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# PRACTICAL BOAT OWNER



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# waiting for the tide with the editor



**EXCLUSIVE**

She's small and tough, with shallow draft and plenty of traditional charm. Sensibly priced and well equipped, she also sails rather nicely. So is there a catch with the North Beach 24?



**Europe's serious  
small cruiser**

**O**NE of the advantages of working on a yachting magazine is that readers tell you things. Above all, you find out what people want – or, at least, say they want. And judging from your letters and emails, there's an enormous, unsatisfied demand for a small, tough, offshore cruiser with shallow draft that looks like a proper yacht. A sensible price and good performance would be nice, too. Or so you say...

But who builds boats like this? With so many manufacturers moving relentlessly up the size range to ensure greater profit margins and escape from the competition of secondhand boats, the number of wholesome small cruisers being built over the past 20-odd years has been steadily falling – with the result that the secondhand stock is growing rather long in the tooth. Unless you're lucky enough to stumble across a lovingly maintained example of your perfect boat, you could be in for a lot of hard work.

So, what to do? Well, you could always write to us. Which, of course, you did...

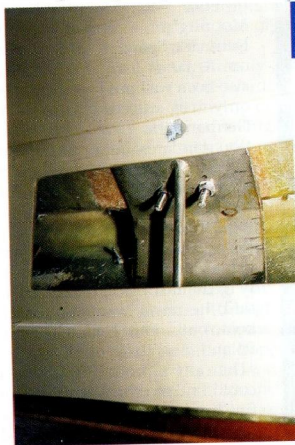
In any event, we saw it as a challenge. Boats of the type described in our bulging post-bag were a little thin on the water even in the good old days, and they're even harder to find now. Seeing if any still existed was definitely a job for our intrepid team of reporters, who were duly instructed to leave no stone unturned across the length and breadth of Europe. Eventually, tired and footsore, we found what we were looking for. It was in Holland, and called the North Beach 24.

Not surprisingly, the first thing I asked Jan Derks on arriving in IJmuiden was how the boat came about. Jan – who conceived the design, owns the factory and looks after the selling and commissioning – started the project because, during his 20 years as a broker representing Castlemain in Holland, he couldn't satisfy the demand for small, tough, attractive, offshore cruisers with shallow draft. The Cornish Crabber 24 comes close – and has long been popular in the Netherlands – but, in Jan's eyes, suffers from two principal drawbacks. One is price, the other the 3ft 6in fixed keel. Jan

needed the shallowest possible draft for the Dutch inland waterways – hence the unballasted centreplate retracting into a long keel – plus an easy way of lowering the mast. Yet he wanted to combine the ability to trickle up dykes and duck under bridges with the stability necessary for Category B (Offshore) certification under the Recreational Craft Directive, and has achieved an AVS (angle of vanishing stability) of 129°. The bowsprit and cutter rig were, in fact, by-products of the stability requirements, being chosen because they spread the sail area fore-and-aft to keep the centre of gravity lower.

### Poles together

All told, Jan set himself a hard task – especially since he was determined to achieve high build quality without pricing the boat out of the market. So he got together with long-time friend and associate, the designer Frans Cobelens, one of whose well-proven hulls from the '70s was modified for the new design. Where to build it was more of a problem. Western Europe was too expensive, so he soon moved production to a factory in Poland – then owned by another Dutchman, and now taken over by Jan himself. At this stage of the story, I began to have doubts. After all, with no disrespect to our Eastern European friends, the boats for which they're known are, perhaps, rather different in concept to the North Beach. Was this appealing little cutter with her well-proportioned hull, solid looking fittings, tidy finish and



## North Beach 24

The swivelling saloon table can also be used in the cockpit.

Port and starboard berths are respectively 73 and 78in long.

Unusually on a boat of this type, the rudder blade is balanced.

A raised pivot point for the cap shrouds mean they support the mast as it's lowered.

The bowsprit can be retracted from the cockpit to reduce berthing length.

The P-bracket is bonded to a bulkhead abaft the engine.

## Specification

LOA	24ft 0in (7.32m) plus 4ft 6 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> in (1.38m) bowsprit
LWL	21ft 6in (6.55m)
Beam	8ft 2 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> in (2.50m)
Draft – keel up	2ft 9 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> in (0.85m)
– keel down	5ft 3in (1.60m)
Displacement	6,063lb (2,750kg)
Ballast	2,755lb (1,250kg)
Sail area (mainsail staysail & yankee)	358sq ft (33.3sq m)
Engine	Yanmar 1GM, 10hp diesel
Headroom	5ft 3in (1.60m) below deckhead
Designer	Frans Cobelens
Price	approx £30,000 (48,800 Euro) ex-VAT, ex-yard

**Builder:** North Beach Yachts, Eindhovenstraat 4, NL-2012 ML Haarlem, Holland. T: (00 31) 23 542 8589. F: (00 31) 23 542 8603. E: [castle.derks@wxs.nl](mailto:castle.derks@wxs.nl) Comprehensive details of the North Beach 24 are shown on the builder's web site – [www.northbeachyachts.nl](http://www.northbeachyachts.nl) The boat will be shown at the Hiswa in-water boat show at IJmuiden from 4th – 9th September.

