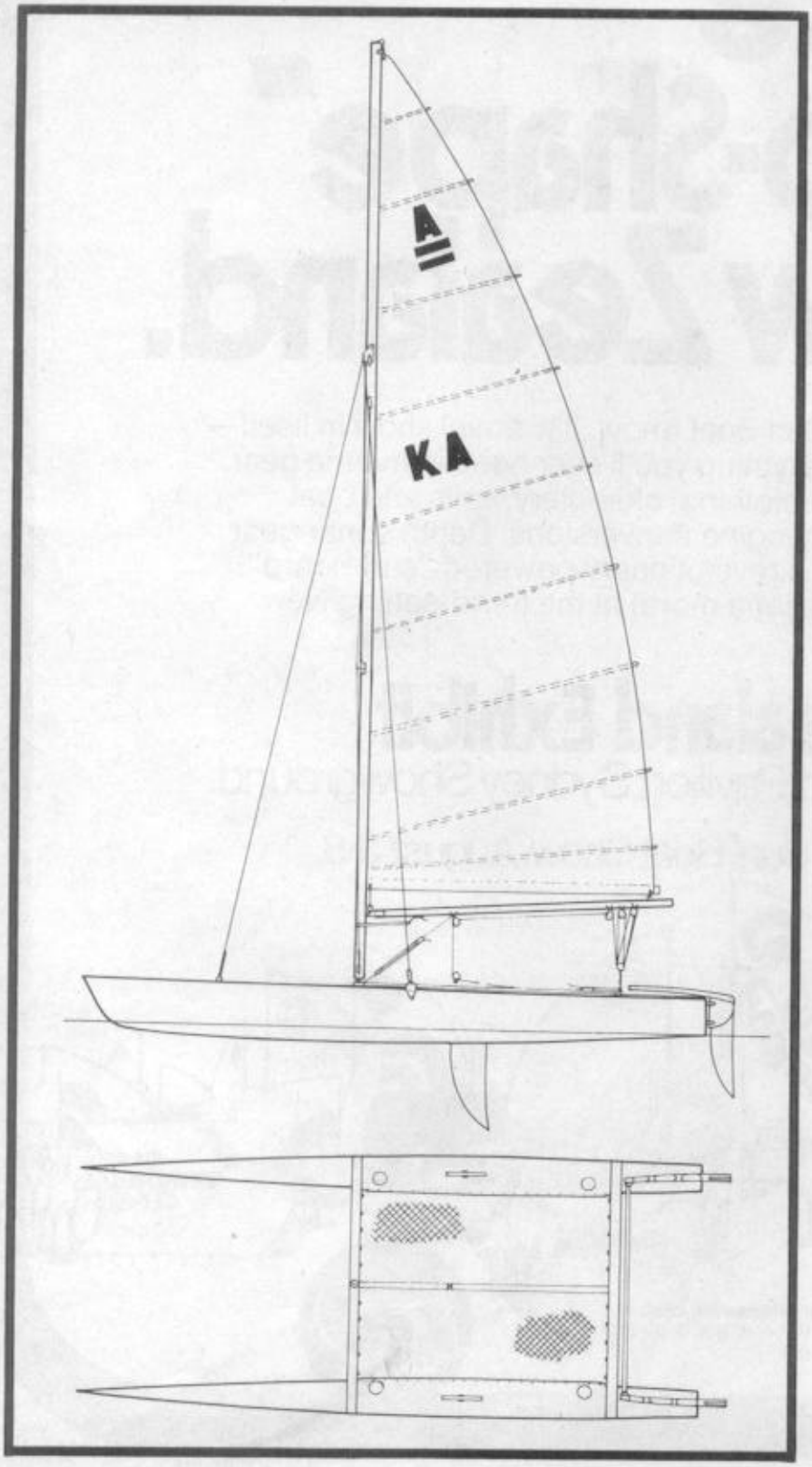
RHAPSODY



Rhapsody is sweet, sensitive and speedy A-class monotype cat. Max Press did the test, took the pictures.

ONE OF the fastest-developing classes in the catamaran field in the sixties was the International Open A Class Division craft. In 1965, the IYRU created three open divisions; the A class for one man, 18 ft loa, 8 ft beam, with a maximum of 150 sq ft; the B Class, in which the Tornado distinguished itself and is now an Olympic cat; and the C Class, still the class used in the Little America's Cup series.

