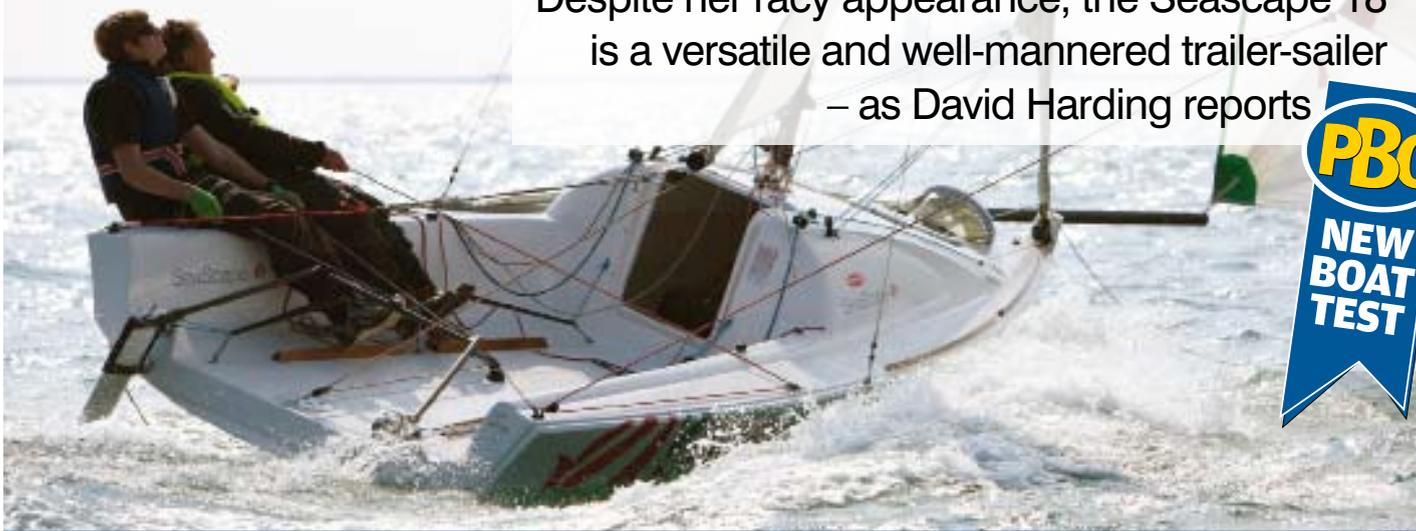


Escape to the sea

Despite her racy appearance, the Seascape 18 is a versatile and well-mannered trailer-sailer – as David Harding reports

PBO

NEW
BOAT
TEST



Tech spec



LOA	5.55m (18ft 3in)
Beam	2.40m (7ft 10in)
Draught (centreplate up)	0.15m (0ft 6in)
(centreplate down)	1.5m (14ft 11in)
Displacement	470kg (1,036lb)
Ballast	125kg (276lb)
Sail area (main & jib)	23sq m (247sq ft)
RCD category	C
Designer	Sam Manuard
Builder	Seascape, Slovenia
Distributor	Seascape Distribution UK
Web	www.seascape18.co.uk
Telephone	01752 839599

PRICE

FROM APPROX £16,700

Appearances can be deceiving. You might take one look at the Seascape 18 and dismiss her as a race machine – but you would be wrong. If you're looking for a spirited, economical, easily-handled and sporty-looking trailer-sailer you might find she suits you very well indeed.

Fast cruising boats have always tended to mirror the racing fashions of the day. That's why fine entries, broad sterns, twin rudders, chined hulls, asymmetric spinnakers and retractable bowsprits are by no means uncommon on multi-role boats in the second decade of the 21st century. The simple fact is that fast doesn't have to mean scary, even if fast means very fast – as it does in the case of the Seascape, with her carbon rig and all-up weight of just 470kg (1,036lb).

Both her French designer and Slovenian builders are mini-Transat sailors. Their idea was to build an inexpensive racer-camper-cruiser that would possess many of the positive attributes of these 6.4m (21ft) speedsters on a smaller scale while doing away with the complexity: they wanted something easy to trail and sail that would appeal to families and sailing schools as well as to keen racers wanting to compete in one-design fleets. That's one reason behind the modestly-proportioned rig which, weighing just 14kg (30lb) and having no spreaders, is as simple as can be to raise and lower.

The centreplate is easy to raise, too: just wind the winch in the cabin and the fully-profiled, 125kg (275lb) iron casting swings up inside the hull to reduce the draught to a mere 15cm (6in). Add the lifting rudders, and beaching the Seascape or sliding her on or off her trailer becomes a doddle in most conditions. These are among the ways she differs from some of her more extreme competitors with their taller, more complex rigs and vertically-lifting daggerboards: they're potentially faster, but more demanding to handle and expensive to buy. Fast, fun and simple was always the theme with the Seascape.

The light fantastic

With a boat this light there's no need for a car when launching on a slipway of modest gradient: two people can easily control the trailer, as I found on my test-sail from Queen Anne's Battery in Plymouth.

As the breeze of about 17 to 22 knots was from the north east, we set the asymmetric as soon as we were in clear water. The boat hopped instantly on to the plane and we gybed our way downwind with the GPS showing a steady 11-12 knots. Bearing away in the stronger gusts took our speed to 14-plus on occasions, peaking for the day at 15.

