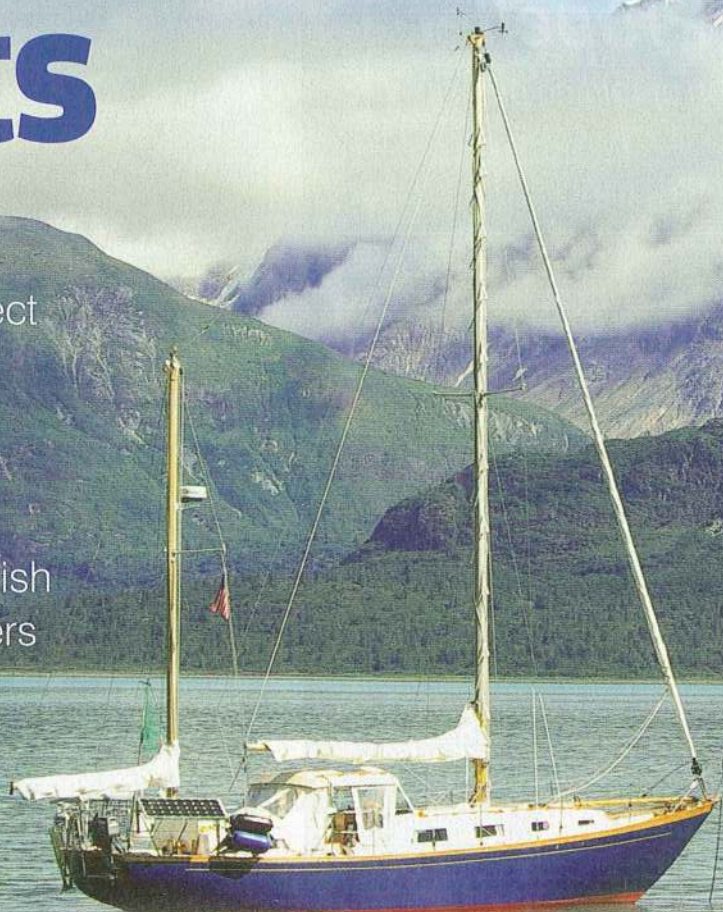


British bluewater boats

What makes a perfect bluewater boat? Peter K Poland considers choices in the second-hand market for great British GRP 37- to 39-footers



Some cynics say that the larger the boat, the more it costs to run and the less often it gets used. But as time rolls by and demographics alter, with more

people having more leisure time thanks to increasing life expectancy, this attitude is changing. The oceans of the world are now teeming with adventurous sailors – often OAPs – fulfilling their dreams and voyaging on their yachts, aided by the modern wonders of GPS, AIS, satellite communications, sophisticated autopilots, furling sails et al.

And the 37ft to 39ft size bracket is particularly popular for such adventures. These yachts are big enough to carry stores and provisions and to cope with heavy weather. Yet they're compact enough to be sailed in comfort by small crews.

In the early days of GRP, British-built

37- to 39-footers ruled the roost, so that is where this survey begins. However, during research I was astonished by the adventurous antics of many members of the Moody Owners Association. So more on these specifically, a few other Brit boats and of course the continental contingent, in following issues.

The 38-footers

Built in 1966, the Nicholson 38 was an early contender. Designed by John Alden, moulded by Halmatic and finished by C&N, the first was exhibited at the 1966 London Boat Show. With her long keel, ketch rig, centre cockpit, protected helm position,

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Peter K Poland crossed the Atlantic in a 7.6m (25ft) Wind Elf in 1968 and later spent 30 years as co-owner of Hunter Boats. He is now a freelance journalist and PR consultant

COMFORT EXPLAINED

If bluewater voyaging is your game it's important to study the statistics and select the right yacht for the job.

Four ratios enable you to compare and contrast differing yachts and assess how they are likely to perform under sail. For help calculating these ratios, see: tomdove.com/sailcalc/sailcalc.html

■ Displacement/length ratio (DLR) shows a yacht's 'heaviness' for its size, indicating its speed and handling characteristics. The formula is: displacement (in lb) divided by $(0.1 \times \text{LWL in feet})^3$. A DLR under 90 is considered 'ultralight'; 90 to 180 'light'; 180 to 270 'moderate'; 270 to 360 'heavy'; and anything over 360 'ultraheavy'. However many older designs with long overhangs have high DLRs that belie their performance potential. Once the boat heels and immerses these overhangs, the LWL increases.

