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THE OLD SAYING THAT “IF IT LOOKS right, it probably is right” applies to the Nimble 24. This is a canoe yawl in the English Rob Roy tradition started in the late 18th century. Today’s 24-foot version of this boat is a good-looking, capable coastal daysailer and overnighter. This is not to say that longer cruises or wider waters are not within her capabilities,

but she is more suited to cruises of limited duration in near-shore waters. The main reason for this is her lack of internal volume and headroom.

In the Nimble 24, designer Ted Brewer has created a sweet-looking, sweet-sailing boat with low freeboard, a handsome sheerline, and double ends. To have increased the headroom belowdecks would have severely

detracted from the beauty of this classic design.

The first thing you notice when stepping aboard is her stability. She is not overly tippy or sensitive to a person of my size stepping directly on the gunwale. The next thing you see is all the beautiful bronze hardware — cleats, portlights, and chocks — that is standard on this boat. It is obvious that the builder, Jerry Koch, took great pride in his product and did not skimp on the hardware. This high quality in materials and workmanship is repeated in the glasswork, the teak joiner work, the hardware installation, and the overall fit and finish of the boat.

Sailers and trawlers

Ted Brewer and Jerry Koch were the designer and builder, respectively, of the Nimble and Nomad series of boats. These hulls doubled as sailboats and trawlers, depending on their deckhouse configuration. They range from the Nimble 20 and 24 through the Nomad series of trawlers, which run 20, 24, and 26 feet. The size dif-

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ference was gained by simply cutting the Nimble 20 in half and adding the appropriate midship section.

The queen of the line, the Nimble 30, is a true round-bottomed hull that is not readily trailerable. The builder is quoted as having said that the rest of the line can be towed behind an average sedan. When we pulled the Nimble 24 test boat from the water, we used a 1-ton van. I would not like to do it with anything less.

Tesseract, our test boat, is the centerboard model with a stub keel and centerboard trunk. She has a draft of 1 foot 1 inch, board up, to 4 feet 2 inches, board down. An offshore version with a fixed-keel configuration was also built. That model has a draft of 2 feet 6 inches. Sail area is 275

Photos by Jim Schmitt

Nimble 24

She's a trailerable, characterful, shallow-draft yawl with classic features

by Bill Sandifer



Tesseract, Bob Dumaine's Nimble 24 yawl, has all the right stuff in 24 feet, on facing page. However, she is not an "instant boat," at right. Launching and haulout require a fairly good effort, and the best tow vehicle for this boat when fully loaded is a full-sized truck or SUV with a towing package.

square feet, divided into main, jib, and mizzen. The quality of the standard hardware is excellent, and more was available as an option, all of equally good quality. If I were selecting a Nimble 24, I'd go for the centerboard model for its ability to anchor in shallow water.

Other than a GPS, fathometer, and safety equipment, there is little extra that one might want aboard. There is adequate stowage for a crew of two, but a crew of four would be pushing the envelope for more than perhaps an overnight, and that is a real "perhaps." I can see where they would all sleep, but how they would get out of the bunks is another matter. A single-hander would have no problem and could easily cruise the Bahamas in this seaworthy small craft. Because it's trailerable, this boat opens up most cruising areas: you could tow her to Maine, the Chesapeake, the North Channel, or Puget Sound. She could even go to Alaska via the Inside Passage as long as a capable crew is carefully watching the weather, of course.

In spite of the quality of the boat overall, Bob Dumaine, the owner of our test yawl, is baffled by broken hinges for the cockpit seat cover over the area molded in for the outboard fuel tank. Apparently these hinges were through-bolted to the deck before the deck was installed on the hull. This makes it faster to assemble the boat, but the owner suffers from this shortcut in the end. The Nimble has quality bronze hinges, but those on Bob's boat broke just inboard of the hinge pin, and there is now no way to unbolt the outboard section to replace them. This may be quibbling a bit, but it would be nice if you could get at the fasteners for all deck hardware when replacement is required. Bob is considering cutting a 4-inch diameter hole in the vertical outboard face of the gas-tank locker in order to reach the bolts and then closing the hole with



one of the screw-in access hatches available on the market. This may be a future project.

