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The 20-knot trailable trimaran



DRAGONFLY 28: 8.75m (28ft 8in) folding trimaran **PRICE:** from £124,000



If you want to sail faster than the wind in a boat you can trail home, easily manage short-handed, keep in a normal marina berth and dry out on the beach, you're looking at the new Dragonfly 28, says David Harding

Multihulls are growing in popularity but still regarded as impractical by many owners of boats with one hull. Whereas that cruising cat with a 20ft (6m) beam that you chartered on holiday might be fine in the Caribbean, even a smaller version wouldn't be so easy to accommodate in your local marina or tack down the harbour.

Trimarans tend to fare worse in the popularity stakes because they're beamier still and give you less accommodation for their length. They have their devotees, however, and for good reason. Their performance can be spectacular and, with the current generation of Dragonflies, Corsairs and Farriers has come foldability that allows them to reduce their beam to monohull proportions and

fit into a normal marina berth.

At their yard in Denmark, Dragonfly have been building trimarans for more than 40 years. Since 1989 all the designs have been foldable. The outriggers fold aft and inwards, so the beam reduces but the boat's length increases and the folded hulls protect the outboard and raised rudders. Farriers fold by rotating their hulls on their sides, so the boat doesn't become any longer; instead, weed will grow on the outside of the hulls unless you antifoul them.

Even though they fold, until now Dragonflies have had to be dismantled further before the beam can be reduced to the legal maximum for trailing on a public road. And that's one way in which the new 28 differs. In a couple of minutes you can go from having

the hulls fully out in sailing mode to folded in so the beam is just 2.55m (8ft 4in) – barely greater than that of the main hull. The mast can be lowered (with the help of the boom as a lever) and the boat winched on to her trailer and taken home.

Dragonfly claim that she really can be used as a trailer-sailer, and several buyers are planning to use her that way. With practice, launching and recovery is said to take around 45 minutes each way.

You need a sizeable towing vehicle, of course: with 1,700kg (3,747lb) on the trailer you're not going to get away with anything less than a muscular 4 x 4.

The flying Dragon

In a way it's hard to compare the Dragonfly with anything except a Corsair or perhaps the new Telstar (both folding trimarans). Yet she's

so different to the multihulls that most people will have encountered and, of course, to monohulls, that some differences are worth noting.

You can buy a single-hulled power-sailer of similar size for much less money and get trailability combined with more accommodation and greater speed under power. But you won't get the ability to average 10 knots under sail in the right conditions, maintain a steady 15-17 knots and peak at 20-plus if you want a bit of fun. You can go a long way very quickly in a Dragonfly, especially if you choose the Sport version with its taller, carbon-fibre mast. And that's good for owners with young families: from their perspective, being somewhere is usually more interesting than getting there.

Alistair Wood, the UK distributor, has two young children and, from



On a two-sail reach the Dragonfly soon exceeded wind speed

ABOVE High-performance beach-boat: the Dragonfly floats in next-to-nothing. INSET Wings folded: with the outriggers tucked beneath the main hull, the beam is reduced to just 2.55m (8ft 4in)

Chichester, can be having a picnic in Cowes, Bembridge or Yarmouth while most monohulls are still in the middle of the Solent.

Other family-friendly features include the trampolines: if you fall off the deck, it's a soft landing and you stay on the boat. The Dragonfly heels slightly and progressively, more like a very stiff monohull than a catamaran, so monohull sailors will feel at home, yet moving around is easy because the angle of heel is so small.

Unlike an equally sporty catamaran of similar size, where the accommodation is only in the hulls, the Dragonfly offers a central saloon. The main hull is narrow, so the accommodation can't compare with that of a cruiser-racer monohull, yet you still get five berths, a galley and a separate heads in addition to a vast amount of lounging space on the trampolines (where you can also keep a fully-inflated dinghy).

Something else likely to endear her to sailors moving across from one hull is her remarkably fast and positive tacking. We tacked down

Chichester Harbour from just outside the Emsworth Channel, leaving in our wake anyone who was sailing as well as most of those who were motoring. In around 10 knots of true breeze we consistently made 8 knots, tacking through 90° and rarely seeing less than 4.5 knots on the log as we came out of the tacks. That gave us a VMG (velocity made good) of 5.7 knots before allowing for any leeway; pretty impressive for a 28-footer with just two people doing the work. The crew doesn't even need to use a winch handle for the headsail sheets if he gets the timing right.

