

THE L34

...WHAT IS SHE REALLY LIKE?

As I am the part owner of *Solar Wind* L34 No. 001, and had a lot to do with the origination and development of the boat, I am definitely the wrong person to write a performance report! I am biased, I am in love with the L34! However, the Editor insisted I write this article having sailed the boat from Cape Town to Durban. So, if it is too one sided, blame him!

By DAVID COX



John Gordon-Thomson and myself had a 33 footer designed in 1980. Inspired by the success of our L26, we set out to produce a one design cruiser racer. However, not enough interest was shown in the L33 at that time to warrant going ahead with the project. The plans sat on a shelf for 5 years until early last year when we thought the time was ripe to discuss the project again. John Robertson and Jerrold Salomon expressed interest in building the boat and with input from them, Angelo Lavranos updated the design. She was lengthened a foot to 34 feet (10,4 metres) and the interior layout was updated and improved tremendously. The keel was changed to a modern bulb, getting the centre of gravity down really low, and giving the boat excellent self-righting characteristics. The idea was presented to a number of interested yachtsmen in Durban, and much to everyone's surprise eight orders resulted off plan! These orders were sufficient for John Robertson to agree to

the long and expensive job of tooling up for a production run. The eight orders were taken in August 1985, and just 11 months later "Solar Wind" was launched.

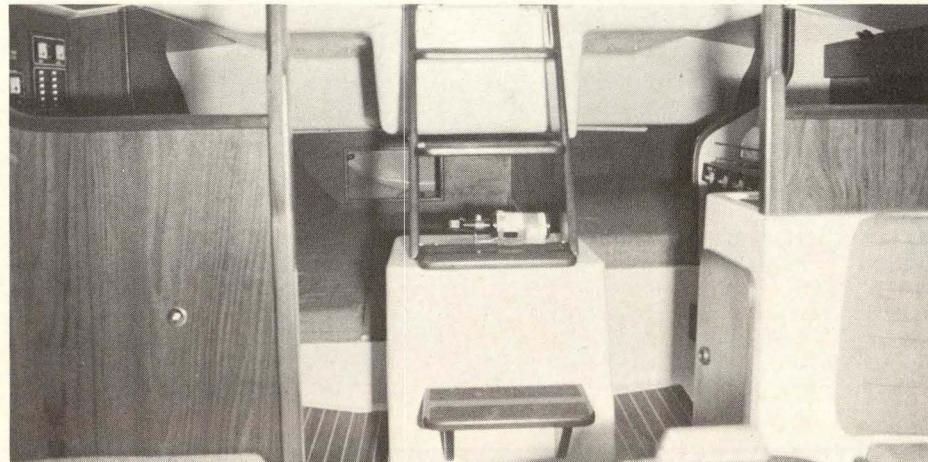
I think that the careful thought and high standard of finish which has gone into this boat must make her one of the best production boats ever to be built in South Africa. Anyway, back to "Solar Wind." After launching on Monday 7th July, the champagne bottle being cracked jointly by John Gordon-Thomson's wife Clare and my wife Annie, we were ready to sail for home (Durban) by the Friday. We decided to break with sailing ship tradition and sailed at midday on Friday 11th July. It was a beautiful day but unfortunately the light North Westerly soon dropped away, and we did quite a lot of motoring before we rounded Cape Point at about 2200 hours. The L34 proved to be very easily driven under power, and she easily exceeded 6½ knots. At a cruising speed of 5 knots the 18 H.P.

Yanmar diesel consumed less than a litre of diesel fuel an hour. The engine installation is very quiet, and I slept happily in the quarter berth with the engine running. With 85 litres of fuel aboard, we could have motored for about 4 days! The engine, unobtrusively installed at the foot of the companionway stairs, is incredibly accessible, not all that usual in yachts.

