

## Part 6: The second part of the Contessa story, plus the Dutch-built Contests and Cornish Crabbers

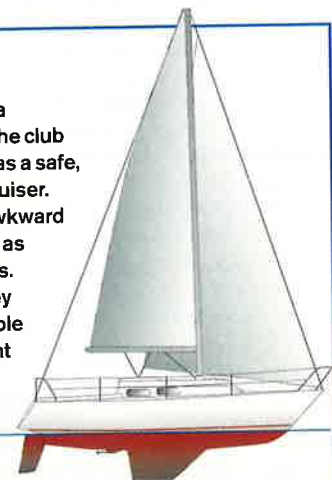
Price guides are approximate only. Prices vary due to factors such as condition and location. Words by James Jermain

### The Contessa story

Jeremy Rogers had been building one-off racing yachts when, in 1970, he teamed up with newcomer David Sadler to build a 26ft racing Folkboat derivative in GRP. As the Contessa 26, it took off commercially and JC Rogers was quickly established as a major player in the production boat-building world. The famous Contessa 32, also by Sadler, followed in 1972 and became one of the best known and loved cruiser racers of all time. For several years, Rogers then concentrated on building cruiser-racer versions of cutting-edge racing craft by Doug Peterson. These included the Contessa 35 of 1975 (ex-Gumboots), the Contessa 43 in 1978 and the Contessa 39 in 1982. They were all modestly successful. In the middle of this appeared the more popular cruiser-racer, the Contessa 28. In 1977, Rogers became involved in the OOD34 project, an attempt to popularise a one-design class outside the IOR. Advanced building techniques, using injection moulding, made the boats expensive to build and disaster followed when the stability and design of the yacht was criticised in the wake of the 1979 Fastnet. A later, detuned cruiser-racer version of the OOD34, the Contessa 34, was actually a very good boat, but she came too late for the company, which went into liquidation during the economic slump of the early 1980s. Other designs included the sporty, but slow-selling, Contessa 33 of 1982, the elegant, but flawed, Contessa 38 in 1982 and the popular Contessa 27, which survived to become the MGC27. The Contessa 38 evolved into the improved Dawn 39, which was produced in modest numbers and is still available as a one-off. The Contessa 32 continued in production by a number of builders, including Macbar Marine and MJ Slack. Finally she went full circle and was relaunched by Jeremy Rogers in the mid-nineties. He now does yacht refurbishments and one-off building, including Contessa 32s.

### Contessa 28

This Doug Peterson design was a reasonably sharp performer on the club circuit, which could also do duty as a safe, manageable and docile family cruiser. Slightly heavy steering and an awkward interior prevented her becoming as successful as some of her sisters. She has 5/6 berths, a small galley and a clumsy fold-down chart table arrangement. Original equipment and inventory was good and included self-tailing winches and even lee cloths. She is a reasonable seaboot.



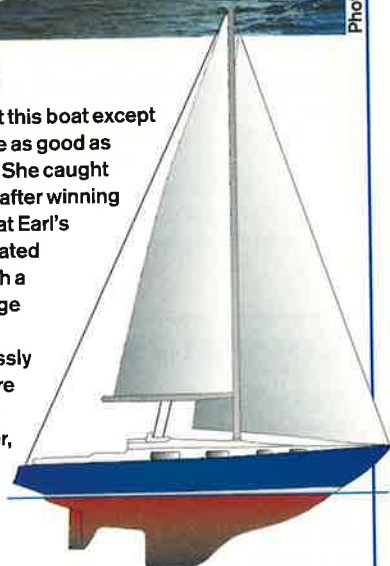
LOA 27ft 8in (8.43m) LWL 22ft (6.71m) beam 9ft 5in (2.88m) draught 4ft 10in (1.49m), displacement 6,970lb (3,160kg). Price guide: £14,000 to £19,000 YM Test Report December 1997



