

PION 30 – 1976 Yacht Buyers' Guide

The Pion 30 is a yacht with a lot going for it. Designed by world renowned naval architect E.G. van de Stadt, it is the world's first national authority sponsored, fixed rating, one-design ocean racer. It also rates as a Half Tonner.

The idea of a one class ocean racer has been mooted by many yachtsmen in many countries, but has been doomed to failure by lack of agreement on the type, size, etc., of the yacht.

The idea of a one-design class for sea going yachts was discussed by the Royal Dutch Yachting Union in 1967 and an attempt was made to interest other foreign yachting unions in the idea. Reaction varied, but it was pointed out that the new IOR rule was expected and it was decided to wait to see its result.

In 1971, after racing for one year under the new rule, the idea was discussed again and the Dutch decided to go it alone.

Acceptance of an existing class was rejected, the guidelines for the ideal yacht were that it had to be able to compete in the long races at sea, and also be a good cruising boat.

In May 1971 the Royal Dutch Yachting Union discussed the guidelines with a group of Dutch designers who had investigated for years the behaviour and speed of yachts in co-operation with the Technical University in Delft headed by Prof. Gerritsma. The group was most enthusiastic about the plan and three plans were sent to the University by September that year. Scale models were made and thoroughly tank tested. After extensive studies and improvements van de Stadt's design was chosen, class rules were drawn up and the first boats built. Since then the Pion class has spread to four countries of the world.

Yachtcraft of South Australia are making the yacht in Australia and are having the hulls built to van de Stadt's hand lay-up specifications and Lloyds A100.

My first contact with these yachts was in 1974 when Karl Texler invited me to sail with him to Glenelg in the beautifully finished Blue Angel. Later in the season I had the opportunity to test the boat first hand when Peter Mander's Dynasty competed in its first ocean race. The Island Cup, which takes the yachts from Adelaide's Outer Harbour down the Gulf to American River, Kangaroo Island and up the Gulf to the Arontes light and across the Gulf back to Outer Harbour. The first impression of the yacht at the pontoon was one of considerable size for a 30-footer. The hull is not excessively beamy at 9ft 7in, but the beam is carried well aft to a wide transom that has minimal overhang. Inside the boat the feeling of space is continued with generous standing headroom, the high freeboard allowing plenty of room above built in furniture and the pilot berths. The Australian Pion has a different interior layout from the European versions, consisting of two good sized quarter berths an L-shape galley to port, and a chart table with an ice box underneath. Midships there are two settee berths with two pilot berths above to port and starboard.

The mast passes through the cabin roof and is supported above the keel. The fin keel is cast-iron let into a recess in the hull moulding, through bolted and supported by ample floors, glassed in. The main bulkhead separates the main saloon from the forward area which contains a marine toilet to port and a hand basin to starboard, plus hanging room. The headroom here is good. The forepeak has two bunks with lift up tops so that sail bins are made underneath when racing, but allowing an extra two bunks for weekend cruising. On deck, apart from the 7/8th rig, the layout is fairly standard, halyards etc. leading back to the cockpit with winches mounted on the aft end of the cabin roof.

The cockpit is roomy and deep. The seating is below deck level which gives a feeling of security and the seats are sloped to drain the water forward and to the side. This is both a good and bad idea. One drawback can be the drain pipe over the entrance to the quarter berth. However, constructed properly the pipe can be used as a handrail to assist getting in and out of the bunk as on Dynasty.

The mainsheet and traveller is on top of the aft end of the cabin. The cabin and deck are of fibreglass with ample non-skid surface. The side decks are pleasantly wide and the handrails give adequate grip moving around the deck.

The yacht proved itself a good all-rounder - very close-winded and with good reaching and running ability. The helm was easy, and provided excellent control of the boat at all times. I

got the impression that the boat was above average in the lighter wind strengths, and its performance in the higher wind strengths was very good.

Back to the race; After a late start caused by a number of small problems we began the race nearly a mile behind the fleet. The race began at 8pm. By midnight we had moved up into the middle of the fleet. Conditions when we started were 25-30 knot wind strength, choppy seas, and we were on the wind. The boat had an easy motion, was very dry on deck, quiet and comfortable below.

By morning the wind had moderated and we found ourselves in close company with a number of boats in Backstairs Passage which separates the mainland and Kangaroo Island. An interesting struggle developed to set who would make the mark first in American River, with the wind dropping away.

Dynasty had come through the fleet to rub shoulders with other Half Tonners and many of the larger yachts.

The next leg from river to Orontes beacon off Pt. Vincent found most boats struggling in a fading breeze. Conquista, a Spencer 30, had taken off and established a lead of at least five miles over us. Cockatoo, another Spencer, was astern. As evening came the beacon was sighted and as we bore down on it in a zephyr of a breeze boats began to appear from everywhere. From the East another Pion, Valkyrie (Rick Ottaway), came across our bow to join us. Darkness brought a patchy breeze and a tense duel developed as a mass of yachts fought for position around the eerie light of the beacon.

To the South we sighted a group of yachts and decided to go around them to the North, As it happened a very wise decision, because the two Spencers spent some time nearly becalmed giving us the opportunity to creep away from them, running before a fluky breeze to the finish. The two Pions finished fourth and fifth on club handicap and Dynasty was fourth on IOR. Certainly the results would have been better had it not been for the gear problems of a new untuned yacht. The Pion proved itself a most suitable yacht for the sea conditions experienced in local South Australian waters. These have always been difficult for small boats and the Pion 30 shows great potential for the enthusiast to compete in IOR and club handicap racing with the added benefit of being a very comfortable cruising boat for its size.