In the early hours of the next morning we hit Easterly winds gusting up to 35/40 knots. We learned we had a powerful boat capable of going to windward in a hurry. After going through the reefs as the wind increased we ended up under a triple reefed main and No. 3 jib. We finally dropped the No. 3 jib and under triple reefed main alone lay quietly under the lee of Cape Hangklip (we were cruising after all) until the wind moderated next morning and we got under way again. A series of glorious sunny days with cold nights followed until as we approached Cape St. Francis we had our first opportunity to try the boat with

gale force following winds. The South Westerly arrived at sunset and built steadily during the night. By dawn it was blowing 35 knots and during the morning we had gusts of 40 knots plus. As the wind increased we went to the first reef, then the second and finally the third. At this stage the jib was stowed and we ran downwind hour after hour under the triple reefed main. Control was perfect and the following seas reached a size sufficient for us to surf at up to 12 knots under our pocket handkerchief rig. If we were racing we could have carried more sail, but we were treating this shakedown voyage as a cruise and we didn't have any intention of driving the "living daylights" out of the boat. As it was we maintained a very high speed, and at 0700 hours we were abeam of Port Elizabeth and some 16 hours later we were passing East London, an average speed of over 8 knots.

During this part of the trip we were testing our gear. Our V.H.F. radio transmitting through a very neat combination Windex/VHF aerial worked perfectly. This fitting really does make for a clean masthead. Our S.S.B. transmitter, pre-tuned to our 13 metre aerial length before being fitted to the boat, also worked well. The deck layout, winch positions, sheet and halyard leads were all perfect and no alterations are required here. No doubt the racing man will add his barber haulers, lead the backstay adjusting tackle forward and that sort of thing, but the basic layout is fine. Reefing is particularly easy and required only the helmsman and one crew member on deck. Ease of reefing was enhanced by the Bellamy strut kicking strap



The two quarter-berths are clearly visible and the engine is mounted under the companionway ladder.

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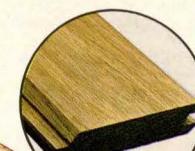
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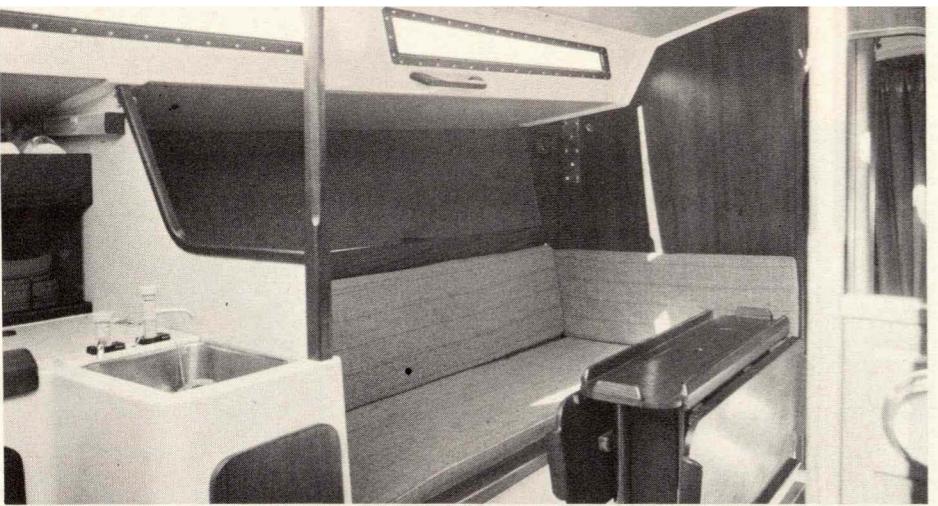
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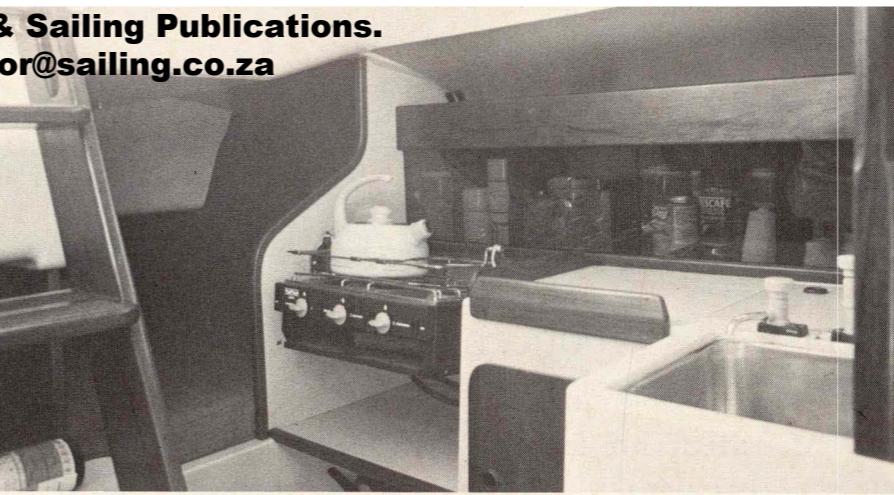
which acted as a topping lift during reefing operations and stopped the boom dropping down and hitting the deck or getting caught under the guard rails. This extra is well worth fitting.

