

CHOOSING A BLUE WATER CRUISER

What do you look for in a true blue water cruiser? Nigel Calder has sold his beloved Nada and compiles a wish list for his brand new boat

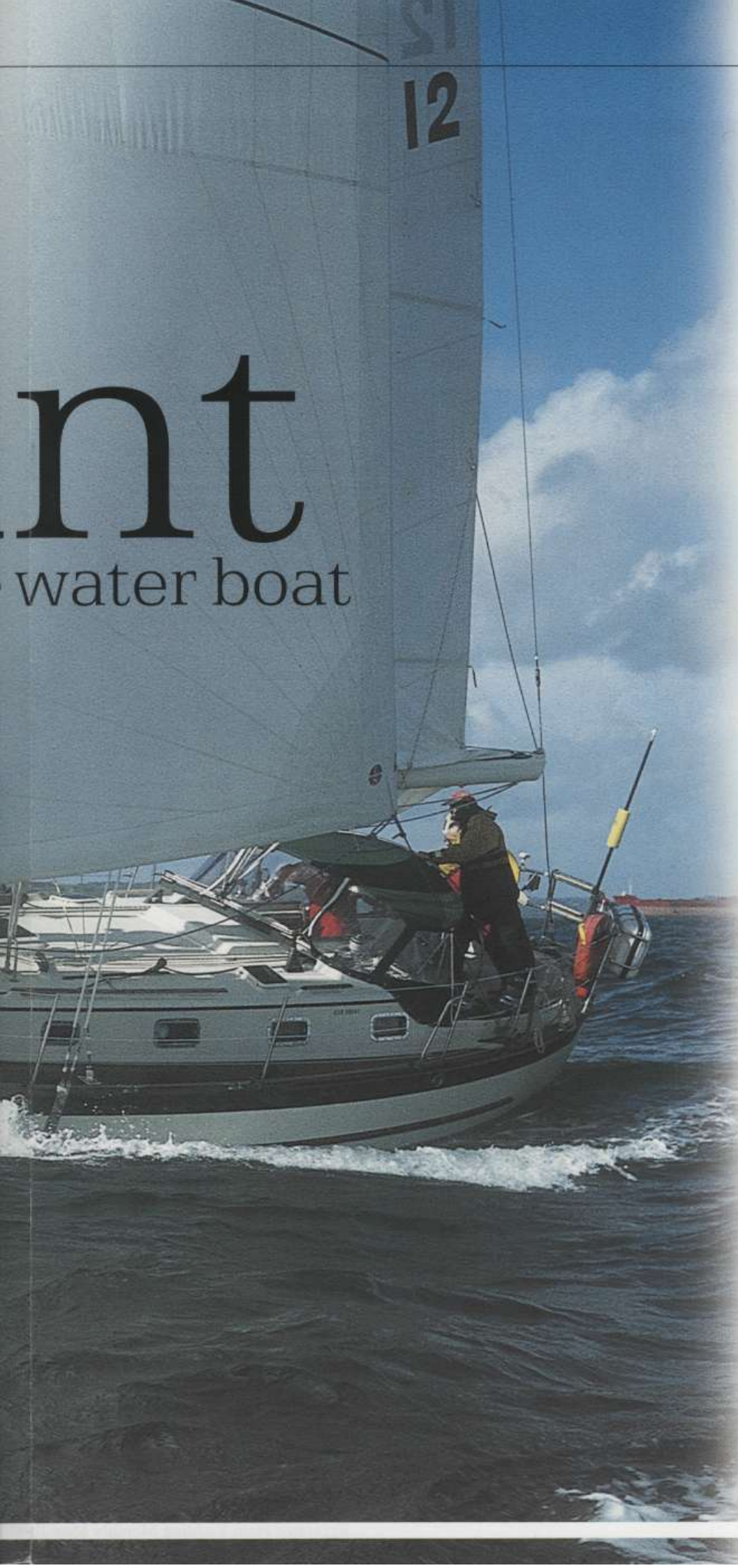
# Blueprint

for a blue water cruiser



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## water boat



**F**OR SEVERAL YEARS now, Terrie, my wife, and I have been bumping up against the limitations of our current boat, *Nada*, a 39ft William Atkin-designed double-ender.

We built her from a bare hull before children (BC), at a time when we planned to take off for a round-the-world cruise. We never did get out of the Caribbean. Instead, we have two growing children, and the boat has become a professional tool, used to research my cruising guides and to develop material for other writing.

For 16 years we've constantly modified *Nada* to enhance her comfort and sailing qualities. Some improvements have been radical, like taking an angle grinder to the cockpit to cut the coamings back to deck level, and reconstructing the entire layout to make it more comfortable at sea.