Photo: Graham Snook

### Contessa 32

What more can be said about this boat except that she is not, perhaps, quite as good as she is often made out to be? She caught the imagination of the times after winning the Boat of the Show award at Earl's Court in 1972 and has captivated subsequent generations with a combination of above average performance, practical accommodation and timelessly elegant good looks. There are several other designs of the time which were either faster, better below decks or equally good looking, but none combined the ingredients in such an appealing package. A strong class association for the 800 or more built, and competitive one-design racing has kept the mystique alive and the prices up. Beneath the glamour the boat had, and has, its faults. Early models were criticised for weak shroud plates and under-sized rigging. Hull stiffening in way of the forward heads was inadequate and required modification. The accommodation is reasonably standard with 5/6 berths, amidships heads compartment with hanging locker opposite, dinette arrangement in the saloon, effective galley and good chart table over the quarterberth. Under sail, she is excellent to windward in light and heavy weather, though careful sail trim is needed to balance out the helm. She reaches well and is stable downwind thanks to her longish keel and powerful rudder. Her reputation keeps prices high, and the long production run and multiple builders also helps to create a wide availability. Nearly new boats can fetch around £60,000 plus.



LOA 32ft (9.75m) LWL 24ft (7.32m) beam 9ft 6in (2.89m) draught 5ft 6in (1.68m) displacement 9,520lb (4,318kg). Price guide: (JC Rogers built) £24,000 to £38,000



## Contessa 34

Introduced in 1982, this Doug Peterson designed cruiser-racer was based on the ill-fated OOD34 which suffered, perhaps unfairly, for its safety record in the 1979 Fastnet. This version had improved stability through a shallower but heavier keel, a more cruising orientated interior and a cut-down rig. Even so, she was a sharp performer. Below decks, there were three alternative layouts with up to 10 berths. The injection moulding building method and Conran (Habitat) designed interior created a decor which is not to all tastes, but is clean and bright. She is a strong boat but several were bought as charter and sailing school boats so may have had a tough life.

**LOA** 33ft 8in (10.26m) **LWL** 38ft (8.53m) **beam** 11ft 1in (3.38m) **draught** 5ft 6in (1.52) **displacement** 9,000lb (4,082kg). **Price guide:** £30,000 to £40,000 **YM Test Report** March 1983

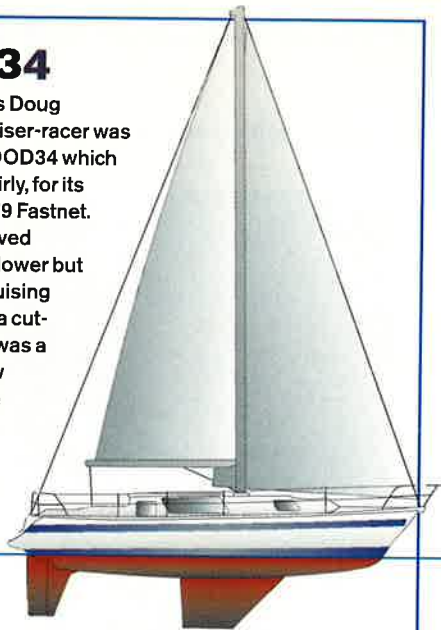


Photo: Patrick Roach

## Contessa 38

In appearance, this is a stretched Contessa 32 and was designed by David Allan-Williams with this intention. By the time of her launch in 1982, however, the long, lean, low hull could no longer offer the accommodation most people were looking for at this size. The galley is decidedly cramped and the saloon, too, is on the small side. However, she has a reasonably generous after cabin and the layout works well offshore, although the heads is amidships. She is a weathery and seakindly boat with her long, encapsulated-lead fin keel, and can make light of long beats to windward. However, she was, as standard, tiller steered, and decidedly heavy on the helm. After Rogers' company's demise, the design was reworked as the Dawn 39 with wheel steering and much improved.

