

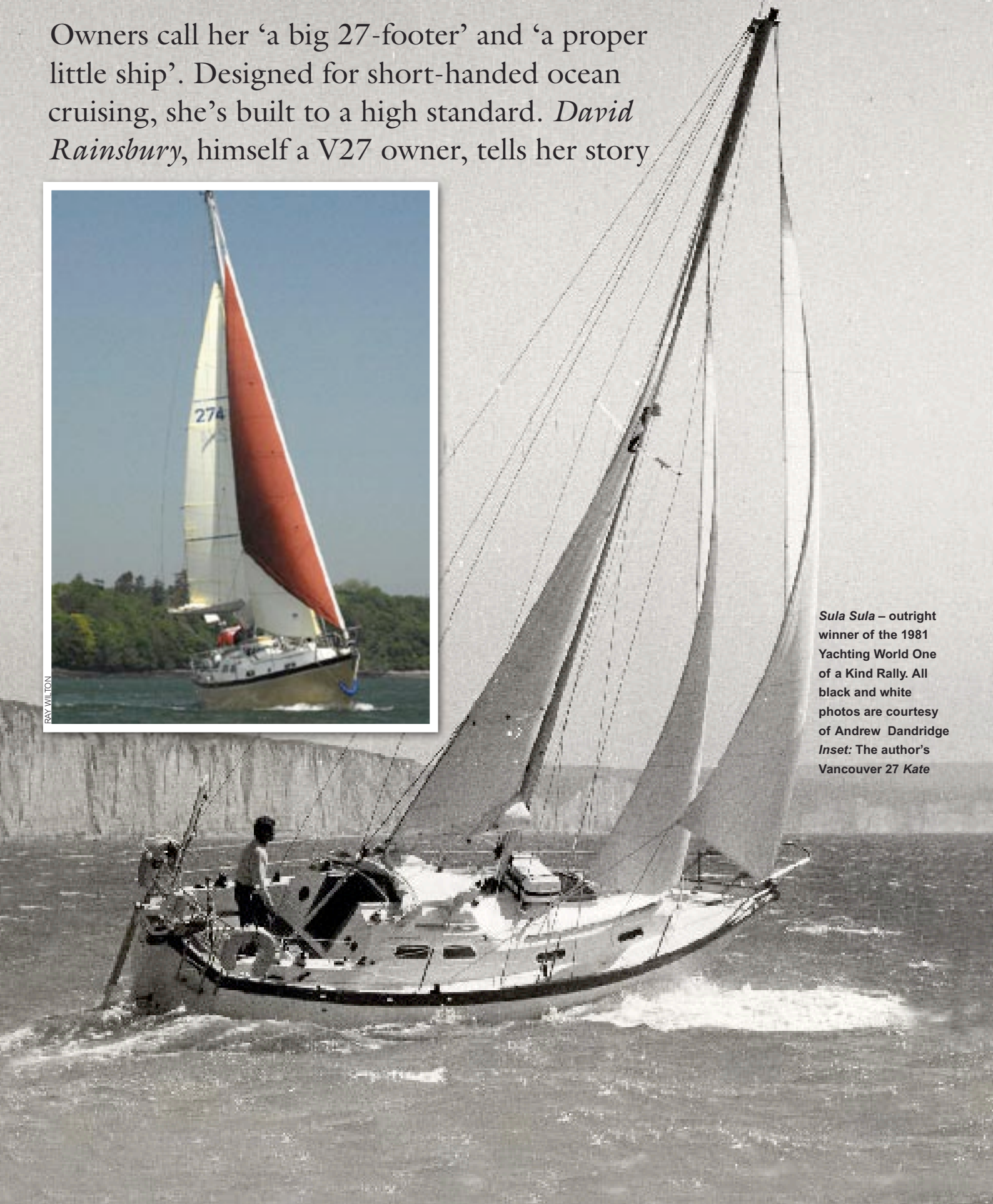
TEST OF TIME VANCOUVER 27

Owners call her ‘a big 27-footer’ and ‘a proper little ship’. Designed for short-handed ocean cruising, she’s built to a high standard. *David Rainsbury*, himself a V27 owner, tells her story



