



Builder Win Cnoops

BRISTOL 6

ACCESS ALL AREAS

The latest collaboration between Star Yachts and Andrew Wolstenholme has produced a small, fast launch that can be floated on a puddle

WORDS STEFFAN MEYRIC HUGHES PHOTOGRAPHS JOE MCCARTHY



Testing a motorboat off an island sounds idyllic. Palm trees, sunny skies and white beaches spring to mind, but this was December and about two degrees above zero, with a light rain falling. Also, it being England, where islands are seldom islands, Dorset's Isle of Purbeck is actually a peninsula, although it's a lovely corner of the realm nonetheless.

The photographer and I arrive at the Ridge Wharf Yacht Centre, a small and very pretty 'marina' on the River Frome, to find the owner in good spirits and offering excellent coffee and biscuits to repel the cold, and the boat's builder, Win Cnoops, AKA Star Yachts, based in Bristol's historic Underfall Boatyard.

The boat we have come to see is the all-new Bristol 6, designed by Andrew Wolstenholme and built by Win. It's a collaboration that has, over the last 15 years or so, seen some of the loveliest traditional motor launches built in Britain during that time, all in strip plank. Win has switched from his usual imperial measurement naming system to metric for this boat, and that is to reflect a significant change, which is that this model doesn't have the trademark stepped sheer of his other boats.

From the wooden jetty, the boat has considerable appeal, not least in the little cowl vents mounted on the foredeck that act as the air intakes for the 65hp Nanni diesel mounted in a box in the middle of the cockpit. The swim platform, unusually, is an integral part of the hull, rather than a bolt-on. This is not normally seen on boats capable of speeds higher than those achieved on inland waterways – and the Bristol 6 will reach a rate of knots somewhere in the high teens.

The owner, who lives nearby, lived on the East Coast for many years and finds this corner of Dorset, with its many creeks and flats, comparable. His sailing career began in dinghies, then moved on to day-racers, particularly the XOD class. He and his wife then took up sea kayaking, but after buying a dog, they bought a 14ft (4.3m) clinker launch with an inboard diesel.

"Through the kayaking, we know every part of the coast," he tells us. "When we were after a serious boat to replace the clinker launch with, we wanted something with similar capability, but much faster and more comfortable. This boat only draws 50cm and goes to all the places they were able to access by kayak. You can

Opposite: Builder Win Cnoops takes the wheel on the River Frome; a clear view of the swim platform

Below: The owner at the wheel at speed, on a different day

even run it onto a beach, then back off a bit, anchor, and swim ashore. There's no need for a tender."

Ideally, the boat should be beautiful, which the Bristol 6 is, but the main reason for building in wood was that there was nothing comparable off the shelf. The only contender was the slightly larger Dale 23, another good looker, this one in GRP, but more expensive.

"The brief" says the boat's designer Andrew Wolstenholme, "was for an open launch with good seating, 17-knot capability and trailability. That meant modest beam, which also makes the boat easier to propel but, still, when you want 17 knots, the size of the engine case becomes more prominent in the cockpit." For these two reasons – the slim beam and relatively large engine box – there is no side seating in the Bristol 6, which gives nice, easy movement around the boat, but runs the risk of having too many people sitting forward under the sprayhood, trimming the boat down by the bows. It is easy to forget on the Bristol 6, such is its serious-looking yachty appeal, that it is still a small, light vessel, and crew weight placement is crucial.

Another design conundrum on a boat this size was the swim platform. "Traditionally, you have a bolt-on stainless steel unit, which doesn't change the all-important aesthetics of the transom" says Andrew. On this boat, he went for a built-in platform, which lengthens the waterline and increases the lifting surface aft. This also gives immense solidity and good space, even with the slight (6.7°) aft transom rake, necessary for traditional appearance. A forward-raked transom would give even more space – and a natural seat back for those sitting on the swim platform – but a more modern look.

The overall package is a pretty little motor launch with a nice turn of speed, low draught to access all areas, and seating capacity for six, with a good amount of lockable stowage, and a neat, folding, sinking table with infill to convert the forward part of the cockpit into a large sun pad or day bed. She lives at the marina, with a winter cover for the whole boat, or a summer cover to protect the engine box and controls.

UNDER WAY

We motor slowly down the River Frome, passing high reeds and boats in every possible state of repair lying to their moorings, the owner at the helm. A mile later, we are out in Poole Harbour, the largest natural harbour in the world. The owner opens the taps and the boat accelerates to around the 16-knot mark. She'll probably go a couple of knots quicker, but it's early days, and no one wants to stress the engine while it is still running in. The cold that we felt on the sheltered river intensified and after a while, one poor soul (either the builder or the owner or, later, me) was left on the wheel while the three other men – none of us exactly feather weights – took shelter under the sprayhood.