**LOA** 38ft 5in (11.70m) **LWL** 31ft 5in (9.58m) **beam** 11ft 4in (3.45m) **draught** 6ft 3in (1.90m) **displacement** 16,000lb (7,300kg). **Price guide:** £49,000 to £59,000 **YM Test Report** June 1982

## Contest yachts

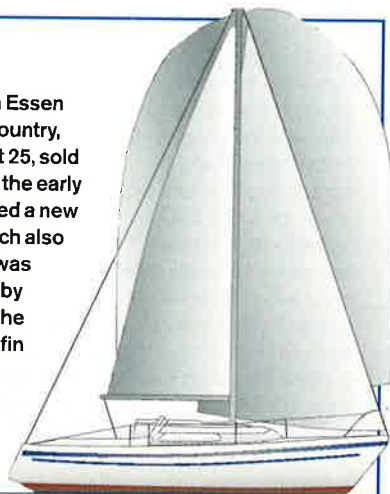
Founded in 1960 by the father of the current owner, Dr Fritz Conyn, Conyplex, builders of Contest yachts, has had a chequered history. At first, the company grew rapidly, with a popular range of cruiser-racers designed first by U van Essen and then Dick Zaal from the seventies onwards. By the mid-seventies Conyplex was one of Europe's largest production builders. Then, towards the end of the decade, economic recession, managerial apathy and an ageing product range, brought

the company to the edge of extinction. But 10 years later it re-emerged as a leading building of medium to large, high-quality long-distance cruising yachts in a similar style to the Swedish yards of Hallberg Rassy, Najad and Malo. Now it builds only larger yachts of between 42 and 60ft. Since 1980, the emphasis has been on solid cruising virtues such as heavy displacement, stability, seakeeping, spacious interiors and high build quality. Some models have been criticised for stodgy performance, but recent introductions have been sharper. There are some 5,000 Contests afloat worldwide.

## Contest 25

The early Contests by U van Essen scarcely registered in this country, though the first, the Contest 25, sold more than 400 in Europe. In the early Seventies Dick Zaal designed a new range of cruiser-racers, which also included this Contest 25. It was imported in some numbers by Interyacht of Woodbridge. She is full bodied with a shallow fin and skeg-hung rudder and moderate masthead rig. Des Sleightholme described her as 'well built and handsome... equally suitable as a family cruiser for beginners or for passage racing'. She may not make the grade in racing anymore, but her 5 berth layout with good headroom, practical galley and heads amidships, is comfortable and spacious, though simple in construction. She is light and stable on the helm and a good sea boat.

**LOA** 24ft 8in (7.54m) **LWL** 20ft (6.10m) **beam** 8ft 3in (2.50m) **draught** 4ft 1in (1.25m) **displacement** 5,160lb (2,350kg). **Price guide:** £9,000 to £13,000 **YM Test Report** May 1973



## Contest 31 HT

This was the most popular Dick Zaal Contest, with more than 200 being sold. She was introduced in 1972 and, despite being recognisably part of the modern family of Contests, was sold as an IOR cruiser-racer rating as a half-tonner. A cruising version with shallow keel was also offered. The rudder is skeg hung and she is masthead rigged. She has a fully fitted and well-built, interior with 5/6 berths including a quarterberth and midships heads. The Contest 31 HT now makes a very good, seaworthy, family cruiser of her period.

**LOA** 31ft 2in (9.50m) **LWL** 25ft 5in (7.76m) **beam** 10ft 4in (3.14m) **draught** 5ft 9in (1.75m) **displacement** 10,509lb (4,776kg) **Price guide:** £14,000 to £20,000

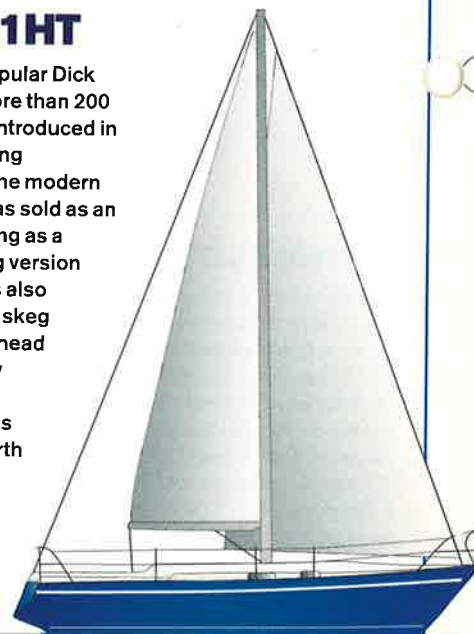




Photo: YM Library



## Colvic Watson 31

One of Colvic's most successful ranges stemmed from a mid-70s partnership with design office GL Watson. Colvic Watsons were produced in a range of sizes from 22ft upwards and shared a rugged, motor sailer character. One of the most popular models was this 31ft 6in model from 1978. She had a big engine and small rig, canoe stern and full, high bows. Bermudan sloop or ketch rig were offered, with the occasional gaffer as well. There was a range of interiors, with four to five berths as standard. Quality varied greatly but the hulls themselves were very sound. It was also marketed as the Navrik 32.