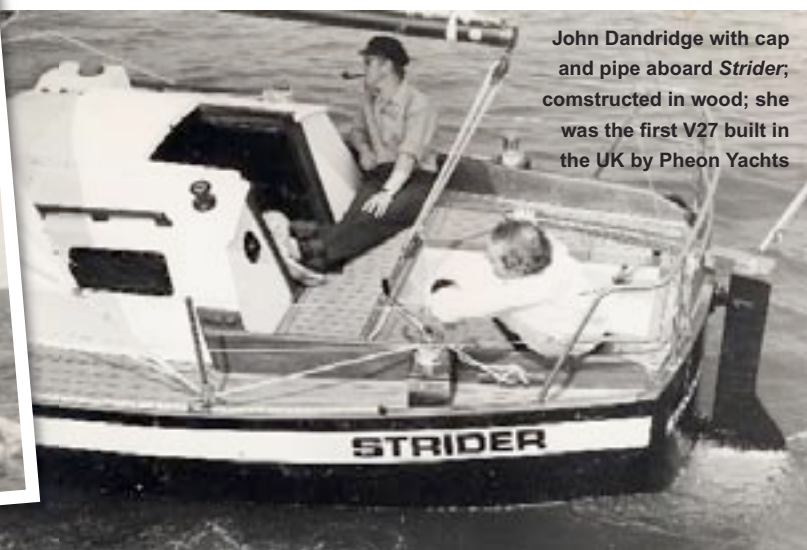
RAY WILTON

Sula Sula – outright winner of the 1981 Yachting World One of a Kind Rally. All black and white photos are courtesy of Andrew Dandridge
Inset: The author's Vancouver 27 *Kate*





Production line at
Cartell's shed



John Dandridge with cap
and pipe aboard *Strider*;
constructed in wood; she
was the first V27 built in
the UK by Pheon Yachts

My previous yacht was a Contessa 26. After spending what added up to years living in her cramped accommodation, sailing over 30,000 miles, I felt the need for a bit more space for the longer passages I had in mind.

Finding a larger yacht with her seakeeping ability and performance was going to be difficult. I had been looking out for a Vancouver 32, but when I heard Vancouver 27 *Kate* was on the market I decided to take a look. Stepping into her cockpit, I was struck by the workmanlike efficiency of her deck layout and the sturdiness of all her fittings and gear. Going below, the layout

is made for life at sea: a proper chart table and enough room to be comfortable in but not so much that you are going to be thrown around when it gets rough outside. My first thought was, "This is all the yacht I need." And so she has proved to be.

The Vancouver 27 was conceived as a small cruising yacht, capable of being sailed across an ocean by a crew of two. The cutter rig keeps the headsails small and gives maximum flexibility of sail plan; a long keel provides seakeeping and directional stability; there are large water and fuel tanks and only three bunks, the space forward being given over to stowage.

Designed by Robert Harris for a Canadian couple to sail across the Pacific from Vancouver BC to New Zealand, the original Vancouver 27 was built as a one-off in 1973. When a second was commissioned, a glassfibre mould was taken off the hull and for several years the boat was built on a semi-production basis, initially by Tradewind Boats in Port Coquitlam, British Columbia. Later, production was moved to Philbrooks Shipyard and then Seair Marine Ltd of British Columbia. In 1988, the moulds were destroyed in a severe storm and construction of the boat ceased in North America.

The Vancouver 27: lines and build

The Vancouver 27 exudes strength and simplicity in every department. Fittings are chunky and of a size and strength more often seen on yachts of 35ft (10.7m). The design is robust and heavy but her displacement to length ratio is misleading. Due to her slender beam she has a surprising sailing ability in light airs. With a sail area to displacement ratio of only 14 the boat may appear under canvassed but she will average 120 to 140 miles per day in the trade winds, with the occasional 150-mile day thrown in for good measure, and will achieve 110 miles per day and more in variable and headwind conditions. Because of its size, a couple can sail the boat to its potential more often than they could in a larger boat. The result, not surprisingly, is passage times comparable to those of boats 50 per cent larger and costing three times as much.

The hull

The hull and deck mouldings are of hand-laid GRP, stiffened by longitudinal stringers and progressively increased thickness, up to 20mm towards the stem and keel, immensely strong. She has a heavy-displacement hull form, with a long keel and cutaway forefoot. The propeller is protected in an aperture, while the transom-hung rudder is both positioned well aft and is easy to reach for repairs. Equally important in a voyaging boat, the outboard rudder can be fitted with a simple and effective self-steering device.

