

Contessa 26



This former racing yacht is an excellent little seaboat in which to start offshore cruising

The Contessa 26 is probably the best known and most popular of the 'Folkboat derivatives' which appeared during the '60s.

David Sadler was a great fan of the Folkboats which, in the early '60s, were being built by Jeremy Rogers at Lymington. When he turned his hand to design, he based his first boat on a Folkboat hull with slightly raised and restyled topsides and a more powerful, masthead rig.

Rogers built the prototype, *Contessa of Parkstone*, and all the subsequent Contessas. Around 350 Contessa 26s were built from 1966 until 1979. The boat is still in production in Canada.



Above: the compact heads compartment which replaced the earlier toilet in the forecabin.

Above right: the saloon is simple yet effective with sitting headroom and two good seaberths

Long, low and lean, the Contessa's accommodation was on the small side, even in the '60s. Maximum headroom is 5ft 8in under the blister companionway moulding (a feature made popular by Van de Stadt, which reduces the chance of leaks and cuts building costs). Nevertheless, the layout offers perfectly practical facilities for up to four crew offshore, with a fifth berth included in one of the four layout options.

Original boats had the heads in the precabin between the vee berths, and both the chart table and galley amidships. Later versions appeared with a

separate heads compartment and various permutations of galley and chart table arrangements either amidships or aft by the companionway.

Most boats have the galley and chart table amidships with a separate heads



compartment. The midships galley was rather airless, but the cook was provided with a slide-away seat. Stowage was somewhat limited and various shelves and holders have been added by owners over the years. A popular modification is to build a basin into the chart table and replace it with a fold-away board.

The standard of fit-out varied over the years, generally becoming more 'woody' as time went by. Early boats lacked detailed trimming but, although they may look in need of a lot of work, often get by with little more than a good clean.

The basic mouldings are substantial and few problems have been reported. The deck, built before foam or balsa sandwich became popular, flexes a fair bit, but this is normal (see Survey).

The Vire 7hp petrol engine was generally fitted. It gives about 4.5 knots cruising and is quiet and smooth running, but tends to cut out at awkward moments, particularly when idling.

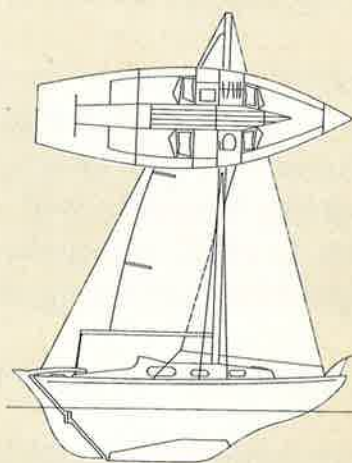
The cockpit is fairly small and the sidedecks are on the narrow side but she has a practical foredeck, rather spoiled by the anchor stowage.

The Contessa 26 is a delightful boat to sail, with her long keel giving steady, stable handling. Her high ballast ratio and moderate rig makes her stiff and well able to stand up to a blow. She remains comfortable and manageable in

heavy weather, though her flat sheer and low bow make her very wet. Off the wind she can keep pace with modern boats quite well, but her windward performance suffers from her high wetted surface area. JJ

Survey

Tony Staton Bevan writes: Early models suffered from a weak beam under the mast which gave way in some cases, creating a distinct hollow in the deck. Any damage to the base of the long keel should be repaired immediately to prevent water getting into the encapsulated ballast. It is not unusual for the long rudder to be slightly twisted and occasionally they can open up along the joint between the two halves.



Specifications

LOA	7.77m (25ft 6in)
LWL	6.08m (20ft)
Beam	2.28m (7ft 6in)
Draught	1.21m (4ft)
Displacement	2,450kg (5,400 lb)
Ballast	1,222kg (2,688 lb)
Sail area	22.7m ² (224sq ft)
Launch price:	£2,000

Current price guide (asking prices)

Early models from £5,000 to £7,000, late models from £7,500 to £9,000

YM boat test

No

Second opinion listing

Yes

Contessa 26 Owners' Association

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