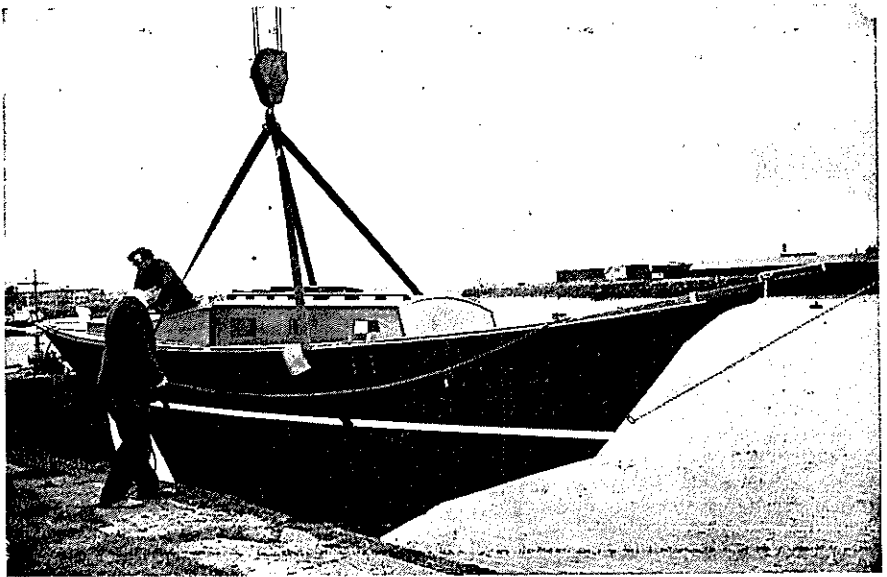


# YACHTING MONTHLY

## Mouette

AN EASY TO BUILD, LOW COST  
CRUISER BASED UPON GRAND  
BANKS DORY LINES.



Mike Desborough

*About Mouette: it was an American designer, John Rowland, who took the lines of a dory, extended them, added a larger transom and a ballast keel and launched the first Mouette in 1959. A number were built in the States and they proved able and seaworthy little craft with a surprising turn of speed and good sea-keeping qualities. In 1972 an exhibit at the Earls Court Show was Erik The Red, undoubtedly a Mouette, but built by Don Ridler from odds and ends of scrap timber, bedsheets and bamboo for a total sum of £160 and subsequently sailed across the Atlantic and back to UK. We didn't applaud Don Ridler's ramshackle boat but we did see the design as a possible way out for the home builder of limited means and we asked John Rowland for his blessing on our proposal to promote the boat in UK.*

*Until that time the only plans in existence were three very basic sheets giving lines, offsets and sail plan. We engaged a naval architect to draw up a complete set of working drawings. This done we looked around for a boatbuilder to produce a bare hull for us, and here we came unstuck. The lowest quote we could get for a bare hull and deck was over £1,800 and our editorial budget wouldn't stand it. By chance we heard of a man who was building from the basic plans and we settled down to wait until his Mouette was built, rigged and sailing. He had a lot of interruptions and delays but, finally, on a wild wet day in late September I went aboard his Tara Blue at her moorings in the mouth of the Tees. The following is a sailing report.*

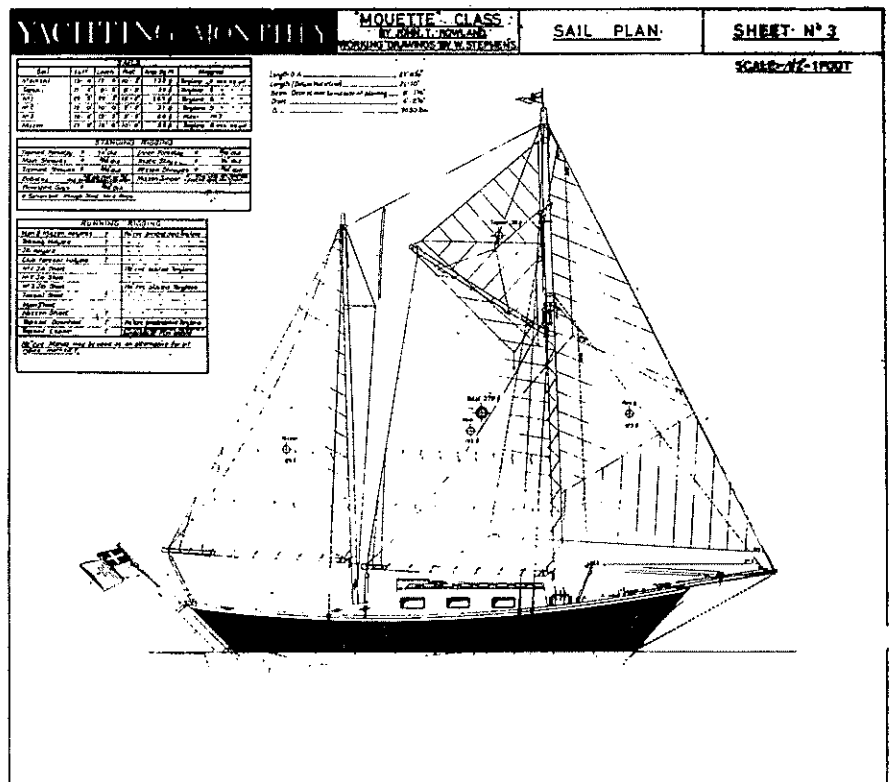
**W**HEN you go out on a boat review you take whatever the weather hands out; this was the most daunting set of circumstances I had ever met. The forecast gave a S-SE Gale Force 8-10 imminent, the wind was already 20-25 knots, gusting in bitter rain squalls that blew grey and threatening on the smoke of the industrial Tees. Outside, the North Sea rolled in great lurching mounds of leaden water and rose smoking over the offshore reefs. Tara Blue had only been under sail twice—both in Force 3 summer breezes, the engine was behaving a bit erratically, the tide was on full ebb and we had an unmarked channel across rocky ground to negotiate before we could reach