The rig

The cutter rig sets her apart from modern designs with their highly stressed masts and huge single headsails. With the mast set almost amidships the mainsail is small enough to be easily handled and is supported by forestay and twin backstays with cap shrouds running to the deck edge via unswept spreaders. Two pairs of lower shrouds support the mid-section of the mast. The inner forestay is countered by running backstays, each tensioned by a block and becket within reach of the cockpit, though in practice these are only used in strong winds. The large foretriangle allows a variety of sail plans, dividing effort between headsail and staysail.

On deck

The cockpit will seat four adults, but is small enough to reduce the risk of flooding from a boarding wave. The bridgedeck serves to strengthen the hull and will keep stray deck water out of the cabin. The coach roof is well cambered, quickly shedding boarding water in heavy weather, and the wide side decks make going for'ard easy and secure, though the running backstays can trip the unwary. On the foredeck Pheon fitted a sturdy rail over the dorade vent. This both protects the vent and gives security for foredeck crew. One disadvantage of the inner forestay is the lack of uninterrupted foredeck space to inflate a dinghy.

Below decks

Standard three-berth layout (Caretta, V27)

Because no effort has been made to provide more than three berths, the boat's interior incorporates several big-boat features and 6ft 6in (2m) headroom. This is a couple's boat, that can be a comfortable home for long periods. The galley to port and the quarter-berth and chart table to starboard are both of a size and style found on 36-footers. The chart table is large enough for a real chart and the quarter berth is an excellent sea berth. The

settee berths are long and wide enough for a large person but no provision has been made in the layout for a double berth for harbour use. The head is forward of the main saloon bulkhead. One drawback of small yachts for long passages is the lack of stowage space. The V27 has a water capacity of up to 65 gallons and the fuel tank holds 45 gallons. The forepeak is given over entirely to stowage.

Four-berth option (Kate, V274)

The forepeak is fitted out as a vee double, and though this is rather short for tall adults it is ideal for younger crew. The head is to starboard with the shower tray midships and lockers to port. The main saloon bulkhead is thus further aft and the length of the settee berths is maintained by use of trotter boxes. Instead of a quarter berth to starboard there is a wet locker at the navigator's back, the remaining volume being given over to a starboard cockpit locker.



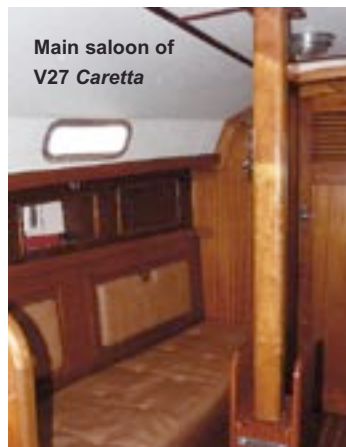
David Rainsbury in the cockpit of his V27 *Kate*, comfortable in a F6

RAY WILTON



Sunrise leaves the shed at South Heighton, the first GRP V27 built in the UK by Pheon Yachts

