH: 3.9m
 BEAM: 1.75m
 HULL WEIGHT: 56kg
 SAIL AREA: 8.5sq m
 TARGET PN: 1066

PRICE: £4,195

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 North Anston
 Sheffield
 S25 4DE

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 MOBILE: 07703 546949

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 WEBSITE: www.redeyesails.co.uk

COMPARISONS... Where does the Solution fit in? Here are some alternatives...



■ SOLO

Jack Holt's best known singlehander, available in marine ply, FRP or composite options with an enthusiastic class providing racing at home and abroad.

LOA:	3.78m
BEAM:	1.55m
HULL WEIGHT:	70kg
CREW WEIGHT:	80-100kg
SAIL AREA:	8.36sq m
LATEST PN:	1155
GUIDE PRICE:	£6,500*



■ PHANTOM

Big boys' superlight boat with great performance which puts it alongside the Blaze as the fastest non-trapeze/sliding seat singlehander.

LOA:	4.42m
BEAM:	1.64m
HULL WEIGHT:	61kg
CREW WEIGHT:	80-100kg
SAIL AREA:	10.5sq m
LATEST PN:	1048
GUIDE PRICE:	£6,100*



■ LASER

Hugely popular, big fleets and all levels of competition are available. Super fitness required to tame a murderous hiking position at top level.

LOA:	4.23m
BEAM:	1.42m
HULL WEIGHT:	59kg
CREW WEIGHT:	65-85kg
SAIL AREA:	7.06sq m
LATEST PN:	1078
GUIDE PRICE:	£4,185*