

‘The Silhouette’

**An investigation into the development
of yacht building, with particular
reference to the small sailing cruiser
known as the Silhouette**

**Dissertation submitted in part-fulfilment of the
requirements for the B. Ed (Honours) degree of the
University of Exeter**

David A Reeves

May 1979

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The Silhouette Owner

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*and the
Auxiliary...*

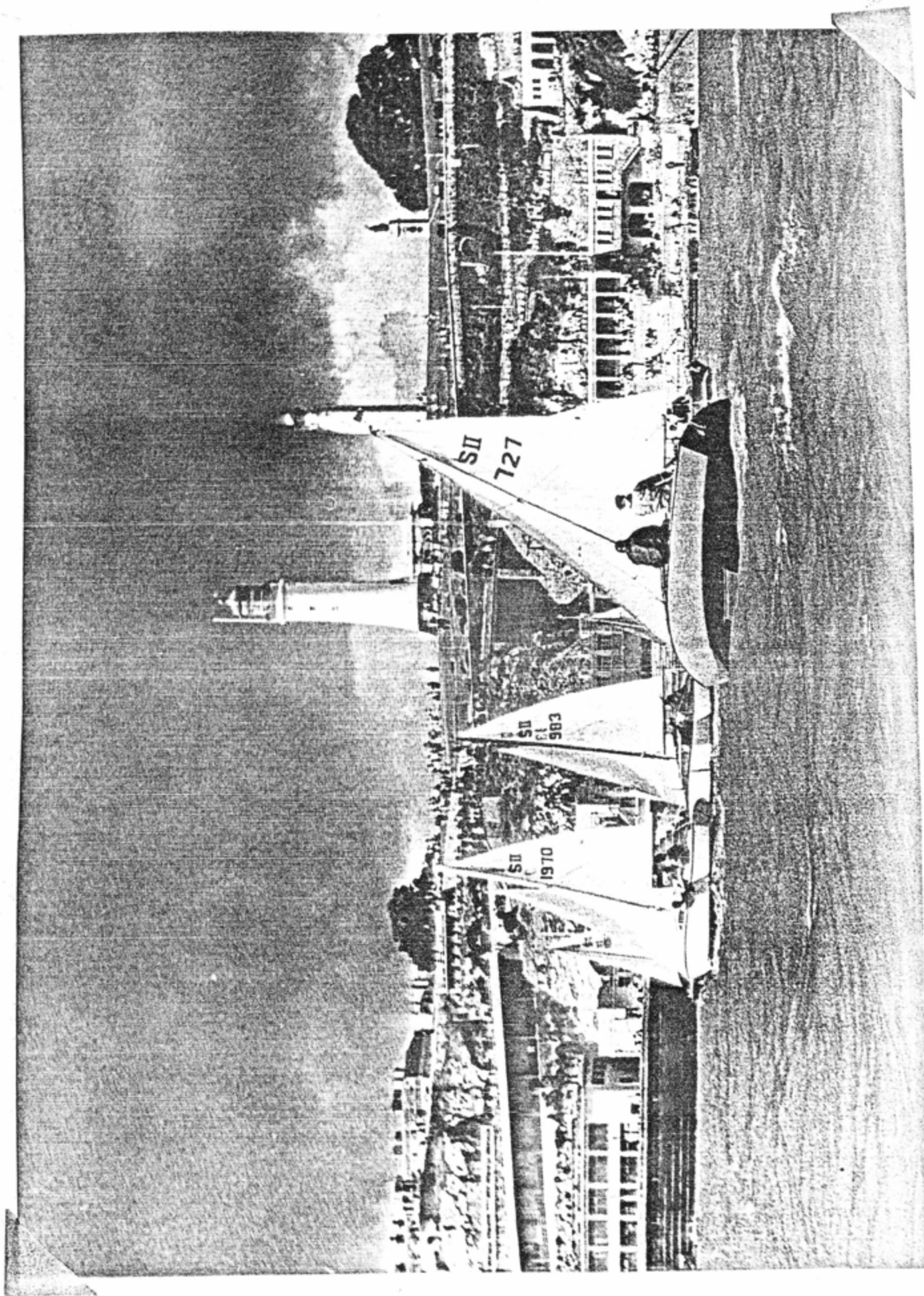


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alienate, to some extent, many of the members in other parts of the country. This seems now to have resolved itself as there is a national committee with groups operating in different parts of the country. Each of the groups has its own Hon. Secretary and is affiliated with the national organization. Through the 'Journal' members are able to keep in touch with each other and the activities of groups. In the 'Journal' articles are written on cruises undertaken by members, tips on maintenance and modifications. News is published of members exploits and misfortunes and there is regular advertising of second-hand boats, sails, trailers and outboard motors.

