

# Affordable Classics 4 – Contessa 26

Published Classic Boats - By Steffan Meyric-Hughes



## Boats under £10K – this time, we look at the Contessa 26

Like the wooden, Kim Holman-designed Stella class of 1958 that we featured for our first boat in this series, the origins of the Contessa 26 lie in the famous Nordic Folkboat of 1942, the most popular cabin yacht of all time, and one of the most attractive. The only problem with the Folkboat was that those sleek lines, on a yacht that size, meant very limited accommodation, a problem that would lead to a number of ‘modified Folkboats’ over the next two decades.

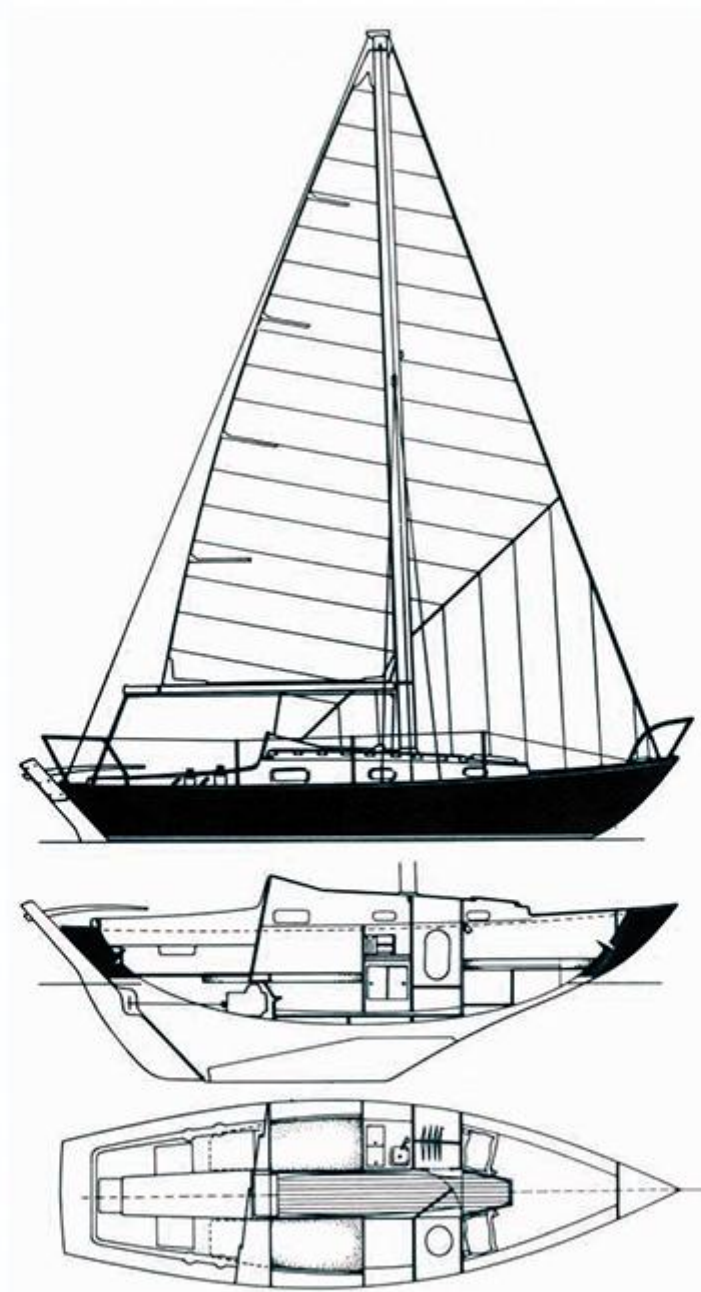
The story starts with boatbuilder Jeremy Rogers of Lymington, who was, in the early 1960s, building modified Folkboats in wood, but with masthead, rather than fractional rig. One owner, the engineer David Sadler, raced particularly successfully with his boat, *Contessa of Parkstone*, named after his wife, Tessa. The Folkboat Association, however, took a dim view of this, so Jeremy moved away from the class identity and tooled up to build the boats in GRP in collaboration with David Sadler and thanks to the backing of grocer Vernon Sainsbury, who paid up front in full, for the sixth boat, to be sure of having one with the teething issues

ironed out. The first boat, *Contessa of Lymington* was followed by nearly 350 sisterships over the next 11 years, and later spawned the Contessa 32. When production eased, a few more were built by nearby Maclan Marine, then the Canadian yard of JJ Taylor built around 400 under licence, firstly as the Contessa 26 then, after 1984, as the lightly modified JJ Taylor 26.



Success came fast, with around 350 built by Jeremy Rogers. Here is a Co26 (foreground) next to a Co32 at the London Boat Show in the 1970s. Photo c/o Jeremy Rogers

The Co26 is heavier than the Folkboat, with a rig set up for a lower centre of effort, so the mast is 2ft (60cm) shorter, and the upwind sail area slightly lower. But with the more modern topmast rig, the Contessa can set more sail area before the mast. The Portsmouth Yardstick favours the Folkboat (1067, with 1166 for the Co26), but this is from data derived from round-the-cans racing. Where the Co26 really excels is off the wind and in heavier conditions, with her higher freeboard, vastly improved accommodation and greater beam. These little yachts have been regularly used for grand bluewater feats like round-Britain and transatlantic voyages, and more than one global circumnavigation, most famously in the late 1980s by Tania Aebi, on *Varuna*.



