

SCORPION



PHOTO JEREMY EVANS

The Scorpion might be pushing 50, but the latest versions of this classic class have plenty to offer. **Jeremy Evans** sails a state-of-the-art edition with a sting in its tail...

First, a history lesson. Scorpion No. 1 was launched at Porthpean SC in January 1960, with a narrow hull designed to cut through Cornish surf and marine plywood construction for professional or amateur builders. The boat was a quick-fire success, with Scorpion No. 70 winning the first national championship at Worthing in the same year.

The 1960s and '70s were good decades for the class, hitting a high with 160 boats at its 1974

national championship. As with most classic classes, numbers dropped dramatically in the late 1980s and early '90s. Seeking to rebuild their class, the association promoted the Scorpion for its light hull weight (81kgs), tolerance of a wide range of crew weights and sparkly performance boosted by a very generous kite. A focus on regional training and youth events helped build numbers to more than 60 boats at every (week-long) national championship since 2000, plus an open circuit

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Right The new Scorpion is stylish and angular. It appears narrow with a distinct 'V', which sets it apart from modern flat-bottomed designs.



which includes 14 dedicated Scorpion regattas this season and class starts at other events.

Recent development

The Scorpion has been steadily modified to keep pace with the times, treading a fine line regarding what is acceptable to class enthusiasts while attracting new blood. Buoyancy has been changed and the hull modified within original plywood tolerances to provide a flatter shape that planes more easily. The rig retains its classic pinhead shape but has been maximised to the current limits of performance with a technical array of controls, as fitted to the boat – a 'Dave Wade championship replica' – we sailed during this test.

An unusual feature of the Scorpion is that most of the current fleet are wooden boats with Gosling Dinghycraft, Paintcraft/JJ Boats and CPC Boatworks all building new Scorpions in wood to order, from around £7,500 according to specification. Glassfibre has played a much smaller role than in other reborn classes like the Enterprise, Fireball, Firefly or GP14, although Chris Turner (national champion crew in 1992 and 1993) started to build foam sandwich boats at Specialized Marine before merging with Ovington Boats earlier this year.

The brand spanking new P&B Scorpion is now being built by Ovington in super-light, super-stiff

epoxy sandwich construction under the direction of Chris Turner. For customers who want the best available, Dave Wade fits out the boat at Pinnell & Bax to match his national championship-winning specification in 2004. The optional 'club spec' has simpler controls and less sophisticated foils, or 'custom spec' is available to order with all boats tuned and calibrated to suit specific crew weights.

Hull and rig

Having spent time on most of the classic dinghy classes – from Cadet to Flying Dutchman – the Scorpion is one of the few that escaped my net. I'd never sailed or looked closely at one, so Dave Wade's Scorpion was a surprise.

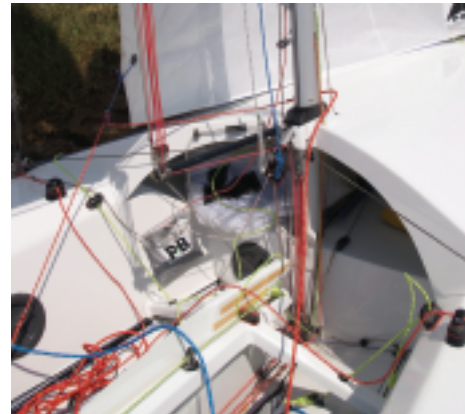
It appears beautifully built and fitted, as you would expect from Ovi and P&B. Forget that the design is 46 years old. The new Scorpion is white, gleaming and angular, with a stylish drawn-out stern providing the Scorpion's tail. It looks really narrow with a distinct 'V', setting it well apart from the flat bottoms that dominate contemporary dinghy design. This is a hull shape with character, that is also light. The Ovi hull is so light in the ends, to reduce dragging the stern and pitching, that they've put 7kg of lead correctors where it's most effective, low down in the centre.

Scorpion class rules allow totally open cockpit layouts and rig systems, with Dave Wade's boat

Below There are no rudder rules, so most favour a conventional lifting rudder, but options include an all-carbon, Milanes fixed foil.

Below middle The large rig and oversized jib mean that most rake has to be adjusted according to conditions.

Below right The cockpit features a lot of control lines.



reflecting currents trends at the winning end of the fleet. The cockpit looks open and quite roomy, despite a load of controls! This is clearly a tweekers' boat, which at first sight appears complex. Dave explained that it's a sophisticated development of the classic pinhead rig, removing unwanted compression so the rig acts as a self-supporting structure that only bends to your will. Two issues need to be sorted. First, it's a big rig if the wind is up. Second, the oversized jib (more like a genoa) has a large overlap which squeezes the slot as the breeze kicks in when you're sailing upwind.

The solution is to start raking the rig back as soon as the boom gets pulled off the centreline, using adjustable forestay and shrouds for absolute precision. P&B provide an easily followed tuning guide, which Dave used to win the nationals. When raking the rig, the centreboard must be raised and jib barber-haulers moved forward so that balance is retained in the rudder with the jib leech not too open. The tuning guide gives a pretty good idea of what and how much to pull in progressive wind and sea conditions.

Launching

The Scorpion is a true twin-crew boat, with a recommended weight range that should suit an archetypal husband/wife, parent/child or two lightish blokes. Start off by stepping the mast on the foredeck – not difficult, but you do need four hands – raising the jib and hoisting the mainsail. With marginal help from myself, Dave progressed from packed-on-trailer to ready-to-launch with no sweat in about 20 minutes. A modern Scorpion may appear complex, but practice will clearly overcome any problems which Dave claims is also true afloat; 'Once you're correctly set up, it's an easy boat to sail!' He certainly makes it look easy...

