

What is a Cherub?

Its a 2 person twelve foot racing dinghy with spinnaker and trapeze. Great. That really tells you a lot doesn't it! Perhaps as good a description as any - at least for northern hemisphere sailors - would be to call the Cherub a baby 18 foot skiff, although the Cherub is more moderate, and doesn't have quite the same glorious area of sail as the 18 footer, and its rig pales into insignificance compared to the magnificent excess carried by the Antipodean Twelve Foot Skiffs! Originally designed in New Zealand by John Spencer, Cherubs are sailed mainly in Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain.

(photo - Hamo Thorneycroft)

Suddenly it seems the world is full of "high performance" Classes. One Trapeze, two trapezes, asymmetric spinnakers, you name it. Is the Cherub just another one? The answer is quite firmly no. The Cherub stands apart from the majority in a lot of ways. The Cherub is the lightest 2 person class sailed in any numbers in Britain. The all up sailing weight is less than the hull weight of many of the current one manufacturer one-designs.

It suits a lower crew weight than any other Trapeze boat, with the exception of the new Youth trainers. No other performance class has had as many women helming and crewing on equal terms at the top level, including National & World Championship Winners. Husband/Wife Boyfriend/Girlfriend Brother/Sister combinations of crew are common. Perhaps the best known of these was Nicola Bethwaite crewed by Julian Bethwaite, World Champions in 1976.

The boat has evolved to need skill and speed to sail it fast, not weight and brute strength. Despite this the boat suits a reasonably large range of crew weights, with combined weights from 16 to 24 stone having been seen in the top ten in recent years. The ideal is probably 17 to 22 stone. With the current rash of boats with adjustable racks it is interesting to note that, like most development classes, crew weight is not as significant a factor as in a one design, and some of the lightest crews are the fastest in heavy weather.



It's bloody quick offwind. Its not sufficiently overcanvassed and too short to be very quick in light airs, especially upwind, but the downwind speed in a decent breeze is exceptional. Exceptional as in having, in our experience, a higher top speed than any UK designed class. Cherubs have never been notorious for hanging about in a decent breeze, having an excellent power to weight ratio and not too much wetted surface. Recent analysis of video footage has produced good evidence for Cherubs hitting anything up to 25 knots in bursts, which is pretty fair by anyone's standards, but of course maintaining that sort of speed over a measured course for a real speed record is another matter.

Learn to really handle a boat well in a Cherub. Iain Murray, Amanda Wilmot, Rob Brown, Gordon Lucas and numerous other top Antipodean sailors spent part of their teens sailing Cherubs. Why is it countries as small as Australia and New Zealand produce such a large proportion of the world's best Sailors? Because they learn racing and boat handling in Cherubs and other similar boats.

Its a Development Class, not a One Design. This means that every few years you have to get a new boat because the old one is no longer fast enough. This distinguishes it from all the popular One Designs, where every few years you have to get a new boat because the old one is no longer fast enough. Still, at least with the Development Class each new boat is faster than the one before.

The Cherub is a class for designers and builders as well as sailors. One of the aims of the class is to provide an inexpensive platform where prospective designers can try out ideas. What do the names Bethwaite, Farr, Murray, Howlett & Bowler have in common (other than being amongst the world's leading Sailboat designers and engineers)? The answer is that they have all designed Championship winning Cherubs. The majority boats have always been homebuilt, and the class has pioneered home building in foam sandwich in the UK.

Do you really believe that anyone can sit down with a clean piece of paper and get a boat exactly right? If you do you've never sailed a Laser, an Enterprise, an ISO, or just about any other one design. Development classes inevitably evolve into better boats, and if the boat doesn't suit you just change it until it does. Do you really want a Cunningham "purchase" consisting of little loops and knots in rope just because the designer got it wrong?

Finally, and most important of all, its great fun to sail, especially if you aren't afraid of getting wet.

Dimensions

Hull

- Length Overall & WL 3.7m (12 ft 1.5")
- Weight of Bare hull 50kg (110lbs)
- Max. Beam 1.8m (5 ft 11")

Spars

- Mast around 22 ft (6.7m)

Sails

- Total area main and jib 12.5 sq m. (135 sq.ft.)
- Spinnaker 15sq.m. (160 sq. ft.) nominal

The UK Cherub & The International Cherub

(photo - Champion)

At the moment the UK Cherub is an appreciably different boat to the NZ/Australian version. The UK have simplified rules which permit a narrower waterline and a less restricted sail plan with the option of a bowsprit and thus an asymmetric spinnaker. The 1996 International Championships in Sydney were won by an Australian built and owned UK rules Cherub. A number of these have been built, and are being marketed by Dinghy Sports in Australia. A recent change in the UK rules also changes the beam restriction, making slightly wider boats more practical, and slightly more sail area in main and jib.



The latest news is that asymmetric spinnakers will be adopted by the New Zealand Association in 1996/97 and almost certainly by the Australian Association in 1997/98. Narrower hulls are not being looked at with such enthusiasm, which is a pity since the narrow low rise of floor boats now designed in the UK are in our experience far superior to the wider high rise of floor boats in moderate conditions, and also easier to handle in a breeze. The Australian preference for a one-design sailplan is also a stumbling block to re-unification.

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