

My Boat

Kim Klaka 2022

See how far down the list you get before you work out what class of boat I have.

1. My boat is 10.3.m long and is designed by a renowned European designer
2. My boat has two double cabins, a saloon and a toilet compartment with full standing headroom.
3. My boat is easily sailed single-handed and two of us lived on it for a year.
4. My boat has a sprayhood, solar panels, a fridge, an inverter and an autopilot
5. My boat doesn't have pressurised water or a 240 Volt shore socket.
6. We don't need to run the engine on my boat to keep the batteries topped up
7. My boat won the offshore racing championships in its first season, and is still winning races.
8. My boat has tape drive sails, spectra halyards and lithium batteries
9. My boat is made of wood.
10. My boat is 36years old. The insurers reckon it is worth \$40,000 (I disagree)

Give up? It is a Van de Stadt 34. These come in various guises – steel, aluminium, wood, deep draft, shallow draft, masthead rig, $\frac{3}{4}$ rig. Ours is cedar strip plank construction, sheathed in and out with glass and epoxy. It has a deep draft (1.8m) lead keel of 2 tonnes out of 5 tonnes total displacement. (the designer quotes displacement as 4.5 tonnes but I measured it at 5 tonnes with all the usual junk on board.). Ours started off as a $\frac{3}{4}$ rig, but after several seasons sailing the Western Australian coast with two reefs permanently in the mainsail, I finally plucked up courage and sawed 1.8m off the top of the mast, converting it to masthead rig. The boat sailed much faster as a consequence, not least because it reduced weight aloft by 16kg (imagine sailing with your main anchor tied to the masthead? Not a great speed feature!).

We bought the boat 27 years ago, having previously owned a succession of cruising and racing yachts for much shorter periods. The boat was built in 1986 for racing with 6 crew; it won lots of races then was lightly cruised for 7 years before we acquired her. We had to decide whether to cruise or race her (there is no such thing as a cruiser-racer in my view), and we decided to cruise. This involved adding all manner of heavy gear to make life simple and comfortable for shorthanded sailing. After a few years we decided we would also like to do a bit of racing, so set about removing much of the extra gear we had installed; so much for my

opinions! We now have a happy compromise in a boat that is comfortable and fast, but will never beat the IRC racing boats.

One important decision we made early on was to keep the electrics minimalist. I had witnessed far too many cruisers stuck in harbours, either waiting for electrical parts and expertise, or practicing pot-holing in the cavities of their boat where the wiring is hidden. We kept our electrical demands low – fridge, , radios, plotter, LED lights, 100W inverter, autopilot only when motoring. No electric pumps, no electric winches. We charge with 120W of solar panels hidden away on the top of the sprayhood, and a standard 50A alternator on the engine. No battery monitoring system – we don't need it because the batteries are always well topped up. However, a year ago we swapped the two house AGM batteries for a lithium, which doesn't drop voltage until it is almost empty. (incidentally, the changeover to lithium was a no-brainer; just an extra voltage controller added to existing regulators, one third the weight for same available capacity, price roughly the same, safer, and with a life probably outlasting mine. Why on earth wouldn't you change?).

What are the best characteristics of the boat?

- Fast and easily driven, especially to windward
- Dry
- Simple to maintain
- Roomy below

And the worst characteristics?

- Small cockpit by today's standards (though still 2m long)
- Lively at anchor – yaws and rolls more than many other boats
- Rudder is slightly overbalanced under power but underbalanced under sail (that's a subject of a separate lengthy article!)

What is the best bit of kit we have installed on the boat? I would say it is a photo-finish between:

- Profurl headsail furler (25 years old and not missed a beat)
- Muir manual anchor windlass
- Fleming wind vane
- Tinker inflatable dinghy (alas no longer made)

And the worst bits of kit?

- Halogen cabin lights (flimsy, power hungry and hot)
- Asymmetric spinnaker (wind angle range too narrow for a displacement yacht)
- Westrib inflatable dinghy (don't get me started on this!)

So far I haven't mentioned the engine – after all it's meant to be a sailing boat and it sails beautifully. Oh alright then, it's a Volvo 3 cylinder 28hp with three blade folding prop, as old as the boat and still going strong. We get 6 knots in calm water at 2,000rpm. We only really use the engine to get in and out of harbour, averaging just 50 litres of fuel a year for typical weekend sailing and summer holiday cruising. That's another advantage of a boat that sails well!

We keep looking around for a better, newer boat but can't find anything for less than half a million dollars, so I think we'll be sailing Panache II until we win lotto. Oh, you have to buy ticket? There goes another dream!