Before you start, this lightweight boat is also really easy to wheel down a ramp and slip into the water. The low transom provides a perfect step-in for the helm who would normally push down a little centreboard and rudder before the crew hops in over the side. However, there are no rudder rules for Scorpions, so while most favour a conventional lifting rudder, Dave prefers an all-carbon, Milanes fixed foil and tiller which is unbelievably light. It's also deep, so instead of getting the crew into deep water, Dave gave an impressive demonstration of the almost forgotten art of rudderless sailing – steering with jib, main and body movement – to get off the shore.

Sailing

This is a boat that clicks straight into sailing upwind. It wants to point high, foot fast and is very responsive, with the chined hull shape allowing a gentle angle of heel rather than the 'must be flat' attitude required by younger designs. With quite a narrow hull and plenty of upwind sail area, you clearly need to hike for maximum performance with ergonomics that suggest hiking shorts are a wise investment – but it's still not as tough as a Laser! You might also imagine that a long and slim hull won't turn so easily, but with that big jib to pull it round tacking feels fast and tactical – one good reason why Scorpions are favoured for inland racing, in addition to their original surf-breaking role.

Offwind, the kite is a big symmetric sail – much



PHOTO: JEREMY EVANS

bigger than a GP14 and almost as big as a Fireball. With an easy planing, lightweight hull you start to feel well powered in Force 3. We got little more wind during this test, but Dave advised the Scorpion can become 'a bit tippy' in a blow, to the extent that some crews drop and hoist the kite each time they gybe. By contrast, we found gybing with the kite easy and controlled in mellow conditions. If the boat does go over, it floats quite low for flipping upright with the centreboard. You can expect water over your ankles in a single bottom cockpit, most of which should disappear fairly rapidly through transom flaps and bailers.

The helm has a load of room at the back of the Scorpion; the crew is a little more cramped, but there's still enough space for anyone halfway slim. For preference, Dave reckons the crew should be kept very busy minding the rig while the helm concentrates on driving, with his championship boat set up so controls can be pulled by all four hands. Sail choice and design is unrestricted, but Dacron is still mandatory for mainsail and jib after a recent closely-fought class vote on allowing Kevlar. As for a carbon mast, Dave reckons it's a non-starter in terms of cost when the Proctor Cumulus or Superspar M7 provides a very efficient rig.

The verdict

You pay a premium for an Ovi Scorpion because it's light, taut and sensitive, providing an immediate result from each gust of wind. You can buy similar-sized dinghies at little more than half the price, which is why they are heavy, floppy and consume energy by comparison.

The Ovi Scorpion is an extremely refined, state-of-the-art version of a classic design. It has a totally different attraction from all the more modern one-design racing dinghies which may be

Above The large symmetric spinnaker means the Scorpion can become quite challenging in windy conditions, but gybing proved well behaved in a Force 3.

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great fun to sail, but are 'out of a box' and will always stay the same. Scorpions provide a very individual sailing experience, always changing and getting more refined with the class holding the brakes on cheque book developments.

Owning and sailing a wooden boat may provide an added attraction, but for minimum maintenance the Ovi Scorpion provides a top performing solution. This was demonstrated at the Scorpion inlands on Grafham Water in June this year, when the first two Ovi Scorpions helmed by Dave Wade and Chris Turner raced in their maiden regatta. They finished 1-2, winning every race in conditions from 30 knots to light and shifty. ■

Thanks to Cobnor Activities centre (CAC) for providing facilities for this test. CAC runs a full programme of residential and non-residential sailing courses and activities in Chichester harbour. For more information visit www.cobnor.com

Above The helm has plenty of room at the back, although the crew area is a little more cramped.

ANSWER BACK

from XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

Ovington Scorpion specifications

DESIGN: Taprell Dorling in 1960
 LENGTH: 4.27m
 BEAM: 1.45m
 HULL WEIGHT: 81kg
 IDEAL CREW WEIGHT: 121-159kg
 SAIL AREA: MAIN 6.7sqm
 JIB 3.25sq m
 SPINNAKER 11.14sq m
 PN: 1056
PRICE: (CHAMPIONSHIP SPEC) £8,411

BUILDER: Ovington Boats

SUPPLIER: Pinnell & Bax Ltd
 Heathfield Way
 Kings Heath
 Northampton NN5 7QP

TEL: 01604 592808
 EMAIL: info@pinbax.com
 WEBSITE: www.pinbax.com
 CLASS ASSOCIATION: www.sailscorpion.co.uk

COMPARISONS... Where does the Scorpion fit in? Here are some alternatives...



■ LARK

Popular traditional one-design based on designer Mike Jackson's experience as a top helm in National 12s and Merlin Rockets. Forty years young next year!

LOA:	4.07m
BEAM:	1.65m
HULL WEIGHT:	95kg
SAIL AREA:	UPWIND 9.75sq m
	SPINNAKER 7.4sq m
PN:	1073
GUIDE PRICE:	£6,300*



■ GP14

Jack Holt classic designed in 1949. More stable and less feisty than a Scorpion with considerably smaller kite. Regular entries of 60-plus at nationals and major events.

LOA:	4.27m
BEAM:	1.54m
HULL WEIGHT:	133kg
SAIL AREA:	UPWIND 12.85sq m
	SPINNAKER 8.4sq m
PN:	1127
GUIDE PRICE:	£6,600**

*Guide prices are approximate **including sails