Another time I took a crowbar to the teak decks. They looked lovely when properly cleaned and cared for, but they collected dirt and became extremely hot underfoot, so pragmatism won out over aesthetics.

After years of struggling to keep up with the brightwork, we painted the teak bulwarks, caprails and hatches. Later I got rid of the wooden-sparred ketch rig and replaced it with an aluminium-sparred cutter rig.

We've lived aboard *Nada* longer than we've lived anywhere else. We've abused her, run her aground countless times, and put her in harm's way, but she's always come through for us. She is as much a part of our cruising identity as we are of hers. But after yet another major refit, which lasted three years (see *Facelift for Nada*, YM January), I've finally steeled myself to put her up for sale and look for a new boat.

We are looking for an **ocean-going** boat. We have a bad habit of making mid-winter passages across the Gulf of Mexico, during which Terrie is seasick much of the time and I am squeamish; so we need a boat that will not only handle unpleasant conditions, but is also easy to **sail short-handed**, and is **self-tending** rather than temperamental.

This boat must be able to go to **windward** without hobby-horsing and without dipping her rail too far under, and do this without too abrupt a motion. We need a keel with a gentle entry that will take a **grounding** without too much of a shock, and with a rugged enough hull (if the ballast is internal) or ballast keel (if external) to take an 8-knot impact with nothing more than superficial damage.

My preference is for a **long keel** with rudder attached and an aperture-mounted propeller. This gives great directional stability and tremendous support and protection for the rudder; also, if you run over fishing nets or lines, there is a good



Above: our final choice, the Pacific Seacraft 40. Her cockpit and deck design (right) met all our requirements for cruising



The enclosed G-shaped galley (above, left) offers a safe refuge for the cook in most offshore conditions. Placing the mainsheet track (above) forward of the sprayhood keeps the cockpit clear. The foredeck set-up, with twin anchor rollers in a plank bowsprit, is excellent for blue water cruising

(water penetration around through hulls will wick into some cores and rot them out over time).

I prefer a cutter rig as it produces a reasonable variety of easily-handled sail plans, suitable for most circumstances. However, I am not dogmatic about this: the key thing is to have a rig that is well-balanced and effective. The mast also needs an external track on which a trysail can be set.

I like uncluttered and spacious flush decks, but when it comes to going forward in heavy weather I appreciate even more the security provided by side decks sandwiched between substantial bulwarks and a raised cabin trunk topped by a rugged handrail.

Bulwarks are also an excellent attachment point for stanchions and mooring cleats without putting fasteners through the deck (which sooner or later seem to leak). The extra couple of inches given to the lifelines by raising a 30in stanchion off the deck adds significantly to deck safety.

Cockpits are an area where otherwise excellent designs have faltered. Too many are fine for entertaining in calm water and on a level keel, but what about when the boat is on her ear, beating into unpleasant head seas for days on end? Is there a protected slot for the person on watch, with a good view forward? Can primary winches be operated without getting backache? Are lines led in such a way that riding turns are avoided and they can be released at short notice from the watchkeeper's location? I am not a fan of large cockpits. They eat into accommodation space and, in the event of a pooping, hold a tremendous weight of water. I like cockpit seats to be long enough, and just about wide enough, for a skinny person such as Terrie or myself to stretch out and sleep under the stars.

The companionway hatch should be on the centreline, rather than offset. This way, boarding seas racing up the side decks on one or other tack are unlikely to spill into the cabin. The hatch coaming should be set above the cockpit deck and above the cockpit coamings so that, if the cockpit fills with water, it will not enter the boat. At the least, there must be a mechanism for locking hatch boards in place.

Lastly, having been pitched over the side one night when alone on deck, I am acutely aware of the need for a permanently installed and realistic means of reboarding in difficult conditions.

possibility of simply sailing over them. If the boat has a split underbody, a full skeg comes close to providing the same benefits with less wetted area (and therefore an improvement in sailing characteristics).

The boat needs to be of rugged construction. In this day and age I feel it is reasonable to expect a 10-year blister-free warranty. The hull-to-deck joint needs to be pretty well bulletproof and the bulkheads and other structural members must be solidly glassed in place.

Although many fine boats are built with cored hulls - which produces great strength with light weight and additionally provides some insulation - I have strong reservations about cores. Core damage can be incredibly expensive to fix. I don't want

major structural problems 10 or 20 years down the line. At the least, I want to see a solid hull below the waterline, and to have some reassurance that tough, and even abusive, service will not result in core damage in a decade or two. It's important that through hulls and other fittings that penetrate the core are installed with the long haul in mind

**Nigel Calder, a diesel mechanic for 25 years, is also a boatbuilder and acclaimed technical author**





Farewell to *Nada*, built by Nigel and Terrie from a bare hull

### Interior designing

We want a couple of sleeping cabins with comfortable sea berths for up to four. At night, it should be possible for the person on watch to work at the chart table, or in the galley, without disturbing those resting. This flies in the face of many modern open-plan designs in which it's impossible to screen the nav station and galley lighting from saloon sea berths. The saloon table should be large enough to seat up to six and the galley will include **fridge**, **freezer**, **double sinks**, **microwave** and decent gas stove. The chart table will need to be substantial with plenty of drawer space. The wet locker should be close to the companionway.

