

test

RL28

RL 28 features high topsides and a reverse sheerline which gives standing head room through most of the cabin area.



Over the last decade and a half the trailer sailer scene has seen well over a hundred different production models try their luck on the market with only a handful gaining any real long-term success. In what appears to be a commercial variation on Darwin's survival of the fittest theory, the designs which do make it seem to have what it takes to turn buyers on.

There is no doubt that one of the great survivors in the cut and thrust of the trailer sailer market has been the Gold Coast-built RL range of trailer yachts. The initials RL stands for Rob Legg, the builder and designer of the range, but in fact to the market the RL stands for both Rob and his wife June.

While it was Rob's sailing and boat-building/designing talents which established the RL concept in the first place, it

24 seemed very daring at the time with a length of 7.3 metres. As funny as it sounds now there were many who thought it was too long to tow!

The RL 24 became a success story because it not only could accommodate a family of four overnight but it was also a fun, fast boat to sail for those who were coming out of dinghies and cats and seeking something with a bit of get up and go. More importantly perhaps, the RL was also pretty inexpensive.

Rob and June built their first RL while living in Victoria but they were visionary people who not only saw the growth potential in the trailer sailer scene, but also the direction in which this market would grow. The Leggs moved to the Gold Coast and set up a modern factory to build the RLs. From there, they travelled the length and breadth of the



Long-legged maxi

It's heading for its tenth birthday but with a few improvements here and there the RL 28 still has a leg on the opposition when it comes to sheer room and size for value. Report by JAMES HILL.

was the dynamic drive and personality of Rob and June together which sold the RL story to Australian sailors. Story is the operative word for the RL range of trailer sailers were more than just sailing boats, the RLs encompassed not just economical boating but a whole new lifestyle for families interested in getting into boating.

The key behind the success of the RL was Rob's strong belief that for trailer sailers to be successful as family craft, they needed to be both light in weight and less expensive than yachts. Rob had a strong grounding in the Olympic Flying Dutchman class and it was this classic lightweight racing dinghy which convinced him that light displacement was the only way to go for trailer sailers.

When Rob and June Legg unveiled their first RL at the Melbourne Boat Show early in the 1970s, many in the yachting industry were amazed. The first RL was a long, lean cabin yacht with hull lines not unlike that of a Flying Dutchman but the boat had much more hull depth and freeboard height than any racing dinghy.

At the time the first RL 24 came out most trailer yachts so far seen where no bigger than six metres. Although it was not a big volume boat for its size, the RL

country promoting their boat, sailing in every regatta they could find and personally giving potential clients demo sails.

The Leggs were one of the first to realise the marketing potential of creating a strong owner's racing-cum-cruising association around a design and set the first RL 24 up as a semi-one-design class.

The Leggs could have done quite well by just staying with their first boat but Rob saw the potential for much bigger TSs, especially for cruising places like the Whitsundays. The RL 28 followed and surprised the market because it was not so much a racing boat as it was a cruiser. In design terms it was still a light displacement craft and it carried many of the design features of the smaller boat, such as the shape of the cabin and in the use of a fractional sloop-rig.

It must have disappointed the racing enthusiasts that the RL 28 was not the racing machine the RL 24 was, but the design did show Legg's ability to understand the market and grow with it. The 28 proved to be just as big a success as the smaller boat because it hit the nail on the head for many buyers moving out of the smaller boat. In moving to a bigger

boat, these buyers wanted more accommodation for cruising, not performance for racing. Legg realised this vital point and gave the RL 28 a number of very attractive cruising features like full standing headroom without needing a pop-top.

Just before Christmas 1977 I tested the first RL 28 on the Gold Coast Broadwater with Rob and June and my own family. The new maxi looked a rather bulky craft both in or out of the water but it sailed remarkably well. Certainly it was



and can heel out to as much as 25 degrees and still keep trucking upwind.

On a close or beam reach the test boat really was in its element. Without having to fight the heeling forces as much, the RL 28 really moved on out when reaching. In this respect it would be a nice boat to cruise since this is the angle where most owners tend to do their pleasure sailing.

Overall we found the small headsail and large mainsail combination very easy to work. The boat could easily be sailed single-handed in the conditions we experienced.

The standard set-up on deck has no running backstays, but you do get an adjustable backstay to tweak the fractional rig. The backstay gives a 4:1 adjust with a combination rope tackle and wire bridle. The mast is supported by cap shrouds running over single set of swept-back spreaders, and a single set of lowers which anchor onto the cabintop.

As standard, the boom is set nice and high so you don't get knocked heads in a gybe, plus there is a topping lift to take the boom when the sail is dropped. The mainsail comes standard with double sets of jiffy reefing. The tails of the leech reef lines are led back to the cockpit via turning blocks led to jam cleats on the rear of the trunk cabin.

