Photos this page Malcolm White

Top and above, lively but completely manageable, the 707 proves easy to handle under spinnaker

Hunter 707

As keen followers of the sports boat revolution, we needed little persuasion to step aboard Hunter Boats' new 707. Matthew Sheahan reports from the Solent

Famous designs such as the Sonata, Medina, Impala, Sigma, Squib and many more, all have either Hunter Boats or David Thomas in common. It seems that the combined efforts of these two modest outfits can place a finger on the button time after time, when it comes to producing a popular and successful design.

Earlier this year Hunter Boats announced their intention to produce a new Thomas design aimed at the dayboat racing market.

Seven months later the new Hunter 707 was on the water, a Class Association had been set up, with a steering committee chaired by Terry Vernon and Mike Webster as class captain, and the RYA's technical manager Ken Kershaw had drafted the class rules. Few new designs could wish for a better start in life.

ABOVE AND BELOW DECKS

'Modest and manageable' probably best sums her up initially, and it is only when you get a closer look that she displays some of the Thomas hallmarks. Her chine, which starts close to the bow and develops as it moves aft, is one of the most obvious, especially to those who have seen his 36-footer *Genie,* or indeed many of his other racing yachts over the years.

The ingenious well for the outboard motor has been refined to provide a near perfect solution to an age-old problem.

Throughout, she is delightfully simple. She has a fine entry and open cockpit with a beam of 2.50m (8ft 2in). Her control lines terminate on the coachroof top where two single-speed winches flank the companionway.

Her sheets are almost the only control lines to end up in the cockpit, where moulded footrests provide ample bracing for the crew, as well as providing support for the engine well cover when the outboard motor is in use.

Forward of the cockpit, a modest-sized coachroof conceals simple accommodation: bunk cushions to sleep four and enough height above the cabin sole to sit comfortably, even if you cannot lean back against the hull. A fixed keel means space below decks is good, too, ensuring that you can move about freely.

RIG AND SAILS

Her fractional, single spreader Z Spars rig is deck-stepped, a common feature aboard many of the modern breed, which makes hoisting and lowering the mast that much simpler.

She has a small, non-overlapping jib and a mainsail with conventional length battens and no permanent backstay. Her sail wardrobe is by Sobstad, using Genesis for the main and jib and Dacron for the spinnaker. In order to prevent the inevitable arms race for sails, the class has adopted Sobstad as the sole authorised sailmaker for the next two years, after which the Association will review the situation.

It is easy to move about on deck, with good boom-to-deck clearance, allowing even the least supple crewmember to move quickly without limbo dancing en route.

But in the current trend of downwind sailing, her sail plan is surprising inasmuch as she does not have an asymmetric spinnaker.

Here Thomas and Hunter's rationale is clear. They wanted to ensure that the boat could take part in handicap racing round the country without having to rely on local one-design fleets for competitive sailing.

It could also be argued that, despite the simplicity of sailing with asymmetric spinnakers, a conventional kite does limit the range of new tricks that a crew have to cope with, especially if they are new to this size of boat or have spent too long aboard something bigger.

CONSTRUCTION

Hunter's reputation for solidly built boats continues with the 707. Her hull is a Kevlar/glass composite satin-weave cloth, forming a solid laminate using polyester resin, and only in the cockpit floor is balsa used as a core material. Even then the construction is not really a sandwich, as the balsa and plywood core sections simply provide additional panel stiffness.

Her keel is an epoxy-coated iron bulb bolted onto the hull and reinforced by keel floors and backing plates.

Matthew Sheahan

Left, control lines are all led aft. Above, the outboard well lid is securely held forward of the mainsheet traveller when the engine is in use

Overall her specification is to a high standard and in their quest to provide an affordable boat, Hunter Boats must be praised for resisting the temptation to cut corners on the spec. Harken and Spinlock have supplied the hardware and the rigging is up to date using Dyform wire for the standing rigging and Dyneema for the running rigging.

A further advantage of her specification and layout is that she meets ORC Category 4 as standard, another useful feature for handicap regattas around the country.

UNDER POWER AND SAIL

As with many boats in this market, very little time is spent using the engine as she is so easy to handle under sail. But when you do need to resort to power, the 707 is one of the easiest in the backbreaking task of fitting the outboard.

Simply lift the well cover, lift the hinged plug and slot the 4hp outboard into the purpose-built support slots in the engine well – no clamps, no brackets and no grief. Because the well is in line and in front of the rudder, steerage under power is good.

