

# The Hurley story

Hurley Marine was one of 1960s Britain's most prolific boatbuilders. Tim Sharman and Nick Vass tell the story and describe the boats that make great second-hand buys today

**T**he British boatbuilding industry has had its ups and downs, but the period leading up to the 1970s was its golden age. As post-war austerity gave way to 1960s swing, Britain

witnessed the birth of a number of now famous boatbuilding names: Nicholson, Moody, MacWester and Westerly were producing innovative designs for boats which are still giving sterling service today.

At the forefront for nearly 30 years was Hurley Marine, builder of the famous Silhouette and Hurley range. More than 8,000 Hurley boats were built in Plymouth between the firm's beginnings in the late 1950s and its eventual closure in 1974. Most of the boats are still around today, some having crossed oceans, circumnavigated the globe and become classics in their own right.

## The man behind it all

George Hurley trained as a carpenter and worked in the Plymouth shipyards during the Second World War. After the war ended he started to build caravans, trailers and commercial vehicles, first from his back garden then from a purpose-built



factory. In 1957 one Ernie Miners asked permission to build a Redwing dinghy in a corner of the Hurley factory, which sparked George's interest in boatbuilding: the rest, as they say, is history.

## Silhouette

Back in 1953 Robert Tucker, a young naval architect, had been dinghy cruising with a friend on the Fens and Broads.

Unconvinced by sleeping ashore on cold, hard ground, he thought of designing a 'dinghy with a lid on', a concept which progressed to a 'nice little cruising yacht'. The Silhouette Mk I was born.

A plywood cruiser measuring 5m (16ft 6in) with a single chine hull, the first boat was named *Blue Boy*, cost £85 to build and was launched on the Medway.

The Silhouette Mk II followed in 1955, aimed at the US market, incorporating increased length and beam with a serpentine sheer to give freeboard at the shoulders. Two

hundredweight of internal ballast was moved out onto a stub keel and the skeg and bilge keels were deepened. The first Mk II was called *Susanne* and cost a little over £100.

Hurley began to build the Silhouette from 1958 onwards, initially during the quiet periods between manufacturing cattle trucks and caravans.

George Hurley met Robert Tucker in the USA in 1965 and they agreed to cooperate on the Mk III, a round-bilge version in glassfibre. Finally, a four-berth version of the Mk III was developed, known as the Mk IV.

The Silhouette proved an enormously popular boat with more than 2,500 built, providing Hurley with the point of entry into the emerging recreational boating market, and the beginning of the Hurley Marine story.

## Alacrity 19

Designed in 1960 by Peter Stephenson, the Alacrity 19 was an open plan, relatively beamy yacht built by Hurley for the Essex-based Russell Marine. They performed well – at least one has crossed

**LEFT** A young George Hurley

**BELOW** George built caravans, trailers and commercial vehicles, initially from his back garden

**BOTTOM** Silhouette MkII on a trailer designed by George



**A busy construction scene in the Hurley factory**



**SILHOUETTE**  
Price from £1,200


David Harding

The enormously popular Silhouette. More than 2,500 were built

## The Midshipman

The Midshipman is a 4.3m (14ft) day-sailer based on the Silhouette. She was designed by Robert Tucker for Imray & Wilson, then a well-known London yacht chandler, and was intended as a beamy, stable sailing cruiser to take family parties on day sailing trips.

There is almost no information about the Midshipman in the Hurley archive: it's likely that only a small number were built at Richmond Walk as she was probably overshadowed by larger, more popular designs. She was, however, exhibited at the London Boat Show around 1960, and can occasionally still be found on the second-hand market.



the Atlantic – but the accommodation and headroom was limited.

Hurley did not just mould the hulls for Russell Marine but completed the whole yacht, ready to take to sea – in fact, the boat was marketed as a Hurley for a year in 1969. Russell Marine built them alone after about 1972 and marketed them as the Alacrity Weekender.

Overall, some 1,200 Alacritys were built by both Hurley and Russell Marine.

