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Stand up and salute: it's a trailer-sailer like no other

PBO
TESTED

How on earth do you get full standing headroom in a trailer-sailer that really sails? David Harding meets the Haber 620 to find out

Small trailable yachts come in a range of shapes and styles. Some are sleek and sporty, like the Seascares. Others draw on tradition for their inspiration, such as the Cornish Crabbers. And then there are the rest, now typified by the Polish lake-sailers of which we have seen many examples arriving in the UK over the past decade or so.

Of course, these are very broad groupings. Some don't obviously fit into any of them, such as Swallow Yachts' BayCruisers. And

now we have another one that slots into no particular category: the Haber (pronounced Harber) 620. This dinky little deck-saloon-cruiser-in-miniature stopped a lot of people in their tracks when she appeared at the Southampton Boat Show last year. Here's a 20-footer that gives you full standing headroom – and you don't see many of those. She has a fully-retractable centreplate that makes for easy trailering and allows her to float on a wet lawn. What's more, though she's clearly a modern design, she incorporates elements of traditional appeal

including tan sails and a rig that's a sort of gunter-gaff hybrid.

There's something rather engaging about her lines. She doesn't look remotely bloated. In fact, she's one of those boats whose proportions would still work if she were substantially larger. If it weren't for the outboard, the crew and, perhaps, the rudder, you might mistake her for a 30-footer from a distance.

Apart from the fact that she's different from anything most of us have ever seen, the baby Haber has instant and obvious appeal to a lot of people. Boats that are easy to trail, launch, rig and recover open up all sorts of possibilities, not to mention potential economies. The trouble is that, until they reach a size that can make them more of a challenge in the trailing, rigging, launching and recovery departments than some people might want, they're often lacking in internal space and creature

comforts, especially for those who are no longer in their first flush. And unless you happen to have a pop-top, there's no way you'll be able to stand up below decks except possibly under the hatch.

If you want a small trailable cruiser with standing headroom and an all-round view of the outside world, the Haber is your boat. Step aboard and you'll find she's surprisingly stable given her weight of just 1.3 tons. Sit in the cockpit and you're sheltered by the wheelhouse yet still able to see forward through its windows. Go below and you can stand up unless you're over 6ft tall (1.83m). You'll find an enclosed heads compartment, a galley opposite a dinette that converts to a double berth, and a generous V-berth in the bow. This is a 20-footer with a difference – a big difference.

A Haber pedigree

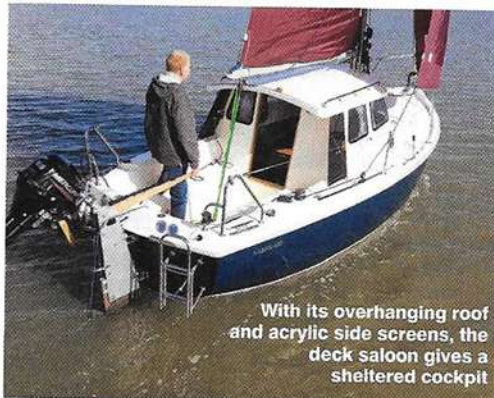
Regular readers of PBO may recall that Habers have featured in these pages before. I met the Haber 800 first, sailing her in Southampton after the boat show in 2009 and then, with Janusz Konkol, her designer and builder, across the IJsselmeer without using an autopilot or touching the tiller (see PBO May 2009). This self-steering ability is thanks to the