■ Sail area/displacement ratio (SA/D) is equivalent to a power-to-weight ratio. The sail area (SA) comprises mainsail area plus 100% of the foretriangle, not the overlapping genoa, as often featured on brochures. Work out displacement in cubic feet (DCF) by dividing Displacement (in lb) by 64. To find the boat's SA/D ratio, divide its sail area in square feet (SA) by its displacement in cubic feet (DCF) taken to the two-thirds power ($\text{SA/D ratio} = \text{SA} \div \text{DCF}^{0.667}$). A result under 16 indicates a low-powered yacht; 16-19 a reasonably good performance; and 20-22 a high performance. Above that, it's a lightweight flyer.

■ Ballast ratio is self-explanatory. A high figure means a stiff yacht; a low figure a more tender one.

■ Ted Brewer's comfort ratio (CR) is a more obscure indication of a yacht's motion in a seaway. If you want to calculate the CR, it is $\text{Displacement} / (.65 \times (.7 \text{ LWL} + .3 \text{ LOA}) \times \text{B}1.333)$ with displacement in pounds and length in feet. CR aims to show how fast and abruptly a hull reacts to waves. It favours heavier boats with smaller waterplanes, the latter being the function of waterline beam and LWL. A CR of 20 or under indicates a lightweight racer; 20 to 30 a typical coastal cruiser; 30 to 40 a moderate bluewater cruiser; 40 to 60 a heavy bluewater cruiser; and above 60 a very heavy yacht.



The Van Eden and Marilyn Johnson-owned Nicholson 38 *Rainshadow* at anchor in the spectacular Glacier Bay National Park in south-east Alaska

Van Eden

stern cabin and elegant lines she was an instant hit. And a DLR of 361, SA/D ratio of 16.75 and CR of 35 show she's a serious cruiser. The first to circumnavigate the globe, in the early 1970s, was *Mauna Kea*.

Nic 38s still cruise extensively. Hull No126 *Rainshadow* (pictured above) completed a 2015 cruise from Seattle to south-east Alaska and back and her owner wrote on the Nicholson38.org website: 'When we reached our home port after four months, we had covered 2,700 nautical miles – and with only a few dings on the hull to show for it: one when I hit a rather large ice chunk while gawking at Margerie Glacier, and another when I

bounced off an uncharted rock outside Welcome Harbour on the B.C. Coast. The latter was the more alarming, but *Rainshadow* is a tough old boat and handled it better than her crew.'

The Rival 38 (1977) is another British cruiser that continues to roam the oceans. This long-keel yacht has all the credentials. A displacement of 17,196lb, DLR of 299, SA/D ratio of 14.29 (around 17.9 with the genoa) and a CR of 32.87 explain why she is so popular with serious sailors.

Dave Nixon took part in the 2017 ARC transatlantic with his daughter Amy aboard the family Rival 38, *Haji*, which was originally completed by his father in an