## Felicity

The Felicity came next, designed by Ian Anderson in 1961 as a larger replacement for the Silhouette with more comfort. Anderson's brief was to produce a cruiser for four with accommodation in one full-size double berth and two quarter-berths. She had to have a compact but practical galley, a roomy, protected cockpit and bilge keels designed for first-rate performance under sail. Finally, she was to be manoeuvrable under both inboard or outboard power.

The result was a 6m (20ft), four-berth sloop in marine ply, with a spruce mast which could be stepped on deck to allow it to be lowered for inland waterway cruises. An excellent all-round boat, the Felicity quickly proved ideal for inshore, coastal or estuary passages.

The keels consisted of one 193kg (424lb) cast iron centreline stub keel and two 70kg (154lb) mild steel plate bilge keels. Although the first models were made in marine ply, the boat was later available in glassfibre with a single-fin keel. About 150 Felicities were eventually built.

The Felicity was designed as a larger, more comfortable replacement for the Silhouette

**FELICITY**

Price from £1,700



David Harding

**ALACRITY 19**  
Price from £1,460


At least one Alacrity 19 has crossed the Atlantic





**SIGNET 20**  
Price from £995

The Signet 20, a Ray Kaufman design

### Signet 20

The Signet 20 was designed by American naval architect and yacht designer Ray Kaufman in around 1963, following several years of research and prototype testing. Signet 20s were built in many countries and by several yards in the UK, although the majority of the UK boats were moulded by Hurley Marine between 1965 and 1967. It's likely that Hurley produced the mouldings and other yards then completed and sold the boats.

Signet 20 with sail number 15 was built by Hurley and was used in publicity shots for other builders. Standards of construction and finish varied significantly from builder to builder, as did interior layout, but accommodation was usually open plan with two forward V-berths, a galley with worktop amidships and two settee berths which ran under the cockpit coamings. Some had a sea toilet between the forward berths.

A strong and seaworthy little yacht, the Signet 20 is similar in concept to the Felicity and Hurley 20.

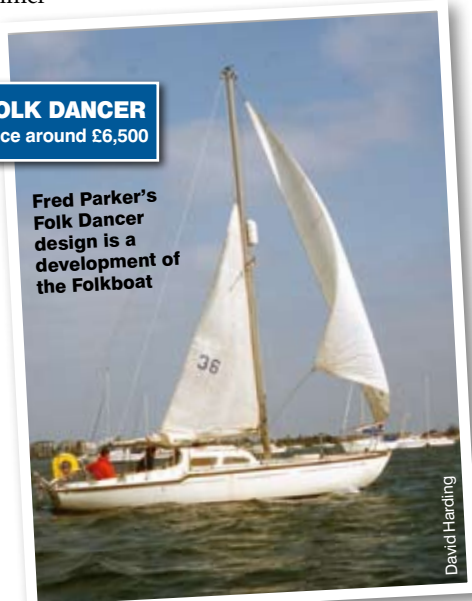
### Folk Dancer

The Folk Dancer is a development of the Folkboat (see PBO Summer 2011) and was designed by Fred Parker and built by Hurley for Russell Marine. This was a long-term and carefully conducted development project, employing a prototype for two years before moving to production, the intent being to produce a thoroughbred offshore cruising yacht but also with the needs of racing enthusiasts in mind.

Two interior layouts were offered, four and

**FOLK DANCER**  
Price around £6,500

Fred Parker's Folk Dancer design is a development of the Folkboat



David Harding



**HURLEY 22**  
Price from £1,250

The Hurley 22, a 'proper little yacht' and perhaps the most famous of Hurley's Ian Anderson designs

five berth. The four-berth plan placed the sea toilet in a separate compartment. A galley advertised as 'de luxe' and a clothes-hanging space for five people were a distinct attraction for the cruising family.

A number of features of the build reflect the Hurley style: for example, the construction of lockers and use of woodwork are clearly similar to that used in Hurley's own boats. Likewise, the upper deck moulding, windows and coachroof bear a striking resemblance to the Hurley 22.

