

LET THE DRAMA UNFOLD

Why cruise at six knots when you can do it at 12, or 18 for that matter? *Sam Jefferson* discovers the benefits of three hulls over one



Let's be clear about this: I am the first to admit I'm not a huge multihull sailor. Despite some youthful experimentation with pitchpoling Hobies at extremely

high speeds, when it came to larger multis, I always shied away. I think it was something to do with those French pioneers of big multihull racing who seemed to glory in vessels that had all the styling and

charisma of two baguettes with a large camembert lashed atop. I imagine they smelt almost as bad when you went below as well.

Thankfully times have changed and the modern multihull seems to

be all things to all people. For the cruising sailor this often seems to mean that it is able to supply decent off-wind performance and a huge living space often reminiscent of a well-appointed garden conservatory. For the racing yachtsman, multihulls these days supply almost limitless potential for performance. And what about the cruising yachtsman who simply likes the sensation of sailing fast, I hear you cry? Well, there's Dragonfly yachts.

Set up in 1967, this quirky Danish company has been turning out sporty yet comfortable trimarans ever since. Nearly half a century of experience has made Quorning absolute masters in the art of producing boats that are easily handled yet also blisteringly fast. In 1989 the company also developed the 'swing wing' which allows you to fold in the trimaran's sponsons when you head into a marina. Such was the success of its system that no Dragonfly has been built without the swing wing since. The 25ft (7.6m) is the latest edition to the range and also the smallest yacht it builds (the largest being the 35ft – 10.7m). Unlike its larger designs, the 25 is a pure daysailer/weekender with a purpose-built roll-on roll-off trailer for easy launching and recovery. The yacht comes in two guises: the 'touring' and the more racing-orientated sport version, which I tested.

All in the boat weighs an absurd 1,050kg – in layman's terms that's roughly ten John Prescotts (2,300lb). Marry that with minimal wetted surface area and a decent sail area and you have a recipe for speed. She certainly looks very purposeful, and with her rakish black carbon fibre mast and Dreadnought bowed sponsons, she almost looks like she's moving fast even when at rest.

Winging it

Before going sailing it was important to get to grips with the deck layout and controls. From the moment I stepped onto her low-lying outrigger and made my way across the trampoline to the main hull, I was aware that this was an incredibly



● **TOP**
With the gennaker up you can almost sail faster than the true windspeed by using your momentum to build apparent wind

● **ABOVE**
The helming positions on the sponsons are great places to keep an eye on sail trim - and just enjoy the ride

technical bit of kit. Everything about this yacht is finely tuned and painstakingly engineered. Those swing wings for starters are a simple enough concept, but to get them right is no mean feat. Yet Dragonfly has been doing this so long it has it all down to a fine art. Yank on the relevant bit of string and the sponsons pivot out on a pair of massive hinges which are then held in place by clutches in the cockpit. It's delicate stuff, but it's also surprisingly simple to operate.

Then there's the steering system. The rudders can be raised independently but also kick up if you hit the putty. On the sport version there are tillers on each sponson and you can also steer from the main hull using what Sir Francis Drake would have described as a whipstaff. On the weekender, you have a more conventional tiller-steered single

rudder on the main hull. Below the waterline is a kick up daggerboard offset slightly to port. This is raised and lowered via a simple rope/jammer system in the cockpit. She draws 1.5m (5ft) with it down and 0.35m (1ft 2in) with it up. The mast is a rotating carbon spar on the sport version and a slightly shorter alloy affair on the touring version.

Given that this is a high-powered racing machine, sail controls are mercifully simple, particularly if you stick to 'white' sails. The self tacking jib is on a furler while the massively powerful fully battened main is on a traveller just forward of the whipstaff. The mainsail halyard is on a 2:1 system and the ball bearings in the batten slides ensure the big sail jumps up like a frog in a pool full of dynamite.

Three times the fun

Technical stuff over, what about the actual sailing? Well, motoring first and with the power supplied by a 6hp Sail Pro outboard on the transom, this was always going to be the most tedious part of the test. The almost non-existent displacement of the Dragonfly means that this engine pushes her along very merrily at up to six knots in flat conditions. It is also noisy and smelly. The best solution is to put the sails up – she's →



● LEFT Below deck the Dragonfly is clean-lined and simple but also a perfectly pleasant place to be

SAM'S VERDICT

This is an easily handled daysailer that can do 17 knots with minimum fuss. What more do I need to say? She's carefully thought out and, although a technical yacht, she's not confusing or daunting to sail. She's a big dinghy but lacks the drawbacks of getting you soaked or being cramped and uncomfortable. Essentially this boat is masses of fun in a carefully crafted package.

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

ACCOMMODATION: ★★★★★

LOOKS: ★★★★★

THE SPEC

Price as tested: (ex VAT): £65,000

Base price: £61,000

Length: 25ft (7.7m)

Length folded: 29ft 4in (9m)

Beam sailing: 19ft (5.8m)

Beam folded: 7ft 5in (2.3m)

Draft: 1ft 1in (0.4m)

Draft incl board: 4ft 9in (1.5m)

Weight: 1,050kg (2,300lb)

Trailer weight: 1,500kg (3,300lb)

Sail area (sport): 31m²

Sail area (touring): 34m²

UK Dealer: Multihull Solutions

Contact: mutihullsolutions.co.uk



far faster under sail anyway. This done, we enjoyed a brisk beat out of Chichester Harbour. Given that my previous experience with a multihull had involved beating at roughly 50 degrees off the wind, I was pleasantly surprised to note that the Dragonfly pointed very well indeed, sitting quite happily at 30-32 degrees off the wind and clocking seven knots in about eight knots of breeze.

I don't care how stolid a cruising man you are – it is always nice to sail fast past other yachts, and we left a trail of victims in our wake as we tacked up the Emsworth Channel. She also spun happily through the tacks without even a hint of stalling. Yet it is off the wind when the fun really starts. Turning onto a beam reach, we unfurled the big code zero and waited for things to happen. They happened quickly: one minute we were pootling along nicely at, say, nine knots and then ZANG! A brief puff of breeze, the leeward hull gripped the water and we scooted off, screaming along at 12 knots and more.

With a Dragonfly, it is all about creating your own apparent wind, so you start off heating up the code zero a bit by running close to the wind, gain some momentum and then ease off. At this point there is a slight 'here we go' sensation and suddenly you're not sailing, you're flying. With its massive floats providing 160 per cent buoyancy, the Dragonfly is well capable of flying both leeward and main hull. It's a great feeling; turbocharged sailing that opens up your horizons. Suddenly you can beat a foul tide with ease and a cross-channel jaunt takes half the time.

Down below is not the place to be with this sort of sailing on offer, but it can be summed up as simple. There are two removable pods with a small cooker and basin units on them, a lengthy forward berth with a Porta-Potti tucked underneath and a surprisingly light and comfortable main saloon with removable slot-in table. It's hardly luxurious, but it is perfectly adequate for the occasional overnighter. There is also a substantial amount of extra storage in the sponsons. ●