For many, such benefits are a bonus. What matters is how she sails, and it is important to get a few things straight right from the start.

The 707 does not pretend to be the world's fastest sportsboat and she's not. She does not claim to be the most innovative day racer of the Nineties and she's not. But she is a rewarding, manageable, conventionally rigged boat, simple to handle yet with planing performance.

For our sailing trials the wind was around 10-12 knots and yet she still turned in upwind speeds of over five knots and downwind at over nine in the puffs. She's stiff, too, heeling to the breeze and staying there.

The 707 is not the lightest in her class, either, and yet she is not so heavy that winches are always necessary. She can, if required, be manhandled using just the winches as snubbers and the ratchets as supplied. When the going gets rougher, the winches and handles will no doubt help to keep her sail plan under control without requiring Herculean crew.

On the helm, she is light and, apart from a distinctive hum at seven knots, she has no particular quirks and should present no problem to anyone familiar with tiller-steered boats.

CONCLUSIONS

David Thomas and Hunter Boats have had their heart in small boats for many years and, in the current climate, some might say it was inevitable that the two should link up to produce a new small boat for the future.

Others may see the team as jumping on the bandwagon, yet this accusation is hotly contested by both Hunter Boats and the designer. Having sailed the 707 we are inclined to agree with them.

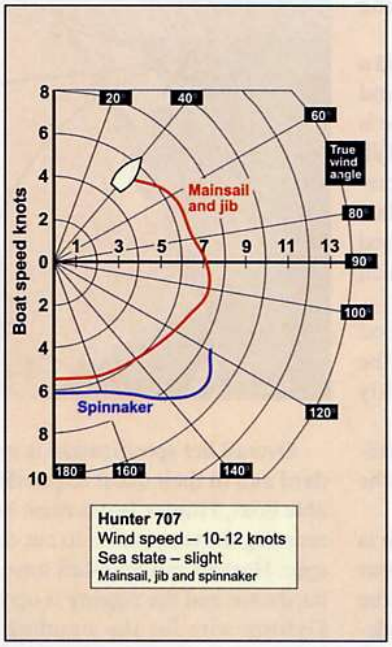
The 707 is designed for a particular market where more extreme designs like the Melges 24 are either too expensive or perceived to be too much of a handful for some crews. She aims to provide fast, simple one-design racing with few of the organisational headaches that inevitably accompany big boat racing – and at an affordable price.

At £14,000 complete, including sails, but excluding VAT (or £12,212 as a home completion boat), she has a significant advantage over much of her competition. ❑

Comfortable to sail and easy to handle, the 707 will suit a wide range of sailing abilities

Technical data

HUNTER 707



Ballast ratio 35.85

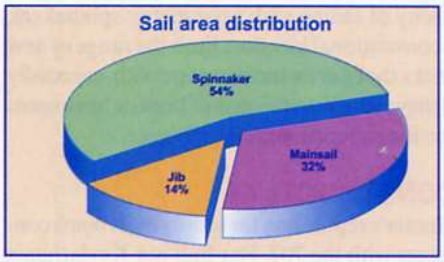
Stowage factor: 3ft³ per person for stowage of personal effects. Factor is shown as a percentage of total volume.
Pounds/inch (kg/cm) immersion: How much weight it takes to sink the boat parallel to DWL.
Prismatic coefficient: The ratio of volume to displacement to a volume of LWL and the maximum cross sectional area below the load waterplane. An indication of fineness or fullness of the hull.

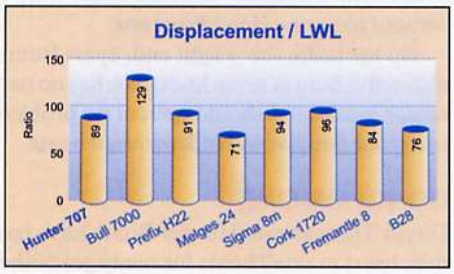
Polar diagram: Shows the optimum close-hauled angle to the true wind. Also shows speed attained on all courses. Important – consider in conjunction with the true wind speed during the test.
Sail area: displacement ratio: This ratio gives some indication of power available. Higher numbers = greater performance.