LYNN RIVAL

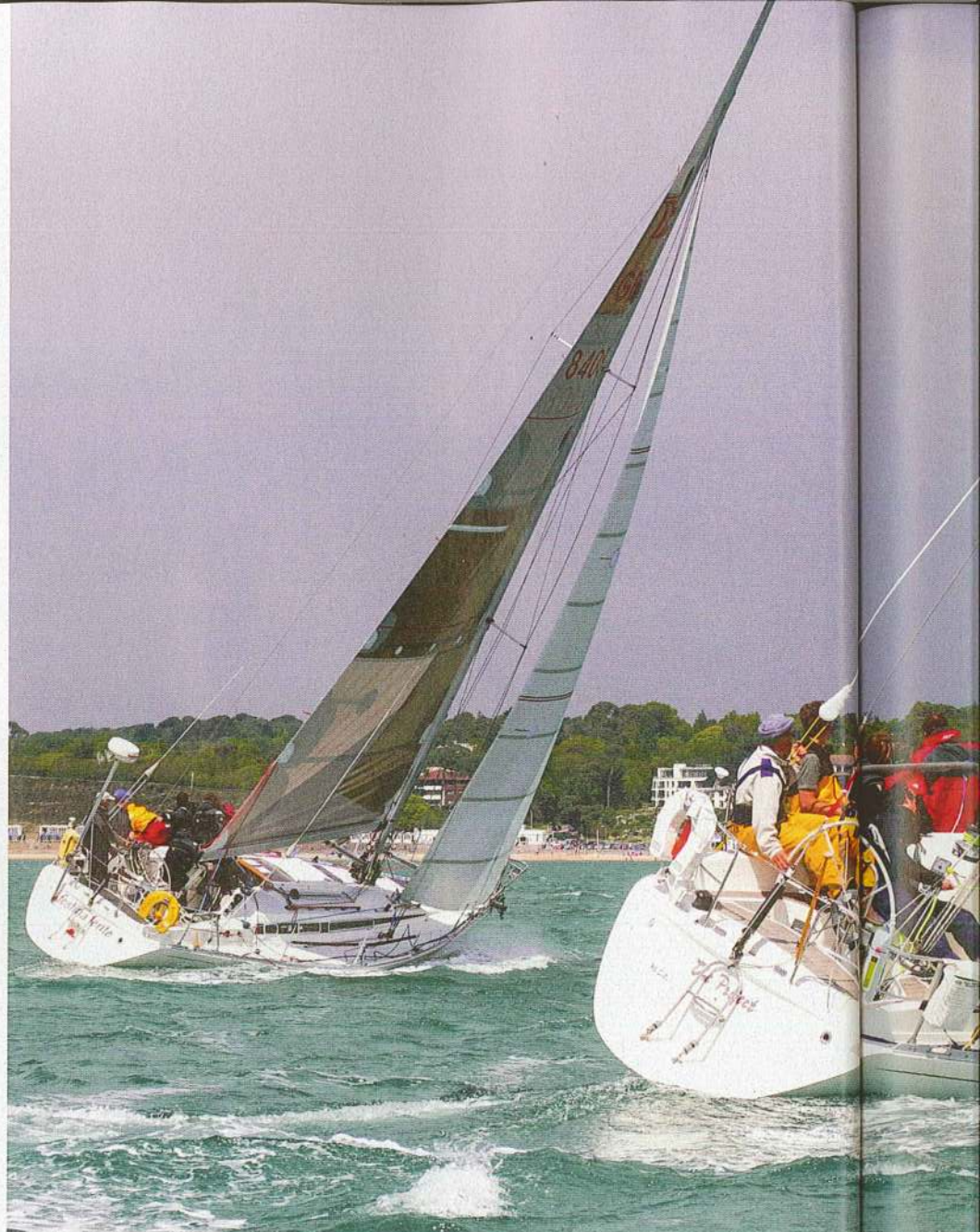
Perhaps the most celebrated Rival 38 sailors are Rachel and Paul Chandler, who were abducted by pirates off the coast of the Seychelles in 2009 and held captive in Somalia for more than a year. In 2012 the couple set sail again on the fully refurbished *Lynn Rival* bound for Uruguay via Brazil, bringing her home this year via the Caribbean and the Azores. She has now been sold. You can find the full story on www.lynnrival.org



Essex garden and sailed on the 1987 ARC. He says: 'I have total confidence in *Haji*. I have sailed her in a Force 8 in Biscay, which she handled in total comfort. I know Dad had some problems in a Force 12 off Florida, requiring a new backstay and a temporary rig to reach the nearest port. She inspires confidence. We are still using the original 1977 Aries windvane self-steering and have much original equipment in daily use. I cannot think of a better boat to cross the Atlantic.'

Jackie and Ian Byrne help run the Rival Owners Association and bought *Rivalady* in 2012, telling me: 'Having owned fin-keeled cruiser-racers we wanted a boat that would look after us and that was more directionally stable. The long fin keel, deep hull shape and skeg-hung rudder were important to us. We also wanted an encapsulated keel.'

Rivalady has fitted the bill perfectly, Jackie telling me that when she had asked other voyaging ladies for advice 'they always said you have to trust your boat. I didn't understand this until we bought *Rivalady*. Now I do. If I'm nervous or anxious I take great comfort in being in



Rivalady and wouldn't want to go sailing in anything else.'

In 2016 they cruised down to Porto Santo, saying 'from Lagos we had up to

25 knots of wind so sailed all the way and alternated between broad reach and dead downwind with sails goose-winged.

'The boat just charged along, stable, content, never giving us any cause for concern. We had reasonable seas at times and she tracked beautifully with the wind vane steering a steady course – just great.'

They added: 'When we have been caught out the boat doesn't slam into the waves, she just ploughs through ... we've faced winds of 40+ knots and never had a problem.'

And what about maintenance? Ian said the boat had a new engine in 2006 and 'we replaced a lot of items before we left: gooseneck, rudder bearings, winches, furler [and] the switch panel.'

If you prefer a sportier cruiser-racer that excels in both disciplines and is excellent value for money, don't overlook the David Thomas-designed Sigma 38. Despite its



Geoff Phillips

LEFT The Westerly Sealord 40 *Spirit of Penmar* on Woodbury Pontoon near Malpas in Cornwall



ABOVE The sportier Ed Dubois-designed Westerly Typhoon 37

LEFT Head to head: Sigma 38s *The Project* and *Festina Lente*

it suitable for short-handed sailing. We have autopilot and vane steering and a 110% furling genoa, but I can convert back to the racing rig in about four hours. In cruising trim we did a two-handed Fastnet and finished 67th overall and 4th in the two-handed class. The boat can't help going fast.