Each year rallies are held where members, their families and friends, bring themselves and their boats to a specific location(Plymouth has been one such location for several years) to race, cruise and get together. At such gatherings many different types of boat appear. Mainly the SIIs and IIIs but with a good selection of other Hurley boats; Hurley 22s and 20s, Felicity's and Signets. At the 1972 rally, held in Plymouth, Colin Simpson brought his Hurley 9.5 Motor Sailer from the Isle of Wight. Owners such as Mr. Simpson have moved to bigger things but without forgetting their friends and breaking their ties with the Silhouette and its association. Colin by-the-way claims to have owned one of each type of Hurley boat made up until 1972 - he ran a yacht agency once in



SILHOUETTE MK II's racing during a Plymouth Rally.

Windermere and has many many tales to tell of the early days of the small boat industry, particularly Hurley as he was one of their first agents.

When asked what sort of a person a Silhouette owner is, Frank Bartlett, Honorary Secretary of the Association and member for much of its existence, said,

"craftsmen and artisans - professional people, doctors, dentist, clergy men and women. Teachers, lawyers, accountants, the men and women who work in shops, offices, warehouses and garages ... serving officers in the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force, non-commissioned members of the services, policemen, engineers, persons with titles, members of Parliament and students. The mixture of owners embraces every type and kind." (Letter

Bartlett 1978)

The occupations of owners certainly seems to spread right across all levels of society and yet they all come together over this boat. The boat has a quality, an attraction, that can appeal to something that transcends all class, jobs or financial status. Frank Bartlett likens the impact and appeal of the little boat to that of the "small cars, Austin 7, Morris Minor, Ford 8, had in the late 1920s and 30s." The Silhouette, like the £100 Ford and the Morris Minor gave the public a freedom and a sense of ownership

it had never experienced before. Like the family car the family boat became the pride and joy of the family; a thing they could all share in and a focus for family interest.

With such family attachment and interest it was only natural that families should want to meet other, similar, families with similar interests. This is probably the foundation upon which the Association was based. There were, however, individuals who wanted a solitary life and some who merely wanted a cheap and enjoyable form of transport. A prime example of the latter is the Rev. Inglesby of the Scilly Isles. Rev. Inglesby was keen on sailing and had a parish spread over the islands of the Scillies. To follow his interest and to enable him to get about his parish he bought a Silhouette, a good reliable outboard motor for when the wind was not favourable and carried out his duties sailing or motoring between the islands.

Another example of the need for transport is the young man who bought a SIII from the factory to transport himself to Singapore. There has always been rumours of Silhouettes sailing the Atlantic, cruising in the West Indies, wine and spirit running from the Channel Isles to the mainland. All seem to be rumours as the writer has never met any of these intrepid sailors. Some sailors, however, get into the newspapers. In 1960 for instance, there was the headline

in the Western Evening Herald, 'Jap buys "Finest sailing craft in Plymouth." (See cutting). The article tells of Dr. Yajima, who had fought with the Wehrmacht on the Russian front, buying a Silhouette II in which he planned to sail to the Mediterranean where he was going to write books and stories.

During the research undertaken for this study the writer asked; Fred Hawkins, Frank Bartlett, several owners, ex-owners and interested parties, 'What made the Silhouette so popular?' 'Why did it catch on as it did?' The answers appear not to be very complicated. The boat was introduced at the right time and at the right price. The Silhouette had the attraction of being within the 'average' mans pocket, it could be towed behind the family car (a far more common possession by the end of the 1950s) and it came on the market at a time of full employment, during the period of an upsurge in the wish for freedom. The freedom demanded by both the home country and the USA was putting demands upon the caravan industry, the camp equipment industry, road building, holiday camps and the yacht and boat building industries. 'You have never had it so good' was the cry of the Conservative Party and the Silhouette was there to fulfil the enjoyment expected and gained by many. (See Breach and Hartwell 1972)

The question, 'Why did the Silhouette stay-on while other

t 'Better Than Expected'



Dr. Shigi Yajima aboard a boat similar to the one he is sailing to the Mediterranean.

