

RS Venture

Jeremy Evans gives his verdict on a new rival for the classic Wayfarer...

In 1957 Ian Proctor launched the 16ft Wayfarer dinghy and ever since, designers and builders have been trying to create a more modern alternative that's as roomy, stable, practical and enjoyable to sail. The latest challenger is the RS Venture, designed by Phil Morrison. Apart from designing best-selling dinghies for major brands including RS and Laser, Phil's portfolio includes designing a new deck and cockpit layout for the current version of the Wayfarer, which surely provided him with useful knowledge when given a clean sheet to design the Venture.

Concept and layout



RS commissioned the Venture in response to requests for a multi-role dinghy that can be sailed with much more than two crew. In terms of space, the Venture is clearly a winner – six inches longer and wider than a Wayfarer with a huge, wide-open cockpit that has an official maximum crew capacity up to 640kg. That could mean sailing to your favourite beach with as many as four adults plus four children on board, using the boat as a floating classroom for one instructor coaching six students who have room to sit on both sides of the boat, or following the wake of Frank and Margaret Dye, cruising the coast with all

the paraphernalia required to enjoy camping in deserted bays.

Despite its size, the Venture has attractive lines with proportionally low freeboard tapering back to a stylish transom that looks wide enough to sport twin rudders – instead the rudder blade is extra deep. The underside of the hull is very flat, helping provide enough stability for the boat to be left on a mooring. Moulded side benches and a rear tank under the tiller contribute enough extra buoyancy to sail with maximum crew, particularly if spray is coming on board or you have just recovered from a capsize. In both instances, the shallow double-bottom with integral self-bailers and transom flaps is designed to clear water straight out of the cockpit, with the self-bailers also acting as automatic cockpit drains on a mooring.

One surprise is that Venture hull, cockpit and decks are built in single skin glassfibre reinforced with coremat, instead of the ubiquitous rotomoulded plastic used for most recent low cost, all purpose dinghies. The reasons are straightforward. As dinghy hulls get longer and wider, it becomes progressively more difficult to achieve a successful compromise between stiffness and weight with automated rotomoulding. Building a glassfibre hull with a hand 'lay-up' is considerably slower and more expensive, but the boat will arguably have better sailing characteristics with more zing and responsiveness thanks to superior stiffness and lighter weight. Glassfibre boats also tend to look more attractive than rotomoulded plastic, which can resemble part of a modern kitchen, as well as being much easier to refurbish or repair. There is a price penalty, but not so great as if the Venture was built in even lighter, stiffer foam sandwich construction. As with most things in life, dinghy sailors have to compromise between cost and performance.

Rigging and launching

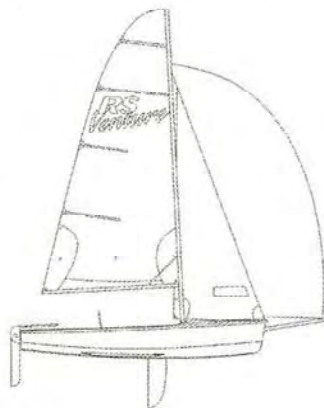


I sailed the only Venture in England (the others had all been sent abroad) with Nick Peters and Simon Letten from RS on a blustery, early winter day. We had to push through soft sand to get to the water at Hayling Island SC, which was not ideal but proved possible for three grown men. In most situations you would want to launch and retrieve this big dinghy on a nice solid slipway