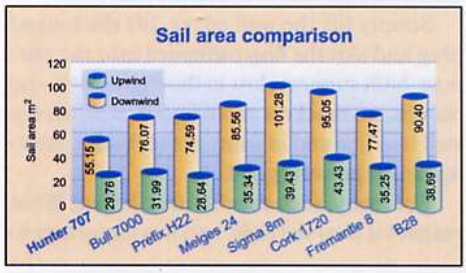
$$\frac{SA(ft^2)}{(Displacement\ (lb) \div 64)^{.666}}$$

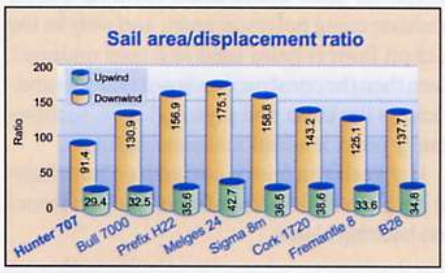
Ballast ratio: A comparison between displacement and the weight of the ballast.
Displacement:waterline length: Performance indicator. Low numbers = higher performance. (Displacement (lb) ÷ 2240) ÷ (0.01 x LWL (ft))³

Designed by: David Thomas
Built by: Hunter Boats, Hamble Point Marina, School Lane, Hamble, Southampton SO31 4NB. Tel: (01703) 452177. Fax: (01703) 456364.
Marketed by: As above.









Mini Sports boats – Technical data and comparisons

Boat name / Rating	LOA m	LOA ft in	LWL m	LWL ft in	Beam m	Beam ft in	Draught m	Draught ft in	Disp Kg	Disp lb	Ballast Kg	Ballast lb	Mainsail Area m²	Mainsail Area ft²	Genoa Area m²	Genoa Area ft²	Spin Area m²	Spin Area ft²	Ballast Ratio	Basic Price £	CHS
Hunter 707	7.09	23 3	6.91	22 8	2.49	8 2	1.50	4 11	1,058	2,332	379	836	20.74	223	9.30	100	34.41	370	35.85	£14,000	0.937*
Bull 7000	7.01	23 0	5.99	19 8	2.49	8 2	1.70	5 7	1,000	2,204	375	826	21.02	226	10.97	118	55.06	592	37.48	£19,517	0.988
Prefix H22	6.71	22 0	6.10	20 0	2.49	8 2	1.55	5 1	740	1,631	325	717	19.53	210	9.11	98	55.06	592	43.96	£12,000	0.965
Melges 24	7.32	24 0	6.71	22 0	2.49	8 2	1.53	5 0	771	1,700	300	661	23.62	254	11.72	126	61.94	666	38.88	£24,395	1.024
Sigma 8m	8.00	26 3	6.99	22 11	2.49	8 2	1.70	5 7	1,150	2,535	420	926	25.20	271	14.23	153	76.06	818	36.53	£22,000	1.025*
Cork 1720	8.00	26 3	7.09	23 3	2.49	8 2	1.60	5 3	1,220	2,689	615	1,355	26.04	280	17.39	187	69.01	742	50.39	£18,200	1.039
Fremantle 8	8.00	26 3	7.14	23 5	2.49	8 2	1.75	5 9	1,100	2,425	370	816	22.41	241	12.83	138	55.06	592	33.65	£24,617	1.006*
B28	8.51	27 11	7.59	24 11	2.64	8 8	1.65	5 5	1,200	2,645	550	1,212	22.88	246	15.81	170	67.5	726	45.82	£35,900@	1.056*

PRICES EX VAT, engine and trailer, but inc sails except for B28
@ Based on exchange rate US$1.56 *Symmetric spinnaker

The Chris Stimson-designed B28 combines sports boat performance with offshore capabilities

Fresh contenders

Matthew Sheahan considers some more recent additions to the sports boat market

"WHO NEEDS nine crew in a 38-footer to race round the Brambles Bank for two hours? It's daft!" said Peter Poland of Hunter Boats. Peter is rarely short of an opinion on current developments and he has an uncanny knack of being able to see through the politics and general chit-chat, to come up with a pertinent and simple solution.

Of course, with his own new model fresh out of the bag and fighting among the best of them, his comments were aimed at promoting Hunter's boat. But even so, this brief statement neatly summed up one of the most important factors in the development of the growing band of small, high performance keel boats.

Be it bridging the gap between the high performance dinghies and the world of keel boat racing, or simply offering a new experience to old hands , there can be no doubt that this new breed is still turning heads and opening wallets.

Having already tested and reported on several sports boats, as well as reviewing the market earlier this year, we thought we had dealt with the issue. But less than six months down the line, yet another wave of new designs has started to break through.

