



BOAT REVIEW BY HERB McCORMICK

One Cool Catboat

The Wyliecat 30:
The more things
change, the more
they stay the same

IN 1935, A BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND, naval architect named Sidney Herreshoff (you may recognize the family name) drew the plans for a funky little number called the Amphicraft, a 13-foot-1-inch trailerable vessel that could be fitted with an outboard, rowed, or sailed. For this discussion, we'll skip the first two options and reach straight for the halyard.

For sailing excursions, the plump little daysailer was rigged as a catboat with a freestanding spar and a wishbone boom, an arrangement not unlike the Wyliecat 30, a recent creation from California boatbuilder Tom Wylie. From this fact the Wylie crew seem

to take both pride and amusement.

When I stepped aboard the Wyliecat 30 last fall on Chesapeake Bay, I was almost immediately handed a page from an old catalog of Herreshoff boats featuring the Amphicraft. The message, I believe, was this: "We think we're pretty smart all right, but we know we're not *that* smart!"

After a cold, breezy afternoon skittering about the bay on their quick, simple, maneuverable little sailboat, however, it was pretty obvious that no one at Wyliecats ever flunked recess. The dudes from Santa Cruz know how to have a good time.

In fact, it was local guru Bill Lee who coined the expression "Fast is fun." The antecedent to that thought—"Light is right"—is certainly the philosophy Wylie espoused when fashioning the rig of his 30-footer. (Wyliecats are also

A fellow named Herreshoff conjured a Wyliecat-like rig 65 years ago; he'd be pleased with how his idea evolved in Tom Wylie's hands.

available in 17-, 39-, and 48-foot versions.) And since the thrust of the boat—literally, figuratively, and aesthetically—starts with its single-sail power plant, it's the logical place to begin an overview.

For those bent on performance—and it must be underscored that the exact point of boarding a Wyliecat is to go for a good sail—carbon fiber is the wave of the present and the future. The all-up weight of the 30's freestanding (no spreaders, shrouds, or attendant fittings), all-carbon stick is a mere 130 pounds. The wishbone, with carbon end fittings on 3-inch-diameter aluminum tubes, adds another 35 pounds, but you get the point: Think quill, as in feather.

The theory behind the rig is self-regulation. When the apparent wind builds, the upper part of the mast bends and sways (picture the tall branches of a willow tree), and pressure is automatically dumped off the sail. In lulls, the spar stands at attention, the sail becomes fuller, and the leech closes down. Whatever the breeze, efficiency reigns.

In practice, you need a puffy day to really test the principle, and we had a beauty, with 12- to 18-knot winds funneling down the bay. Downwind, with the fully battened sail eased out like a gate swung open, we fairly flew down the

bay at 6.5 to 7 knots. Upwind, things were more exciting. Still sailing with a full hoist, it seemed the boat might've been happier with a reef, as we definitely felt overpowered in the gusts. Self-regulation is one thing, but a shortened sail plan further enhances efficient sailing.

The double-ended mainsheet is led aft to the respective port and starboard coamings of the long, low, open-transomed cockpit for convenience on either tack. Playing the main is an athletic undertaking in a breeze. A "choker" line adjusts the wishbone and is eased or trimmed as the air pressure dictates, in effect acting as an outhaul, vang, and backstay all in one. Lazy jacks bundle the sail nicely when it's reefed.

The vacuum-bagged hull is a composite laminate around a balsa core, with carbon-fiber reinforcement at the mast step and the rudderstock (and, if you opt for one, the diesel auxiliary mounts).

The interior is low and functional, with a couple of double berths at the ends sandwiching a pair of snug settees and a straightforward galley. A trip on a Wyliecat is more akin to camping than opulent cruising. And if you want to stand up, as the legendary Uffa Fox once said, go outside.

Once there, with the breeze blowing, the Wyliecat is in its natural element. You don't need to be named Herreshoff to know what to do next.

The author is CW's editor.

| Wyliecat 30 | |
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| LOA | 30' 5" (9.26 m.) |
| LWL | 25' 0" (7.62 m.) |
| Beam | 9' 6" (2.90 m.) |
| Draft | 5' 3" (1.60 m.) |
| Disp. | 5,500 lb. (2,494 kg.) |
| Sail Area | 430 sq. ft. (39.95 sq. m.) |
| Base Price | \$107,500 |
| Designer | Thomas Wylie Design Group |
| Wyliecats | |
| (925) 376-7338 | |
| www.wyliecat.com | |