

## Malcolm Evans, Member N<sup>o</sup>. 242 & ex-Vice President of the DCA, and Jack Holt's RAMBLER

**E**ach time I get the marvellous present-day DCA Journal I see my name and a number. The number is small and stays the same, unlike the cost of living. When I check the Membership list nowadays I see very few three-figure numbers, and I now realise that my number is second to smallest. And this sets me thinking. In the beginning was the word. That is to say, we just used names. I understand that when it got too clumsy, numbers were allocated to the original members alphabetically. After that people got numbered as they joined. Don't forget that this was in the years BC (Before Computers).

I had been building a Jack Holt RAMBLER (17ft) in the sitting room. It was too big to go out of the window, so I cut it in half along the hog, passed it out through the window and hurriedly glued it together, with the keel and an extra hog to make a sandwich of the split hog. It was freezing, so we covered all with a tarpaulin and set a kerosene heater going to cure the glue. Later we glued an inner hog to make a sandwich for strength. In 12 years of hard use it held together as we cruised in the Solent, to Poole and round the Isle of Wight, as well as on the East Coast, the Broads, Swansea Bay and Milford Haven.



Photographs of RAMBLER Lively in the 1960s by Malcolm Evans

While building it we saw a notice of a talk by John Deacon of the DCA on dinghy cruising, and as young impecunious people we thought it would be just the thing for us, so we joined at once. The annual subscription was 5/- (for the young among us, that means five bob, or 25p) and I had the pleasure and distinct privilege to sail in company with John and the *Jady Lane* on many occasions. It warms my heart to see the spitting image of John and the *Jady Lane* on the mailing cover sheet of the Journal. If it isn't him, it should be. (*It's whoever you want him to be, Mal, be my guest -Ed*)

When I got to be Vice-President my Secretary used to type/cut the stencils for the Journal so they could be duplicated by hand, by a process long forgotten. (It was BC, remember!)

On emigrating to Australia we sold the boat and recouped the cost of building, later buying a plastic bathtub with a top (a bit of a come down?) which we sailed in Port Phillip Bay (Port Melbourne), the Victorian Lakes and the Murray Mouth Lakes (when present), but the real joy was sailing single-handed out of Westernport into Bass Strait where the circumpolar swells come sweeping in from the West, so that even on the calmest of days at the bottom of the swell there was no sight of land even close in, the boat going gently up and down.

In this, one was aided by the Great Thermal Engine of the atmosphere. In the morning the sea is warmer than the land and the wind blows from the land to the sea, wafting simple sailors out to sea. At 12:30 the wind falls away as the land warms up. Then, after lunch, the wind blows said simple sailors back to land. What a Dispensation of Providence! It never failed me in ten years. I did keep my ear open for forecasts of fronts. The passage of fronts can be exciting here. Known as Southerly Busters, they divide Victorian sailors into two classes, those that have survived a Southerly Buster, and those that have not. And that's not always a joke. I got blown right on my beam ends, foot on the centreboard, even, though I was singled up, reefed right down, and expecting it.

At 70 I decided that single-handed small boating in Bass Strait was a bit foolish, so I too took to the races, as we could always get a crew for that. Enjoyed that for ten years, too, and never missed it for work !

So there's a lifetime of sailing under the DCA banner, (leaving out the bits south of Cape Horn).  
ME



Rambler Lively

# Building Jack Holt's *YACHTINGWORLD* RAMBLER 17, by Malcolm Evans

**A**fter he received my piece about being member No 242 from the years 'Before Computers', our Editor asked if I could do a piece about building our old boat, the Jack Holt RAMBLER 17, so: Back in '63 when I got to a position in the Hospital Service where I was likely to stay for a little while, and had a spare room, we started to think of building a boat. Just the two of us, at that time.

Which boat? Sailing for sure, capable and capacious. Strong. Not too heavy; stable and deep, so as to be IN rather than ON the boat. But shallow draught withal. So, a centreboard. Chine ply, within my skill capacity. I had reasonable woodworking skills, but no boat-building experience.

However, We Antarcitics Can Do Anything !

Going to Earls Court and reading the journals led me to the Jack Holt RAMBLER. 17 feet, double-chine, nailed and glued ply built on mould frames, with a clean sweep from bow to stern and no frames left in the way. They could be built either half-decked, or with a small cabin, or with a hinged cover over the fore cockpit. She had a heavy galvanised centreboard and airbags for buoyancy. Beam was 6ft 3ins. She had a rockered keel and the sail area was 184 ft<sup>2</sup> maximum. So we bought a set of plans, with a licence to build one boat, and that's when we met snag one.