Swinging a wing

Before leaving the marina, where the demonstration boat (only the second one built) was tucked into a narrow berth by the fuel dock, I had had a look at the folding mechanism. The stainless steel hinges on the main hull are substantial but only taking any load

while the outriggers are being folded in and out. Once the outriggers are in their sailing position, the beams are exerting a compression load: 'water-stays' running from just above the waterline on the main hull to the underside of the beams by the outriggers convert the upward

thrust from the leeward hull into compression (a bit like spreaders on a mast). That's why the Dragonfly's main

hull has two extremely solid composite ring-frames between each set of outrigger beams, to withstand the tension of the water-stays and the beams' compression.

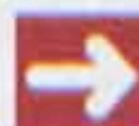
When the outriggers are folded in, they swing both aft and slightly down, lifting the main hull a few inches in the water and ensuring that the centre of buoyancy moves right outboard if the boat heels. Should a gale come along when you have the hulls folded in it's important both to maximise form stability and to minimise windage

from the beam, which is why the mast section is round rather than a wing. If seriously strong winds from either side are forecast (the builders say up to 40 knots is OK), you will probably sleep better if you move the boat to a different berth or take a halyard across to something solid for support.

This will be more critical if you have the Sport version like our test boat with its 13.5m (44ft 4in) carbon fibre mast; with the Dragonfly 28 Touring you get an aluminium mast 1.5m (5ft) shorter and Polyester laminate sails instead of the Sport's Technora. The Tourer will still sail rings around most monohulls of similar size but won't have quite the pace of the Sport.

Carbon is used for the Sport's rig for several reasons: it reduces the boat's overall weight, substantially lowers the rig's centre of gravity (reducing the pitching moment for greater speed and comfort) and makes the mast easier to raise. It also costs a good deal more, not that either version of the Dragonfly is cheap. The folding mechanism adds to the

We consistently beat at 8 knots into 10 knots of wind



cost and so does the high-quality hardware that makes the boat easy to sail short-handed. Examples include the Ronstan mast track and luff cars which, combined with the 2:1 purchase on the Dyneema halyard, allow you to hoist the large, fully-battened, square-top mainsail on the Sport version all the way without using the winch.

Speed without compromise

Once clear of the channel outside Chichester Harbour, and sailing in a lumpy sea kicked up by the onshore breeze, we cracked off a few degrees, used the barber-auler to control the twist in the headsail, and soon hit 14 knots in 12 knots of wind. As it freshened slightly we regularly clocked 14-15 knots, peaking at 15.8.

Plenty of single-hulled sportsboats are capable of these speeds and more under spinnaker in 30 knots, with the crew hanging off the stern

waiting for the next broach (I've been there and done that enough times), but effortlessly close-reaching at 15 knots under plain sail with a crew of three is a different experience. The word 'broach' doesn't feature in the multihull-sailor's dictionary.

Despite her speed, the Dragonfly's upwind motion is surprisingly comfortable: she seems to rise and drop gently over the waves with minimal pitching and no slamming. Both the asymmetrical outriggers touch the water at rest. Then, under sail in more than a few knots of breeze,

the windward hull lifts clear and the asymmetry of the leeward hull can get to work: the outboard side is almost straight and the curve is on the inboard side so it acts like a very low aspect-ratio asymmetric foil. Jens Quorning, the designer, says it can generate up to 750kg (1,650lb) of windward force.

Another significant point about the outriggers is that their bows are forward of the main hull by 0.3m (1ft) when extended. This brings their centre of buoyancy forward, to maximise diagonal stability on high-speed reaches. We didn't have enough wind to push the boat hard, though the builders have flown the main hull and apparently have yet to succeed in getting the leeward outrigger to nose-dive enough to scare them. Because the outriggers' stems are the forward-most parts of the boat, they're

The leeward outrigger acts like an asymmetric foil

made of a rubber compound that compresses on impact and whose profile is a continuation of the hull

mouldings, so they appear to be nothing more than grey stripes until you look closely.

Speedy though she is, the Dragonfly was conceived as a boat that's easy and forgiving to sail. She's aimed principally at those who enjoy fast cruising, because only around 15% of Dragonfly owners race their boats. If you do want to race, expect to give much bigger monohulls a run for their money. In last year's Round-the-Island Race a Dragonfly 920 (the 28's bigger sister)



Moving around the deck is easy and the trampolines provide extra security

completed the course in just over 5 hours. The elapsed time of this 30ft (9.2m) trisaran sailed by three people was 10 minutes less than that of the Farr 52 *Chernikeeff 2* with a crew of more than a dozen. And while other boats with asymmetric spinnakers were having to gybe around the back of the island in winds that approached 30 knots at times, the Dragonfly crew hauled the tack of the spinnaker to windward (using the outhaul that runs through blocks on the stems of the outriggers and doubles as a barber-auler for the headsail) and sailed dead downwind at 17 knots.