Designed by Jeremy Rogers and David Sadler, LOA 25ft 6in (7.8m), Beam 7ft 6in (2.3m),

Draught 4ft (1.2m), Displacement 2.5 tonnes, Sail area 2,44sq ft (22.7m<sup>2</sup>)

To sail, they are well-balanced, simple to handle, fast and commodious for a boat of that era.

The increase in volume over a Folkboat means better accommodation (layouts came in three versions, but it's basically a small, four-berth yacht) and more buoyancy to support an inboard engine. This came as standard, elevating the Co26 to the status of a proper yacht.





c/o Jeremy Rogers





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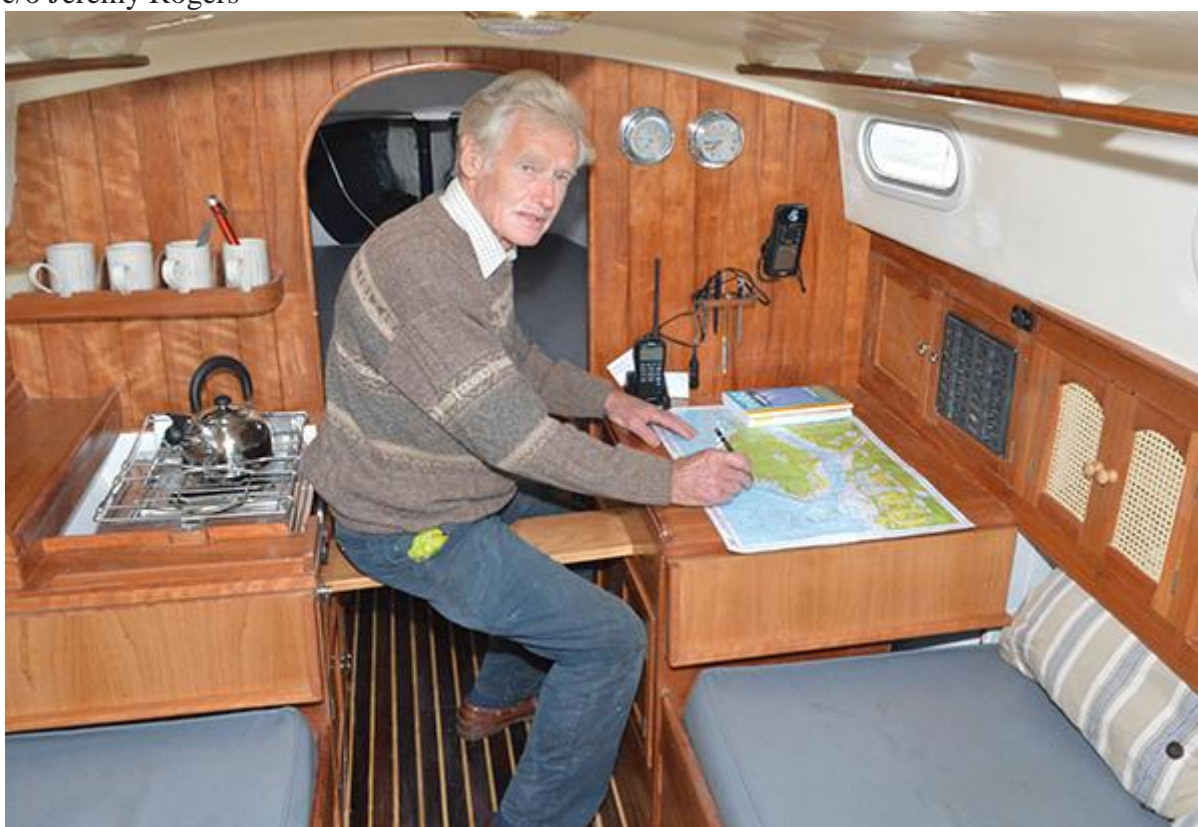


c/o Jeremy Rogers





c/o Jeremy Rogers



Class founder Jeremy Rogers at the chart table of a Contessa 26

Their racing victories are many and varied, from a first in class in the 1970 OSTAR to four Round-the-Island victories, three of those under Jeremy Rogers aboard *Rosina of Beaulieu*. If you want a handsome, low-maintenance classic that can take you around the world for less than the price of a used car, this must be on your shortlist.

### **Things to look out for**

Choose a 1971 or later boat, with a self-draining cockpit. Forestay fittings and chainplates might need replacing, particularly if original. This is not a big issue. Replacing leaky windows is costly and time-consuming. The original fuel tank was sited in the lazarette – not great for weight distribution. Some boats have them sited behind the engine. This is a bonus. These boats are not particularly prone to osmosis, but it always pays to check. Some original rudders have waterlogged foam interiors. New rudders are expensive. As always, it's best to apply the principle of *caveat emptor* – so consider a survey.



An owner's view



Vicente Castro Sotos

“My goal was a boat seaworthy enough to sail anywhere, mainly the high latitudes. This boat is fast enough to make passage and strong enough to crush ice. I’ve grounded her surfing at 12 knots with no damage. At sea, I feel so safe; even heeled right over, you know she’ll spring up like a bamboo stick. In big seas under bare poles, she floats like a cork – no resistance. When I see her anchored from a mountain top, I know that she’s home.” *Vicente Castro Sotos, extreme climber*



One of Carlos’s moorings

See [Jeremy Rogers Ltd](http://jeremyrogers.co.uk), [jeremyrogers.co.uk](http://jeremyrogers.co.uk) and the [Contessa 26 Owners’ Association](#)