By keelboat standards it was respectably fast but far from furious. By dinghy standards it was dry and remarkably controlled. The wide stern provides ample form stability

and there's grip in abundance from the twin rudders: a quick tweak of the tiller as a gust hit would put the bow down 20° and send the speed climbing nicely. As the gust eased, reaching back up would keep her on the plane as we slowed to what felt like a positively pedestrian 9 or 10 knots.

Although we tried sailing as shy as we dared, not once did the boat show the slightest sign of becoming over-powered or losing grip: she just went where she was pointed. Everything was so simple and undramatic, including the gybes, that I soon found myself wishing for more breeze. Some boats begin to feel a bit hairy at 15 knots. On the Seascape it felt as though she was just getting into gear. That there's potential for a lot more has been proven emphatically: the maximum recorded to date, in around 30 knots of wind, is 24.3 knots.

Staying in the comfort zone

With three of us on the high side we barely needed to de-power the boat on the way back upwind and the main could be sheeted in fully most of the time. Our speed hovered around 5 knots – pretty healthy given the pointing ability. We had no boats to pace ourselves against but she was seen to out-point all but a few of the cruisers in the 2010 Plymouth Winter Series.

Hiking is optional. Unless you're feeling energetic, the toe straps are there just to make sure you don't perform a diver-style backflip. It's a



The square-top mainsail and carbon rig contribute to the Seascope's sporty image and performance



A boom tent can be used for camper-cruising



Launching is simple from the two-wheeled trailer



The cabin is a useful place to store the outboard, rudders and sails. It also provides two full-length berths

Seascope's pottering and cruising capabilities and several 'raid'-style events have taken place, especially in France where the boat is attracting a strong following. There are two full-length berths in the cabin – which can be closed off under sail with a neoprene cover instead of the glassfibre hatch – and the foot-chocks can easily be removed from the cockpit sole to create a wide flat sleeping area beneath a cockpit tent.

The finish throughout is neat, simple and unfussy. Buoyancy is built in so the boat should remain afloat if flooded. All you don't get is cockpit stowage: the outboard has to be lashed around the compression post in the cabin.

PBO's verdict

The Seascope joins a growing number of boats in similar mould. In the UK, the Laser SB3 is probably the best-known design that's broadly comparable, though it's bigger, heavier, more expensive and more complex.

For racing, owners will probably choose the boat with the best one-design fleet in their area. If you're not racing, or you're looking for something that's genuinely multi-purpose, the choice widens and there's absolutely no reason why the Seascope shouldn't be seen as a spiced-up alternative to some of the more traditional offerings of similar size. She's not as deep and roomy and has sharper handling qualities, but if you're tempted by the fizz factor there's really no reason to hesitate. She's self-righting, self-draining, positively buoyant, light, simple, easy to sail, launch, rig and trail, extremely fast and, above all, tremendous fun.

superbly comfortable perch on the gunwale and you could sit there for hours without having to nurse any aching muscles the next day.

For racing, the Seascope carries a crew of three. Otherwise, two is ample – it just takes a few seconds longer to hoist, gybe and douse the kite and you won't have quite as much power upwind in a breeze. Single-handing wouldn't be a problem either, while for a leisurely sail you could fit five in the cockpit.

Sails supplied with the boat are in a heavyish Pentex laminate and had stood up to plenty of use. Hardware, mostly from Ronstan, is simple and well positioned.

Peter Wanstall, the UK distributor

who has already upset the French by winning a couple of their regattas, has made some modifications that will find their way into production boats including rounding the mouth of the spinnaker chute. Both the chute and the carbon-fibre pole are mounted externally to keep the cabin dry.

As you would expect on a boat like this, there was no slop in the steering system, leading to a direct response from the nicely balanced rudder blades that lift vertically in their stocks. In light airs you could reduce wetted area by lifting the windward one if on one tack for some distance. You would also

need to shift your crew weight well forward and to leeward to lift the broad aft sections clear of the water.

In heavier conditions it's a good idea to insert the sheer-pin in the centreplate to make sure it stays down if the boat's knocked flat. The hatch stays above the water and she'll pop back up pretty rapidly: with the plate accounting for 26% of the weight and its tip all of 1.5m (5ft) below the waterline, it exerts a significant righting moment.

Bed on board

As well as racing in growing one-design fleets across Europe, the class is promoting the

Other boats to look at



Laser SB3

PRICE: £????

Laser's marketing muscle has helped this 6.10m (20ft) Tony Castro design become extremely popular on the racing circuit. A full-on race boat with a daggerboard keel, fixed rudder and no accommodation. www.laserperformance.com



Westerly Nimrod

PRICE: FROM £1,000

Ian Proctor's National 18-with-a-lid never sold as well as it should have but shares many of the Seascope's qualities: big cockpit, small cabin, swinging centreplate and superb performance. Available second-hand.



BayCruiser

PRICE: FROM £15,600

This 20-footer has more in common with the Seascope than her traditional looks might suggest. She's distinctly less sporty but still capable of planing downwind. Also available with a full or mini cabin. www.swallowboats.com

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