

# CAPRICE MK 3 TEST

1969  
C.L. NELSON

Originally a hard-chine, plywood cruiser, the latest version of Robert Tucker's Caprice is in GRP with a round-bilge hull. It is available complete or part-built.

The first version of Robert Tucker's 18ft Caprice cabin sloop was a hard-chine plywood boat designed to have a superior windward performance to that of his Silhouette. This was followed by a Mark II model with increased cabin space and heavier ballast keels.

In the Mark III version, the hard-chine plywood hull has been replaced by a round-bilged glass fibre one and the boat is now offered by Southerly Marine of Westbury, Wilts, at a basic go-for-a-sail price of £675.

The vital statistics of the Mark III are 18ft 6in LOA, 16ft LWL, 6ft 3in beam, 2ft 6in draught and a displacement weight of 1680lb of which 600lb is carried in the twin bilge keels.

The sail areas are 75sq ft in the main and 65sq ft in the jib. These two sails are provided in the basic price. Extra sails consist of a genoa and 160sq ft spinnaker.

The boat we tested was the 1969 Boat Show model with just the standard rig of main and working jib. Sailing out of the Hamble river into Southampton Water we were confronted with a powerful Force 4-5 wind of unsteady character and puffing up to something like Force 6 at odd moments. These conditions presented an awkward problem as the masthead jib was too big and was unreefable.

To give the boat and ourselves a chance, we put two rolls in the mainsail with the Barton roller reefing gear and set forth on a close fetch out of the Hamble entrance. This worked well in the lighter spells, but the Caprice went down on her ear in the heavy puffs under the influence of the jib and there was not enough drive in the

mainsail to push her up to the wind and maintain a safe sailing speed. We had to play the jib sheet in the puffs which again meant some loss of sailing speed and performance.

All of this added up to the fact that one cannot get the best out of a boat if she is not suitably canvassed for the prevailing wind conditions. In this instance we had no storm jib to set and would imagine that, if we had, the recommended sail would have been too small. What we needed was to be able to reef the working jib down to about 40sq ft. Such a facility could be made available in the form of a pair of conventional cringles and reef points or eyelets, or better still by way of roller reefing gear of the Wykeham Martin pattern.

Another solution would be to have a no. 2 jib of about 40sq feet to put up in fresh weather. Reefing a jib on the dancing foredeck of a small boat in rough weather is a rather dicey job, particularly if there is no pulpit or guard rail and these do not come within the Mark III's standard specification. They are on the list of what we would call essential extras for safe cruising.

## Came to life

In spite of these difficulties, we found that when given the chance, the Mark III was close-winded and the helm was light at all times. Later, when we eased off from the wind on to a reaching course, she showed quite good speed and came to life at a steady angle of heel of about 10 degrees. Running back toward the river entrance



she was rock steady and easy to steer, her twin keels tending to act as stabilisers and the small skeg, on which the rudder is mounted, keeping her tail straight.

Out in the Water, the boat crunched quite happily over a few small seas without shooting spray over her foredeck and over us.

The conclusion we drew from this single outing was that the new Caprice is quite a safe and reliable little sea boat providing she is properly canvassed, sensibly handled and not expected to carry full sail comfortably in anything over Force 4.

## Man-sized seas

The safety of a sailing vessel at sea depends greatly on being able to keep her going and not to lose steerage way. This applies still more forcefully to a small boat which is having to contend with man-sized seas. To smother her with canvas is not the answer and one has to bear in mind that twin keels have a prime purpose to serve as useful props for the boat when she is aground or ashore and do not contribute so much to a boat's stability and ability to stand up to her canvas as does a centrally-placed keel.

The other advantages of the twin keel system are that they permit a boat to sail in shallower water—an advantage which rapidly diminishes as the boat heels—and a gain in lateral resistance which should make the boat more weathery. In the Caprice, Robert Tucker who is a proponent of twin keels, has again experimented with an asymmetric form of fin in which the

inner side of the fin is curved and the outer side is flat. This, he believes, will give the boat a lift to windward in the same way that an aircraft or a bird derives lift from the curved upper surface of its wing.

The application of this theory is somewhat bedevilled by the presence of the windward keel which is presumably working in the opposite direction and one has also to pose the question of what is happening to the sails when the hull is climbing to windward under the influence of the lee bilge keel. These clearly must be kept full and drawing or the boat will stall and lose all advantage. One should, therefore, refrain from pinching the Caprice and in giving the boat a firm touch of weather helm one may draw comfort from the thought that Robert's 'aerodynamic' keels are taking the boat to windward like one o'clock.

In sailing the boat on the test we were admittedly over-canvassed. Although we did feel some slight uneasiness as she heeled to the puffs, there seemed to be a point at which the boat was saying 'so far but no farther'.

A glance at the hull lines shows that the rounding of the hull occurs along the line of the old hard chine and the top sides have the same flatness as those of the earlier models. There is an increase in the water line beam dimension amidship which should give the new Caprice a greater initial stability and the lines show that she should be able to heel to 30 degrees in safety.

