

## “A Little Boat Goes a Long Way”

why a small boat like the Flicka makes so much sense

*by Angus Beare*

I didn't have a clear idea what I wanted when I set out to buy a sailing boat. I only knew I wanted something beautiful and seaworthy. I asked a classic yacht skipper what kind of boat I should look for and he said; “It's important that when you row ashore in the dinghy you look back at your boat and sigh”. He was right. I didn't want another floating sports shoe. I wanted a boat with shape and character.



*Flicka Caraway at anchor in Fornells bay in Minorca, copyright A.Beare*

I looked at various boats and studied the market and soon came to realise that I didn't want a renovation project because I wanted to go sailing *now*. So, as much as I love them, I turned my back on wooden boats. I kept looking and I started to plan how I would finance my purchase. Weeks and months went by.

Then, by chance, I stumbled upon a boat I recognised for sale. That boat was ‘Caraway’, a Pacific Seacraft Flicka 20. I had heard all about this little boat from a good friend of mine who had looked after Caraway in Cornwall and done some serious sailing on her. As soon as I saw her I knew immediately she was the boat for me. There were no doubts. She made sense in every way and I bought her within a few weeks. The price seemed high but I had bought a lot of boat for the money.



*Small boats such as the Flicka can be launched with a mobile crane.  
Try that with a 40 footer!*

Going to sea in a 20 footer is some people's idea of hell. For my colleagues in London it was clear. I was off my pintles. The pressure of delivery focused computer programming had been too much. Giving up a good career to sail off to the Mediterranean was madness. But they knew little about my childhood by the sea. Behind me were years in small fishing boats gill-netting and lobster potting. I even knew roughly how to sail. I had done my homework on Caraway and I had a very experienced friend guiding me. I knew the Caraway was a proven boat.

So why do small boats make sense? Firstly, let's get one thing straight, most small boats are *not* built to take the sea. Think of a trailer sailer and one might picture a crudely built craft with decks that flex when you walk on them. Imagine lightweight fittings supporting an exposed and flimsy rudder. On top there is a frail rig with spars like drinking straws. Think of waking to a nasty bump on the head and one foot in the porta-pottie. Didn't it occur to anybody to make a clever small boat?

Well, to Pacific Seacraft it did. In the late seventies they took Bruce Bingham's plans for a pocket cruiser based on an old lobster fishing boat and created perhaps the most widely sailed small production boat in history; the Flicka 20. They built Flickas to a standard and not to a price. In Europe the Flicka is almost unheard of but in the US she is a legend. The Flicka has crossed the Atlantic and the Pacific. She has survived hurricanes, severe groundings on reefs and has brought many an exhausted sailor home.



*The author on board Caraway.  
There's something special about a cosy teak lined boat cabin.*



*Small sailboat interiors need not be cramped and shoddily fitted out. Don't small boats deserve a bit of craftsmanship too?*

In a few months time a determined American lady will be setting off on a circumnavigation in her Flicka; 'Flight of Years'. I fully expect to meet her when she

arrives in the Mediterranean. For the small band of like-minded individuals who own a Flicka she is not a substitute but a choice.

The main reason we Flicka owners chose this boat is the cost of cruising and not the initial purchase. We have ambitious dreams but we are realistic about pursuing them. Times have changed since the pioneering days of Eric and Susan Hiscocks. Marinas are expensive and crowded. Yard services and parts are costly. If one can buy a small boat that can go anywhere then why not go sailing with more spare cash? Why not have a smaller boat of higher quality?

Every time I go to a marina I look at all the large boats that seldom go to sea and I think of the deluded souls slaving away to pay for them. Why not work less, own a smaller boat and have more fun?

With a smaller boat you will save money on maintenance, berthing, spares and fuel. You will not need crew which means you will save time. Small boat maintenance is easier and quicker. In one sunny day I can apply two coats of anti-foul, polish the topsides, fit a new anode, grease the folding prop and be back in the water in time for a sun-downer.

Small boats are better for the environment. They require less paint, less fuel, less detergents and cause less damage when anchoring. In Caraway I use either zero fuel or about 1 litre per hour. In comparison, a 40 foot power-boat can consume 43 gallons an hour! A small sailing yacht leaves little trace and makes no wash.

I decided to go cruising early while I'm still young enough to handle the work. But what if you've just retired and are heading off for the good life on your new 50 footer? Will you be able to hand reef and steer in a good blow? Will you find the dream too much? Would a smaller boat be easier to handle?

Might a smaller boat be considered more seaworthy because one can shorten sail more easily? I once crewed on a big racing yacht and it took two men half an hour to drop the main sail in a squall. The pressure on the sail almost jammed the slides. This was a dangerous amount of time to be standing at the mast. If we'd been knocked flat we could have been thrown into the water. In contrast, when it blows 40 knots I can reef or drop the main on Caraway in less than two minutes.

But what it's really all about is *fun*. Small boats *are* more fun. Small boats are a joy to sail. You can anchor under sail with ease and in the morning, without even starting the engine, you can slip out respectfully leaving your neighbors surprised to see you gone. You can sneak into busy ports and find a berth when everyone else must anchor outside in the swell. You can get in amongst the rocks where bigger yachts can't follow. And if you make a mistake the damage will be less serious and less expensive.