'It is moderate in all aspects (weight, beam, sail area etc) so trundles along happily in all conditions. The relatively large main and small foretriangle contribute markedly to ease of handling. The boat's big enough to look after us when it blows hard (we usually go below and let her sail herself), yet not too big to make docking, anchoring, sail handling etc too physical.

'The heavy, basic lay up and huge box section matrix make the hull very strong. I hit a rock at 7 knots and survived – incredibly, with no damage. Sometimes we get boat envy when inside more plush modern boats – but we'd have to spend £200,000 to get the same size boat, and the envy rapidly disappears when we overtake them the next day!

Tim Pilcher moved from a Contessa 32 to a Sigma 38 as his two daughters grew, explaining: 'Like the Contessa the Sigma has a great reputation for seaworthiness and is a good looking boat. She is fast – at least fast enough for us – which makes covering ground easy, even in light airs, without the need for much engine use.

'She has plenty of accommodation that is very useful when taking family and friends sailing. The cockpit layout is great as people can do jobs without getting in each other's way. I've always felt confident working on deck. Similarly, below decks the pilot berths mean that off-watch crew can rest securely. The galley is tucked away beside the companionway with the chart table the opposite side. Access to the engine, gearbox and stern gland is excellent. David Thomas clearly spent a huge amount of time at sea and knew how to design an effective sailing boat.'

However, finding a good one isn't easy as lots were raced hard in their early

'The heavy, basic lay up makes the hull very strong. I hit a rock at 7 knots and survived – incredibly with no damage'

undisputed speed, this elegant yacht excels as a comfortable cruiser with a 206 DLR, 19.4 SA/D ratio, 41.9% ballast ratio and a CR of 22.83. Its interior is functional and spacious rather than fancy and trendy – but it's designed to go to sea.

Living with a Sigma

Nigel Goodhew has been cruising and living aboard his Sigma 38, *Persephone*, for more than 30 months in the last five years, completing two Atlantic circuits and also doing the 2013, 2014 and 2015 racing seasons, coming 19th overall in the 2015 Fastnet.

'I bought *Persephone* in 2004,' he tells me. 'An easy decision as she is a one-design, so culturally synonymous with the world of dinghy racing from which we were graduating. The boat has been

fantastic! My sons learned to race on her, we sailed as a family, have been across the Channel countless times and completed five Rolex Fastnet Races.'

In 2003 Dr. Phil Meakins bought a Sigma 38, saying it cost much less than most equivalent sized cruisers. Initially he entered inshore and offshore handicap racing and Sigma one-design racing.

Then he retired and things changed. 'We did an Atlantic circuit two-handed. Now I seldom race (can't afford racing sails) but my wife and I spend four to five months each summer in northern waters. We have cruised to the Faeroes, Shetland, west coast of Norway, and the Baltic (spending this summer in the Finnish archipelago), always returning home and averaging 3,000-4,000 miles per year.

'The boat is neutral on the helm making

years. Nick Woolven agreed that his Sigma 38 can have niggles, as you would expect from a 30-year-old boat that has been raced, and major work has included a new P-bracket, new engine (because the boat is often used for tuition), new wiring, rudder bearing and stock brackets and occasional new racing sails.

He sums his Sigma up saying: 'Another fantastic David Thomas design! I'll never stop learning the finer points of how to sail the Sigma 38, or enjoying how easy she is when she settles "in the groove".'

Westerlys and Starlights

For less sporty cruising, the centre-cockpit 1983 Westerly Sealord 39 has many fans. She has a long fin keel, DLR of 241, SA/D ratio of 16.01, 43% ballast ratio and CR of 26.68 so she assures steady, comfortable sailing.

Geoff Phillips, who has completed an Atlantic circuit, told me: 'We always aspired to own a Sealord as she is a wonderful sea boat with a sea-kindly but easily driven hull with extensive accommodation and stowage. The

emphasis is on a seagoing interior rather than acres of space to fall around in... and her deck layout makes moving around a pleasure. Her sailing performance is "fast cruising" rather than exceptional. She was designed as a comfortable cruiser... we sail two-up most of the time, aided by our Monitor wind vane, and she's easily handled by a man-and-wife crew.'