**LOA** 31ft 6in (9.80m)  
**LWL** 28ft 3in (8.61m)  
**beam** 11ft (3.35m)  
**draught** 4ft 4in (1.32m)  
**displacement** 18,300lb (8,170kg). **Price guide** £23,000 to £32,000. **YM Test Report** March 1979

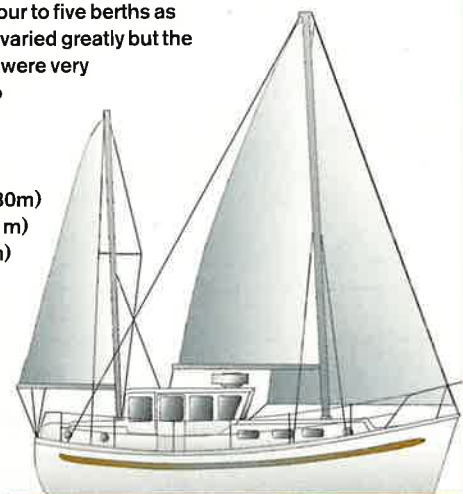


Photo: Comanche



## Comanche

From the Rod McAlpine-Downey range of fast cruising catamarans, the Comanche dates from 1978. By modern cat standards, she has a sleek, low profile and a narrow beam. She came with stub keels as standard but a few were built with centreboards. She carries a reasonable amount of sail and performance is lively, particularly with the wind free. She has two, nominally double, cabins aft, and a single cabin in each hull where headroom is 6ft 6in.

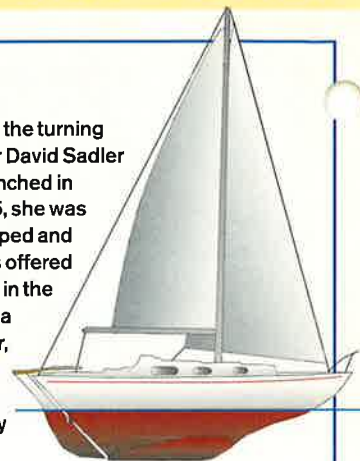
There is a large heads in the starboard hull and a galley to port. The bridgedeck has 5ft 10in headroom. It contains a spacious saloon and a large chart table. Single outboard or twin inboard engines were offered.

**LOA** 32ft 2in (9.80m) **LWL** 28ft 9in (8.76m) **beam** 13ft 10in (4.21m) **draught** 3ft 2in (0.96m). **Price guide:** £25,000 to £40,000. **YM Test Report** April 1980



## Contessa 26

This now classic design marked the turning points in the careers of designer David Sadler and builder Jeremy Rogers. Launched in 1966 as, briefly, the Contessa 25, she was regarded as narrow, with a cramped and low saloon. Four interior options offered berths for four or five crew – two in the forecabin, two in the saloon and a quarterberth. During her 13-year, 360-strong production run, the vestigial galley moved from amidships to the companionway along with the chart table. The heads was originally in the forecabin but later models had a small, enclosed compartment. She is stiff and can punch through anything, though she ships a fair amount of water. She is surprisingly sharp on a light wind reach. Build quality and trim detail varied over the years but was generally acceptable. Check the mast support area for compression damage and the foot of the moulded keel for damage allowing water ingress.