In rather quieter conditions we used the 28's 80sq m (861sq ft) spinnaker to help us back up the channel and into the harbour. Dead downwind with the tack on the centreline on the removable bowsprit we rarely dropped below 8 knots, and hardening up a few degrees brought the log up to 12 in an



Cockpit seats hinge down from the stern rails both sides

instant. Gybing is straightforward even for two people and so is the drop: blanket the kite behind the mainsail and bundle it down the hatch (unless you want to use a snuffer or rolling system). If some of it escapes, it will most likely land on the trampoline so spinnaker trawling is unlikely.

Triple smoothie

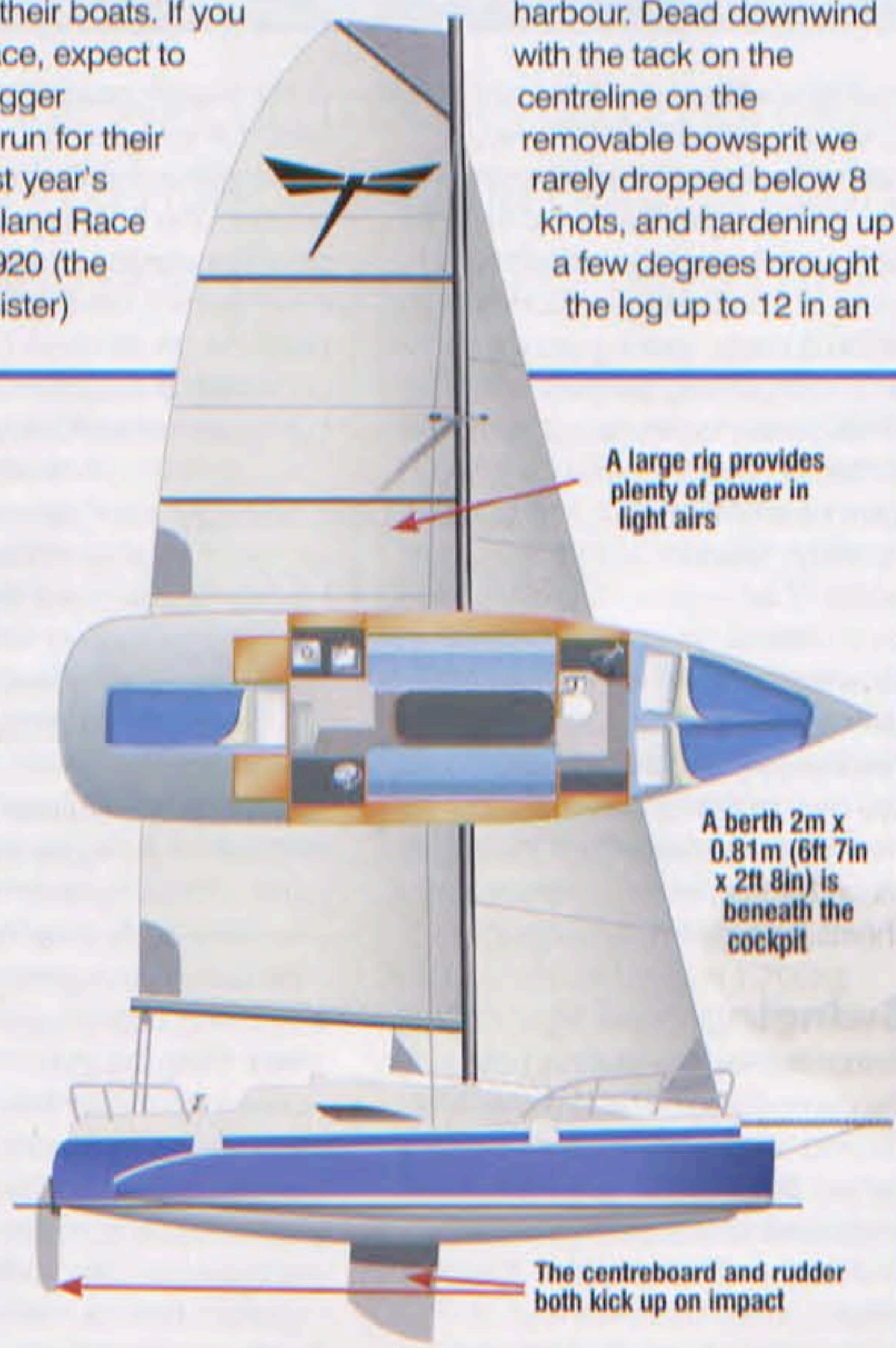
Because of the fine entry of all three hulls, the Dragonfly gives an exceptionally smooth ride. The outriggers are there purely for dynamic reasons so their shape is not compromised. The main hull flares markedly half-way up the topsides to deflect spray and create living space.