Getting under way

Under way the Nimble 24 is easily singlehanded, but with two of us aboard, I handled the lines while Bob backed out of the slip and turned toward the open Gulf. The boat has a 9.9-hp, 4-stroke Yamaha outboard, but the Nimble 24 was also built with a small diesel inboard. The price difference between these options was \$6,300.

Once clear of the jetties, I removed the sail ties and Bob easily raised sail from the cockpit. The sails are a 100 percent jib, full main, and full mizzen. Bob plans to add roller furling and a 135-percent genoa for a little more sail area and ease in singlehanded. We settled down in the comfortable cockpit for a daysail in light air.

Because this is a trailerable keel/centerboard boat with a fin-type centerboard in a low trunk, she really does not point well until the board is fully down. The bottom of the hull is interesting in that it is nearly flat athwartship, with a stub keel and fore-and-aft rocker similar to a sharpie's. Without the board, there is just the stub keel to keep her from sliding sideways through the water when the sails

are up. The original Rob Roy yawls were built of wood and were round-bottomed. They would have had even less internal room, but they may have had a better grip on the water.

Ted Brewer says the round-bottomed yawls were a little tippier than the Nimble. He felt that such a small, light yacht needed more form stability than was available with the round bottom so he designed the hard-chine sharpie shape. The fore-and-aft rocker was added for hull strength, not aesthetics. Earlier, Ted had designed the Rob Roy 23 yawl with a round bottom similar to the original

"This boat opens up most cruising areas: you could tow her to Maine, the Chesapeake, the North Channel, or Puget Sound. She could even go to Alaska via the Inside Passage..."

English yawls, so he has had experience with both types of bottoms.

With this flat-bottom configuration, going to windward in a steep chop produces a slapping noise when the boat encounters a wave, but this does not translate into physical motion and it is not really objectionable. To compensate for the pounding, the boat performs well off the wind and would probably surf in appropriate-sized seas. Bob and I had several hours of enjoyable off-wind sailing followed by a short motorsail to windward to gain harbor.

Belowdecks

The bunks are 6 feet 8 inches long. The Porta Potti is adequate, although the

head area is cramped. The boat has a water tank of about 20 gallons, a sink, and a pump. There is room for a stove, though with the limited headroom I think I'd cook in the cockpit with a propane grill suspended overboard.

I would think that a person of my size — 6 feet and 200 pounds — would get very tired of crouching belowdecks. In the cockpit or in the companionway it is, of course, possible to stand upright. In foul weather, however, it becomes a sitting-on-the-bunk exercise to get one's pants on. This in no way detracts from the appropriateness of the boat for its intended use but is simply a statement of fact.

Trailerability

By definition, this is a trailerable sailboat, but it is quite big and heavy. With a beam of 8 feet 3 inches and a length overall of 27 feet 3 inches, this is a good-sized vessel. Its weight is advertised at about 3,000 pounds. Add



“After our sail, it was time to put her on the trailer and take her home to Bob’s house. This exercise took two experienced people a couple of hours ...”

assorted personal gear, such as an ice chest, water, fuel tanks, sails, and other options, and the actual weight may come close to 4,000 pounds. It requires at least a four-wheeled trailer with surge or electric brakes. To tow it, you need a V6 or V8 engine in a full-sized truck or SUV. A vehicle rated by the manufacturer to tow 5,000 pounds with a towing package — transmission oil cooler, frame hitch, and oversized brakes — is the best bet for towing the Nimble 24.

After our sail, it was time to put her on the trailer and take her home to Bob's house. This exercise took two experienced people a couple of hours

to accomplish as Bob needed to wash the bottom, remove the sails, drop the masts, and get her ready for the trip home. With a little less of an agenda and more help, the time from trailer to water or water to trailer could be cut to less than an hour, but this is still no “instant boat” to launch. The boat floated onto the trailer nicely with no need to winch it aboard. Winching it onto a trailer would be a lot of work.

Conclusion

I like this boat. She is an excellent daysailer or overnight cruiser for a party of two. Ted Brewer has done an excellent job by creating a capable, beautiful small boat that would be a joy to own and sail.

Unfortunately, the Nimble company recently ceased operations with the death of Jerry Koch. The Nimble 24 sells used for around \$15,000 and is good value for the money. I think it will hold its value in today's economy. 



Down below, the Nimble 24 has crouching headroom, at top, plus a 20-gallon water tank, a Porta Potti, and 6-foot bunks. The rudder, at left, for the centerboard model is a curious affair with a pop-up section. The mizzen mast, tiller, outboard, and boomkin, at right.