Geoff said another Sealord was in the final stages of a circumnavigation (see yachtcamomile.co.uk) while other friends had cruised their Sealord down to

The Oceanranger 38 makes a great all-purpose cruiser offering good performance and a steady ride



Patagonia and the Falklands. He added: 'Our own Atlantic trip was eventful – including a rigging failure due to a faulty toggle and the mid-ocean rescue of a single-hander – but no issues at all with our Sealord... she is an honest and practical cruiser and as seaworthy as just about any production boat out there.'

And this applies equally to coastal or bluewater cruising.

The 1989 Oceanranger 38 also has a centre cockpit and makes a great all-purpose cruiser. She offers good

Westerly Oceanranger 38 features a centre cockpit

performance and a steady ride with a 244 DLR, 15.87 SA/D ratio and 41.5% ballast ratio.

Mary Buchanan, vice-commodore of the Westerly Owners Association, tells me: 'I have an Oceanranger which I and my husband adore. We bought her in 2000 and love the space, the storage, the cockpit. We like her safety at sea and the layout. There's nothing really we don't like!'

They spent two years sailing out of the Hamble, then cruised her home to the Clyde. Mary added: 'We have since sailed to Orkney, Fair Isle and Shetland.'

'We have also visited St. Kilda and the West coast of Harris and Lewis to Loch Roag. We circumnavigated Ireland anticlockwise – somewhat exciting at times – and have sailed extensively up the west coast of Scotland.'

And what about maintenance? 'We replaced our engine two years ago and my husband has done various modifications to her – she is still going strong,' says Mary.

If a sportier Westerly appeals, the 1990 Typhoon 37 is worth a look. Ed Dubois' sleek design has a 226 DLR, 21.34 SA/D and 36.7% ballast ratio, so she's quick.

Down below she offers two different layouts and typically elegant Westerly finish. Compared to the cruising Westerlys, however, the Typhoon was not a big seller – probably because it was outside the typical Westerly market and considered more of a racer. The 1994 upgrade Regatta

370 is even slicker thanks to interior designer Ken Freivokh's styling.

The 1990 Starlight 39 is another versatile quick cruiser. Designed by Stephen Jones, it has a 275.5 DLR, 15.67 SA/D and 36% ballast ratio. It also has a low centre of gravity thanks to its lead wing keel. Like the Westerly Typhoon, it didn't sell in huge numbers. But find one in good condition and you will have an excellent and seaworthy fast cruiser.

I interviewed one owner who admitted he had gone looking with a shortlist that included the Moody 38, Westerly Corsair, Hallberg-Rassy 37 and other Swedes.

'I started looking around the Solent and West Country,' he said. 'The Starlight was, by chance, the first boat we looked at. It was not quite love at first sight but it ticked boxes. I thought Moodys were too beamy and too high. The Westerly aft cabin was too small and the Swedes too expensive (but nice). I felt that modern French boats seemed too light.'

'I kept coming back to Starlight... About the only drawback is that she has a high barrier between the cockpit and companionway. With the sprayhood up, you go in or out like a rabbit down a burrow. She sails well, especially in high winds. We came back from St Vaast with a wind on the quarter of over 40 knots. She was remarkably stable.'

Next month: Moody yachts between 37ft and 39ft

CHECKLIST FOR A COMFORTABLE CRUISING YACHT

In 2014-16 Steve Litson sailed his Rival 38 around the world, covering more than 46,000 miles, including one ten-day stretch in 40+ knot winds that gradually built 50ft following seas. "Wandering Dream had 0.5m² of genoa unfurled," he reports. "At times she was averaging ten knots and surfing down the waves at up to 15. Waves were landing on the solar panel arch and filling the cockpit, but at no time did I feel she was in any danger. This was the biggest weather and seas I had experienced in her and she proved to be solid and reliable in extreme conditions. Also the deep cockpit gives good protection from the elements."

His checklist for choosing a round-the-world yacht is illuminating for all sailors:

Must-haves

- 38-40ft yacht
- wheel steering (not hydraulic)
- 35% ballast ratio
- 20+ Comfort Ratio
- 2m (6ft 2in) headroom
- two sleeping cabins (min six berths)
- good access from cockpit to side decks
- good sea keeping and sailing qualities
- well-respected manufacturer for durability and strength



Steve Litson's Rival 38 Wandering Dream takes a break in the Cocos Keeling islands

- slab reefing/inline spreaders
- good fuel and water storage
- shaft drive

Ocean sailing equipment

- SSB
- wind generator
- solar power
- water maker
- diesel generator
- wind vane steering
- holding tank
- auto pilot
- inverter
- smart charging
- LED lights
- bimini