The helming positions are extremely good and are very comfortable. The angles of the coamings and contouring of the cockpit seats are excellent and for heavy weather downwind sailing the helmsman sits in the cockpit and steers with the tiller. Sailing to windward, he sits on the specially sloped outboard side of the cockpit coaming, steering with the tiller extension. This position is absolutely secure, comfortable, and gives an excellent view of the genoa luff. It is just as comfortable to steer to windward sitting inside the cockpit, and this is the obvious heavy weather position.

So much for the situation above deck, what about the interior? Well, I certainly can't think of another 34 footer with the L34's interior volume. The layout really is practical and worked well at sea. The bunks are roomy, but not so large that one rolls about when running downwind. The double berth aft, thought by some to be only a harbour berth, actually makes a very good sea berth. The mattress is split, and a lee cloth divides the berth into two for use at sea. There is ample stowage for food and clothing, and a big draining wet locker for oilskins. A large toilet compartment closes off with a sliding door and offers excellent privacy. The gallery was workable in bad weather and excellent meals were produced during the passage. The double burner gas stove is serviced by two gas bottles, situated in a special compartment aft, closed off to the boat's interior. In the event of a leak at the bottles, the gas will drain overboard. The navigation station also worked well, in both fine and bad weather.

Small details make the difference between a good boat and a superb boat, and the L34 has many of these significant little details. The engine compartment for instance has a moulded in sump and oil spillage can't escape into the bilges. The Brooks and Gatehouse log impeller has its own compartment. It is hidden away, can't be kicked and broken, and any water admitted during fitting or removal is confined to this very small compartment. The liferaft has its own roomy, cool and dry stowage compartment. This has direct access to the cockpit and because of the dry, well ventilated sunfree environment, the raft should last a long time. A second watertight locker can be used for sheets, sails, fenders, warps and that sort of thing. The working anchor, plus rope and chain, is kept in a special foredeck anchor locker. A large, well insulated cold compartment is moulded in under a portion of the saloon settee, and could be refrigerated for those who require this luxury.

What about the purely social aspects of the boat, for instance at anchor, on the moorings or at a marina? Here I think she really excels. Down below the saloon is roomy and airy, the folding saloon table is large (it also has a liquor cabinet built in) and ventilation is excellent. The main hatch is big, there is a Lewmar skylight over the saloon, and a smaller skylight in the toilet compartment. For entertaining on deck the cockpit is huge (but volume is well within the safety limits) and the tiller can be