ANDREW DANDRIDGE



Main saloon of V27 *Caretta*



Original galley of V27 *Caretta* with sink and drain board

RAY WILTON

Sailing performance

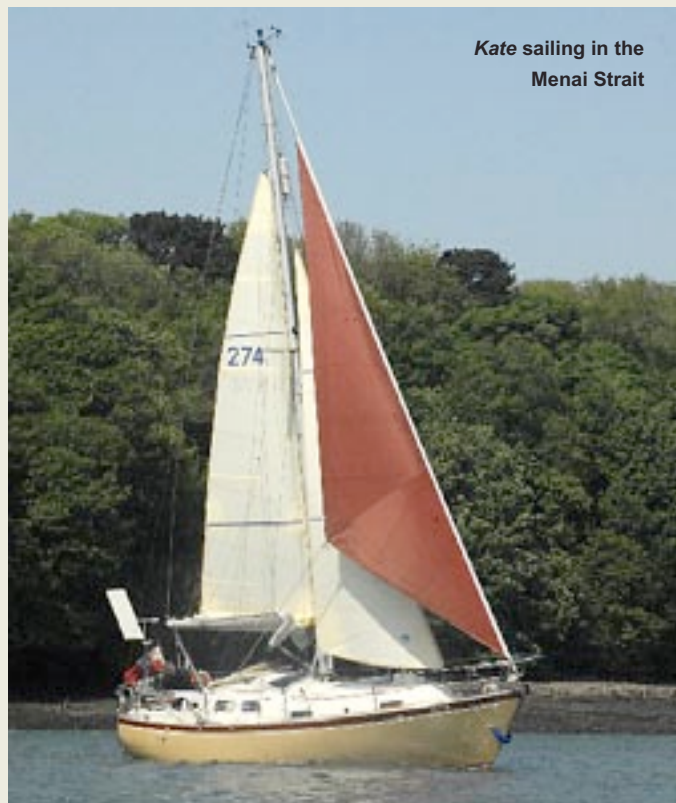
Conceived from the start as a boat to sail the oceans of the world, top-end speed and weatherliness have been sacrificed in favour of stability, ease of handling and comfortable accommodation.

Kate can carry working canvas up to 18 knots apparent. As the wind strengthens I pull down a reef in the main and put a couple of rolls in the yankee until she is jogging along comfortably under double-reefed main and staysail. The hull is quite high-sided, so the decks tend to stay dry in all but the worst conditions. Oddly, when sailing hard, water can slop over the aft end of the leeward coaming.

In light airs under full working sail she remains responsive, tacking easily, especially when the staysail is held aback until she is through the eye of the wind. Her long keel demands that she be sailed round rather than turning sharply, and though acceleration is stately she makes good speeds once under way.

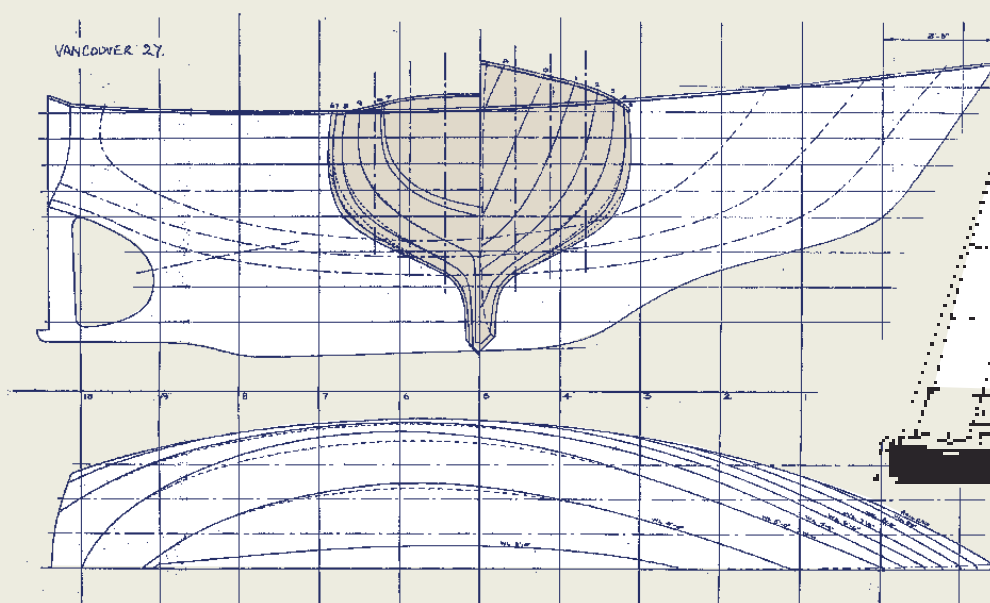
Close-hauled, though the cutter rig may not point quite so high as a masthead sloop, she has the ability to hold her course whilst making little leeway, leaving her upwind of her rivals. Reaching, she is fast and surefooted, never faltering as the wind comes aft even with a big quartering sea. On a dead run she will roll, though not to extremes, and the cutaway forefoot ensures that she is unlikely to broach. The helm is light and balanced on all points unless she really is being overpressed, with only slight weather helm up to about 20° of heel.

Overall she is even-tempered and forgiving but capable of exhilarating performance, and when it gets rough she keeps her head, inspiring confidence with her unruffled strength.