## Construction

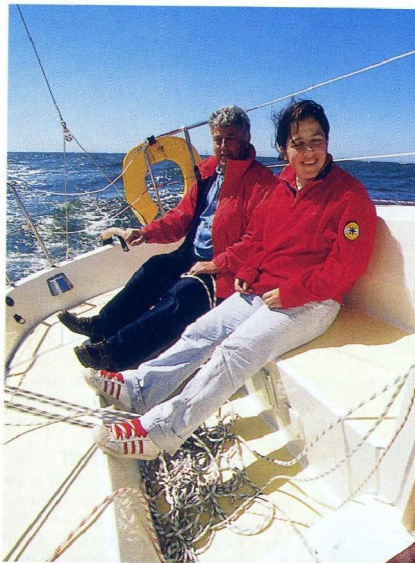
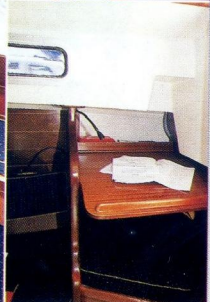
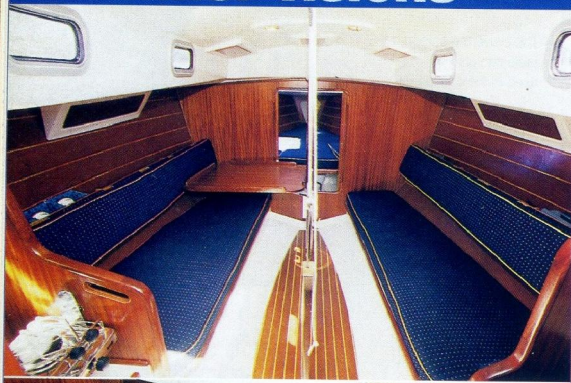
**I**NSIDE the gelcoat – which is pigmented both above and below the waterline – the hull is a solid laminate of CSM, woven rovings and isophthalic resin. Just under an inch thick (22mm) in the way of the keel, it's joined to the Airex-cored deck with a 'biscuit lid' overlap, where the two mouldings are bonded with epoxy and bolted together at 20mm spaces. Several layers of mat and resin are also applied over the inside of the joint.

Internally, the hull is stiffened longitudinally by six full-length stringers of 10mm Airex foam, glassed in with three layers of 600gsm mat. The chainplates are bolted through to stainless steel plates which, in turn, are bonded to the hull and laminated into the top stringer. On the outside, the hull is given two coats of epoxy before leaving the factory.

The hollow steel keel – with a 15mm top plate attached to the hull by thirteen M16 stainless steel bolts – is filled with lead ballast in the forward part, and provides a home for the fuel tank abaft the centreplate.

Following structural completion in Poland, the boats are taken to the port of IJmuiden – on the North Sea coast north-west of Amsterdam – for the gas installation, electrical work, rigging and commissioning.

## Inner visions



ABOVE: High coamings and a good leg-bracing width in the cockpit.  
 TOP RIGHT: The stern seat lifts up to reveal storage space for a six-man liferaft.  
 RIGHT: Small boats still need big hatches...

**I**n addition to the headliner, the North Beach has a second interior moulding which forms the bunk fronts and galley. The resulting substantial area of pale plastic is offset by the mahogany-faced ply and solid mahogany trim.

Significantly, a thorough poke around in the inaccessible areas beneath the moulding drew no blood; the inside of the hull is flow-coated throughout, and care has been taken to leave no ragged edges inside the lockers.

Immediately forward of the galley to port and quarter berth to starboard – over which you slide out the chart table – is the keel's lifting mechanism: a rectangular stainless steel duct with the top of the lifting rod projecting through the top and attached to a 3:1 tackle. Jan attaches a rod rather than a tackle to the keel both to avoid tangles and to provide a means of pushing the unballasted, glassfibre plate down should it get stuck in the case.

Under-bunk stowage in the saloon is supplemented by a deep fiddled shelf each side above the berths' backrests, the latter being hinged up out of the way at night and used as extra shelves. Sitting headroom above

the berths is a comfortable 35in.

Forward again, the optional German-made 'dry toilet' (using bio-degradable plastic pouches which you place inside the bowl and seal afterwards by closing the lid) lives beneath the V-berth. A pair of sliding wooden doors closes off the heads/forecabin.



ABOVE: Next to the companionway, the galley is compact but functional.

TOP: The open saloon...  
 TOP LEFT: ...with settee berth backrests that hinge up as extra shelves  
 TOP RIGHT: A chart table pulls out over the quarter berth.

generally sturdy air the genuine article or not? I'd come across classic-style boats with green hulls before, some of whose builders seemingly used the combination to create an illusion of robustness in the hope that potential buyers would feel no need to probe any further.

