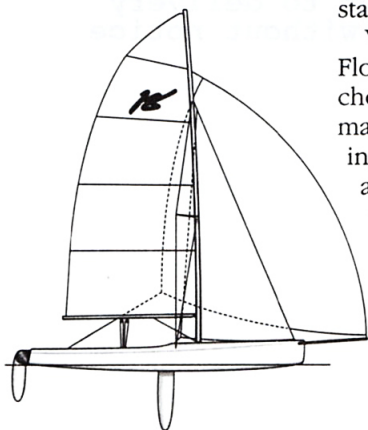


New Boats

JOHNSON 18: NEW FAMILY FLYER

Edited by Charles Mason

Light but durable, the Johnson 18 is expected to be able to race for many years without losing its lines. Fast under sail, it's also stable. When it is motionless in the water, a 175-pounder can walk the side deck right up to the bow without worrying about a capsiz



Skip Johnson, who manages the Johnson Boat Works on White Bear Lake, Minnesota, believes there is a need for a couples racing boat that will perform as well as an E Scow but is also suitable for sailing in more open water than is normally found on inland lakes. Three prototypes and a lot of computer modeling by designer Rodger Martin have produced this new entry into the family-racing circuit.

The idea is to have a light boat (it weighs 430 pounds) with a hull that is strong enough to stand up to a routine of heavy racing for many years. The hull is built in a split mold and vacuum-bagged with a lay-up schedule that consists of a vinylester gel-coat, type 908 Nyltex knitted glass, type 75 Klegecell core, and another layer of glass for the inside skin. A round and hollow spine of E-glass runs the full length of the boat's cockpit floor from bow to open transom, giving excellent torsional stability. The spine also contains the well for the high-aspect-ratio centerboard and houses some of the control lines to help keep the cockpit clear. A watertight bulkhead is located underneath the deck-stepped mast, and there is foam flotation throughout.

The hull shape is fine forward with little flare running aft to the mast. At that point the hull dishes out rapidly to its 6-foot, 7-inch maximum beam, much the way a scow does, with the rounded deck then flowing neatly into the cockpit. This configuration makes hiking very comfortable.

In profile the Johnson 18 has a slightly rounded plumb bow and a graceful sheer. The deck layout is clean, and the boat is very stable.

We test-sailed the boat off St. Petersburg, Florida, in a 12-knot breeze with medium chop. With 184 square feet of sail in the main and jib, the boat had no trouble planing to windward, and the helm had a light and well-balanced feel. The boat seemed to like a little heel; flattening it by hiking hard didn't seem to improve performance. The spray that came over the bow—and there was a fair amount—didn't slow us down, and the water flowed over the unobstructed deck, into the cockpit and out the open transom.

The boat tacked cleanly and acceler-



ated quickly on the new tack. Sailing on a broad reach with the 190-square-foot asymmetrical spinnaker up, it really took off, cutting cleanly through the waves. Setting the nylon chute is easy. The crew hauls two lines, one to move the carbon-fiber bowsprit forward about 2½ feet, and the other to pull the tack of the sail out to the end of the sprit. As soon as the helmsman hauls on the halyard, the kite is up and flying. Acceleration is dramatic, but the boat remains stable and manageable.

The boat is a strict one-design class, although the choice of sailmaker is up to the owner. For a couple who wants a boat that delivers speed and excitement without requiring either a trapeze or brawn, the Johnson 18 can deliver. The current price, with rigging and spars but without sails and trailer, is \$10,000. A trailer is about \$850, and the mainsail, jib, and spinnaker package will run between \$1,800 and \$2,000. *Johnson Boat Works, 4495 Lake Avenue, White Bear Lake, MN 55110; tel. 612-429-7221, fax 612-429-3248.*

—Will White