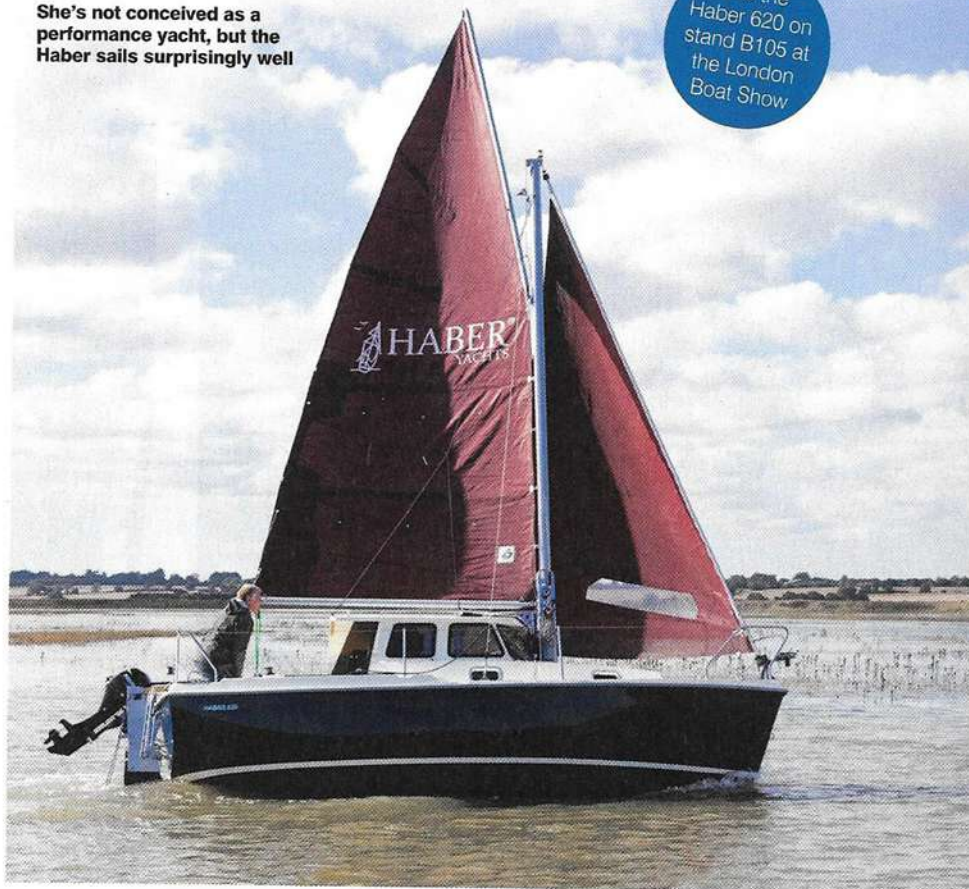
Standing up in the cockpit gives good visibility forward – or you can see through the windows

She's not conceived as a performance yacht, but the Haber sails surprisingly well

See the Haber 620 on stand B105 at the London Boat Show



With its overhanging roof and acrylic side screens, the deck saloon gives a sheltered cockpit



clever arrangement of multiple centreplates that's available with the larger Haber models.

Next I saw the Haber 34 at a couple of Düsseldorf Boat Shows before eventually testing her in Gdansk (PBO August 2015). Over the past few years I have probably covered more test miles on Habers than on any other boat. I have also spent more hours in technical discussion with Konkol, at boat shows and test locations around Europe, than with any other designer. I wouldn't have done this were I in any doubt that the philosophy behind the designs makes a lot of sense or that the boats themselves do what they're designed to do. Surprising though it may sound, many of the features that increase safety or comfort offshore serve to enhance the boats' appeal and practicality for coastal and inshore use too – and vice versa.

The obvious question is why any of this is relevant in the context of a 20ft trailer-sailer. It's relevant because it shows that this is a boat with a pedigree. We have seen a lot of Polish offerings in the UK in recent years, some of which have been less impressive in design, construction and sailing ability than others. This might encourage purists or performance

sailors to take one look at the Haber 620 and dismiss her. That would be a mistake. This little boat has been designed and built by someone who knows exactly what he's doing and for whom sailing ability is a fundamental quality in any boat.

The Haber name has yet to become established in the UK and is probably still unknown to many people other than those enlightened souls who read PBO, but the new baby of the range is more likely than any of her larger siblings to change all that.