Kate sailing in the Menai Strait

RAY WILTON



Vancouver 27

LOA: 27ft (8.2m)
LWL: 22ft 11in (7m)
Beam: 8ft 8in (2.6m)
Draught: 4ft 3in (1.3m)
Sail area: 379sqft (35.2m²)
Disp: 8,700lbs (3.9 tonnes)
Ballast: 3,500lbs (1.6 tonnes)
Ballast ratio: 38.5%

Price guide
£24,000-£32,000

19mm thick plug
taken from *Kate*'s hull



DAVID RAINSBURY

Back in the UK the design had been taken on by John Dandridge and his son Andrew at their Pheon Yachts yard at South Heighton, near Newhaven. While the Canadian producer fell by the wayside, the Dandridges and Pheon Yachts forged ahead, not least due to their commitment to perfectionism, and their capacity for sheer hard work.

The first British Vancouver 27, called *Strider*, was completed in wood and went to an owner on the River Orwell. She was very much as Robert Harris had designed. The interest at the time of construction was huge and it was clear that GRP was the

only way forward, so as *Strider* was being built a mould plug was started for the GRP version. However, when *Strider* was launched she was found to be very tender with a tendency to roll a lot. Designer Robert Harris was in the UK for the launch and it was agreed to fill out the mould plug by 3in (75mm) each side at waterline level to stiffen her up, giving the distinctive and very attractive tumblehome look.

The first GRP V27 was launched in June 1976. Andrew Dandridge had just qualified as an interior and three-dimensional designer and took this yacht, called *Sunrise*, up to Denmark with the owner, Kristian

Lambertson, spending three weeks on board. This gave him the opportunity to see how she performed. On his return he started working with his father, introducing refinements to the design, and for the next 11 years was constantly developing ways to improve the design and construction techniques.

The second V27 was sold as a shell for home completion. The third, *Trinity*, was the last yacht to be built in the shed at South Heighton. To satisfy demand, production moved to Cantell's Boatyard in Newhaven. During the construction of *Trinity*, Pheon was visited by Martin Barr,

The origins of the UK-built Vancouver

BY ANDREW DANDRIDGE

Son of the Pheon partnership, Andrew was responsible for much of the design work. He is now a painter and his eye for elegant proportion and what looks 'right' is evident in the layout of the Pheon-built yachts.

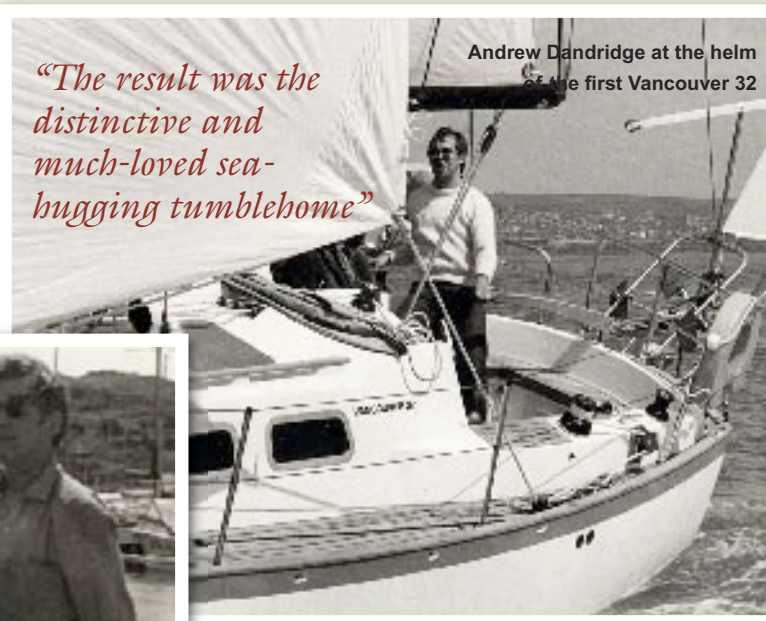
My parents John and Peggy Dandrige started Pheon Yachts Ltd in 1972 – the company was named after a 19ft (5.8m) gaff-rigged bilge-keeler my father built in our back garden in Sevenoaks when I was 11.

