

Jack Holt (1912–1995) was one of the most prolific designers of performance dinghies of all time and made a massive contribution to post-war sailing. With early support from *Yachting World* magazine, he pioneered hard-chine hulls designed for building in marine plywood by DIY sailors and professional alike.

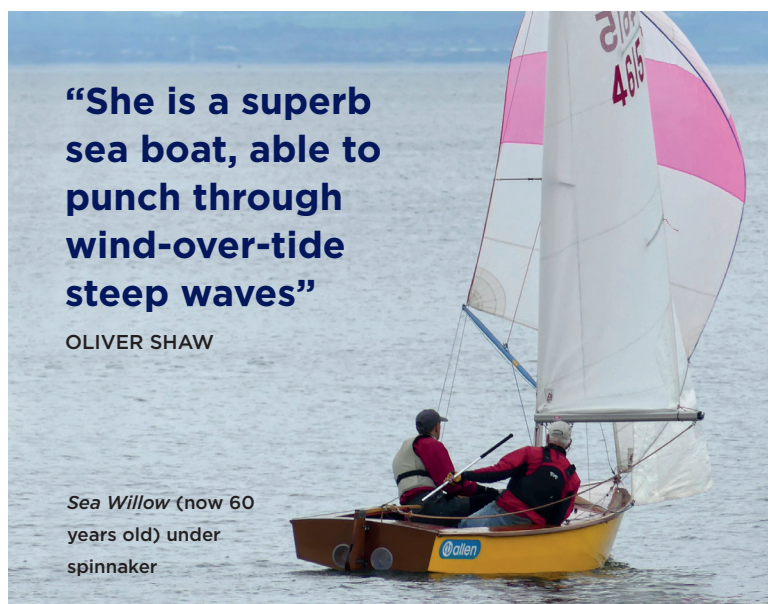
Holt's earliest design – the Cadet – dates from 1947 and remains an international youth trainer to this day. More than 8,000 have been built. Then, in 1949, he came up with one of Britain's most popular and versatile dinghies of all time. Originally sponsored by *Yachting World* magazine for home construction, this 'General Purpose' hard-chine marine plywood dinghy was named the GP14 and aimed squarely at family sailing, rowing, motoring (with a small outboard) and trailing behind a family car. It rapidly evolved into a hugely popular one-design racing class with more than 14,000 now built.

A hyper-efficient association (gp14.org) runs the class, organising extensive nationwide and international regattas, social events, cruises, and even instructional events and classes for newcomers and novices.

Stephen Parry – past vice-president then secretary of the class association – explained the evolution of the GP14, telling me: “The basic design remained little changed until the 1970s, when a glass-fibre version was introduced. The only significant change was the introduction of built-in side tank buoyancy. The sail plan was modified in the early years, but the size and shape of the main, genoa and spinnaker have been fixed since the 1960s, and metal spars have been accepted since that time. In 1992, the cockpit design was substantially changed to create a self-draining hull and much more up-to-date appearance. This version of the boat is known as the Series Two. The shape of the hull and its weight remain unchanged from the Series One.”

Stephen added that he had campaigned his own 1960-vintage boat for many years before giving her a major overhaul prior to the 2016 World Championships in Barbados, carrying out approved weight-saving modifications and shedding 50lb (22kg).

Oliver Shaw, who runs the association's cruising side, said: “The ‘cosmetic’ and interior design of the boat has developed since 1949, but the hull remains exactly the same shape, and the rig and the foils have had only very limited and strictly controlled development. The result is a seriously good racing dinghy class in which the older boats can sail competitively to the highest levels.”



“She is a superb sea boat, able to punch through wind-over-tide steep waves”

OLIVER SHAW

Sea Willow (now 60 years old) under spinnaker

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANGELA CRAGGS

GP14

LOA

14ft (4.3m)

BEAM

5ft (1.5m)

DRAUGHT

3in (7.5cm) to 3ft 1in (94cm)

WEIGHT

293lb (133kg)

SAIL AREA

139sq ft (12.9m²)

Proving the point, Oliver told me Mike Senior had won the 2018 Worlds in a home-built boat (No 13417) that was 23 years old, while David Warden-Owen had won the 1970 UK Nationals in boat No 830, which was pre-1956. He added that championship honours were shared between wooden and plastic boats, and that – thanks to modern materials and lower density timber – newly built GP14s tend to be slightly underweight, so need corrector weights to meet class rules. But one thing never changes: as past association president Ian Sinclair was fond of saying, the GP14 is a very easy boat to sail, but a very difficult boat to sail really well at the highest level of competition.

On the cruising front – which is now Oliver Shaw's main interest – he appraised the design: “She is a superb sea boat, very forgiving when sailed competently, able to punch through wind-over-tide steep waves when necessary, able to be sailed to windward even in very adverse conditions, and with a good load-carrying capacity.”

During the GP14's golden jubilee year in 2000, the class produced an anthology of cruises saying: “In 1959, a member sailed singlehanded from Southend to Calais and followed this in 1962 with a trip from Dover to Ostend. In 1963 others sailed round the Isle of Man, while in the next two years, young members from Lee-on-the-Solent sailed to Weymouth and Dungeness respectively. A crossing from the Solent to Barfleur in 1966 shows just how ambitious these early cruisers were. Others have made crossings of the Irish Sea and a circumnavigation of the Isle of Mull.” And Roger Seal once sailed a GP14 from Cardiff to New Quay via the hazards of Saint David's head. All are amazing adventures – but perhaps not to be encouraged in today's health and safety era.

The joy of the GP14 is its versatility. Old wooden boats make enjoyable restoration projects, and can then compete against brand new ones. GRP versions make durable school and training yachts that are a pleasure to sail – and if you feel like really splashing out, you can buy a brand new one in GRP, FRP or gleaming wood.

Two on the market



£3,500 GP14 sail number 13876. Excellent condition and well maintained. gp14.org



£500 Bell Woodworking boat built in the 1950s. No 6221. Well maintained and mainly cruised. gp14.org