Stand up and sail

The first question I wanted to answer was how the 620 sailed. If she didn't go, it would be a matter of 'well, what would you expect from a trailable 20-footer with standing headroom?' I was, however, confident that she would perform far better than her appearance might lead some people to imagine – though to be fair there's really nothing to suggest that she shouldn't sail, once you get over the notion of a deck saloon on a boat of this size. Freeboard isn't that great, she carries a decent spread of sail and the hull looks quite sweet. There's no enormously wide transom on the Haber: Konkol prefers more

moderate lines and has made no attempt to squeeze a double berth into the stern.

Ballast is internal for easy raising and lowering of the centreplate but, while many trailer-sailors make do with flat sheets of steel, the Haber's plate is a profiled glassfibre section. Incorporating just enough weight to ensure negative buoyancy, it gives her a draught of 4ft 5in (1.35m).

To find out whether my suspicions about her performance were correct, I paid a visit to Haber Yachts' UK dealer, Westwater Yacht Sales, in Walton-on-the-Naze. This delightful corner of Essex is a long way from anywhere for we South-Coasters, so I arranged to sail the Haber after another job on the East Coast.

The day we chose was a stunning day for exploring the Walton Backwaters: we had gloriously warm autumn sunshine and such a high spring tide that we could almost sail over the top of the marshes. All we missed was the promised breeze: it struggled to reach 10 knots, and even then only in the occasional gust. We did such sailing as conditions allowed and I completed everything else I normally do on a boat test, but left still wondering

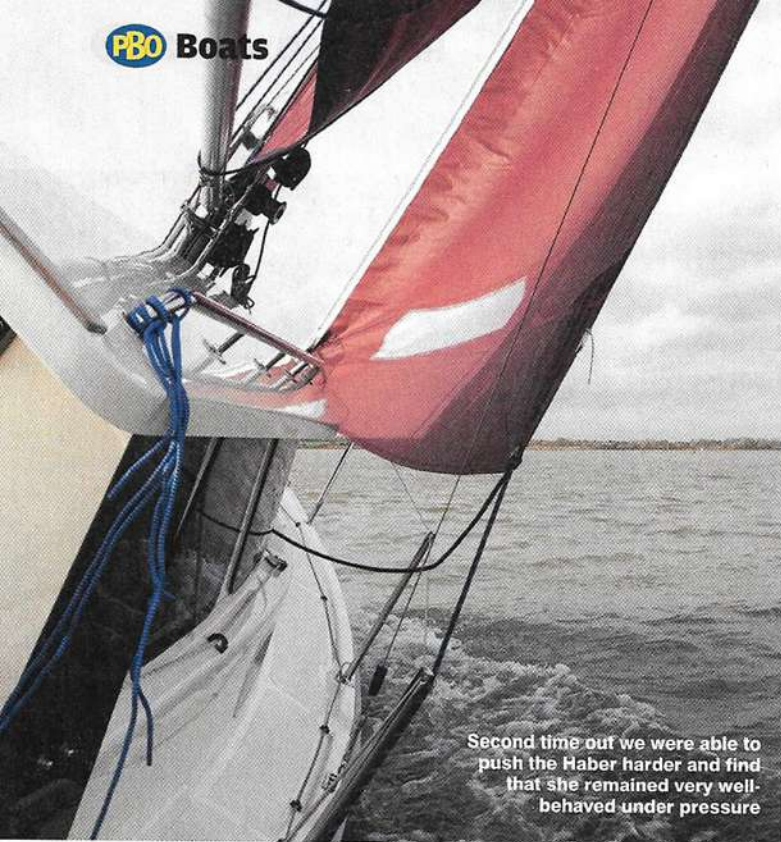
how the boat would perform under pressure. At least we sailed straight past a Westerly Griffon upwind, not that her crew appeared to be trying very hard.

I left realising there was no avoiding a second visit. Beautiful though the Walton Backwaters are, it would mean another 400 miles and eight hours-plus in the car for a couple of hours on the water and perhaps one modified paragraph. Such is the lot of a boat tester if you want to find the answers.

