

Spirit 46

From the tip of her bow to the acres of 'wasted' overhanging deck space and lovely counter stern, the Spirit suggests an extravagant approach to yachting, where nothing is compromised. The hull is epoxy and Speedstrip, finished in International's enamel, the result totally unique

Look at the Spirit 46's profile drawing and you would be forgiven for thinking she is a 6-Metre or a skerry cruiser from Scandinavia. Without seeing the underbody you might imagine a long, deep keel – indeed a traditional shape to set off what is unmistakably a classic profile. In fact this is a 14m (46ft) flying machine, not a 30-footer (9m), with an up-to-the-minute fin and bulb keel, a carbon-fibre Proctor mast and kicker, fully-battened mainsail and a performance that makes nonsense of the old 'square root of waterline length x 1.4 speed' formula.

Sean McMillan and Mick Newman, the designers, eschew computer screen and software for the drawing board, building elegant shapes the old way based on what they, not what the computer wants. In doing so they fly in the face of convention, designing yachts that they like, coincidentally finding that they appeal to others, rather than trying to design to fill a perceived need.

The Spirit 46 was built alongside the 33 and 37 at a farm near Saxmundham in Suffolk, by a small team working in red cedar Speedstrip and the WEST epoxy and glass. Yellow cedar is extensively used for structural components, with a little judicious carbon thrown in only where strictly necessary. The finish is by International.

Her Swedish owner previously commissioned a sophisticated steel 55-footer (16.7m) which, even before she was

completed, he began to suspect might be too complex. And so it proved. It explains a great deal about his choice of yacht to know that he races a Ducati motorcycle, drives a Mercedes sports car and turned up on Spirit Yachts' doorstep during the building of his boat on a BMW tourer.

The owner gave McMillan and Newman a free hand. The prime criteria were beauty and speed. Headroom, for example, was not in the equation. In any case, as McMillan explained, headroom in a boat of this type would only begin to look in keeping at an overall length of 21.3m (70ft).

'We'd rather make a simple boat more complex, than vice versa,' was how they explained the philosophy behind the boat. While not quite pared to the bone, where would one normally find a spirit stove, portable head and a tiny Yanmar 9hp diesel – turning a two-blade folding prop – in a yacht whose waterline length is a shade under (10.3m) 34ft?

It does mean that the yacht is remarkably light, her cedar and epoxy hull easily lifted by three men, while all-up she weighs around 3.3 tonnes. The long, lean hull is driven, also easily, by a big-roached mainsail and roller jib measuring 66.7m² (719sqft). The carbon mast represents a weight saving of 30kg over alloy, but at that height above the centre of gravity, the saving in lead below is prodigious. The top section is swept back to allow a straight leech for much of the high aspect sail's height. It stows in lazy jacks.





The keel carries a flattened bulb for maximum effect and to encourage the high/low pressure separation of water-flow across the keel. Both keel and rudder have vortex tips to reduce turbulence and an end plate reduces the rudder's tendency to stall at very high or low speeds.

In a day-long test sail on the River Orwell, Suffolk, in winds ranging from light to moderate, she accelerated like a shark and steered like an angel, without ever feeling overpressed or hard-mouthed. With a ballast ratio of 60 per cent and such infinitesimal control, she was unbroachable. At 12 knots the Spirit 46 was arrow steady, the tiller, if anything, becoming

more stable rather like a gyroscope. But pull up a few inches and the response was immediate. McMillan and his partner had the day before taken a few millimetres off the rudder to achieve that classic 'half a bag of sugar's worth' of weather helm, unbalancing the semi-balanced spade by a fraction. The result: a driver's machine.

The first boat was fitted with the innovative Secumar winches which were not a success in such highly-loaded applications. They have been replaced with Andersens.

The rig relies on running backstays for much of its support, which alone makes it a yacht for experienced hands. The

The fully-battened, full-roached mainsail gives the Spirit awesome power. Easily driven, she winds up to full speed within seconds

11-15 METRES
36-50 FEET

RIGHT: With simple Origo spirit stove and a cool-box opposite, the Spirit's facilities and accommodation are simple, spartan and in keeping. FAR RIGHT: A concession to luxury is the bronze chromed hatch, and hang the weight



carbon, twin-spreader rig and sitka spruce boom – strengthened along its perimeter edges with a 3mm band of carbon – carries a Hood, cream Dacron, straight roached, fully-battened mainsail that generates awesome power.

Below, the Spirit is straightforward: twin sinks and keel-cooled fridge to port, Electrolux spirit stove to starboard. Two berths flank the centreline, with a simple mahogany table set solidly amidships. The bunk backs hinge up to increase width and provide stowage, while forward one can just make comfortable use of the portable head to port and washbasin opposite. A V-berth forward completes the accommodation in a length that, ordinarily, might swallow a master stateroom and two double guest cabins.

The interior is modestly finished in white varnished 4mm mahogany panelling on 6mm plywood backing. Forward, the speed strip is left varnished, while elsewhere it carries a coat of white gloss enamel. The 12mm teak-on-ply cabin-top is broken only by a chrome-on-bronze hatch – heavy perhaps, but a touch of quality in a boat where one gets the impression that every fitting and detail has been the subject of close debate between owner and yard.

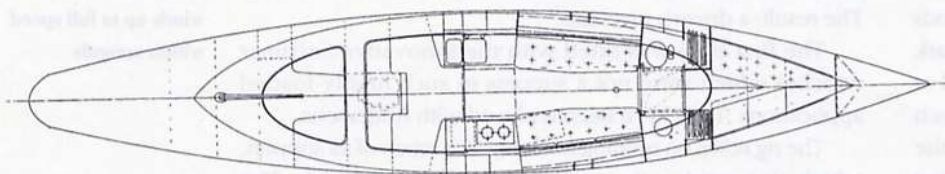
As a gesture towards comfort on a bitter morning, a Dickinson Newport solid fuel stove sits in a hand-made, tiled alcove to starboard, then it's back to the utilitarian with a stack of blue and white enamelled plates and mugs. A hand-held GPS swings out on a hinged bracket into the cockpit,

and that, more or less, is it.

Of standing headroom, naturally, there is none, but one soon gets used to going below and sitting down. Three oval portholes aside shed light into the accommodation and onto the light Majilite cushions, beneath which there is minimal locker space.

The main cockpit would seat three in comfort, and carries the sail bin for the asymmetric spinnaker, two lockers aft for the twin 55Ahr batteries, with excellent access to the engine water-filter and Vetus fuel tank. The central box houses the Yanmar 1GM10, driving what appeared to be too coarse a pitched propeller to our mind, as the engine was revving out at 2,500rpm. Even then, with the engine making barely 6hp, the Spirit was achieving six knots, as if to emphasise how easily driven a yacht with an overall length of 14m (46ft) and 2.53m (8ft) beam can be.

Certainly a yacht for the purist and one that takes simplicity and the search for speed to the extreme – for this owner it is clearly the antidote to over-sophistication and complexity. While other 46-footer (14m) owners are still rounding up crew, this one will be half way down the harbour, under sail, and in Costa Smeralda well before the weather breaks – and having a good time in the process.



S P I R I T 4 6

LOA	14m (46ft)
LWL	10.3m (33ft 10in)
Beam	2.53m (8ft 4in)
Draught	1.98m (6ft 6in)
Displacement	3.3 tonnes
Ballast ratio	60 per cent
Sail area (working)	66.7m ² (719sqft)
Design	In-house
Builder	Spirit Yachts