### Hurley 22

Referred to as a 'proper little yacht' by PBO in December 1996 and perhaps the most famous of Hurley's Ian

Anderson designs, the Hurley 22 went into production in 1964 and was still being built by various companies until 1991.

The 22, offered with fin or bilge keels, became an instant hit. Aside from her pretty lines, she is solidly built and a good performer. From the outset, the boat was intended to be raced as well as cruised: a 22 won the Round The Island Race in 1967, and 22s acquitted themselves well on the Junior Offshore Group (JOG) circuit.

However, it has been the 22's cruising performance that has won the respect of many yachtsmen over the years. The boats have proved themselves on long cruises, several 22s have crossed the Atlantic and at least one has cruised the Pacific. In the late 1960s, the yacht was successfully raced and marketed by SHE Yachts, which produced the 22s version with a slightly taller Proctor rig, different winches and altered central cockpit mainsheet traveller, for racing under JOG rules.

During the 1970s the Royal Navy bought more than 30 Hurley 22s and used them for training purposes. They were mostly fin-keelers and were named, so the story goes, after the girlfriends of senior naval officers!



Margret Hurley takes a Hurley 22 on the water for PBO in 1967

David Harding

**HURLEY 18**  
Price from £1,950



David Harding

Some 300 Hurley 18s were built

### Hurley 18

The Hurley 18 was designed at about the same time as the 22 and shared a common design style. Key to the design was the requirement for offshore performance and the characteristics of larger deep-keeled yachts, with a good ballast/weight ratio but on a smaller scale. She is a stiff and comfortable sea boat making the most of the limited internal space.

Commentators noted the Hurley 18's 'sweet' hull and overall lines, which were given priority in the design over accommodation. One also commented that in small cruiser racing most of the Hurley boats seemed to be able to 'wipe the eye' of most of their rivals in size. The 18 was referred to as a 'right-looking boat which employs her 50 per cent ballast ratio where it matters and which, for her size, is powerful'.

The Hurley 18 won a place in the top 10 at the Weymouth One-of-a-Kind Rally in 1966. Some 300 Hurley 18s were built until the line was discontinued in 1972.

### Hurley goes international

By 1966 the company had a truly international reach. In that year, Hurley



**HURLEY 20**  
Price from £5,000

David Harding

The Hurley 20, a roomy 6.1m (20ft) family cruiser with a performance to interest the ex-dinghy sailors



Margret Hurley attended many '60s boat shows

exhibited at shows in London, New York, Hamburg, Malmo, Copenhagen, Gothenburg, Stockholm, Milan, Genoa, Berlin, Seattle, San Francisco and Chicago.

George was supported in this by his elder daughter Margret, who was still in her teens, starting even before her O-levels. Margret and George would go to shows in the UK, Europe and Scandinavia, sometimes towing a Silhouette or other model behind their family car, and Margret would play a full part in setting up the stand, greeting enquirers, answering technical questions and handling sales. This included a boat show in Barcelona where her O-level Spanish came in most handy!

She quickly established a reputation for no-nonsense professionalism – no mean achievement in the male-dominated marine industry of the 1960s. Margret managed the 1965 show in Copenhagen on her own for two weeks, for example, achieving sales of 20 boats.

The early London Boat Shows were held at Olympia and, to keep costs down, the family would travel up together and live in a caravan which they had towed and parked nearby.

### Hurley 20

A replacement for the Felicity, the Hurley 20 was designed in 1967 by Ian Anderson. He was asked to produce a roomy 6.1m (20ft) family cruiser with a performance to interest the ex-dinghy sailor. Keeping costs down to make the boat affordable was important, but without sacrificing strength or safety.

The design was based on a round-bilge version of the Felicity, and both bilge and fin keel versions were offered. Like the other members of the Hurley line, the H20 is a good sailing boat above all, with a proper seagoing, sailing hull form. It followed the design philosophy of the 22, putting a good hull shape and seaworthiness above interior comforts.