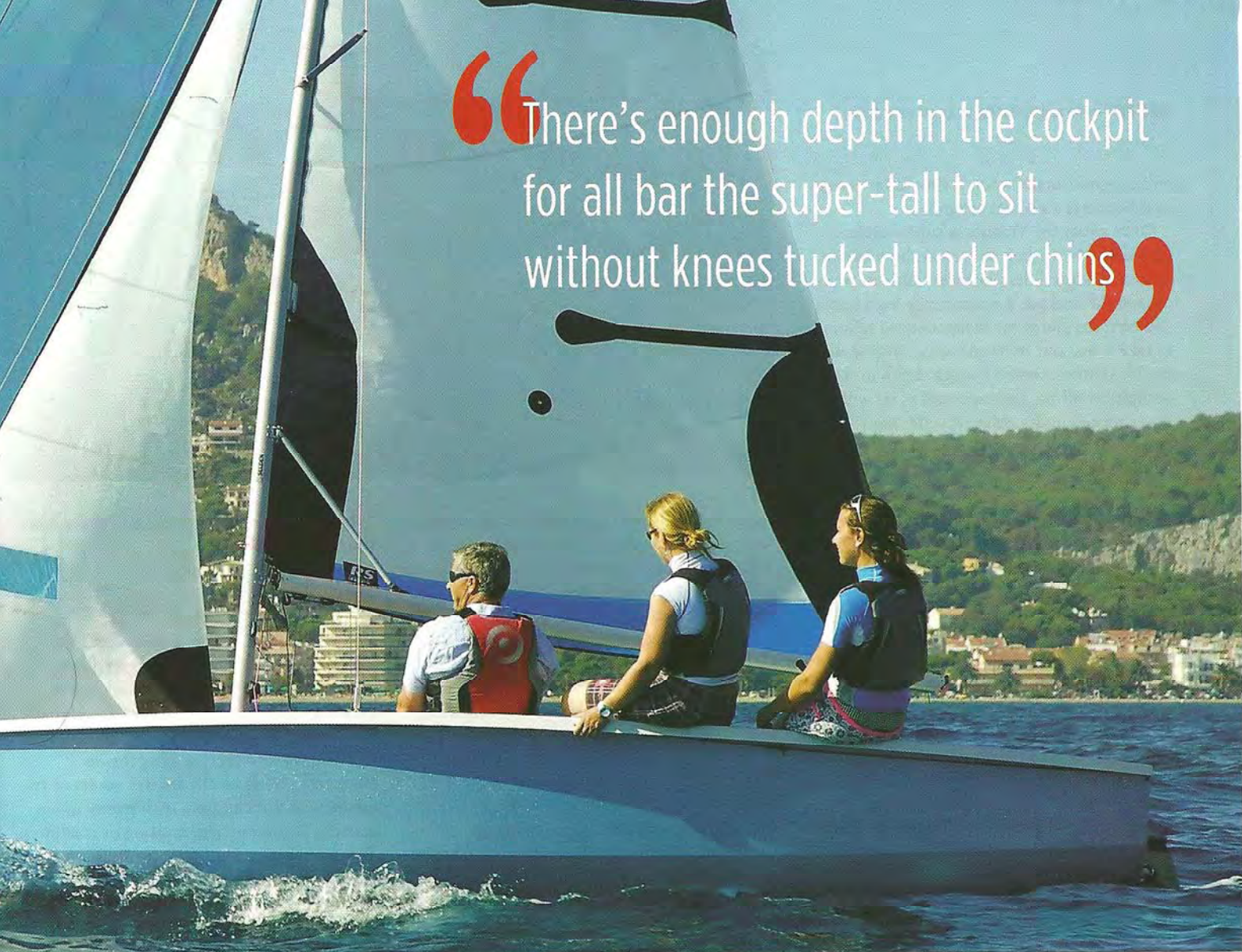


SPECIFICATIONS

Design	Phil Morrison
Length	4.98m
Beam	2.03m
Hull weight	198kg
Mainsail	11sq m
Jib	3.8sq m
Optional spinnaker	Asymmetric 14sq m Symmetric 10.5sq m
Ready to sail price	from £6,750



“There’s enough depth in the cockpit for all bar the super-tall to sit without knees tucked under chins”



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1 The Venture is a competitor for the Wayfarer as a family or instructing boat 2 A solid strut kicker (GNAV) above the boom makes manoeuvres easier for crew 3 The Venture should go well under outboard but doesn't appear to be row-able 4 The centreboard is easily reached from the water when capsized 5 Reaching with a lot of boost from the asymmetric



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RIGHT This a roomy dinghy that can take up to eight people

with a gentle angle, when it should be as easy as a Wayfarer to wheel around.