more open water. On the credit side we had the shelter of the land and a reach out and back. Ordinarily, sense would have prevailed and we would have cancelled. I had travelled the length of England to sail the boat and I had to return next day. I was determined not to release Mouette plans until I had sailed the boat; we decided to be very very careful and make it quick—very quick.

The dory hull shape is totally different to anything I have experienced. At rest, her initial stability is low and a number of men moving around her decks will make her heel excessively. Using a clinometer and two men whose weight totalled 26 stone, both on the side deck by the shrouds, I measured 12-15 degrees but at that point

she went no further. We set double reefed main and one headsail and made off along the narrow channel towards the open river mouth, aided by the engine, more for morale than because it was necessary.

Given wind and sea one can assess a boat quickly and as soon as she felt the wind clear of the headland and the scend of open water I began to feel confident. Using a sophisticated anemometer I recorded 20-25 knots apparent wind on the beam and an angle of heel of 20-25 degrees—convenient figures to remember. At that angle she seemed very stiff and I felt that a very great deal of wind would be needed to put her hard over. We were, on the other hand, under canvased and ill balanced. Her motion was long and easy, her weather



chine was still immersed and we seemed to have her nicely in hand. She needed the mizzen though; Mouette is a boat which obviously uses her mizzen for balance. She has a long keel and a cut-away bow profile, and under our main and headsail she was heavy to the point of lee helm.

A big disadvantage was that the headsail sheet was single part and there were no sheet winches. Had it been doubled via a bullseye at the clew we could have flattened it but in the event we couldn't get the sheet hard home on the wind. We pointed her at it for some minutes and I tried to tack her but she missed stays—just failing to get round. With the mizzen set she would have stayed nicely but we gybed her instead. After a while discretion won the day and we headed for the mooring. The engine was not reliable and so we got the unreefed mizzen on her. The difference was dramatic and she came alive in our hands. She will be a slow boat in stays I think but no more so than any long keeled boat, needing to be sailed round rather than spun round. The mizzen should be capable of really deep reefing so that it never has to be stowed in order to reduce sail. We made the mooring easily after perhaps forty minutes of sailing. Later came the wind but by then we were safe ashore.

Eric Plummer's *Tara Blue* is strip planked. He and Mike Desborough, who was the man in charge of building, estimated this to be a better and cheaper method than using plywood. Basically, she is closely similar to the *Mouette* of our plans, except that her accommodation is slightly different and that she has solid pole masts instead of the recommended hollow box section spars; she also has a gaff mizzen instead of Bermudan. Her fittings, deck layout and general appurtenances are as per plans. The builders utilised a lot of timber and materials obtained through friends at attractive prices, picked up as scrap, adapted or otherwise improvised; they fitted a second-hand engine, used wooden scaffold poles as spars and bought directly only such things as sails, ropes and blocks. The total price came to just under £800.

*Mouette* is a 27.5ft boat but she cannot be compared with conventional production boats of that length. She has a 21ft waterline but her accommodation is poor by modern standards, having only 4ft 6in headroom below beams, long and not very accessible ends and a great deal of length taken up by cockpit and stern. She is, however, a pretty

boat, low deck profile and a sweet sheer; her length in fact contributes only extra speed and stability to what is really a 3-berth boat.