In the case of the North Beach, though, it seems that few corners have been cut. For a start, most of the fittings and materials are from well-known names – Bruynzeel plywood, 'Neste gel-coats' (as used by Nautor, among others), Barton hardware, Moonlight hatches from Denmark, Sparcraft spars, and so on. As far as I could tell, they'd also been well put together – not only in accordance with Germanische Lloyds construction standards, but in such a way that Jan won't have to spend his life flying around Europe sorting out problems. "I'm a one-man band," he reminded me, "and I don't want to do that. It's less trouble to build the boat properly in the first place!" Anyway, he said, he never wanted a Polish boat, but a Dutch boat built in Poland. And that's different.

The only aspects of the boat I could find to criticise in terms of finish or construction were a few rough patches on the moulded

headlining down below, and lack of easy access to some of the deck hardware fastenings. But Jan assured me that the interior finish – otherwise to a quite acceptable standard – will only improve. He also showed me how to get at all the nuts and bolts, which didn't involve dismantling the entire boat. Significantly, major stress points like the chainplates and hull/deck joint are relatively easy to see.

In response to my comment that everything appeared commendably solid, Frans – who joined us for the day – said, "I see no advantage in weight reduction in a boat of this type." He then added, "this boat doesn't flex."

Up top, it was good to find nice wide side decks covered in non-skid paint – a sensible but inexplicably unfashionable solution – and a large (2ft x 2ft/60 x 60cm) forehatch raised on a substantial plinth to deflect water. Small boats often have hatches through which only small people can escape...

Coming back along the deck, we find a pramhood the width of the companionway, cleverly let into a groove around the moulding to avoid the need for pop-studs – an idea borrowed from

**But I was forgetting one rather important point: until he appoints a dealer over here, to buy one, you'll have to go to Holland...**



**ABOVE:** The bowsprit is designed to be retracted and re-set from the cockpit.  
**LEFT:** Hulls can be any colour, but so far they've all been green. Standard sails are white.  
**BELOW:** Lifting the centreplate is easily done with one hand.

Nautor's Swans. You can't enjoy the hood's protection while sat in the corner of the cockpit, but it's visually unobtrusive, provides standing headroom while you're working at the galley or chart table, and allows easy access forward. As for the cockpit, it's equally well thought out, with an enormous locker to port, a smaller one to starboard, and room for a 6-man Plastimo liferaft in an open-fronted compartment right aft. A crew of four would have plenty of space to stretch out, though things must have been a little tight on an earlier boat whose owner, Jan told me, managed to cram in 13 people and a dog...

### Who needs a helmsman?

Having conducted as thorough a survey as possible alongside the pontoon, it was time to cast off and discover whether this hitherto virtually faultless little ship would meet the same standards under way. Given the backgrounds of her designer and builder, it seemed likely that she would; Frans has over 30 years' experience designing everything from racing dinghies to offshore supply vessels, while Jan - who co-owns a Whitbread 30 - has cruised, raced and delivered

dozens of yachts and campaigned J/24s extensively.

My first impression was one of smoothness; the North Beach carved her way through the seas with the ease of a much bigger, heavier boat. She was quick, too, reaching 6.4 knots at one stage with 15 knots of wind just abaft the beam and a little help from a quartering sea. Upwind, she settled down at around 4.7 knots, tacked through 90°, and maintained a perfect close-hauled course with the tiller unattended.

As on most cutters, the biggest problem was seeing the luff of the yankee from the helm - especially since, being free-flying, it sagged away to leeward. To be fair, we were at the top of its range, so we also tried sailing without it. Then, apart from slowing down half a knot or so, the boat felt little different. We noticed just the slightest hint of weather helm but, more significantly, had no occasion to touch the sheets as we made upwind thanks to the self-tacking staysail. We also tacked through around 15° less on the compass.

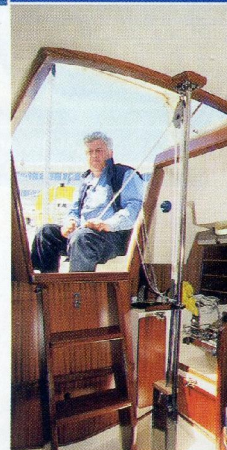
About the only remaining hope I had of catching her out was during the 'circuits and bumps' routine; surely that would cause a long-keeler to stumble? Not at

all; she stopped virtually dead when hove to with the tiller held to leeward, spun through a surprisingly tight circle with the sheets spinned in, and never failed to respond to the helm even in the tightest of spots.

It was a similar story under power. I've never been able to steer a slalom course with a long-keeler in astern, but the generous propeller aperture meant that she did exactly what she was told. All I didn't like was the pitch of the prop, driven by the ubiquitous Yanmar 1GM; I thought was too fine, though it's the same with most new boats as a result of recent 'clean-burn' legislation.

Overall, I was a little concerned at having discovered no significant flaws in Jan's boat - especially when she costs substantially less than several others of similar size and, apparently, comparable build quality. But I was forgetting one rather important point: until he appoints a dealer over here, to buy one, you'll have to go to Holland ...

David Harding



### How do you buy?

If sailing from Holland to the UK, you give North Beach Yachts a cheque for the Dutch VAT which they return after you've entered the UK - where British VAT becomes payable. If you're shipping the boat over, it's simplest to employ a customs agent who will need to pay the VAT on entry.