This time we had a solid 12-16 knots of wind – enough to keep the boat fully powered up most of the time and marginally over-pressed in the gusts. We would have needed a few more knots before starting to think about reefing.

It was immediately clear that the little Haber is great fun to sail. She's respectably quick – the log recorded mid-to-high 4s on the wind – as well as responsive and well balanced. What also matters to my mind is that she makes you want to sail her for sailing's sake.

This might be of little consequence to many of those who will buy her, but if you're a keen sailor it means you can enjoy yourself without imposing privation on members of your



Second time out we were able to push the Haber harder and find that she remained very well-behaved under pressure



A built-in mast-lowering system is designed to make the job easy



No need to hunt for tools to tension the rigging



Minimal space below the boom need not preclude a kicking strap: this is Haber's solution

crew who are more interested in their creature comforts. It can only broaden her appeal. Some boats just have that fun factor and, believe it or not, the Haber 620 is one of them.

Being fun doesn't mean being skittish. She's as well-behaved as you could wish a boat to be. The helm remains light, thanks to those balanced hull lines that are something of a Haber speciality. If we bore away in the strongest gusts with the sheets pinned in, the rudder eventually loaded up

before the blade lost grip as the gunwale approached the water. It took some pushing to get her to this point and even then she only issued the mildest of rebukes, rounding up in a thoroughly measured way and stopping well short of head-to-wind.

For a boat with internal ballast, she's commendably stiff. The modest freeboard and relatively narrow stern mean that moving from side to side in the cockpit has less effect than it typically has on boats of similar size with

towering topsides and enormously broad transoms.

A balanced view

A profiled centreplate does more than just increase upwind performance. For example, she would stall only when at a virtual standstill hard on the wind, then crab for just a few yards before the laminar flow reattached to the foils. It was like letting in the clutch and off she would go again. Easier, more predictable manoeuvring under sail is the result.

With a shifty wind in confined waters it was hard to gauge our tacking angle, but it appeared to be around 90°; quite in order for a boat like this. Off the wind she picked up her skirts and slipped along at 6 knots plus. Significantly there was no clonking from the

centreplate, because Haber custom-fit each one inside its case and adjust the bushes individually. On a run, goose-winging was much easier than with a typical modern minimal-overlap headsail.

In terms of ergonomics, the presence of the wheelhouse inevitably has a bearing. If you want to sit inboard on the cockpit seats, it's easy to brace your feet across to the opposite side. Visibility is pretty good on starboard tack because you can see through the windows to port unless you're heeled to the point where the headsail gets in the way. On port tack the headsail partially obstructs your view to starboard, but in practice we rarely found it a problem.

If you don't want to sit down and peer around the deck saloon

Tech spec: Haber 620

Length inc. rudder: 6.50m (21ft 4in)

Hull length: 6.12m (20ft 1in)

LWL: 5.5m (18ft 1in)

Beam: 2.50m (8ft 2in)

Draught – centreplate up: 0.32m (1ft 1in)

– centreplate down: 1.35m (4ft 5in)

Displacement: 1,300kg (2,866lb)

Ballast: 300kg (661lb)

Sail area (main & 100% foretriangle): 19.8sq m (213sq ft)

Displacement/length ratio: 200

Sail area/displacement ratio: 16.87

RCD category: C

Engine: 4-6hp outboard

Headroom: 1.83m (6ft 0in)