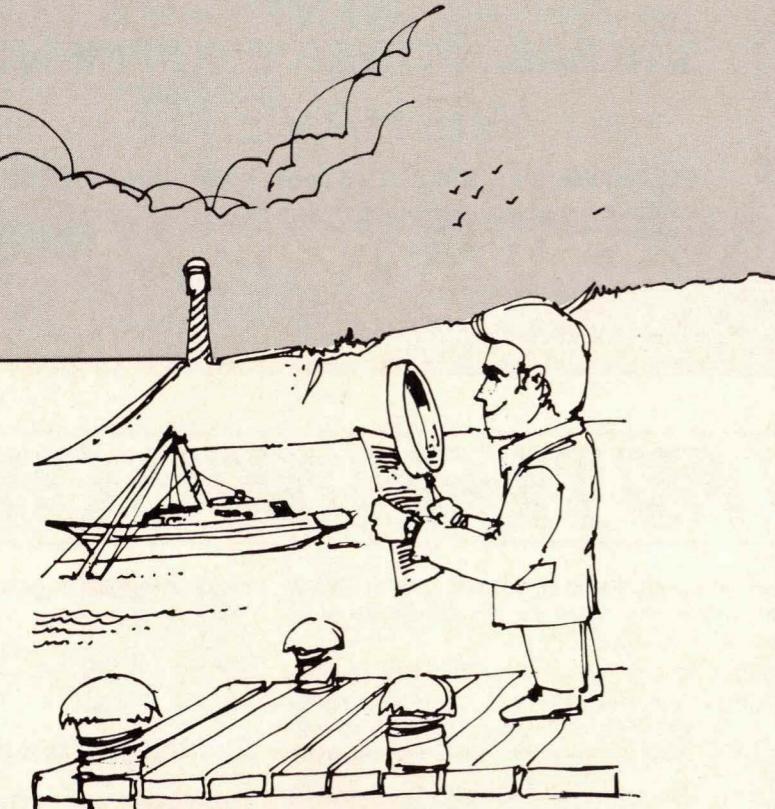
Above: The spacious galley. Below: Opposite the galley, the well appointed navigation area.



swung into the vertical position and lashed out of the way. We have entertained twelve with ease aboard "Solar Wind" on moorings. A very good feature is the lifting board in the transom. A short length of guardrail is released by pelican hooks, the lifting board removed, and a series of moulded steps take one onto the "sugar scoop" stern. For mooring stern-to at a marina this feature enables one to step easily onto the dock. It also makes boarding simple for swimmers, and is excellent for boarding the dinghy, or the children's Optimist. She is a very versatile boat which will suit the racing man, the family sailor or the long distance cruiser, or the lucky people who have the time to do all three. For deep sea work we have licensed "Solar Wind" for 9 people by day and 8 by night.

When briefing Angelo Lavranos to do the design we set out to produce the impossible. We wanted a very fast, easily handled boat which could be cruised long distances with a small crew, raced on passages, raced around the buoys, or used for weekend sailing. We realised the boat would have to be a compromise, but in the event she has exceeded our expectations. She will certainly do all the things described above and do them well. Just how fast is she? Well, with a crew of five, one who had never been to sea before, we covered the distance between Cape Town and Durban in six and a half days. We didn't drive the boat hard, we were loaded with good food and other things, and we lived well! Sailing against other boats since we have arrived in Durban, we can confirm she is fast. She is powerful to windward, and simply flies when the sheets are eased.

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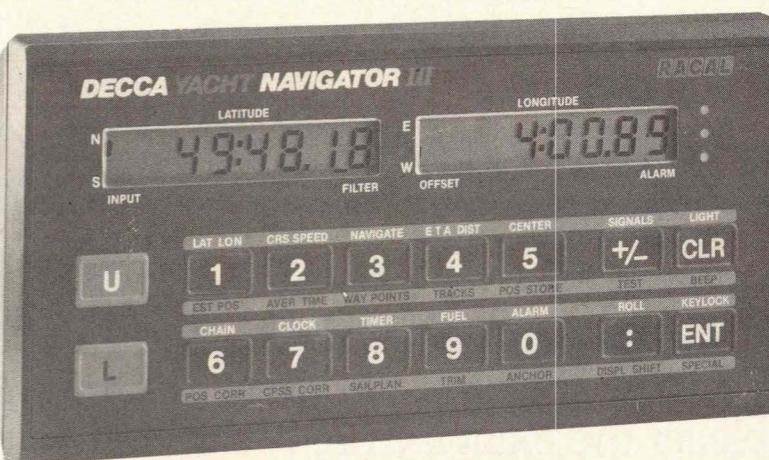
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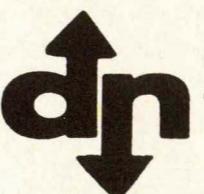
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