Rob Roys, Nimbles, and Nomads

Designer Ted Brewer remembers builder Jerry Koch with fondness

by Ted Brewer

IN EARLY 1982 I WAS APPROACHED BY JERRY KOCH, WHO ASKED me to come up with a unique small boat design unlike anything then in production. My mind immediately went to the small and charming English Humber yawls of the late 19th century, and I suggested that this type of yacht would find a niche in the market. Jerry was not familiar with the type. I drew up a rough sketch of a trailerable version, mailed it off to him, and awaited his comments.

It was an instant hit with Jerry. I was immediately commissioned to design the boat that became the Rob Roy 23. That name was based on the yacht featured in the 1867 John MacGregor book, *The Voyage Alone in the Yawl Rob Roy*. Jerry Koch was actually more entrepreneur than boatbuilder at that time and arranged for the little yawls to be built by Marine Concepts in Florida. Eventually he tired of this arrangement, sold the rights to the design to the builder, and started his own production shop, Nimble Boats.

In 1984, Jerry came to me for a new design. This time he had much bigger ideas. He wanted another Humber canoe yawl, but this time he wanted a 30-footer, the Nimble 30. He also wanted a much smaller boat to start the line and, in 1985, commissioned the Nimble 20 design before the ink on the 30's drawings had dried. The plug and molds were still in the works.

In the meantime, I'd been sailing my own Rob Roy 23 in the San Juan Islands, and my first thought was that a 20-foot version was too small and would be on the tender side. I'd taken my little yacht through some rather heavy weather and, while quite able, she was not an ideal craft for a beginning family. The Rob Roy had a fairly narrow, round-bilged canoe hull. One way to increase stability is to widen the beam, another is to use a more powerful hull form. The narrow beam was easily answered by adding 10 inches to the 6-foot 11-inch beam of the Rob Roy, and the hull form was modified to that of a more powerful, hard-chine, arc-bottom sharpie. That solved the form stability part of the problem, and the tiny Nimble 20

proved to be a rugged little cruiser for a couple or a small (very small) family.

Quick and easy answer

Eventually, Jerry wanted a new boat somewhere between the Nimble 30 and 20 in size. The problem was that Nimble Boats was always one step short of Chapter 11 and could not afford completely new tooling. So, in 1987, the quick and easy answer was to stretch the Nimble 20. That boat was actually 20 feet 10 inches; by cutting one of the hulls in two amidship and pulling it apart about 3½ feet, we arrived at a 24-foot 3-inch LOA for the new boat. At the same time, we let the deckline follow its natural curve to the new midships, and that increased the beam to about 8 feet 3 inches. Notice that I said "about," as I don't think that anyone ever

measured the final result. I certainly didn't!

Nimble Boats then proceeded to fair up the new "24" and ready it for use as a plug for a new mold. I returned to the drawing board to work up a new deck plan (based on the 20's deck mold of course), a new layout, and a larger sail plan.

Jerry was always a man with ideas, so we also did a deep-keel version and, later that year, I was drawing up the pilothouse version of the 24 that became the Nimble Arctic. The Nimble 20 also spawned the Vagabond "trawler," and her 24-foot sister was later developed into the Nomad trawler. Finally the Arctic was enlarged with a longer pilothouse to become the Kodiak. So that little Nimble 20

had a great many descendants over the years.

My last design for Jerry was the 29-foot Wanderer trawler/motorsailer in the early 1990s. Jerry Koch passed away last fall, far too young. He was, undoubtedly, the most maddening, annoying, obstinate, inventive client ever... always coming up with some new and wild idea for me to translate into a working design. But we had a lot of laughs and a lot of great times together for more than 20 years. I loved him, and I miss the crazy devil. 



Nimble 24 yawl

Designer: Ted Brewer

LOA: 27 feet 3 inches

LOD: 24 feet 6 inches (excluding rudder and sprit)

LWL: 23 feet 5 inches

Beam: 8 feet 3 inches

Draft: board up, 1 foot 1 inch; board down 4 feet 2 inches

Displacement: 2,800-3,000 pounds

Ballast: 1,100 pounds

Sail area: 280 square feet (sloop); 275 square feet (yawl)