The accommodation plan shown in our drawings is too ambitious for reality, and *Tara Blue*, with one berth forward, a settee berth and a quarter berth and a half bulk-head sheltering a toilet area is about the optimum. Best to build the hull and evolve the accommodation to suit oneself.

Another essential departure from plan seems to me to be the necessary raising of the rig. Both booms are far too low and need lifting at the clews, also perhaps the sails shortening in the luff by six inches to get them higher up the masts. I also feel that pulpits and guardrails are needed, especially in light airs and at moorings when the low initial stability is felt. Apart from these changes I believe *Mouette* will be a fine little craft to build. Our aim, in the plans, was to make it possible for every ordinary mast and deck fitting to be made by hand from mild steel bar and rod for galvanising afterwards and in *Tara Blue* this had worked out well.

The general data on *Mouette* is as follows:

LOA	8.38m	(27ft 6in)
LWL	6.66m	(21ft 10in)
Beam	2.48m	(8ft 2in)
Draught	1.29m	(4ft 3in)
Displacement	3,200kg	(7,050 lb)
Total sail area	41.71m <sup>2</sup>	(449sq ft)
Engine	Any suitable 8-10hp diesel	

Plans: Sheet 1, lines, body and table of offsets.

Sheet 2, construction.

Sheet 3, sail plan.

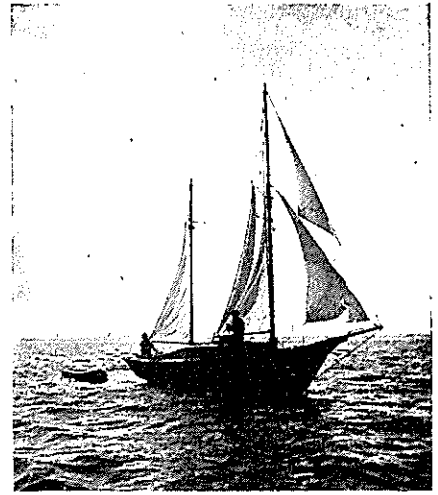
Sheet 4, accommodation.

Sheet 5, spar plans and rigging.

Sheet 6, rigging, Part II.

#### CONCLUSIONS

I treated this boat review as I would have treated any other, namely, I reported upon what I found, on that occasion and under those circumstances. My conjectures are as follows: *Mouette* will sail at an angle of 10-25 degrees most of the time but it will take a lot to heave her down further than that. She should move easily in light airs but she will probably be troublesome to tack at

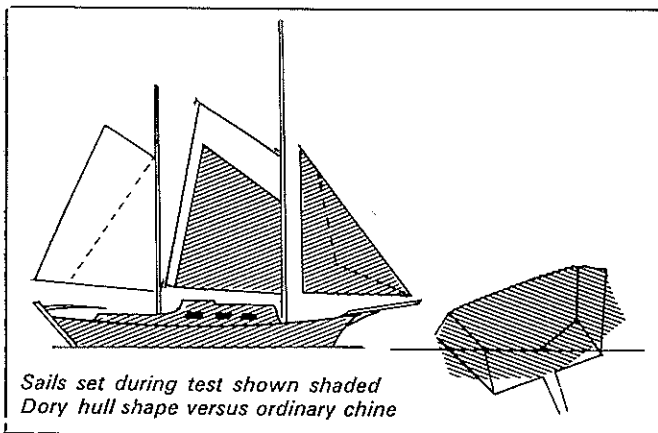


*A first sail, a sunny Force 3. The owner is unlikely ever to set his sails so badly again*  
Mike Desborough

low speeds unless the jib is backed. She should be a very dry boat and, unexpected perhaps, I doubt if she will pound much because she will be sailing on her chine. Unlike a conventional hard chine shape, the dory shape, when heeled, lays her flared topsides on the water and forward, her chine becomes a cut-water. The dory shape increases her stability when heeled at a far greater rate than a conventional hull shape. I would guess that when snugged right down in bad weather she will become a windward plodder, albeit a dry one.

For her size the modest accommodation means that she should be regarded as a 3-man boat which has the unexpected bonus of generous deck and cockpit space and the advantage of a longer LWL. With a really open plan accommodation she could, of course, sleep four quite easily.

The gaff rigged mainsail looks good and it is right for the sort of boat she is. No doubt we could give her a re-designed Bermudan rig but it would still be a 2-mast rig, otherwise the weight aloft would make her a pig on a mooring or at anchor in a swell. She will probably be a bad roller in an exposed anchorage. She is not new and she is not untried. Had she had any dark secrets or hidden faults, we can be certain that an embittered ex-owner, somewhere, would have written to us by now. Nobody has. JDS



*Sails set during test shown shaded*  
*Dory hull shape versus ordinary chine*

*She will probably sail at about this angle of heel most of the time*  
YM Photo

