

Renaissance boat boasts pint-sized utility

Canoe yawls deemed suitable sailing vessel for Texas Gulf Coast

Sailing

By JOHN IRA PETTY

Like an echo from the last century, canoe yawls that originated in England are finding a niche in American sailing. At least one is in Texas.

Because of their generally good performance under sail and their shallow draft, it wouldn't be surprising to see more around our coasts. With reasonable accommodation, the smaller versions seem close to ideal for poking about in shallow Texas bays.

Canoe yawls are not really canoes, and some weren't even yawls. They were known, too, as Humber yawls. (The Humber is a wide and sometimes shallow river that flows past Hull and Grimsby into the North Sea.)

The boats evolved there for some of the same reasons they seem suited to our waters: Their shallow draft and reasonable ability to cope with boisterous conditions.

They're pretty, too.

Their renaissance began in the 1960s, when designer Ted Brewer came up with a boat totally unrelated to the Humber yawls. But it caught the eye of a fellow in Nova Scotia who wanted to build one. He had no money, but he had an old book he offered to trade for a set of plans.

The book dated from just after the turn of the century, and was by Dixon-Kemp, who wrote yachting books that have become classics.

"I knew the book was a rarity, so I said sure," said Brewer, of Anacortes, Wash. "He sent me the book, and in it were a lot of illustrations of these little canoe yawls. I just fell in love with them."

More than 10 years later, Jerry Koch (who was working as cable TV newsman) went to Brewer for a boat he could build and market as a sideline. Brewer suggested a Humber yawl, and the Rob Roy 23 was born.

Koch became a partner in Marine Concepts, which, with Ron Johnson at the helm, still makes the Rob Roys in Tarpon Springs, Fla. The partnership didn't last.

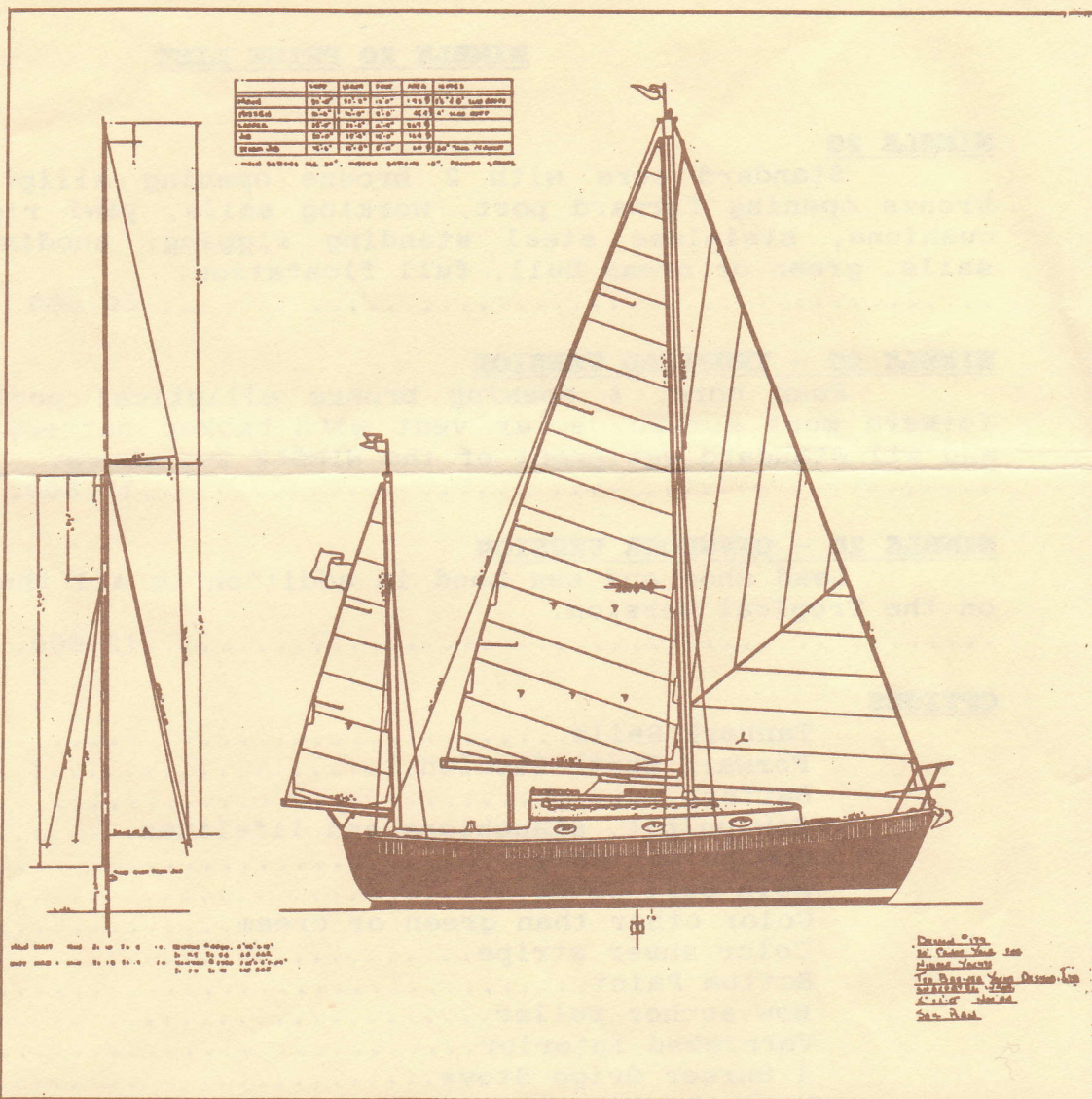
Koch subsequently founded Nimble Boats in Crystal Beach, Fla. He makes two Humber yawl descendants, the Nimble 30 and the Nimble 20. Both are Brewer designs.