Designer: Janusz Konkol

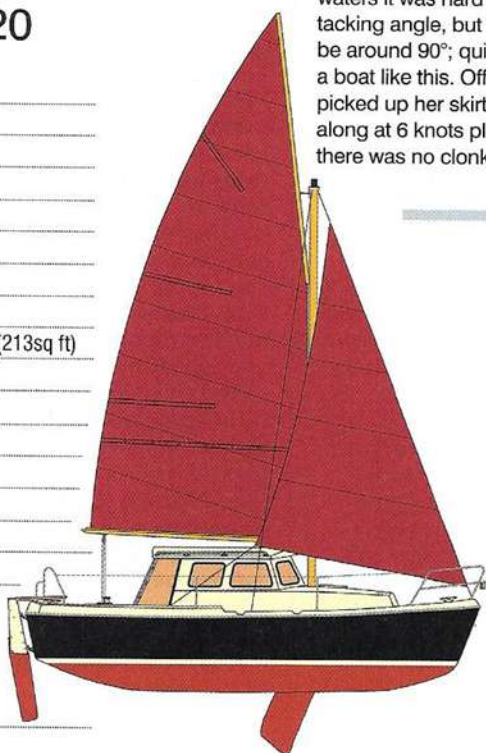
Builder: Haber Yachts, www.haber-yachts.com

UK distributors: Westwater Yacht Sales, Essex, www.westwateryachtsales.com

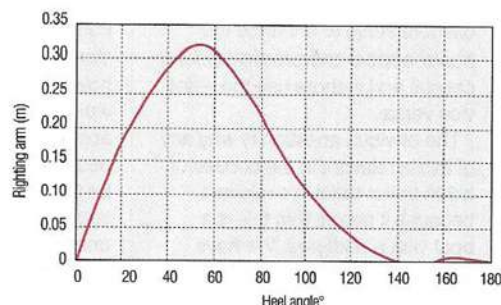
Price (delivered UK):

■ From: approx. £33,000

■ As tested: approx. £39,660



STABILITY CURVE



The GZ curve for the 620 has yet to be drawn but will be broadly similar to this one for the larger 660, with next-to-no inverted stability

when necessary, you can stand up and see over the top. Perching on the coamings is another alternative, though gravity pulls you inboard when the boat heels. My solution was to sit on the windward coaming and duck my head beneath the guardwire. That way you have a good view forward and of the headsail's luff, with your chest supported by the outboard side of the guardwire. It seemed the obvious answer unless you're tacking every 100 yards, in which case threading and un-threading yourself might be more trouble than it's worth.

Handling is simple. It's a smallish cockpit – three people would be a comfortable maximum – so nothing is far away. The mainsheet is taken to a strong-point on the cockpit sole far enough forward of the tiller for the helmsman to slide easily between the two. Overlap on the headsail is greater than with a typical modern rig, yet sheeting it in is easy. A pair of Barton 6 winches handle the sheets, so when tacking you take a couple of turns around them, pull in the slack and then, once the boat is moving on the new tack, luff up briefly to take the weight out of the sail and sheet it home. The potential issue in this case is that the cleats are abaft the winches, aligned for use by the helmsman, and the coamings aren't wide enough for them to be fitted elsewhere without a bit of re-jigging. Great for single-handing, it's perhaps less than ideal if the crew wants to play an active role.

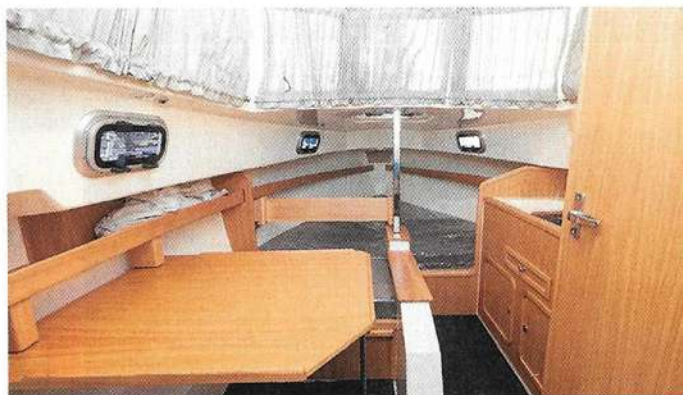
Also helping single-handing is the boat's balance. On our test boat, however, a biff to the rudder had made the bearings a bit stiff so it was hard to determine to

what extent her course-keeping ability was a function of her design and how much was down to friction. That was a shame, because the yard goes to great lengths to achieve smooth, slop-free movement in the whole rudder assembly. Good balance and the ability to keep going where you point them are characteristics of Habers as a breed, so I suspect the 620 would be easy to trim to sail herself. The balance on the rudder blade is both good and adjustable, while the absence of play adds to the positive feel.