The Bristol 6 is a semi-displacement type, like all of Andrew and Win's collaborations. It's a great compromise, giving decent speed up to around 30 knots in some boats, with better economy than a planing craft, better visibility and less slamming. The weak spot of a semi-displacement boat, however, is they can develop yaw under a quartering sea. When you have three heavy







men in the bows of a small boat like this and a sea pushing on one of the stern quarters inducing some bow steering, it's a combination that creates some significant yawing. However, as I found myself later, during a spell on the wheel heading back home, there is no feeling of instability in this motion; despite the significant spray chine running along most of the hull, there was never any sensation that the boat might trip over its edge.

By this point, Win and I are so cold in the light rain, freezing temperature and apparent headwind, that there is no question of taking notes; even talking was hard, with teeth chattering so hard.

It was a relief to get back, and a source of regret that we'd not been able to do this in better weather. The Bristol 6 is a lovely boat at the size, with quite a bit of nearly everything most people want: trailability, seakindliness, speed, stability, accommodation and good looks. This is a fast, adventurous picnic boat, and its ideal role would be zipping from one secret beach to another over a long summer's day, or even weekend, with the ability – thanks to that power – to go quite far afield. The owner is clearly very pleased with their perfect little launch. His wife has named the boat *The Celaeno*, a star in the Pleiades constellation, in honour of its builder, Star Yachts.

BUILDING THE BRISTOL 6

Win Cnoops has built up a considerable practice building motorboats to Andrew Wolstenholme designs. Most or all of his builds are in strip plank and to a handful of standard designs, or close derivations of them. They range from 16 to 32ft, and all but this one are



Above: Horseshoe seating with dining table shown in the up and 'in-fill' positions
Above right: Chine rail

characterised by a stepped sheer. They are mostly powered by a single diesel engine, but the 32 has twins. The build of *Celaeno* starts with MDF moulds that Win gets CNC-cut from data files supplied by the designer. The hull is then built upside-down over these moulds in 16mm yellow cedar strip plank, which is epoxy glued. It would be easier, says Win, to glue up in polyurethane, due to the increased in clean-up created by epoxy, but

epoxy gives more strength, necessary for the curvature of the hull. The outside is then glassed. Once right way up again, the structural elements, in marine plywood, are glued in. There is no framing on *Celaeno*, as the structural timbers, like the seat risers and bulkheads, give enough stiffness on both axes to make the hull a strong monocoque. The lack of frames also saves on the interior space, a significant saving given the size of the boat.

The deck is marine plywood, with a layer of glassfibre, then 6mm-thick teak laid on top. The trim on the Bristol 6 is nearly all teak, including the attractive folding dining table. One exception is the sole boards, which are in red cedar and give a lovely smell every time the cover is taken off. The finish inside and out is in two-pack paint and two-pack varnish.

Win commends Bristol Sails, who make the covers and the sprayhood. "They always do a really good job, so long as I don't get involved!" he says. The cushions are from Custom Boat Upholstery in Plymouth.

The engine is a Nanni 65, which gives 57hp, chosen for its compact dimensions. "We've generally had good experiences with Nanni" says Win.

Celaeno took nearly a year to build, around other jobs. Win and his men at Star Yachts (they number half a dozen in all) have got a good year coming up, with the build of two new 18-footers for the river (one electric the other diesel); the possibility of a one-off race boat for an existing client; and a small, luxury ferry for an Irish client in discussion. Another Bristol 6 to similar finish would cost around £85,000 + VAT.

BRISTOL 6 DESIGN Andrew Wolstenholme

BUILD
Star Yachts
2021

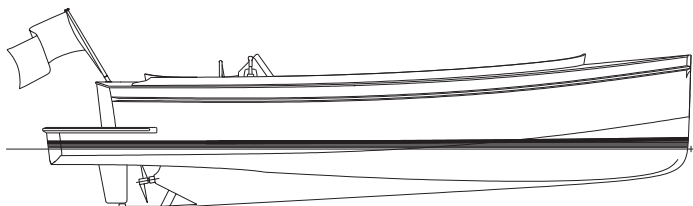
LOA
20ft (6.1m)

BEAM
6ft 6in (2m)

DRAUGHT
1ft 10in
(55cm)

DESIGN WEIGHT
1.3 tonnes

ENGINE
Nanni 57hp



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