Brewer had a Rob Roy of his own, until last spring. He had sold several of the boats, using his as a demonstrator. Then a customer went sailing with him and decided he wanted the boat — that particular boat.

"I've ordered a new Nimble 30 from Jerry," Brewer said.

Construction has begun, and he hopes to take delivery late this spring. It will be the 10th Nimble 30, and there are orders after his.

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Ted Brewer also designed the Nimble 30, a descendant of the Humber yawl.

The first Nimble 20 will be finished by early spring.

The Rob Roy has done well — more than 40 are sailing in the United States. There is one in Corpus Christi but none in our area. The Rob Roy is being built in England, too. A British magazine declared it fit to cross the English Channel.

Brewer said a properly equipped Rob Roy with a good man aboard could probably cross the Atlantic, although he wouldn't recommend it.

The Nimble 20 is a lighter boat, more dependent on form stability than its 250 pounds of ballast. It is, Brewer said, is a different kind of boat, although it is still reasonably powerful.

"She's quite beachable, I would think,"

Brewer said. "Her keel is quite shallow." There is a centerboard that increases the 20's draft from 11 inches to 4 feet.

The Nimble 20 (actually almost 21 feet overall), is in some respects more similar to boats like the Mudhen or Dovkie than a scaled-down yacht. There are, however, two good-sized single berths in the cabin, with children's V berths and stowage forward. Price is about \$10,000.

Like the Nimble 20, the Rob Roy has an outboard well, but weighs about 700 pounds more and draws 1½ feet with the board up. It is more yacht-like, but more expensive; the price starts at \$18,000.

The Nimble 30 is something else — a go-just-about-anywhere sailing vessel. Displacement is 6,500 pounds, with 2,400

pounds of ballast and 450 square feet of sail. It has a base price of \$34,000.

Brewer has a book out (*Ted Brewer Explains Sailboat Design*, available in soft cover from International Marine Publishing Co., 21 Elm Street, Camden, Maine 04843, \$17.95) which addresses the basics and a little about the yawls. He explains some of his views on sailing, too.

He summed it up pretty well in our conversation.

"If people would just try a little yawl — you can trim your sails and not even touch the helm for 20 minutes at a time — they'd get an entirely new concept of sailing," Brewer said. "You're out there to relax and have fun, not to beat yourself to death to get an extra quarter of a knot."

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