

Dear Mr. Pearlman:

First, some history: There used to be a fleet of day racers hereabouts called I-boats or Class I. The proper name was Massachusetts Bay Yacht Racing Association 18 Foot Waterline Restricted Knockabouts, so they had to be called something for short. They were built to a measurement rule made up in the 1890s and were about the most competitive class in the country for eight or ten years. Charles Francis Adams, for instance, had several of them—a new, up-to-date design every year or so.

The boats gradually got kinkier, as happens when designers try to build the most boat inside a set of restrictions. By 1908 they were all about 31 feet long on deck, still with 18-foot waterlines. They were rigged as gaff sloops, with sail area limited to 450 square feet. They had big fin keels, about like the one shown here except that the roots of the fins were faired into the hulls with planked-down fillets. For a while most of them had separate rudders like today's racing boats, but toward the end they went back to rudders hung on the fins as shown here. I'll be interested to see if this happens again in the next few years.

They gradually went out of fashion as the top sailors went into other classes. The last of them were still racing at Sandy Bay Yacht Club in Rockport, Massachusetts, after the Second World War. I once saw one of them humiliate the North American Champion 5.5-Meter over a triangular course. They finally all perished of old age, but (the point of all this preamble) many people still remember their speed and power with nostalgia. Even the most extreme modern keel racers look like bulky cruisers alongside them.

This suggests that we can get the sensations you're envisioning without going longer than 31 feet, which happens to be a convenient length for plywood construction (three butts).

The I-boats were essentially flat-bottomed, though the bilges were rounded off and the sections had reverse curves over the keel. We don't have to respect the restriction to 18 feet waterline, so we can eliminate the rule-cheating hollows in the end profiles. The fairer sweep of the bottom will compensate for the square bilge. I don't think there's anything to be gained by an arc bottom. It would be structurally stiffer, but it's best to have a thick bottom anyway, and some stringers won't add much expense. It's my opinion that the vertical sides make the fastest boat as well as saving some time in assembly. In a boat as low-sided as this, with exaggerated tumblehome of the transom obscuring the rectangular stern sections, the boxy shape won't be very obtrusive. If you'd be happier with a little flare, I wouldn't give you much argument. I'd split the difference between the bottom and deck, making her slightly wider on deck and slightly narrower on the bottom.

Not all the old I-boats had trunks and cuddies, but all the late survivors did. I like the looks of it myself. It's handy for locked stowage, and I've slept a good many nights in such cuddies, dry and screened. Add a cockpit tent, and you'd have a weekender.

There's no doubt about the speed potential of keel sharpies. If you put an IOR-type sloop rig on this hull, you'd have a fast and weatherly boat. However, your stipulations about the rig touched a chord. I agree with you that bending masts in compression is undesirable, to put it mildly. But the fact is that a bendy-masted sloop will beat a stiff-masted sloop every time. We don't have to beat everything afloat, but you say you'd like all the speed you can get. This rig here, which I'd call a staysail cat, is what I think almost happened to masthead sloops at one time. Remember when the ocean racers

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