Also standard are two headsails, both with piston hanks. You can have an optional roller furler and here there is a wide choice of models to choose from. Eric Skews of the charter boat company considered the Giot roller furler the best he had so far tried on the RL 28.

Certainly one of the best features on deck from a sail-handling point of view is the large, shallow bow well which also doubles as an anchor locker. As long as the anchors are stowed to one side this self-draining well gives the for'ard hand a nice secure place to stand during a headsail takedown.

On the subjects of cockpits, the big one aft is a nice comfortable place to lounge around in while cruising. The cockpit features backrest support coamings and recessed seats with three stowage hatches under. There is a raised bridge at the for'ard end of the cockpit to keep water from getting below and to form a step into the cabin entrance. The outboard auxiliary, a Mariner 15hp long shaft, is neatly tucked away in a through-the-bottom well just under the tiller. A hatch covers the outboard but allows the throttle and other controls to be exposed enough for the helmsman to be able to easily reach them. One of the best touches in the cockpit, the one item in fact voted number one by our test crew, is the thin drip-dry foam seat cushions which made the life of a boat-tester just that much more bearable. The cushions



Cockpit features drip-dry cushions and fixed mainsheet take-off point on floor.

were covered in a special non-absorbent material called Dorton which allows the cushions to stay out in the rain and weather without becoming water logged. In short, a great idea even if it is an optional extra.

Accommodation

The first thing you notice when you come below is that you are standing upright without benefit of a pop-top. The RL 28 has full standing headroom right through the main cabin and up ahead of the mast where there is a fully enclosed toilet/shower compartment.

The accommodation inside the RL 28 provides all the necessities for cruising. There is a nice big L-shaped galley off to your starboard side when you come below while ahead of you is a big saloon with a four-seater saloon table offset from the main walkway. There is a good sized quarter-berth on the port side as well as comfortable settee with padded backrest.

The saloon is fully closed off from the fore area by a full-sized teak-faced bulkhead. Going through an attractive louvre-pannelled door, offset to port, you come into the area ahead of the mast. Here there is a big, full-length hanging locker on your port hand while to starboard is a moulded fibreglass toilet-cum-shower compartment with hand basin and teleflex type shower hose. The toilet compartment has its own vanity unit with mirror and as well a dorade air vent and shower sump with electrically operated pump which automatically clears the water out.

Up for'ard there is a large double-berth with under-bunk lockers and shelves for extra stowage. In all there is sleeping for six once the saloon dinette is converted to a double-berth.

In the deluxe sail-away the RL 28 is equipped with virtually all you need to go

cruising. There is a good sized icebox, two-burner stove and window curtains as well as carpet on the floor areas. While all the bunk units, galley and toilet compartment are built up from separate fibreglass mouldings the interior does not have that clinical fibreglass look. The teak-faced bulkheads, teak topped saloon table and carpeted headliner and hull skin liner all add up to a softer feel below. The red and beige colour scheme below made for a warm, inviting interior though I wasn't mad on the lime green curtains. Drapes aside, however, the RL 28 looked really cosy and inviting. I would really recommend any of the fleet of RL 28s run by Eric and Pam Skews for a holiday. I have seen quite a few charter boat operations now and I can honestly say that Sail-Cruise really are one of the most professional outfits around.

It is always interesting to see what gear charter operators put on boats, especially when they are yachtsmen as experienced as Eric Skews. Interestingly Eric is not so keen on roller furling gear at all, believing that in the long run simplicity of equipment is best. Eric has fitted up all his RL 28s with 27MHz two-way radios so that at all times his hirers can stay in touch with his home radio base station. Personally I think this is an excellent idea for a charter boat company and one which I would like to see more companies adopt.

Summary

The RL 28 is still one of the best value boats on the market today in terms of interior accommodation for your dollar. While the standard rig can no longer be considered for racing, an optional racing rig version of the boat can give this option.

In terms of trailing this is not the sort of boat you are going to pop in and out of the water for a sail of an hour or two. The boat is trailable provided you have the right size vehicle to tow 1360kg. Ideally a big four-wheel-drive would be the right sort of horse at the other end of the tow ball. It's not that the boat is so heavy but a big rig on a trailer and when combined with a double-axle trailer is going to need something substantial to STOP it as well as haul it up a steep ramp.

Specifications

Length	8.54m
LWL	7.2m
Width	2.41m
Draft	40cm-145cm
Displacement	1360kg
Ballast	544kg
Sail area	23m ²
Price, base sail-away	\$29,000
Available from Rob Legg Yachts, Runaway Bay, Qld.	