Even if we took the casement windows out, the boat would be too large to get out of the room. It's a big boat.

Long pause for thought. Visit to Jack Holt in Putney:

'Jack, suppose you cut a RAMBLER down the middle to get it out of the window, could you glue it back together again ?'

He went a bit pale and sat down. Then, 'Yes, I suppose so. Let me know how it goes – take some photos, if you can!'

So we spent a fortune (then) on wood, ring nails, brass screws and glue. We used very dense high-quality mahogany ply that I haven't seen for years, and cut the keel and stem apron in half. After bolting the parts together again we built the hull in the ordinary way, on mould frames that had been cut in half then screwed together with a sister piece, so that the halves could go with each half of the boat. As it was a bitter winter, though, we would have to get a kerosene heater to cure the glue.

Came the day ...

One thing about a hospital, lots of willing helpers eager to witness a disaster! Actually, good friends, all. Even those only there for the beer!

So, camera at the ready, we unbolted the halves and lifted them with the half mould frames and off the (so far) free transom. Each side of the boat then became just a thin ribbon of ply with a slight twist to it.

These were rapidly passed through the de-windowed window frame, glued together with an extra hog of 3/4" marine ply joining the two half hogs, the transom also glued and nailed in place



*Gretta Evans with Richard on the tiller*

and all bolted up again. A tarpaulin was thrown over all and the kerosene heater set going, as it was a freezing night outside. It was all such a hurry, fearing that the twisted ply would untwist without the support of the other side, that I forgot to take Jack's photos, so, sorry, none for you now either. And I am ashamed to say that I never told Jack Holt how successful it was – or what a good design it was.

Later the keel was glued and screwed on top of the hog (which was underneath when the boat was righted), so the join was sandwiched. When the glue was cured the hull was solid and very strong, all parts giving strength to each other, and taking the strain equally. When struck it boomed like a drum.

It was at this time we went to a talk on the DCA by John Deacon, and joined.

Finishing her off as a half-decker was straightforward. Building the 21ft mast was a particular pleasure. We got cruising sails from Jeckylls of Wroxham, and a 24 ft<sup>2</sup> storm jib later. Roller-reefed foresail and main. We could always use the jib as a storm mainsail. The tabernacle came from a scrapyards in

Southampton. All-in-all, building from the plans was uncomplicated; they seemed to be intended for home builders, not boatyard craftsmen.

And so we came to the first wetting of the keel on a cold and foggy day on the Thames. Little thinking that one day I should own Australian wines I did not have a bottle to break – waste! – but in she went. Sadly there was a certain amount of seepage round the centreboard case. Disappointing, but ... simple corrective measures cured the case and there was no more trouble in eleven years of hard use.

As we had read that in Tudor times two warships had been built on the Hamble, *The Lively* and *Badger*, well, as our boat was so light in the water it was a no-brainer.

We soon found that *Lively* was fast, forgiving and was indeed lively. With a tent the length of the boom, braced out with elastic to the shrouds, there was a most comfortable space at the beamiest part. (Now that there were four of us, we needed it.)

With increasing experience the cruising areas grew. It was light and easy to tow with an ordinary car, two people could carry it, even with the centreboard in, for a short distance. Square buckets clipped between the foredeck beams for food and stores.

The buoyancy bags doubled as rollers, and the bilge could take a couple of bottles of red and some beer. Not for nothing did I fly the white triangle of the Dinghy Boozing Association, sailing from pub to pub. The Jolly Sailor to The Folly Inn very often!

Over the years we sailed the Blackwater and Broads, the Thames and the Solent, often in company with John Deacon and the elegant *Jady Lane*, his old clinker boat that he boasted he preserved with creosote. (Now owned by Aidan de la Mare –Ed)

Later we sailed from Lymington to Poole for a Rally there, which got us out of sight of land. We felt like real cruisers. SE force three, and a bit hazy, I remember. What could be better?



*Malcolm Evans (right) with our Librarian Doug Forster during the latter's visit to Australia some six years ago. Mal says they look like a couple of old codgers; Doug says they look like typically well-seasoned DCA members. As always, dear reader, the final judgement is yours –Ed*



*Gretta Evans feeding Cath under the boom tent in the capacious cockpit of the Rambler. A great advertisement for its roominess and stability.*

From the Middle Thames, Solent to Poole, Milford Haven, where we sailed alongside the First British iron battleship, having previously steamed past the last, to the Cleddau, Broads to the Blackwater. And in and around Swansea Bay with its tides of 30 feet and streams to match.