JAP BUYS 'FINEST SAILING CRAFT' IN PLYMOUTH

LEAVING 'WONDERFUL CITY' FOR ITALY TO WRITE SHORT STORIES

A JAPANESE professor of languages who could not settle in Scotland as a physical training teacher because of objections to his nationality, has bought a 17ft. Silhouette sailing boat in Plymouth and was leaving the Sound today, bound for the French coast, the French canals, and his home in Italy.

Dr. Shigi Yajima, 36, said yesterday that he found Plymouth the only place in this country where he could find a "first-class sailing boat."

He has named the craft—which he says is "the finest I have ever seen"—Shizuko, after his four-year-old daughter.

He had nothing but praise for the builder, Mr. A. G. Hurley, of Richmond-walk, Plymouth, and for Plymouth, which he considers a "wonderful city."

Dr. Yajima, a professor of English and German, speaks six languages fluently—English, French, German, Spanish, Japanese, and Italian—and he said yesterday: "I find little difficulty in getting around the world." He once wrote for the Japanese bilingual newspaper "Asahi."

His search for a boat began in Scotland, where he at first wanted to settle down as a teacher of physical training.

"I have now decided to go back to Italy and write books and short stories."

Born in Tokio he found himself

in Heidelberg University at the outbreak of the war. Because of an Axis agreement, he was forced to join the Wehrmacht in 1942, and was soon in action on the Russian front.

A severe wound cut short his service there, and when the war was finished, he became an interpreter and instructor of German to the British occupation forces in Denmark.

Dry Rot Closes Church Aisle

A LARGE part of the centre aisle of the Church of St. Nicholas and St. Faith, Saltash, was roped off—because of dry rot—for the harvest festival service last night.

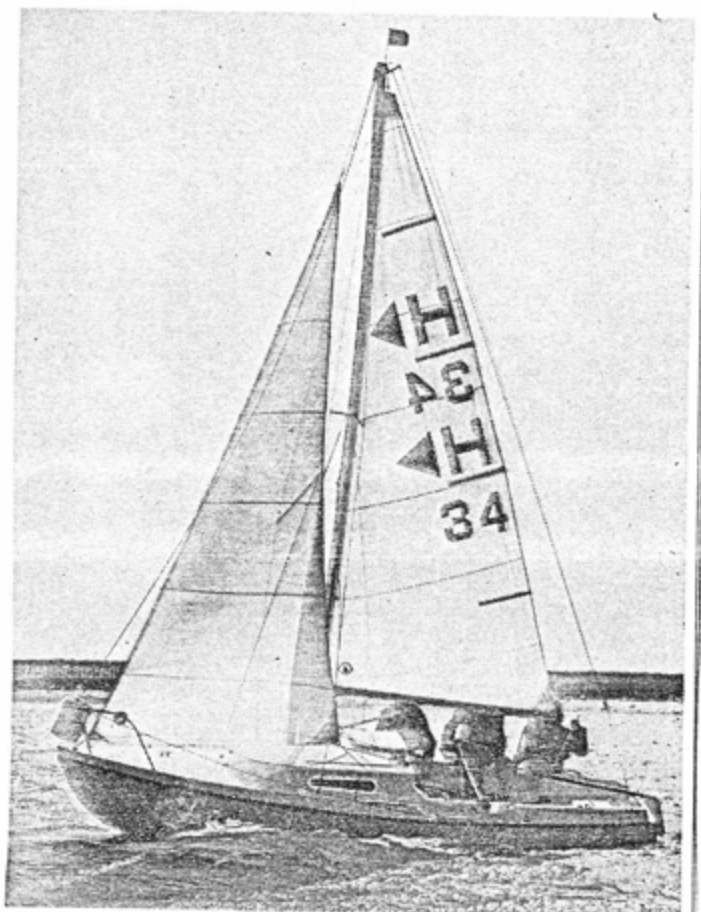
The service was conducted by the vicar, the Rev. J. C. Boyes, and the Rev. M. B. Gesch, of St. Dominick, gave the address.