In 1967 the Australis was chosen in the IYRU trials (along with the Tornado) for international status, and became Australia's first locally-designed class to reach international status.

But in Australia, even with the Australis consolidating, a pocket of one-man cat enthusiasts wanted to stay in the open class area, designing and building one-man cats within the IYRU open division restrictions to test their creations against one another, idea for idea, race for race, design for design.

One of the older stalwarts in this field is Harold Stevenson, whose son Philip, twice won the Open A Class Championships in their design Rhapsody.

But this year Harold got the bit between his teeth and, after designing and building a new craft which he also called Rhapsody, he took the Australian titles over Easter on Lake Macquarie in NSW. It was no mean feat because Harold recovered a couple of seasons ago from heart attack, and he beat a fleet of 21 boats.

On top of this, Harold won every heat. What's more, as I was writing this story I tried to ring him, only to find that he had gone to Darwin to sail in Catamaran Week.

What is so special about this craft in which he is knocking off the major competition with ease?

Undoubtedly Harold's experience in designing several of this class has resulted in this latest boat being a winner. Its simplicity of design and layout is excellent.

The hulls are built in the now-accepted stitch and glue manner. Plywood sides are laced together at the keel by copper wire, while fibreglass is laid along the keel line on the inner side. The first layer is one-inch chopped mat and the second layer is 2½in chopped strand mat.

On the outside the first layer is 3in tape, as is the second, both laid to either side of the centre so that the load is spread as much as possible while the keel joint receives two layers. There are only two frames in each hull, at either end of the centrecase. A foam filler piece for reinforcing the hull runs from the bow almost to stern. This piece is

IN A CAT SPECIAL

shaped and glassed into position prior to the decks being put on.

The boat is cat-rigged with an alloy Quickcat section mast of 27 ft. The mast has a single 20in spreader with a 3in forward angle. A trapeze is swung from the hounds which support twin forestay wires and shrouds. The sail has a luff of 24ft, foot of 8ft. The boom is rigged with a vang; the mainsheet system has a 6:1 purchase and leads forward to a single block on the boom 3ft from the mast. The sheet leads through the block and down to another single block amidships so that the helmsman is sheeting the sail with a for'ard haul on the mainsheet rather than the older idea of sheeting from the rear beam. This results in a tendency to haul the skipper aft when he is hiking in strong winds and rough seas. The new system makes it easier to maintain his position on the trapeze.

The daggerboards are operated by the system I first saw on the Australis. A hole is drilled in each board and a small line is led through the hole and up a groove in the board to a fastening on the deck. The line leads back up the case side, through a deadeye and across the boat, through another deadeye and down to the hole in the other board etc. The board is easily raised by hauling the sheet, but they have to be pushed back down into position. The sail is loose-footed, in line with all modern catamaran rigs.

I took Harold's boat for a sail right after the Cock of Sydney Harbour event. The wind was fairly light but enough to get a hull raised on several occasions and, having been a one-man catamaran enthusiast for years, I was excited by the delicate response this boat has. The hulls are beautifully shaped and cut through the water with no fuss. The cat tacks very quickly and weight placement is very important; the boat is light (under 150lb) and requires an agile, thinking skipper. The boat's tune was excellent and it was obvious that Harold would win a few more pots before having to produce a faster design. Upwind, the boat's acceleration, even in lightish winds, is remarkable, and in puffy conditions the trapeze has to be used with full understanding to trim the craft. The response to the helm was the best I had felt for a long time; Harold's rudders and centreboards were immaculately smooth.

No effort has been spared to make this craft nearly perfect, and the result was one of the finest racing catamarans I have sailed. The cat costs about $750 to build and plans are available from H. S. Stevenson, 28 William Rd, Riverwood, NSW 2210.

Even though the open A Class may survive for only a few more years, it continues to serve the sport of sailing by contributing new designs. Stevenson's boat shows what can be done by an amateur willing to accept noghitng but the best. ●

ABOVE: Deep-section hulls have fine entry and exists, move with little fuss. BELOW LEFT: Mainsheet runs on wire hawse across mainbeam. BELOW RIGHT: Mast rotation limiter is simple cleat affair. Line running through daggerboard runs across boat, permits easy raising. Vang leads from wire strop at maststep.