Given its smaller size, the compromise makes itself felt more clearly than in the 22. One reviewer called the 20 'a wolf in sheep's clothing', after sailing her in a Force 8 and noting how she took the waves while maintaining perfect helm balance. These are typical of the reasons why the Hurley 20 remains popular to this day. Some 435 H20s were produced.

### Hurley 27

The Hurley 27 was designed in 1971 by Ian Anderson to provide a larger boat in the Hurley line.

She was based on the Bowman 26, a boat which Anderson had designed for the



**HURLEY 27**  
Price from £4,995

David Harding

The Hurley 27 from 1971, based on the Bowman 26



**HURLEY 24/70**  
Price from £5,500



David Harding

**Around 160 Hurley 24/70s were built**

Normand Boatyard in Dartmouth.

The Bowman was herself a glassfibre development of the Sirius, a small sailing cruiser in strip-planked mahogany which Anderson had designed for Lee Wright Ltd, which was later taken over by Normand. A number of changes were made to the Bowman design, the most noticeable of which was the raising of the forward coachroof to provide standing headroom in the forepeak. The topsides were also raised all round by about 15cm (6in) resulting in an increased length overall to 8.2m (27ft). Further improvements to the design were made in 1972, during an upgrade and rationalisation of the Hurley line. Ninety-one H27s were built between 1971 and February 1974, some being sold as kits.

### Hurley 24/70

Anderson designed the Hurley 24/70 as part of the revitalisation of the product line in 1972. She was a stretched version of the Hurley 22 but with key modifications. The coachroof was raised to give standing headroom inside and the cockpit coamings were raised, making her safe for families. The counter stern gave her a modern look while lengthening the waterline when sailing and heeled over.

The 24/70 refers to 24ft/7m and was intended to make the yacht sound modern and acceptable for the European market. They sold well, and around 160 were built.

The short boom, large genoa and high-aspect rig was favoured by IRC and JOG racers at that time, but the Hurley 24/70 is not a racing boat – she is easily manageable by solo sailors. The sail area is less than the Hurley 22 but the boat has

about the same maximum speed due to the longer waterline length.

The hull form is fin and skeg like the 30/90, as opposed to the semi-long keel of the 18 and 22 and the long keel of the 27. The 24/70 was also available as a bilge keeler. She has a reverse-counter transom, giving low wetted area and a long waterline for extra performance.

### Hurley 30/90

The Hurley 30/90 (30ft/9m) was designed by Ian Anderson in 1972 and was the largest of his designs for Hurley. She formed the last stage of that year's modernisation programme, and about 30 were built.

Like most Hurleys, the 30/90 is a stiff, dry boat that is good in moderate to heavy wind and sea. She is a well-built, heavy boat for her size and shares many of the traits of the Hurley line. The size of berths is generous and there is plenty of room in the deep cockpit. She is a true offshore sailer capable of blue water cruising. The fin and skeg configuration makes her a great performer but many had offset propeller shafts which made going astern challenging in the hands of novices.

**HURLEY 30/90**  
Price from £8,950



David Harding

**The Hurley 30/90 from 1972 was the largest of Ian Anderson's designs for Hurley**

The first Hurley 30/90 built, *Claren*, is still afloat and is now berthed in Wales. Her photograph was used for the brochure shot some time later, she entered the 1974 Fastnet race with Ian Anderson at the helm.

After the demise of Hurley Marine the 30/90 moulds were sold to Southbourne Marine Ltd of Emsworth. The new yacht was moulded by Northshore Yachts and marketed as the Cobra 30. Later still, Ian Anderson bought the tooling himself and built the yacht as the Anderson 30.

### Hurley 9.5 motor ketch

The Hurley 9.5 was designed in 1970 by GK Collyer, previously of Morgan Giles Ltd. She's a 9.4m (31ft) centre-cockpit, high-volume motor-sailer with a 'doghouse' wheelhouse. Around 30 were built by Hurley between 1971 and 1973.

The first boat was wooden and built for Hurley by Coysh of Teignmouth. She was named *Hurley Maid* and formed the pattern for production in glassfibre.