A supper and concert was afterwards attended by 125 people. Entertainment included items from the Guild of Youth and the Guild Players.

boats designed and built during the same period disappeared in the mists of time? is a more difficult question. To answer the question one suspects that one has to look not at the boat and its excellent design, obviously a crucial factor in attracting the real cause of its success, but to the people who bought, or who built for themselves, the boat. The owner, probably as many as 5000 of them, has been of that type of person who know a good thing, in this case the Silhouette, when he or she sees it and who is willing to defend that decision by involving themselves in their choice. In this defense a fellowship of people coming from all walks of life has been brought together. Frank Bartlett suggests that the key to the social factor, which is the common denominator of Silhouette owners, is the pride of ownership. He suggests that politics are never discussed in the Silhouette Owners Association, although religion is, due to characters such as Rev. Clemintine Gordon and the Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness, and that this comined with a caravanning spirit makes Silhouette owners a 'nice set of people' faithfull to their boat and to the friends they have met by owning the boat.

In Bristow's Book of Yachts 1964, the Silhouette was not alone in the small cruisers shown; the 'Tiburon' 17ft 6in, built by Janet & Cie; the 'Talisman' 18ft by Banham Limited and the 'Caprice' 18ft 6in, built by Clark (Coves) Limited and designed by Robert Tucker was also included. These few boats, some made of plywood others of GRP, went to make up the range of small cruisers available to the public that year. The 1964 prices ranged from £350 for the Silhouette to £540 for the Talisman. In the 1972-1973 publication of the book the numbers of small cruisers had increased as had the prices. For instance, the 'Hunter 490' cost £695 in GRP and the Mirror Offshore 18ft 11in cost £1503. The price of the Silhouette III was quoted as £775 ex-works.

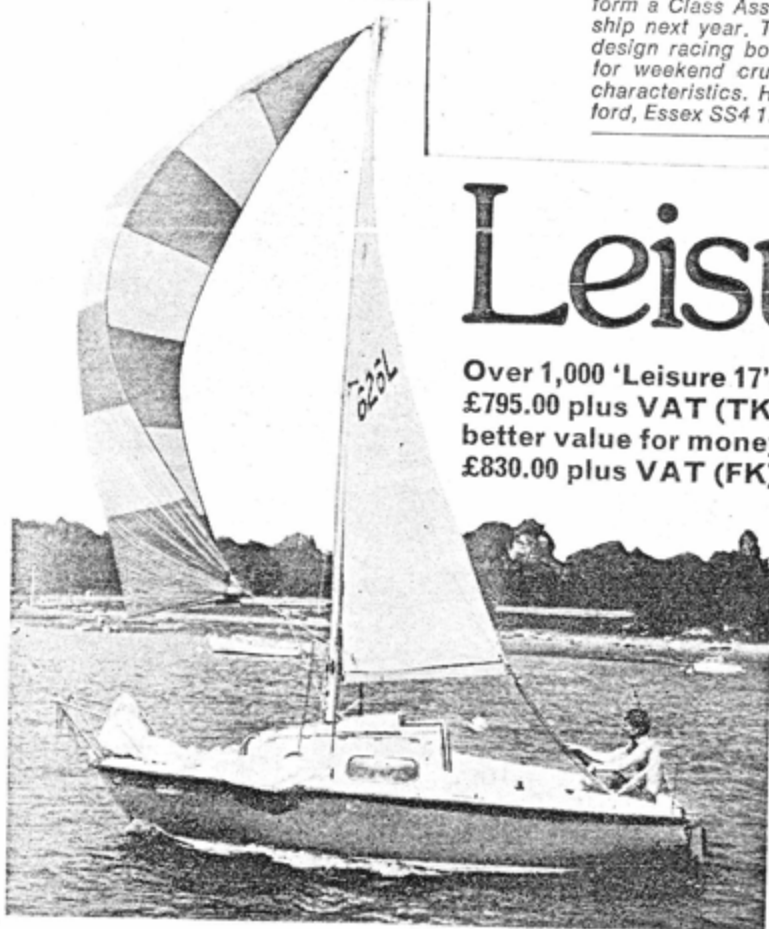
1973, the year that Hurley Marine Limited introduced what was to be their 'swan-song' and probably the finest boat they ever built; the Hurley 'Tailwind', was a year of relatively high activity in the small cruiser market. In the January 1974 issue of 'Yachting World' there were advertisements for several of the smaller boats; the 'Hunter 19' had passed the 250 mark in production and was hoping to establish a class association; the 'Leisure 17' built by Cobramold Limited, was claiming that over 1000 boats had been sold. Also in the magazine was an advertisement for the 'Sea-Shanty', by Norman Pearn of Looe in Cornwall, an 18ft motor-sailer that had been successful