Cowes-based designer Christian Stimson was commissioned to produce an exciting 8.5m (28ft) sports boat suitable for participating in the Caribbean circuit of regattas such as Antigua Race Week, the Heineken regatta in St Martin and Tobago Race Week. This basic requirement meant that the boat had to be truly capable of sailing offshore if she was to be moved about the Caribbean chain.

Built by Blue Water Composites in St Lucia, the first of four **B28**s has a fractional rig from which either a masthead or fractional spinnaker can be flown from an over-length spinnaker pole, allowing either symmetrical or Whitbread 30-style asymmetrics to be flown.

High performance downwind is one thing, though; clawing your way upwind is another. But, fully aware of the 18-knot tradewinds and big Atlantic swell, Stimson has been careful to ensure that she performs well and is easy to handle in both directions. Having sailed her during Tobago Week this year, I can vouch for both her performance and handling.

At the other end of the size range, the first of Rob Humphreys' innovative **Prefix H22**s has been officially launched. Readers of Leading Edge (May 1995) will remember that this is the plywood boat that relies on laser-cut panels to allow the boat to be almost completely dry-assembled before bonding takes place.

Gary-John Norman

At 6.71m (22ft) LOA, she is one of the smaller boats in this market, but no less of a performer and a boat that certainly has a different concept behind her.

Because she is essentially a kit boat, there is a temptation to think of her as appealing exclusively to the home-build market, yet although many boats are expected to be built this way, a considerable number will be built or finished by professional boatbuilders.

Indeed, one of Humphreys' objectives with the Prefix process was to provide a boost for the small boatbuilder, a breed which has hitherto been progressively priced out of building and into repair and maintenance work.

Afloat she looks anything but a plywood boat, with no chines or odd looking sections as a compromise to ease of build. Under sail – well, you wouldn't expect a Humphreys boat to be short on performance and she isn't.

Fractionally rigged, with an asymmetric spinnaker flown from the hounds, she is sprightly, but well mannered and stiff with a ballast ratio of 44 per cent, second only to the rock solid Cork 1720.

Her light displacement of just 740kg makes her easy to handle on land as well, and ensures that most family saloon cars could tow her with ease.

Her design throughout is littered with clever ideas such as the winch post which ▷

Review

acts as the sailing winch (should you require it), as well as the means of lifting the keel. Two berths below decks, a cockpit tent, a false bottom cockpit sole and cockpit seating with backs are all features designed for added appeal. The equipment all comes with the boat.

Prices start at £5,705 ex VAT for the basic structure for home build, rising to around £12,000 ex VAT for a professionally built boat.

If that still all sounds a little pricey by the time you have the completed boat on the water, then it's been a long time since you last went to check out the prices of dinghies!

Topper International are, of course, one of the UK's biggest dinghy producers with one of the biggest ranges. In their position, they would certainly put you straight about current dinghy prices, but they would also be able to show you their **Bull 7000**.

Despite its name, this boat is not about to lock horns with Laser's 7000, as she is a 7.00m (23ft) sports boat. Designed in New Zealand by Greg Young, this fractionally rigged boat is to be built under licence by Topper International for distribution throughout Europe.

As a trailer sailer, there is little surprise to find that her maximum beam is 2.50m (8ft 2in), the European towing limit, and that she has a lifting keel and a deck-stepped mast.

But while this may be the norm for modern performance trailer sailers, her looks are quite distinctive. A fully battened, large roached mainsail on a well raked and backstayless mast gives her an aggressive, no-nonsense look. And yet she is clearly designed to appeal to a much wider audience than just hotshot speed freaks. Cruising for two was, to Young, as important as high speed racing with three.

With performance high on the list of features, a high volume coachroof, moulded sink and galley units as well as seating, cushions and even a folding table are not what you expect to see aboard this boat.