Finally, we need plenty of **stowage**, and **tankage** for at least 150 gallons of fresh water and 60 gallons of diesel. Our boat has to be able to carry a considerable cargo of cruising stores, without suffering a serious loss of performance.

### Narrowing down the choices

It is best to pack these features into as small a boat as possible, to keep down initial costs, plus ongoing bills for maintenance, insurance and berthing fees. We found that we could just about fit our basic requirements into a modern 38-footer, with 44ft providing a luxurious amount of space. Above 44ft, boats get considerably more complex, and way beyond our ability to purchase or maintain.

We have found a number of excellent production-built cruising boats in the 38ft to 44ft range which meet our general requirements. We looked particularly hard at one or two Scandinavian boats, and several British boats, including the Bowman 42 (a Chuck Paine design), the Victoria 38 (Chuck Paine again, but no longer being built) and the Vancouver 38 (Robert Harris). In the USA we eventually cut our short-list to the Valiant 40 and 42 (Bob Perry), and the Pacific Seacraft 40 (Bill Crealock).

As I get older, I become less tolerant of discomfort, so we considered pilot house versions of several of these boats. But aesthetics are important to us, and I think it's just about impossible to put a pilot house on a 38-44ft boat without making it look as if someone cut the top off a bus and dumped it there.

In the final analysis, we chose the Pacific Seacraft 40. Two things tipped the scales in its favour. First, in terms of both her overall design and interior, she is in many ways a big sister to *Nada*, with many of the features we have come to know and love. Secondly, the company has been incredibly responsive to our idiosyncratic demands. It is clear that we will be able to put our personal stamp on this boat. ▲

**In a forthcoming issue, Nigel Calder will be writing about the sea trials of his new boat and looking in detail at what makes a successful cruising yacht**

## Three cruising essentials

We asked YMs three blue water correspondents each to name three things they wouldn't sail without



**Annie Hill, currently in Cape Town, building a catamaran to replace her junk-rigged *Badger***

**Luke (fisherman) anchor:**

at anchor you really want to be sure of your security. When *Badger* is lying to our 65 lb Luke, we feel confident that she will stay put regardless. Lukes don't come cheaply and you have to import them from West Marine in the USA. If I could only have one anchor, this is the one I'd choose.

**A decent library:** I can't imagine cruising without books. With plenty of time and few distractions you can really concentrate on what you're reading and become immersed.

**Pressure cooker:** I find it amazing that some people sail without a pressure cooker. They save fuel, are safe in the roughest of weather, when you really need good, hot food. And just think of the wonderful soups and sponge puddings you can turn out!



**Jack Gush, bound for Hobart, Tasmania, in *Jackella*, his 43ft steel sloop**

**Aries windvane:** on a passage to Noumea, it broke down. The prospect of having to steer all night was grim.

Someone once called it 'the tyranny of the tiller'. The only advantage was that a good lookout was kept at all times.

**Staysail:** *Jackella* is cutter rigged. On long passages you can't choose your weather, but you *can* snug down. Staysail and two reefs in the main put the load more nearly amidships and low down. Going to weather, a bit of furled genoa, staysail and reefed main give two slots and more power.

**SSB radio:** at first we didn't have one. We thought the oceans were empty, silent places. As soon as we got one, we found they were full of chatter. We keep in touch with other cruisers, exchange news, discuss plans, swap notes on gear, chat with shore stations and make new friends.



**Hugh Marriott, currently in Bali aboard his *Valiant 40, Tacit***

**A trolley:** an

unexpected joy of long-term cruising is leaving behind the angst and expense of car ownership.

But you *must* have a trolley for carting jerry cans, gas bottles and groaning shopping bags, sometimes for a mile or more. Ours is strong, stable and stows in a small space.

**'Floater' spinnaker:** we have no light canvas at all. We don't mind in the Trades or higher latitudes. But messing about near the equator our sails sometimes give us only 1-2 knots, beating themselves to death in the process, when a 'floater' might give us 5 knots.

**A gimballed platform** in the galley (other than the cooker) does wonders for the quality of life when you're at sea for days at a time. Cups of tea, bowls of sloppy stew and jugs of milk can all be plonked down safely, even when rolling downwind or, Heaven forbid, bashing to windward.

