

Dinghy Specs

	Dyer Midget	Dyer Dhow	Dyer Dink	Fatty Knees 8	Fatty Knees 9	Puddleduck	Trinka 8	Trinka 10
LOA	8' 3/4"	9' 0"	10' 0"	8' 0"	9' 0"	8' 6"	8' 0"	9' 11-1/2"
Beam	4' 1-1/4"	4' 6"	4' 6"	4' 0"	4' 3"	4' 0"	3' 9"	4' 0"
Weight	83 lbs.	104 lbs.	135 lbs.	100 lbs.	110 lbs.	85 lbs.	85 lbs.	125 lbs.
Sail area	36 sq. ft.	45 sq. ft.	66 sq. ft.	50 sq. ft.	60 sq. ft.	36 sq. ft.	38 sq. ft.	64 sq. ft.
Capacity	3 persons, 465 lbs.	3 persons, 650 lbs.	5 persons, 740 lbs.	4 persons, 750 lbs.	4/5 persons, 850 lbs.	3 persons, 390 lbs.	3 persons, 450 lbs.	4 persons, 640 lbs.
Base Price								
Row	\$1,435	\$1,470	\$2,095	\$1,895	\$1,995	—	\$1,675	\$2,375
Sail	\$2,280	\$2,320	\$3,625	\$2,745	\$2,845	\$1,795	\$2,300	\$3,300
Options (sail models)								
Gunwale guard	Std.	\$140	\$150	Std.	Std.	\$105	Std.	Std.
Oars	Std.	\$118	\$118	\$95	\$95	\$60	Std.	Std.
Kick-up rudder	\$40	\$40	\$45	Std.	Std.	—	Std.	Std.
Teak	\$140	\$135	\$180	Std.	Std.	Std.	Std.	Std.
Total	\$2,460	\$2,753	\$4,118	\$2,840	\$2,940	\$1,960	\$2,300	\$3,300

All four of these dinghies are well built. We liked the sailing ability of the Fatty Knees and Trinka best, which isn't surprising given their rounded hull forms and greater sail area. The Dyer and the Puddleduck were excellent rowers, but also sailed well under the conditions encountered. The Trinka's appointments, and traditional styling probably make it the closest to the "classic tender" category, but all of the boats, even the fairly spartan Puddleduck, were pleasing to look at. As for the comments cited, we found few serious flaws in any of the four.

On price alone, we'd rate the Puddleduck a Best Buy. But any purchase decision should carefully weigh appearance, the relative importance of sailing vs. rowing, and price. Among the remaining three we'd go with the Trinka.

Puddleduck

Puddleducks were developed in the early 1950s when St. George's prep school in Middletown, Rhode Island decided to start a junior sailing program. Robert H. Baker, who taught mechanical drawing and shop at the school, teamed up with Norrie Hoyt to produce a variation on a traditional plywood pram, but with more sheer and more of a V-bottom. The result was a boat that kids could safely take out on Narragansett Bay. Baker's students helped draw the plans and he began building them as a sideline at his Warren shop; later, the work was subcontracted to the Herreshoff family. Eventually, about 400 of the wooden boats were made.

Production of the fiberglass Puddleduck began in 1984 when Jonathan Nomer, a New York native who summered in Rhode Island, took over the business after Baker, really a custom boat builder at heart, had let the dinghy lapse. Nomer, a former charterboat captain, chose building dinghies as an affordable way to get into boatbuilding. Nomer does the fiberglass and woodworking at his shop, New England Skiff Builders, in Perryville, Rhode Island; his wife Nicole makes the 3.9-ounce Dacron sails in a second-floor loft. About 500 of the fiberglass models have been built.

The Puddleduck hull is a single unit of hand-laid fiberglass, beefed up with heavier mat at the stress points. The teak gunwale is fastened with Sikaflex and rivets. Flotation, enough to maintain three inches of freeboard when swamped, Nomer says, comes from built-in air chambers inside the molded-in seats. The stainless steel tow ring (located low on the bow) is reinforced with stainless front and backing plates and a 3" teak block.

The builder continues to refine the product. Cotton-over-foam gunwale protectors will be replaced on new models with plastic shell over expanded polypropylene foam—not as aesthetic, maybe, but more practical. The 12-foot, two-section Sitka spruce spar, gunter-rigged, weighs 12 pounds and can be stored on board.

Prospective customers sometimes are put off by the Puddleduck's pram shape, but shouldn't be. L. Francis Herreshoff liked the one he saw in England so much he produced his own 10-foot version. A properly designed pram—as the Puddleduck appears to be—provides a lot of room for its short length without giving up too much in terms of performance. The key to a blunt-nosed boat is the amount of rocker, which keeps the transom clear of the water and the bow entry easy; too much and the boat tends to bounce around. Underneath, the V-bottom flattens in the aft sections to

facilitate planing when towed. A teak skeg (protected by a stainless steel guard), 6" deep at the stern, keeps the boat on track.

We tried the Puddleduck on an early fall day on the quiet waters of Long Pond in light and intermittent air. Under these conditions, and with its light weight, the pram, not surprisingly, rowed easily. The positioning of the oarlocks (Herreshoff preferred the term "rowlocks") seemed exactly right and only the slight bulge of the daggerboard cap created any hint of discomfort. Anyone 5' 10" or taller can brace his legs against the rear seat for extra pulling power. Instead of the usual three-thwart arrangement, Puddleduck features side seating aft of the amidships thwart. This enables kids to get up from the floor and onto a seat while sailing; it also provides extra flotation.

With two aboard, the boat sailed well enough, despite the relatively small (36 sq. ft.) sail; with just one, it sailed proportionately better. The boat seemed nicely balanced, and the hard chines provided plenty of stability. A cleat on the aft side of the trunk allows you to take a turn with the sheet if you're inclined; two smaller cleats on either side are for tying down the teak cap while towing.

Options include a self-bailer, boat cover, floor grate and a few, such as oars, oarlocks and skeg protector that probably should be standard. Some customization is possible; one customer had handrails on the bottom for grasping in case of capsize, another jacklines! The skiff is rated for a 2-hp. outboard and comes with standard motor pad, offset slight-

ly to counteract the operator's weight. Puddleduck has a new stripped-down version, developed for the Boy Scouts, that offers the same hull but with virtually no teak trim; it also has a molded-in skeg. At \$1,395, this is a less expensive alternative to the \$1,795 standard model (including rig).

Bottom Line. We like the side seating but lament the absence of a kick-up rudder. Still, we rate it a Best Buy.

Below: The Puddleduck was conceived as a sail trainer. We particularly liked the side seats.