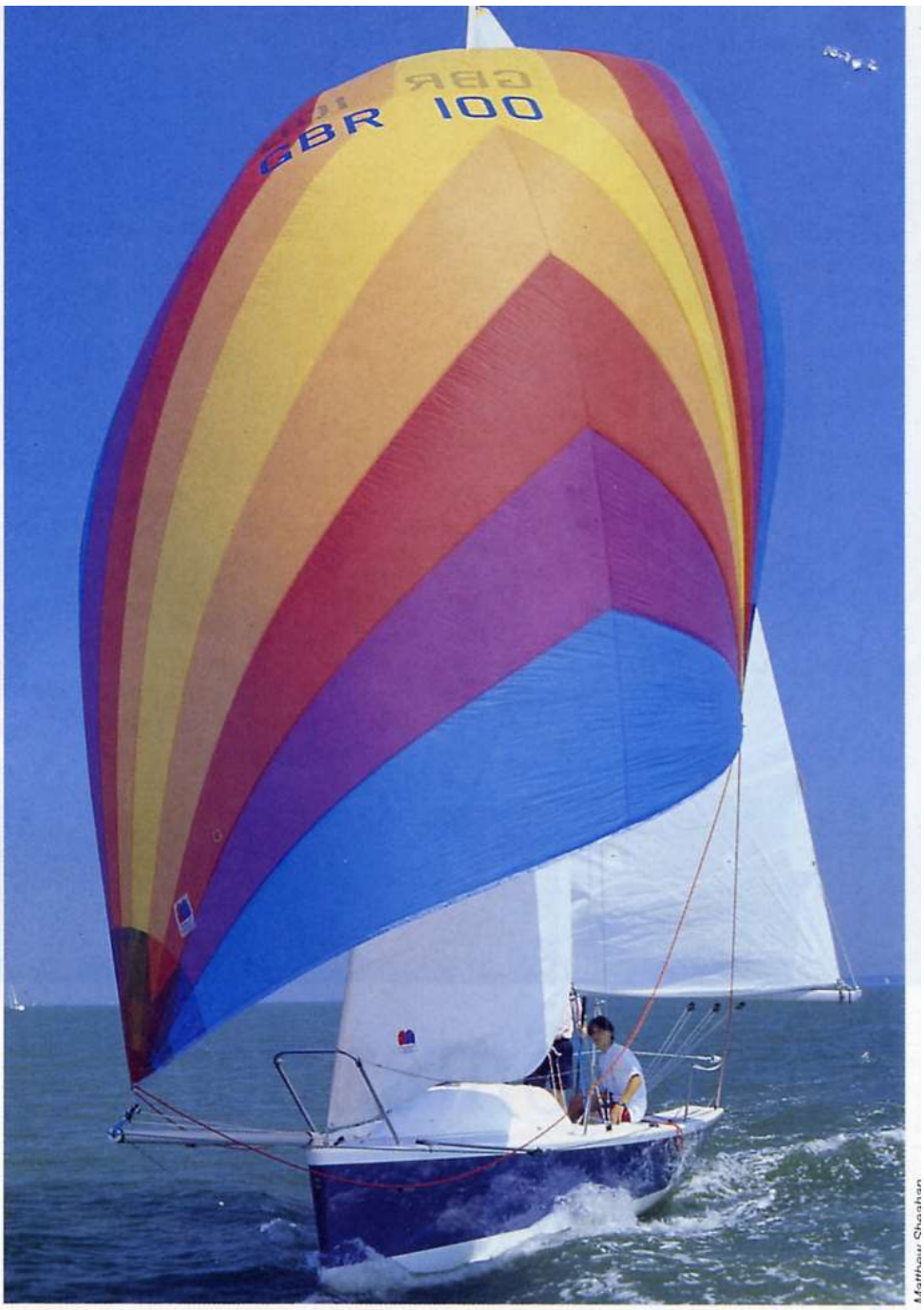
On deck she has an intricate moulding with angled side decks, twin companionway entrances and innovative deck-mounted horns that allow the 2m (6ft 7in) bowsprit to cant from side to side.

The Bull's spinnaker pole can be swung through 120° to improve downwind performance, especially in light winds at sub-planing speeds, off which a masthead or fractional kite can be flown.

One of the most frequently used arguments against some of the current breed of sports boats is the notion that asymmetrically-rigged boats may have an Achilles heel when it comes to running deep downwind and in coastal/tidal waters. Whether you agree or not, it is interesting to see that some boats such as the Bull and the Prefix H22 are addressing this problem.

Topper aim to keep the cost below £20,000 ex VAT including sails, and with Topper's undeniable marketing strength, it will be interesting to see how she fares in the market.

But as each new model is launched, the one thing you can be sure of, from both salesmen and sailors, is tales of simplicity, stability and double-figure speeds. And at the very least, you can be sure that, compared with a 38-footer, this means many more laps of the Brambles Bank. ❑



Matthew Sheahan

Rob Humphreys' Prefix H22 looks good, sails well and uses a novel build technique

Malcolm White

The Bull 7000 is Topper's first venture into the keelboat market