The first yacht he fitted out was a Hurley 24 but at the time of completion the Hurley company went into receivership. Looking for his next project he started work on a cold-moulded one-off 20ft (6.1m) Vagrant.

It was while building the Vagrant that my father saw an article about a yacht called a Vancouver 27 being designed for a couple to sail from Seattle to New Zealand. Struck by its appearance, he immediately contacted the designer and asked if he could build one in Britain. Bob gave him the rights for Europe so he stopped work on the Vagrant and started a cold-moulded Vancouver. At the same time he advertised the yacht in *Yachting World*. The response was immediate and Vancouver 01, *Strider*, was built for a Dutch client.



John Dandrige



Andrew Dandrige at the helm of the first Vancouver 32

“The result was the distinctive and much-loved sea-hugging tumblehome”

It became clear that wooden one-off construction was not going to work long-term. Work started on a plug for a GRP version. *Strider* was launched as the plug was nearing completion and Bob Harris came over to see the result. It was found that whilst she sailed beautifully she was rather tender and rolled a bit too much. Bob suggested adding 3in (75mm) to the beam at the waterline to increase stiffness. It was just in time as the plug could still be altered, albeit with buckets of P38 car body filler! The result was the distinctive and much-loved sea-hugging tumblehome only seen on UK-built Vancouvers.



COURTESY NORTHSHORE YACHTS



The legend lives on: the Vancouver 28 is still in production at Northshore Yachts; left, her interior

lead guitarist of the rock band Jethro Tull, who placed an order for a V27 to be called *Sossity* – later featured in a glowing article in *Yacht and Boat Owner*, July 1978, with the quote “As with the Vancouver 27 or a Rolls Royce, anything at the top of its market is a fail-safe investment”.


Pheon was launching one V27 every week. Exposure in the yachting press boosted demand, and in 1981 the V27 *Sula Sula* won the Yachting World One of a Kind Rally, sweeping the board in every category. Andrew developed layout variations such as the V274 with forward double cabin and amidships shower compartment.

Meanwhile, Vancouvers were forging an enviable reputation for seakeeping and performance. English sailor Rona House completed a solo circumnavigation aboard her Vancouver 27, earning her the Ocean Cruising Club’s Rose Medal.

In 1979 Bob Harris drew up the lines for the Vancouver 32 and the first of the line was exhibited at the 1980 London Boat Show. About 130 Vancouver 27s and up to 30 32s were built at Pheon.

Both the 27 and 32 were tiller steered, but increasingly owners were looking for wheel steering. Also, though the cockpit of the 27 is ideal for a couple and secure in

rough conditions, it was considered cramped with four or five aboard. The solution was to modify the transom to give a counter stern, thus extending the cockpit without radically altering the underwater shape. This became the Vancouver 28.

The mid-80s were a difficult time for the yachting market. The company was bought by Kevin Seymour, an enthusiastic V27 owner. Despite this Pheon went into receivership the following year and its assets were bought by Northshore Yachts. Production was moved to its yard at Itchenor where V28s are still being built to Andrew Dandrige’s 1986 design. 

ZOPHIEL

"this is a proper little ship"

ANNA PIZZAMIGLIO



MARTIN EDGE AND HIS VOYAGES IN HIS VANCOUVER

"I have sailed *Zophiel*, my first real boat, 14,000 miles in six seasons, mostly solo and including a North Sea circuit and a trip up to Arctic Norway.

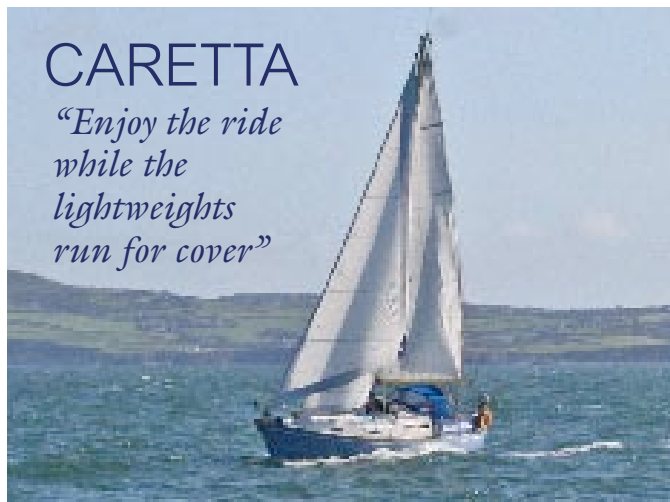
"People often don't know what I mean when I say she's a big 27-footer. As soon as they go aboard they understand. This is a proper little ship. Not fast but a proper sailing boat which will keep going whilst all around boats twice the size with full crews are broaching or heading for harbour.