Gaff or gunter?

Konkol describes his rig as 'Huari gaff'. It's a sort of high-peak, high-aspect-ratio gaff with just one halyard. It keeps the mast short for easy raising and lowering and avoids the need for spreaders. Hoisting and lowering the mainsail under way is easy enough, even if the position of the clutch low down on the mast means that it's quickest and simplest to hoist directly from the halyard's exit sheave and then pull the slack through the clutch before using the winch if necessary. Hardware is good and well positioned, and the stainless steel work is made in Haber's factory.

One omission in the rigging department is a means of adjusting the clew outhaul under way. Of interest to more owners will be an anchor roller, which is to be fitted to future boats sold in the UK. Provision for the rode will also be needed. Less critical, if rather unsightly, is the way dirt becomes trapped inboard of the thoroughly practical plastic rubbing strake along the flange forming the hull-to-deck joint. Ten minutes with



The interior is what really sets the Haber apart – room to stand, sit, eat, sleep and cook, and there's an enclosed heads compartment too

a toothbrush will clean it up, but it's still a grime-trap.

Back in the cockpit, we find full-depth lockers to port and starboard. A separate lid gives access to the starboard locker's aft end where a stainless steel fuel tank can be built in for the outboard if you don't have an engine with an integral tank, as most 4-6hp models will. Our test boat had 9.9hp on the bracket; overkill on a massive scale.

An alternative arrangement is to have twin rudders, with an outboard well in the cockpit.

Returning to the stowage, it was good to see plenty of it – more than on many larger boats, in fact. A useful addition would be a cubby locker in the coaming. There looked to be space to fit one to starboard, even if you couldn't expect it to come as standard: ready-accessible stowage for small items in the cockpit is always needed.

Accommodation

As described earlier, the interior offers far more than you would expect of a 20-footer. It's roomy,

light, airy, and neatly finished in Polish oak. A full interior moulding forms the basis of the layout. Overhead is a moulded headliner that still allows access to the fastenings for the deck fittings. That's an important detail. Other details include provision of a half-height hanging locker to port abaft the dinette. Stowage is under the berths and beneath the cockpit sole, where there's room for a fair amount of gear (but not an inboard engine). Additions in the galley, where you have a comfortable perch on the centreplate case, can include a freshwater tank and tap.

PBO verdict

By rights, the Haber 620 should sell like hot cakes. She's more expensive than some offerings of similar size, but that's inevitable given the way she's built and fitted out. For example, the laminates are hand-laid and the hull spends four days in the mould before being kept at a temperature no lower than 18°C for 30 days to encourage full curing. Few builders go to such lengths.

Issues of quality aside, the Haber can't be compared with other boats on a length-for-length basis because she's so different. I recently tested a more conventional trailer-sailer of similar size that was a fraction of the price but nowhere near as well finished or enjoyable to sail.

It's hard to think of another boat that offers what the Haber offers. Trail and sail where you like, add a cabin heater and keep going right through the winter with your warm conservatory on the water. This might be one of the most fun, versatile and generally likeable little boats you'll ever meet. **PBO**

Other boats to look at



Cornish Shrimper 19

PRICE: FROM £26,750

The yardstick for modern gaffers in this size range, the Shrimper has a strong following among cruising and racing owners alike, with several keen racing fleets around the country.

■ www.cornishcrabbers.co.uk



Cape Cutter 19

PRICE: FROM £24,750

Originally from South Africa, she has become well established in the UK over the past 17 years or so and, in many ways, is a more modern and sporty alternative to the Shrimper.

■ www.capecutter19.com



BayCruiser 23

PRICE: FROM £39,900

Longer than the Haber, and with water-ballast to minimise the trailing weight, she has a four-berth cabin and is a sprightly performer. A carbon rig makes for easy raising and lowering of the mast.

■ www.swallowyachts.com