One or two points were noted in the course of the test. The glass fibre decks are adequately covered in plastic to give a non-skid surface, but the moulded cabin

forehatch had been overlooked. This presents a small but highly treacherous little skating rink in front of the mast which is perched on the main cabin top.

Two minor points in the rigging of the main sheet also gave some trouble. The tang carrying the upper block was too short so that when the boom was turned while reefing the sail, the shackle of the main sheet block bore up against the boom end and went round with it.

At the lower end of the main sheet tackle, which is carried on two quarter blocks, the jamming cleat on the block carrying the tail of the sheet was too efficient and captured the sheet as we put in a gybe. To cure this fault, the block should be shackled to a short strop from the deck eye so that the angle of the sheet tail or fall is more favourable.

## Good lay-out

In all respects the rig and deck lay-out of the Caprice are very good with adjustable fairleads and snubbing winches for the jib sheets, a permanent backstay, stemhead roller and fairleads, a foredeck cleat for the anchor and mooring ropes and quarter deck fairleads and cleats for the stern ropes.

The tiller is hinged at the rudder head and the rudder post and tube are of non-corrosive metal carried on nylon bearings. The skeg and rudder are of glass fibre and so are the bilge keels, the latter mouldings being loaded and sealed with shot and resin.

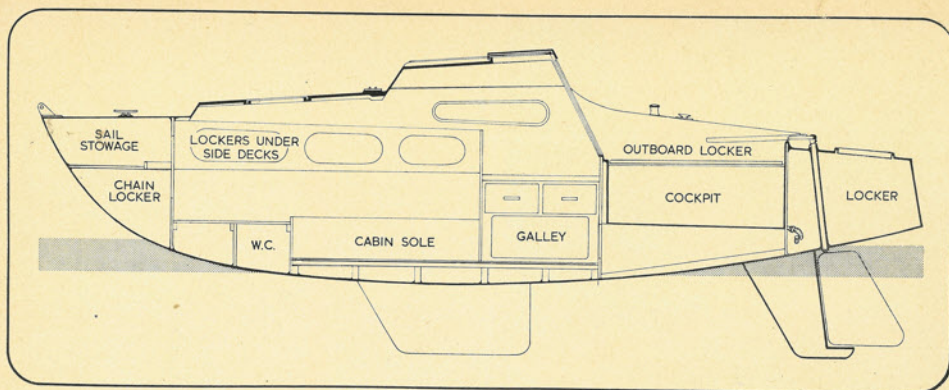
The cockpit is self-draining and a lockable side locker is provided for stowing the



Above: in the Mark III version of the Caprice, the hard-chine plywood hull has been replaced by a round-bilged glass fibre one. The sails shown in this picture are the basic 75sq ft main, and 65sq ft working jib. A genoa and spinnaker are also available.

Left: the rig and deck lay-out of the Caprice are very good with the glass fibre decks adequately covered in plastic to give a non-skid surface.





bottled gas cylinder and the outboard motor. At the stern there is a large and very useful locker with removable hatch in which one can stand while bracketing on or removing the outboard from the wooden pad on the transom.

Down below, the Caprice is designed to give luxury for two, comfort for three, and very friendly co-existence for four. The galley shelf is to starboard within reachable distance of the head of the quarter berth on the opposite shore. Mushroom ventilators are fitted in the cabin roof at these two points.

Farther forward there are two full-length berths with stowage under and a moulded shelf with wooden facings on both sides of the cabin so positioned that they support the back when seated. There is good sitting headroom.

A triangular space up forward gives room for a wet or dry closet and in the fore-peak there is a moulded recess for the anchor with a small shelf over it for stowing the warp.

The cabin windows have aluminium frames and give forward as well as side vision.

The cabin roof is a double skin of glass fibre with urethane foam filling which gives

extra strength, also insulation to minimise roof condensation. The forward cabin hatch is recessed so that it does not project above the surrounding deck level and is fitted with a guttering and drain holes.

The hatch screws down to become waterproof and all it needs is a non-skid top surface.

The after cabin hatch is a slider and the single removable wash board seals the cabin entrance and can be locked. Stout wooden grab rails are provided on the cabin top and the gunwale is provided with a wooden rubbing band.

Southerly Marine are having their moulding done by an experienced firm, and, in addition to completed boats which can be provided within six weeks of receipt of the order, they offer two kit assemblies which represent considerable savings in the purchase price. The kits cost £528 and £573 according to whether or not the customer is prepared to bond the superstructure to the hull. All the kit parts are prefabricated and are accompanied by full explanatory diagrams.

In all, we regard the Caprice as a useful little cruiser offering reasonable comfort and sailing performance at a competitive price for her size.

# CAPRICE MK 3 TEST

construction  
length overall  
length waterline  
beam  
draught  
sail areas

displacement  
outboard  
basic price  
kit price  
builders

GRP  
18ft 6in  
16ft  
6ft 3in  
2ft 6in  
main 75sq ft  
jib 65sq ft  
1680lb  
5hp  
from £675  
from £528

Southerly Marine Co,  
West Wilts Trading Estate,  
Westbury, Wilts