Sales of the Hunter 19 have now passed 250, and it is hoped to form a Class Association and even to hold a National Championship next year. The Hunter is gaining popularity as a club one-design racing boat, since it combines adequate accommodation for weekend cruising with good speed and pleasant handling characteristics. Hunter Boats, Sutton Wharf, Sutton Road, Rochford, Essex SS4 1LZ

Leisure 17

Over 1,000 'Leisure 17's' have been sold and at £795.00 plus VAT (TK), she now represents even better value for money. Foreshore rally winner 1971. £830.00 plus VAT (FK)



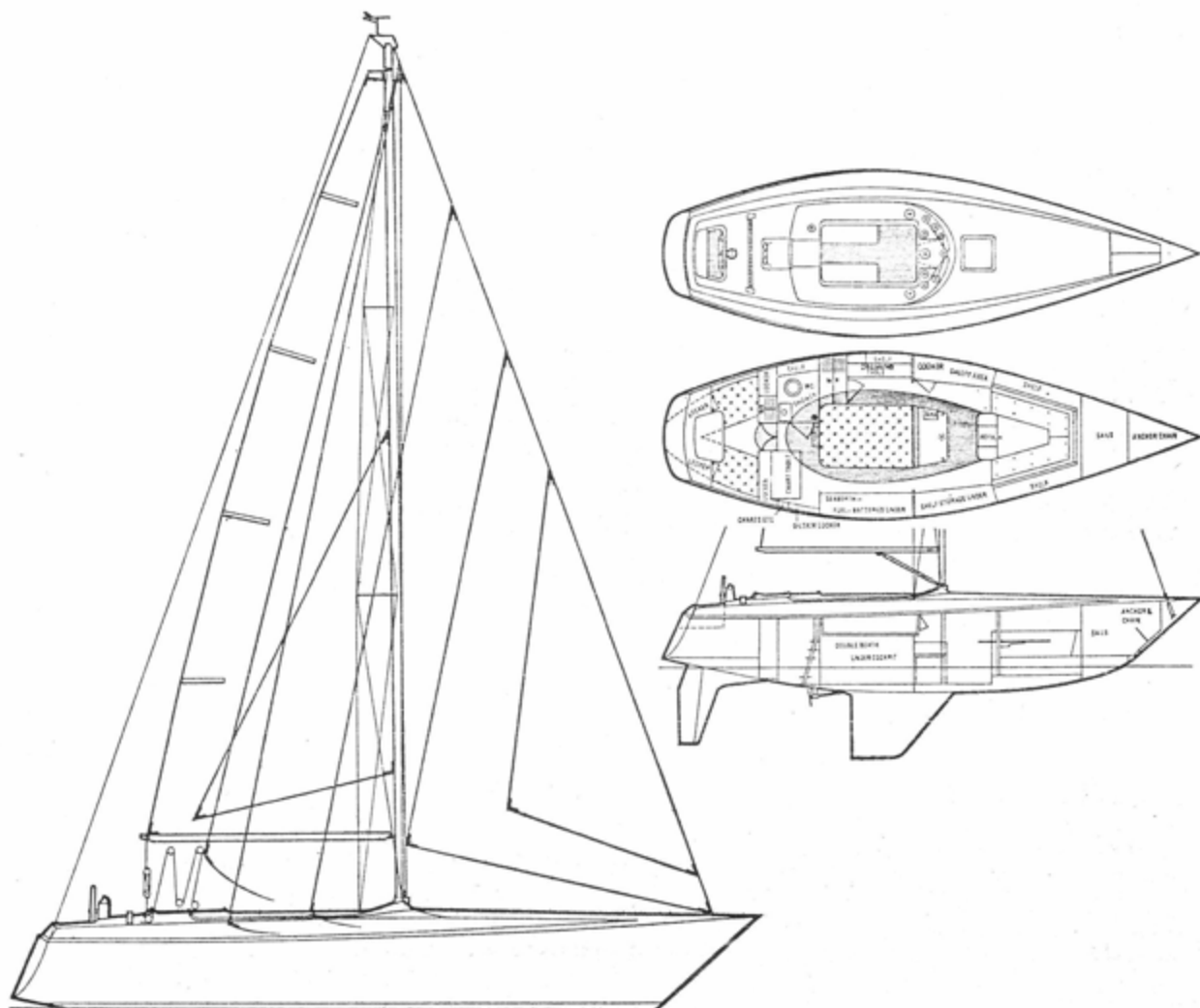
Technical specifications Leisure 17:

