

Impulse 21

Too good to be true, the jaded reader might mutter about a boat that promises top-flight performance yet demands only a minimum of athletic effort. "The responsiveness of a dinghy, the stability of a swimming float, and the comfort of a lawn chair!" Right!

However, in reality the Impulse 21 is sailboat enough to make claims like these seem almost modest. Bill Cook designed her. His International Off-shore Rule designs have been in and around major winner's circles during the past decade and have helped blaze a trail to the top for that lightweight, fractionally rigged, dinghy-hulled style of ocean racer that is today's boat to beat. It may not seem strange, then, that the key ingredients in the Impulse 21's performance under sail are light weight, a controllable fractional rig, and a shallow-rocker hull with a gradual run aft and a modulated fore-and-aft distribution of waterline beam.

But the Impulse 21 is neither an IOR racer nor a racing dinghy. She is the answer to Impulse Marine president Harris Clark's commission: "fast and sophisticated, yet very stable and easy to sail." Cook's stab at turning that impossible dream into a boat began "not by sitting in my office and being clever, but by talking with sailors, racers, builders, designers, and club officials." From this quest came a smoothly self-tacking jib, a dinghy-style spinnaker launcher, and some clever innovations like her cockpit console (which works beautifully to centralize and simplify controlling sails), the back porch transom, plus a commitment to making her ramp launchable from her trailer. "I made her weather deck as comfortable as possible (with a radiused and clean curve for your legs), but I've found that sitting on the cockpit sole is pretty



comfortable, too," Cook says.

And then Cook made her stable. He gave the 21 "something like twice" the form stability of many boats her size, primarily by extending her waterline beam. He flared her topsides somewhat to increase the holding power of crew weight from the weather rail. And he gave the boat a 600-pound keel (40 percent of her total displacement) and made it thicker at the bottom than at the top to get as much lead as low as possible. Class rules prohibit hiking, but racing or not, the 21's great reserves of stability add a great deal to the pleasure of sailing her. Still, she is far from being a "lead mine."

Four generations of Johnsons have built sailboats near the Johnson Boat Works in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, and the craftiness and pride that have helped them turn out blue ribbon scows are focused now on the Impulse 21. Nytex and Divinycell foam are the materials; remarkable uniformity, mirror fairness, and sailorly innovation

(as in the 21's no-rasp nonskid) characterize the results. The tiny cuddy might house a sleeper in a pinch, but it is intended only to offer lockable onboard stowage.

—R.R.

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LOA	21'
LWL	18'
Beam	8'
Draft	3'5"
Displacement	1,300 lbs
Ballast	600 lbs
Sail area	208 sq ft