Whether you favour the motion and handling qualities of a catamaran or a trisaran depends on personal preference. I found the Dragonfly more responsive and monohull-like in character than most cats I have sailed, with a pleasant feel to the helm. You sit on the fold-down seats outboard in the cockpit, tiller extension in hand and eyes on the jib's telltales, guiding the boat upwind as if sailing a dinghy. Little wonder a high proportion of Dragonfly owners move up from dinghies and across from monohulls.

Whichever you come from, you will need to get used to using plenty of grunt on the mainsheet to tension the leech of that powerful mainsail, even with the 6:1 fine tune giving a 24:1 purchase. It's a good

Dragonfly 28 Sport

LOA (centre hull)	8.75m (28ft 8in)
LWL (centre hull)	8.6m (28ft 3in)
Length folded	9.99m (32ft 9in)
Beam (sailing)	6.5m (21ft 4in)
Beam (folded)	2.54m (8ft 4in)
Draught (centreboard up)	0.40m (1ft 4in)
Draught (centreboard down)	1.70m (5ft 7in)
Weight	1,700kg (3,748lb)
Sail area (main and jib)	54sq m (581sq ft)
RCD category	B/C
Engine	8-10hp outboard
Headroom	1.75m (5ft 9in)
Designer	Jens Quorning
Builder	Quorning Boats, Denmark
Distributor: Multihull Solutions. Tel: 01243 370707 www.multihullsolutions.co.uk	





You can choose between pale laminates and a traditional wood finish. Both saloon berths convert into doubles

idea to ease a few inches on coming out of a tack to help the boat pay off and build up speed again. While tacking is remarkably positive thanks to the deep centreboard and well-rockered outriggers, timing and good coordination between helm and crew make a big difference.

Unlike earlier Dragonflies, the 28 has no mainsheet traveller. Separate purchases on a snap-shackle each side of the cockpit (like spare mainsheets) can be used to control the twist on a reach. The benefit is a clearer cockpit – a reminder that this is essentially a fast cruising boat. The drawback is a little more fiddle if you're sailing short legs.

Other sail controls are fairly standard, most being led aft over the coachroof to a pair of Andersen 24 winches. The mast is kept in column by Dyform rigging over two sets of diamonds and held upright by the forestay and two shrouds, the latter being tensioned by rope purchases after the outriggers have been swung out.

Swinging out the outriggers is easy because they're also moving up, so their buoyancy helps. Tension the endless inhaul/outhaul line, close the clutch and then attach the security stop to the outrigger. Bringing them in calls for a little more grunt because you're immersing them more deeply and as you bring in the second one you're lifting the main hull. You might need to use the coaming



The massive forward bulkhead takes the load of the outriggers' beams and water-stays; hence the relatively small aperture to the forecabin

winch for the last bit. It's about a minute's work each side.

Accommodation

You don't buy a Dragonfly for the accommodation. Nonetheless, you can stand up (headroom will be 1.85m/6ft 1in on production boats), lie down (all berths are 2m/6ft 6in), cook, wash, use the toilet and stow your kit. While you don't have as much room as on a comparable monohull, you spend a lot less time at sea being uncomfortable.

The interior is formed by a full moulding and the 28 breaks with Dragonfly tradition by offering bulkheads finished in a pale laminate as an alternative to varnished veneers.

Apart from a wobbly toilet bowl, attention to detail on the test boat was good. As far as can be seen externally, the structure appears

solid and well thought out, as it needs to be on a boat that's subjected to such high loads.

The outriggers are built with watertight bulkheads that separate the forward and aft sections from the centre, where a hatch allows gear such as fenders and an anchor to be stowed.

PBO's verdict

Even if you start with some reservations about multihulls, you might find it hard to resist this new Dragonfly once you've got to know her. At well over £100,000 she's not cheap: for the same money you could get a longer, roomier and plusher monohull (or catamaran for that matter) but you wouldn't be able to sail faster than the wind and then trail it home afterwards. There's a lot you can do with a trailable tri.

Other boats to look at



Corsair 28

PRICE: FROM £78,465

Lighter and less expensive than the Dragonfly, the Corsair comes in centre- or aft-cockpit versions. From trailing to sailing is claimed to take 30 minutes.

www.multihullworld.co.uk



Telstar 28

PRICE: FROM £63,250

Built in America by Tony Smith, who developed the original Telstar in Kent in the 1970s, the 'T2' is also a speedy sailer designed for easy folding and trailing. Price excludes shipping.

www.performancecruising.com



Virus V8 cat

PRICE: FROM £35,000

Light, sporty and remarkably inexpensive, this French cat with optional trapezes has low-aspect ratio keels and dismantles for trailing. Sleeps up to six in the slim hulls.

www.ahoy-boats.com

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