G.R.P. Construction
2-4 Berth arrangement
L.O.A. 17' 0"
L.W.L. 14' 0"
Beam 7' 0"

Draft Fin 3' 2"
Twin 2' 2"
Sail area 148 Sq. ft.
Design Weight 1475 LBS.

hurley TAILWIND

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It is confidently predicted that the Hurley Tailwind will make a major contribution to the international yachting scene.

BASIC TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Length Overall	38 ft. 2 in.	11.65m
Length Waterline	30 ft. 4 in.	9.25m
Beam	11 ft. 11 in.	3.65m
Draft	6 ft. 6 in.	1.98m
Displacement	6.79 tons	6900 kg
Working Sail Area	663 ft ²	61.6m ²
I.O.R. Rating	30.5 (approx)	
Berths	6/9	
Max. Headroom	6 ft. 1 in.	1.85m
Ballast	2.75 tons	2800 kg

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for some years. There was also the 18ft 6in 'Sandpiper' being offered at £1265 including VAT.

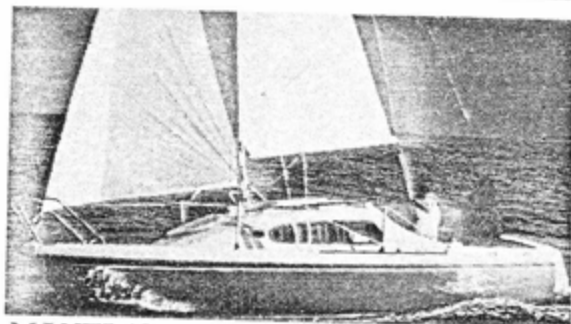
This 'Value Added Tax' was to create a lot of damage throughout the yacht industry. The damage being done by the government of the day imposing a 25% tax upon luxury goods which included yachts, motor boats and dinghies: any boat that could not be classified as a working boat. Many of the small cruisers were built by small firms, Norman Pearn is a good example. Unlike Norman Pearn, however, many of these small firms were unable to sell their boats and either went into liquidation or changed their product. By using the expertise gained in the boat industry many turned their production to GRP waste-bins or concrete shuttering, one person making a living by making GRP coffins.

By 1973-1974 the small cruiser industry was in serious trouble. Many builders saw their way out by building bigger boats, working on the principle that if the customer had enough money to buy a boat he would have enough to cover the extra 25%, and that selling your product was not entirely based upon the price. Many of the smaller boats relied heavily for their saleability upon price; many of the buyers being first time boat owners. This state of affairs virtually took the small boat off the market. The

result was that the second-hand market became very active, prices being inflated by the rocketing price of new boats. This increase in costs was directly related to the VAT and to the increase in the cost of raw materials. Resin, particularly, was climbing in cost to the builders, being directly related to the cost of oil.

'Yachting Monthly', February 1979, advertises only four small sailing cruisers; the 'Kelpie 15' and the 'Manta 16' both by Blakes Marine of Liverpool; the 'Seafarer 575' by Small Craft Limited and 'Sea-Shanty' by Norman Pearn. No sign of the Silhouette or many of its competitors of those days when sailing in a small yacht was such a common thing.

The general wealth of this country and many of the other sailing countries of the world has, of course, had an effect upon the size of yacht being demanded by the public. Small off-shore racing/cruisers, 20ft-27ft, have appeared opening up a completely new field of off-shore sailing. Due to the increase in the cost of materials and the high cost of labour (boat building is a labour intensive industry) many of the small boats are being offered in kit-form or as mouldings only. Due also to these costs many boats are now jointly owned by syndicates, clubs, or organizations completely cutting out that factor of ownership: an attraction attributed to the Silhouette's popularity by Frank Barlett. The Silhouette always cost



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less than a family car but now, at £2413 for the basic boat, is only just able to retain the claim.