"Everything in the small, secure cockpit is directly to hand. The manageable cutter rig and main with three deep reefs and single-line reefing mean that I can reduce sail to the size of a Mirror dinghy without leaving the cockpit. To windward, I often forget when her wind vane steering isn't connected, she steers herself so well."

CARETTA

"Enjoy the ride while the lightweights run for cover"

RAY WILTON



RAY WILTON APPRECIATES THE SIX-FOOT HEADROOM

"Sail boats are made for sailing and that is what I love about the Vancouver 27. She may not be quite as fast as some modern lightweights, but she is certainly no slouch. The versatility of the cutter rig, long, heavy keel and small cockpit give a feel for a secure and comfortable ride. In a breeze, heeling to about 15° and stiffening up, you just point her where you want to go and let her get on with it.

"When it starts to blow hard, roll up the yankee, and under staysail and reefed main enjoy the ride while the lightweights run for cover.

"Down below the 6ft (1.8m)-plus headroom, large galley, forward-facing chart table and 6ft 6in (2m) berths all give a feel for a much larger yacht. Reversing under power can be challenging, but half an hour with the engine in reverse to find what she can and can't do will soon have you getting in and out of even the tightest marina berth."

Robert B Harris, father of the Vancouver legend

Robert Buckman Harris was born in New Hampshire in 1922 and at the age of 20 joined the US Merchant Marine Academy as a cadet, seeing wartime service in the US Merchant Marine. In 1945 he joined the Wood's Hole Oceanographic Survey ketch *Atlantis* as mate before completing four years as an apprentice with Crosby Yachts, Oyster Bay, New York.

In 1950 he joined Sparkman & Stephens, staying until 1957. In his spare time he designed and built catamarans, notably the cold-moulded *Tiger Cat*, winning *Yachting Magazine's* one-of-a-kind race in 1959. His books on multihulls was a pioneering work. After a time at Grumman Aircraft and designing multihulls with Frank Maclear, Bob returned to S&S.

In 1972 he moved to Vancouver and set up a small office. The first design off his drawing board in his new office was the Vancouver 27.

Now in 'retirement' Bob is still active as a yacht designer and has just published his autobiography, *Tracks on the Water*. I asked him where the inspiration for the design came from, what he thought of it now, all these years on, and where the project fitted into his long and distinguished yacht design career.

"The concept for the design of a small ocean-crossing cutter arose out of a request by the late George Hartley of Vancouver BC to provide plans for him to self-build the boat according to his general arrangement requirements. I accepted the challenge and he



"I doubt if I would want to change any feature"

paid for the plans by building an office for me in an old empty iron works building on False Creek in Vancouver. The result was a double-headrig sloop, often called a cutter, of about 27ft (8.2m) by 8.7ft (2.7m) beam and a draught of 4.3ft (1.3m). The boat he built, in endgrain balsa core glassfibre laminate, attracted Tradewind Boats of Port Coquitlam BC to request licensing for production units, thus starting a class of boats we named the Vancouver 27.

"My wife Patricia and I have sailed extensively in a Vancouver 27 and if we have another chance with one again I would want her to be rigged and arranged exactly as per original layout and equipment because I would not want to change any feature of the design. Oh, at times if we had a guest or two with us it would have been more comfortable in the cockpit of the Vancouver 28,

an addition requested by the UK producer, Northshore Yachts, plus giving room for a steering wheel and binnacle. Once established, I doubt if I would want to change any feature for the 27.

"Prior to the design of the production Vancouver 27 plans, and before the first hull for George Hartley, all my own design work was in multihulls. Beside that it was the first design I did upon moving to Vancouver, a very important step toward a new era in monohull yacht design. It led to many new designs I was to do in Vancouver."

Robert B Harris designs are now handled by Rodney Cowen, Tel: +1 604 809 9409; Email: vanyacht@shaw.ca; www.vanyacht.com