



TOP 10 BRITISH DINGHIES OF ALL TIME

10. Laser 5000
09. Cadet
08. Kestrel
07. British Moth
06. Fireball
05. Mirror
04. GP14
03. Firefly
02. International 14
01. The 505

the 505

1st

The countdown of Dinghy Sailing Magazine's list of top UK dinghy designs reaches its climax this month with the 505 proudly taking the number 1 spot.

Over the last ten months, UK dinghy designs have faced tough competition, as other equally deserving dinghies could easily have replaced any one of the 10 boats chosen. Each of the boats that were finally selected clearly had an extra special 'something', which lifted them above the rest. Right from the outset the editorial team at DSM knew that the final selection was bound to be controversial, as was proven by the monthly mailbag, which has contained many letters and emails suggesting dinghies that our readers felt were worthy of inclusion.

All of the boats featured in the series are excellent, but when it came to choosing the top design there can be little in the way of dissent. The class chosen to top the list really does represent the very best in dinghy design. A famous designer (involved with Concorde no less) once said that sometimes a design was so 'right' that it was immediately apparent that any further development would add little to the quality of the original. He then went on to quote the Comet Airliner, the Spitfire and the E-Type Jaguar. In dinghy terms, there are very few designs that could be described in this way. The most noticeable of these is the Flying Dutchman/Contender shape (for they share remarkable similarities) but as both dinghies are from foreign designers they fall outside of the terms of this list.

'The winning design is so unique and recognisable that it really does stand head-and-shoulders above the rest!'

The winning design is so unique and recognisable that it really does stand head-and-shoulders above the rest! The John Westell creation that became the 505, is as eye catching as it is fast, whether it is thrashing around a windy open water Championship race course, or ghosting along in the lightest of zephyrs at an inland lake location.

John was already a dinghy racer of note, reaching the final qualifying Trials for the dinghy slot at the 1948 Olympic Regatta. In 1952, he started work on a design for a boat to compete in the 1953 IYRU Dinghy Trials at La Baule. At 18ft, his first boat was considered quite long for a dinghy, but from the overall length perspective John's design was in line with the ideas of the time for performance dinghy design.

The main feature of the Westell design, (which at the time was called the Coronet), was the hull form which included topsides, that flared out to create a hull with a narrow waterline, but a wide overall beam. In exploring this feature, John drew on the experience of Austin Farrar, who in the year before had designed a beamy International 14. Austin had designed the interior of his boat so that the cold moulded sidetanks rolled upwards and outwards, thus

helping to extend the beam. The additional width of the sidetanks provided a comfortable platform for the crew to hike out from. At the same time, the flared hull shape proved effective at deflecting the spray and water downwards and outwards (remember, this was still in the days before self bailers). The development was seen as too radical by many within the International 14s and following a class wide vote, was outlawed.

John utilised Austin's hull development to great effect on the Coronet, with the boat being one of the stars of the IYRU Dinghy Trials. From a purely performance viewpoint, the Coronet could well have been considered the winner of the event. Instead, the IYRU chose to expand the international status of the Flying Dutchman, a boat that has enjoyed a long and glorious career as the Olympic performance dinghy.

Another entrant to the Trials was a French dinghy - the Caneton. The backers of this boat were so impressed with the Coronet that they approached John Westell requesting that he modify his design to suit the French rules.

All John had to do was reduce the hull length to 16ft 6", or 5.05 metres, lighten the hull weight and trim the sail area down to a more manageable size. John also revised the Coronets hull lines, softening



some of the more angular flare into a more sweepingly curvaceous shape. This resulted in an initial design that was very different to any of the other performance boats of the day. John's final design had underwater sections that were markedly flatter and less rockered than most conventional dinghies of that era. Above the waterline, the flared hull sections, which gave the boat the appearance of having an extended gunwale, resulted in a considerable hollow in the topsides, a design feature that many classes were quick to legislate against. The new line drawings were presented to the French Caneton Association, who were so enthusiastic about the new boat that they adopted it before the first boat had been completed. Building on this presence in France, the 505 started its early life with a strong international presence

and by 1955 the IYRU granted the class international status.

The very early boats were made from wood, but soon Fairey Marine started to use the same build techniques developed for the Firefly, to hot mould hulls for the 505. The complex hull shape with curves running in two planes, was an early candidate for GRP construction and it was not long before the first boats were being constructed using this material. Since then, the 505 Class has been involved in a process of continuous but conservative updating, with hulls being laid up from epoxy, kevlar and carbon fibre. The rig too has developed over time, with the most recent change being the introduction of a much larger spinnaker.

In the UK, the Class has suffered in the face of the 'buy it off the shelf' skiff designs, however on a worldwide

basis, the 505 continues to represent the pinnacle of dinghy sailing outside of the Olympic Classes. There are many sailors who feel that the boat is so demanding in respect of both technical knowledge and tactical sailing ability that the 505 should have been given the opportunity to shine as an Olympic Class.

Today, there are skiff designs that are faster, but these have yet to answer the questions of durability and longevity. However, the 505, with a hull design that has remained the same and will continue to do so, has already proven to the dinghy world that it has been the best in the past, is the best now and will continue to be the best in the future.

That is why the 505 is the top boat in Dinghy Sailing Magazine's Top Ten British designed dinghies. It is, 'Simply the best'.