They are strong and heavily-built boats with excellent accommodation, and have lasted well. After the closure of Hurley, the moulds were bought by Elizabethan Yachts



David Harding

**HURLEY 9.5  
MOTOR KETCH**  
Price from £14,000

The Hurley 9.5 motor ketch, a 9.4m (31ft) centre-cockpit, high-volume motor-sailer

which marketed the boat, with some modifications, as the Meridian 31 until the mid-1980s.

### Sailwind 27

In the last years before closure, Hurley's managers were looking to revitalise the product line and had already commissioned the 24/70 and 30/90 from Ian Anderson, along with revisions of the 22 and 27.

With an eye on the serious racing market, they also partnered with designers Lars Bergström and Sven-Olov Ridder of Sweden (B&R Rigging), together with Bjorn Liddell, to produce the Sailwind 27 and Tailwind 38.

The Sailwind is a flush-decked cruiser-racer, with accommodation for six in two cabins and a revolutionary rig.

Unfortunately, the company closed before completing any. Certainly there is no archive evidence of Sailwinds being marketed by Hurley, but it is thought that

five Sailwind hulls may have been moulded and sold to Latham's of Poole, which completed and marketed them from the mid-1970s onwards.

Reviewers at the time of Sailwind's introduction were impressed with many features of the radical design, in particular the flush deck, excellent visibility for the helmsman and crew, and chines in the cockpit sole for better support. The aft cabin provided three bunks and the intelligent internal layout gave a total of six berths, all within 8.2m (27ft) which was considered impressive.

Her sailing qualities also came in for strong commendation, including ease of handling under both sail and power.

### Tailwind 38

The Tailwind 38 is a fast and powerful cruiser/racer, designed by Swedes Bergström, Ridder and Liddell and built during the last few years before the demise of Hurley Marine in 1974. She incorporated

a new rig also created by the designers.

It is not known exactly how many Tailwinds were built, but we do know that most were taken to the USA for long-distance racing.

The Tailwind design required several years of tank and wind tunnel testing, many of which were spent on the rig and keel. She was the first production boat to carry the innovative Bergström and Ridder rig, which aimed to reduce windage and improve air flow across the mainsail by using a smaller section mast supported by additional swept-back spreaders and stainless-steel rod stays, in addition to conventional stays.

The Tailwind can perform well as a family boat with her spacious and fully appointed accommodation, able to sleep seven in reasonable comfort. However, she is also a capable ocean racer with a crew of up to nine. The Tailwind was exhibited at the 1974 London Boat Show, where she attracted the attention of the Prime Minister, Edward Heath.

### The end

George Hurley retired in 1967. These were tough times for boatbuilders, and Hurley was no exception: a heavily unionised workforce, growing competition and production problems were combining to lead the company into difficulties.

In 1971 consultants were called in to make recommendations for the company's revival, and fortunes were turning around well until two seriously damaging events occurred.

First came the government's compulsory three-day week from January to March 1974, in an attempt to reduce electricity usage and conserve coal stocks during the 'winter of discontent'.

Then there was the introduction of VAT in April 1974. While this was initially set at 10%, a higher rate of 25% was added in 1974 for luxury goods, which seriously affected boat sales.

Sales started to sharply decline against a backdrop of conditions in the UK which were generally going from bad to worse. Receivers were appointed and the last boat – a 30/90 – left the factory for Hong Kong in December.

So ended a fine company which had achieved so much. It had led the development of glassfibre boatbuilding, created an internationally recognised brand, produced more than 8,000 boats and achieved a phenomenal export performance.

**PBO**


**SAILWIND 27**  
Price from £7,600

The Sailwind 27, a flush-decked cruiser-racer



**TAILWIND 38**  
S/H price unavailable

The Tailwind 38, built during Hurley's last years

To buy a copy of Nick Vass and Tim Sharman's book *The History of Hurley Marine*, and for a wealth of other Hurley information, visit the Hurley Owners' Association website [www.hurleyownersassociation.co.uk](http://www.hurleyownersassociation.co.uk)