When the wind blows hard off the shore you can sneak right up and anchor in six feet of water leaving all the larger yachts and their smelly generators downwind. Then in the morning you can torture them with the smell of bacon sizzling in the pan. This treachery even works in France where they've never heard of proper bacon. They will be salivating over their stale croissants like Pavlov's dogs.

Part of the joy of cruising is meeting interesting people and I certainly attract curiosity arriving in an unusual 20 footer. As I sailed into Brighton marina one day an American spotted me from the sea wall and walked all the way down to the end of the harbour just to ask; "is that a Pacific Seacraft Flicka?"

In France its common for people to describe the boat as 'tres mignon'. And when they hear I have just sailed back from Minorca across the feared Gulf du Lyon in October they nearly always say; 'c'est pas vrai!'.

Over the years I have met many wonderful people that I may never have met

had I not bought a small boat. But the irony for me is that she never feels that small. I never bang my head in the morning because there's 5'11" of headroom in the cabin. I never trip over the porta-pottie because I have a proper head with holding tank behind a solid teak door.

I can easily feed four at the table and I swear, chicken tastes better poached in wine on a modest two burner hob. There's even an enormous cold box which I have turned into a fridge. With a crew of two she can carry enough water and food to anchor for a week. There's room for loads of gear and clothes and books. We have music from an MP3 player, a laptop if there's WiFi and a spacious V berth. The dinghy, a folding Origami by Wooden Widget stows in the quarter berth and can be in the water in minutes.

Beneath the cockpit is the trusty Yanmar 1gm10 installed on a special bay with inclusive drip pan that forms part of the interior molding. On the transom is the reassuringly heavy rudder, supported by three cast bronze gudgeons with pintles as thick as sausages. The rudder is slightly raised from the back of the keel so when you go aground (as all honest sailors do) it will not make contact with the seabed.

I'd like to encourage others to consider a well-found small cruiser as their next boat. I am happy to be a small boat sailor. I even found a girl willing to come along with me. A small girl that is.





Why not buy a small boat and spend all that spare cash on a good set of sails and other quality items like high tech rope and latex cushions?



*Dyneema halyards make a big difference.  
Because the cord is so much stronger than ordinary braid you can easily drop a  
size but still have stronger rope! You will have less windage and weight.  
these ropes are not cheap but imagine how much more you'd need for a 40 footer!*



*Adventures are so much more satisfying in a small boat.  
He we are rounding some icebergs in the southern ocean.  
Seriously, these are the white cliffs of Dover on way home to Chichester  
after buying Caraway in Burnham, 2002.*



*Finally in the Mediterranean running under full sail off the French coast, pic Benjy.*



## What are the alternatives?

Well, let me make clear at the start of this reflection that I am talking about the Pacific Seacraft Flicka (PSC) and not just any Flicka. It's the PSC Flickas that created



*Another item you could have is a feathering prop like this one from Darglow. They are not cheap but since you only have a 20 foot boat you have already saved enough in your first year of mooring fees to buy this prop!*

the reputation based on legendary PSC construction quality.

People are always comparing the Flicka to other boats but really there are no others in the same class. All other 20 foot boats I have come across are of very light construction and not suitable for ocean passages. I have heard the Flicka compared to the Contessa 26 or Folkboat. But the Contessa is 6 feet longer which makes her a much bigger boat. Does anyone compare the Contessa 26 to the Contessa 32? No, because that would be silly. Get my point?

Even the Dana 24 which is an outstanding boat seems huge in comparison with the Flicka. There simply are no other 20 foot production boats that bare comparison. There is the Etap 21 which is clever and unsinkable but alongside the Flicka it looks like a day sailer. I couldn't believe how flimsy the mast looked. It was thinner than my whisker pole! And don't get me started on the rudder..

The Corribee 21 is another option, being the boat Ellen MacArthur sailed around the coast of Britain. It's not of the same strength and quality as the Flicka but it sails well and goes to windward better.

For me it's the Flicka or nothing if you want a 20 footer that can take you cruising with confidence.

## Flicka 20 Specs

LOA - Length Overall	24'
LOD - Length on Deck	20'
LWL - Length Waterline	18'
Beam	8'
Draft	3'3"
Displacement	6,000 lbs
Ballast	1800 lbs
Mast height above water	30'11"
Headroom	5'11"
Sail area	250 sq.ft
Main sail	113 sq.ft
Working jib	133 sq. ft

## Buying a Flicka

The Flicka was discontinued in 1998 with hull number 434 and unless the new owners of Pacific Seacraft decide to resurrect the Flicka then a used model is the only option if you don't want to build one yourself.

The Flicka plans, first published in *Rudder* in 1972 were originally aimed at the home build market so there are Flickas out there built in a variety of materials to differing standards. In my opinion the Pacific Seacraft is the one to go for due to their superior construction quality. PSC Flickas were built in GRP to a very high standard. They have teak interiors and floors, headliners with zips , large bronze sea-cocks, hull mounted chain plates and proper electrical installations. The later models such as Caraway have beautiful custom bronze port lights, a bullet-proof cruising rig by LeFiell, an enclosed head with holding tank and inboard engine. I would look for one built after the mid eighties.

There is no better time to buy a used Flicka from the US. There are still approx 430 Flickas out there and always at least half a dozen or so for sale. Many are in great condition. They are a bargain. Prices from \$10,000 - \$50,000 depending on year and condition.