(at the time of writing)

The price of £2413 is the cost of a new Silhouette V being quoted by its new builder Mr. Russell Curnow (see brochure). Since the break-up of Hurley Marine in 1974 the future of the Silhouette has been rather precarious. Just before the break-up the Silhouette IV was being sold exclusively by J. G. Meakes Limited of Bursledon, Southampton, and built by Hurley Marine. After September 1974 the Receiver stopped trading but retained a small work force to finish off all partly built boats, including Silhouette, allowing them to be sold off as assets. After the completion of all boats all the moulds of all the Hurley boats were offered for sale. All of the moulds with the exception of the 'Tailwind' moulds, those of a brand new boat that was never completed, a 27 footer racing/cruiser, and the Silhouette moulds, went without hesitation to new builders.

With the Silhouette moulds come confusion. Initially J. G. Meakes were going to take them to put them into the hands of another builder allowing the organization in Southampton to continue to sell the boat. For reasons that are only vague this operation was never completed and George Hurley acquired the set of moulds plus one complete set of mouldings.

George Hurley by now recovered from illness had gone into

partnership with the once Works Manager of A. G. Hurley limited, Mr. Clifford Hoare. Between them they had set up the company H. J. H. Engineering Limited (in the original premises occupied by George in 1959) to build and repair commercial vehicle bodies. Mr. Hurley had the idea that along with the engineering going on in his new company he could organize and build Silhouette on a small production basis. This, however, turned out to be difficult, one reason being the acquisition of skilled men. After the liquidation of Hurley Marine many of the men who knew how to build Silhouette, and many of the other Hurley boats, had found employment in other yards or factories, in some cases building the same ex-Hurley type of boat. The Hurley 22, for instance, bought by South Coast Marine in Plymouth, continued to be built almost without a break. These, one-time, Hurley employees had established themselves in other places by the time George acquired the moulds and was ready to go into production.

In 1977 Mr. Hurley negotiated the sale of the moulds to another Cornishman Mr. Russell Curnow, who was already making the Hurley 18. On receipt of the moulds the new owner began to implement many of the modifications suggested by Robert Tucker at the time of considering the Mark 4s. Immediately work began on raising the hull sides by two inches to increase headroom but then another set-back. Mr. Curnow suffered a heart attack and production of every-

thing came to a halt for months. As Mr. Curnow says in his letter of the 27th March, 1979 "This was quite a blow for the Silhouette (not to mention Mr. Curnow presumably!) because orders fell behind and promotion of the 'new' mould was not possible." (Curnow 1979)

In 1979 things are returning to normal and Mr. Curnow who is offering the completed boat or separate mouldings for home completion is to show the Mark 5 at the Plymouth Boat Show in May. The boat he will offer is very different from 'Blue Boy' built 25 years ago, it has four berths, a galley with cooker and sink, a sea toilet and all the advantages of modern glass fibre technology. Its competitors come from other developed boats using the same technology but lacking that something that makes the Silhouette a 'real little yacht' and a boat worthy of all the faith and good-will owners and builders have put into it. With goodwill and the skills of Mr. Curnow the Mark 5 Silhouette could have a limited future. The production numbers of seventeen boats per week may never be reached again but a steady number may find owners who look for quality and an honest boat with a long and distinguished pedigree.

Small cruising yachts will continue to be designed and made as there appears that there will always be a market, and a demand, for such boats. It is doubtful, however,

that there will ever be another 'Silhouette' or a boat that during its life of production has created so many 'firsts' and spanned different materials and different production methods. The advances in modern boat building technology has only produced advanced forms of reinforced plastics eg. carbon fibre and some other variations. Technology and science has not developed a material that could have such a fundamental effect on the boat building industry as did GRP. It is, therefore, doubtful if a new material could produce the fundamental change comparable to the change that introduced the Round-bilge Mark III Silhouette; not in the foreseeable future anyhow. The future of the Silhouette is probably limited. The boats that are still sailing will, I feel sure, continue to do so for many years. New boats being produced will find only a limited number of new sailors keen to sail off-shore in a 17ft 3in boat, the trend seems now to be for the bigger cruisers.

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