Once afloat the Venture is super-stable. It's really easy to step aboard at the transom or over the low sides, with very little to trip over in the cockpit, a reassuringly high boom and obvious places for inexperienced sailors to take a seat out of harm's way. Despite the double bottom, there's enough depth in the cockpit for all bar the super-tall to sit without knees tucked under chins. A solid 'gnav' strut kicker above the boom makes it easy for crew to move around the front of the cockpit, with a stainless steel mainsheet hoop helping ensure they don't get lassoed by the mainsheet.

Our boat was fitted with a furling jib plus asymmetric spinnaker, which seems a worthwhile extra for more fun downwind. Other options such as Mylar mainsail and trapeze sound like luxuries. A factory-fitted thwart and rubber gunwale protection would be useful for sailing schools, or you might like to invest in front locker storage, aluminium keel bands and an anchor for cruising, plus a transom boarding ladder and a watertight hatch to create a large aft locker.

I was impressed by the long, slim aluminium rudder blade with a replaceable tough plastic tip used in conjunction with a simple GRP centreboard that pulls up or down. If you hit the bottom, both should kick up without any damage.

Under sail

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Sailing in Force 3-4, the Venture was great to sail with just two on board. She took off on gusts, felt surprisingly responsive for a big boat



with a modest sized rig, powered to windward and broad reached at good speed downwind with a lot of boost from the asymmetric spinnaker, all the while being very easy to manage, particularly during tacks and gybes.

If you want to cut power, a single-line reefing system immediately reduces the area of the mainsail. If you want to sail without power, the Venture should motor along nicely with a small outboard.

Capsizing

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

It's not a big problem if you manage to capsize this ultra-stable boat. You would have to try quite hard, but if the worst happens the Venture floats low on its side with foam inside the mast floating the rig to hold the boat at little more than 90 degrees. Unlike so many modern dinghies, it is fairly easy to haul yourself onto the centreboard, which is close to the surface of the water. Leaning back on the righting line (ready-for-use under each gunwale), it's surprisingly easy to pull this

oversize dinghy back upright and enjoy more trouble-free sailing.

Verdict?

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

The Venture is a people carrier with the potential to carry more than its dinghy rivals. If you are looking for a dinghy for between three and eight people, this is where the Venture offers so much.

If you want to race, it will provide enjoyable sailing ideally for 3-4 adults or two adults with 2-3 children, with plenty more capacity for fun racing, cruising or teaching. This makes it an ideal boat for sailing schools or institutions, for which the Venture could become a popular choice. There is the added bonus that you can still sail the Venture safely and enjoyably with two crew, or even singlehanded, which may be useful on occasions. If you seldom expect to sail with more than two you will probably do better with a smaller boat, if you have a big family it could be perfect!

COMPARISONS



Topper Omega

Designed for multi-purpose use including cruising, instruction and family sailing. Tough rotomoulded construction makes it a popular workhorse for sailing centres.

Length 4.7m

Beam 1.88m

Maximum capacity 6

Mainsail 10.27sq m

Jib 3.75sq m

Gennaker 14.66sq m



Wayfarer

The latest Wayfarers built by Hartley Boats have provided the class with a new lease of life, with the advantage of a well established class association and regular racing.

Length 4.82m

Beam 1.85m

Maximum capacity 4

Mainsail 8.83sq m

Jib or Genoa 2.79 or 4.27sq m

Spinnaker 13.5sq m

ANSWER BACK

From Martin Wadhams

The Venture sets a new benchmark for space and stability in a cruising/training dinghy. After launch it was in action at the Southampton Boat Show with a Rockley Watersports instructor introducing up to seven youngsters to sailing at a time throughout the show.

Families are equally enthusiastic, finding the comfort and handling irresistible - we've already heard of two (non sailing) grandparents, a pair of parents and two novice kids all having a great day out - finding the Venture roomy and safe for a remote picnic. There are many options to allow schools and private buyers to customise their Venture to suit their requirements and the price represents exceptional value. Many thanks to Phil Morrison and our RS development team who have made the Venture good looking as well as so practical and rewarding to sail.

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