I never wished I had made a different choice either, because of its sailing qualities, its seaworthiness, its accommodation, its handling on land, towing and ease of getting her on or off the trailer. It was easy to do it single-handed, with a winch one way, and gravity the other.

There are many very happy memories, a repeated one in particular, of waking in the early grey dawn in some anchorage or other, peering through the front of the boom tent to check that the anchor rope was OK, and that the bearings were within limits, to find that the boat had looked after me again.

With a beam of 6ft 3ins and use of crew weight inside the boat she was very stiff, and with the high freeboard very little flying water came over: if we were sitting in the fore part of the cockpit it mostly went overhead, while the rockered keel meant she was very easy to steer, particularly when gybing.

Various other smaller forms of shelter were tried over the years, from a frame of alloy tubes supporting a rubberised hood to a 6ft pram, carried as a tender, in halves (is this some sort of fetish?), that could be reassembled differently to make a cuddy. It all got in my way when I needed to get to the mast or mooring bitts in a hurry. I have heard it said that in a well-organised boat you never need to hurry. Frankly, this has not been my experience.

We always went back to the boom tent where there was plenty of room and I could get through the front of the tent to the mast and running rigging.

It was a real sadness to sell when we went to Australia, recovering the cost of building. But it went to a good home. The new owner had sold his yacht to pay for his children's education, but found that they could not do without any boat at all. *ME*

++ To see *RAMBLER Lively's THIRD lease of life after her second owner sold her on in the 1970s – and to see a lot more of that lovely big hull – go here: <http://www.bluelightning.co.uk/Lively/lively.htm> ++*



## YACHTING WORLD RAMBLER (1954 Review)

**T**he RAMBLER is the ninth and latest addition to the *Yachting World* 'Build-her-yourself' series of designs. She is a versatile boat, fulfilling, in her various versions, several different purposes. Jack Holt, who has designed many well-known boats for the series, including the GP14, Cartop (HERON) dinghy, and the YW CADET, has collaborated with the Editor in this design.

The RAMBLER is undoubtedly fast; a man who has designed the *Yachting World* HORNET is not likely to produce a slow boat, and the prototype has been sailed against and can hold her own against the NATIONAL 18 class boats and others; but it is not speed which is so important here. With 6ft 3in beam and high freeboard the RAMBLER is a camping cruiser which can, and will, be raced: not a racing boat in which the crew could sleep.

There are three quite different versions. *Plan A* with a larger mainsail which gives 168ft<sup>2</sup> total area, no cabin top and a large cockpit, makes a fast, stiff and dry day-boat that can be sailed by a family party or raced in estuaries or in semi-open waters with three in the crew.

For those who like to move about the country the centreplate can be lifted out at the end of the day to ease the work of hauling out and lifting onto a trailer.

With exactly the same hull, *Plan B* has a 20ft<sup>2</sup> smaller mainsail and a lifting cabin top over the forward half of the cockpit. The level of the cockpit is raised in the fore part of the boat to form a platform where there is ample room for two air mattresses, one on each side of the plate case under the cabin top, plus stowage in the forepeak. Cooking will inevitably be restricted to a single-burner paraffin stove and water will be carried in small containers. It would be wrong to try to build a complicated galley or bulkheads and shelves into *Plan B* and waterproof bags for bedding and clothing and hooks along the fore part of the shelves will be the best answer for the stowage problem. *Plan B* is also a light boat. The centreplate can still be removed for hauling out or for trailing, and the 3 cwt of ballast (336lbs / 153 kilos), which is recommended when RAMBLER is being used as a camping cruiser with two crew, can be removed for beaching\*.

*Plan C* is still the same hull but there is a shallow fixed keel, with a smaller centreplate, and a fixed cabin top. With this arrangement the shelter, with a canvas screen across the middle of the ship, has become a cabin.

*Plan C* has lost some of the advantages of the other two versions, but for those who are looking for a small cruiser they can build at home, which will normally be kept on a mooring, this version has much to recommend it, and RAMBLER has now become a miniature cruiser.

\* Malcolm Evans can't believe so much ballast was recommended, and doesn't think it is at all necessary.

*Designer: Jack Holt. LOA: 17 ft / 5.18 metres.  
Beam: 6ft 3in / 1.89 metres. Draft 9in and 4ft 6in / 1.35m  
plate down. Displacement 1.3 tons (maximum, Plan C)*