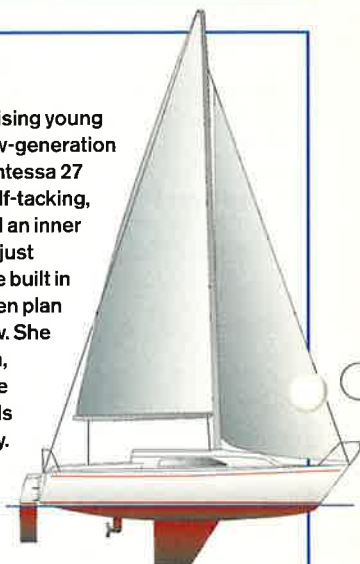


**LOA** 25ft 6in (7.77m)  
**LWL** 20ft (6.08) **beam** 7ft 6in (2.28m) **draught** 4ft (1.21m)  
**displacement** 5,400lb (2,450kg). **Price guide:** £5,000 to £10,000. **YM Test Report** June 1992

Photo: Collorjan

## Contessa 27

In 1984, Jeremy Rogers turned to rising young designer Rob Humphreys for a new-generation small, family cruiser-racer. The Contessa 27 was the innovative result, with a self-tacking, fractional rig, lifting keel option and an inner lining with foam filling, making her just about unsinkable. Early boats were built in pale American ash and, with an open plan layout, were particularly light below. She has six berths (two in the forecabin, two in the saloon and a cosy double quarterberth), a big, separate heads compartment and a practical galley. The cockpit is particularly large. She is a very handy performer, though the self-tacking headsail lacks power off-wind and in light airs. When Contessa Yachts went under, the 27 resurfaced, slightly modified, as the MG C27 and about 50 were built. She is well worth a look as a sporty, easily handled family cruiser, but she was rather lightly built.



**LOA** 27ft 5in (8.38m) **LWL** 7.16m (23ft 5in) **beam** 10ft (3.05m) **draught** 5ft (1.52m) **displacement** 5,750 lb (2,608kg). **Price guide:** £17,000 to £25,000. **YM Test Report** April 1985

Photo: YM Library

## Next month...

The ever-popular Contessa 32, the Contest range, plus, the Cornish Crabber



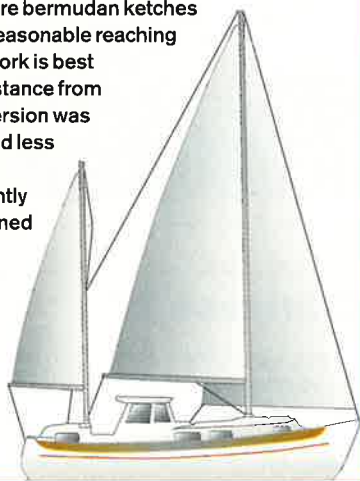
Photo: Colloryan



## Coaster 33

This is a fine, traditional, long-keeled, 32ft motor sailer by Alan Hill for RJ Prior & Son. Launched in the late 60s, she was exceptionally well built and appointed, with a heavy teak interior to a GRP hull. She had a central cockpit under an open wheelhouse with three double cabins. The standard inventory included refrigeration and hot water. A variety of rigs were offered, although most were bermudan ketches with enough area to give reasonable reaching performance. Windward work is best achieved with a bit of assistance from the 50hp engine. A Mk 2 version was launched in 1975 which had less woodwork, more internal mouldings and a significantly lower price tag. She remained in production for nearly 20 years.

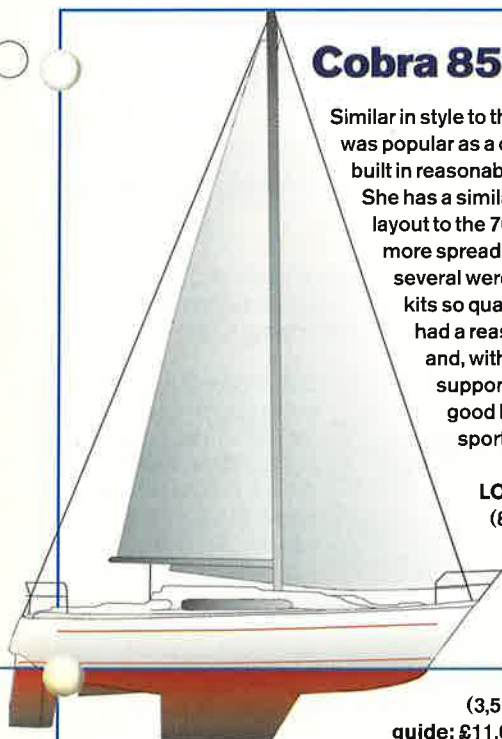
LOA 32ft 9in (9.98m)  
LWL 28ft 5in (8.67m)  
beam 10ft 2in (3.10m)  
draught 4ft (1.22m)  
displacement 17,920lb  
(8,130kg). Price guide  
£19,000 to £25,000



## Cobra 850

Similar in style to the 700, the 850 was popular as a charter boat and built in reasonably large numbers. She has a similar four-berth layout to the 700 but a little more spread out. Again, several were fitted out from kits so quality can vary. She had a reasonably long fin and, with a large skeg supporting the rudder, good handling and sporty performance.

LOA 28ft 5in  
(8.67m) LWL 22ft  
(6.71m) beam  
9ft 6in (2.90m)  
draught  
3ft 6in (1.07m)  
displacement  
7,750lb  
(3,522kg). Price  
guide: £11,000 to £14,000



## Cobra 700

The smallest of the Cobra range, the 700 was a budget family cruiser offering four berths. High freeboard and generous beam made her roomy, but she had a sporty underwater shape and performs well in moderate conditions. She has an enclosed heads and four berths in two cabins. Build quality was below average and many were fitted out from kits, but good ones make good priced starter boats.

LOA 23ft (7.01m)  
LWL 18ft 4in (5.59m)  
beam 8ft 9in (2.64m)  
draught 3ft (0.91m)  
displacement  
4,500lb  
(2,045kg). Price guide:  
£7,000 to  
£11,000

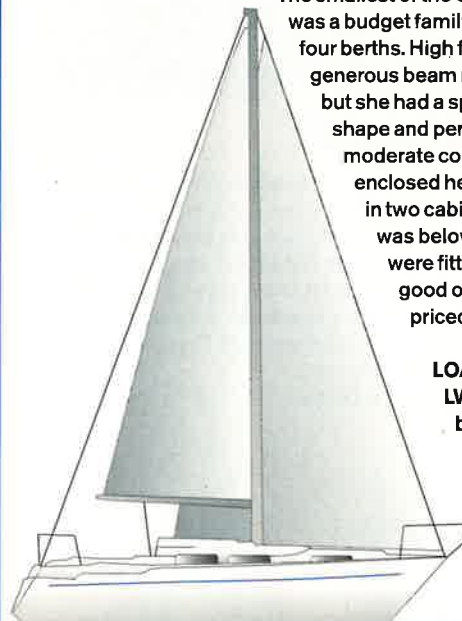


Photo: Rod Heikell



## Colvic Victor 34

Colvic was mainly a moulding company that produced hulls for completion by a range of other firms and private customers. The Victors 34 and 40 had powerful sailing hulls topped with deck saloons and easily managed ketch rigs. On the 34, the deck saloon contains a dinette and galley, and the interior steering position. Below is a double cabin with a large heads opposite, and a double forecabin. The principal variation was to have the galley below and better navigation facilities. She sails fairly well but is a bit sticky in light airs when the engine, usually 30 hp, comes into play.

LOA 34ft (10.36m) LWL  
27ft 6in (8.38m) beam  
11ft (3.35m) draught  
5ft (1.52m)  
displacement  
14,560lb  
(6,500kg). Price  
guide: £25,000  
to £35,000. YM  
Test Report  
December  
1979

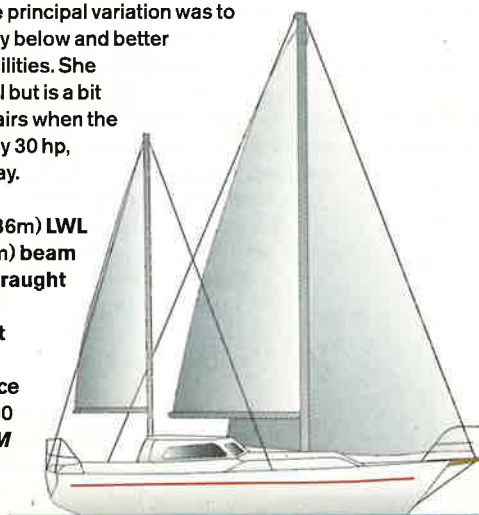


Photo: YM Library