



PHOTO: HENZSTICKA SPORTCAMP

Seascape 18

Tempted by the pocket-rocket style of the Mini 650? **Neal Pawson** tries out a new Sportsboat based on the offshore class.

After six years of Mini Transat racing Slovenian sailors Andraz Mihelin and Kristian Hajsek decided to try to bring the thrills and spills of Mini 650s to a wider audience. Their aim was to produce 80 per cent of the fun of a Mini for 10 per cent of the cost. The boat was to be accessible to recreational sailors,

small, with a lifting keel and ability to easily trailer. Extensive research into the market place demonstrated that the owner for this type of Sportsboat was more likely to be 56 than 26! They developed the Seascape 18 over two years producing three prototypes to iron out all the issues before presenting the boat to the market.

Design and layout

Drawn by open class designer and multiple Mini Transat winner Seb Manuard, the Seascape 18 hull is flat and wide with chines fading out from the shrouds. Low freeboard and a straight sheerline give a dart-like appearance accentuated by the chine that runs half the length of the boat. The chine is high enough to prevent it from digging in upwind and the broad underbody has a gentle arc to help keep the wetted surface area to a minimum in lighter conditions, whilst the beam with the chine provide plenty of form stability in a breeze.

The keel operates as a centerboard, pivoting into a molded case flush to the hull. At 125kg it provides enough stability to right the boat from a kite broach. There is a safety lock pin to prevent the keel from pivoting back in its slot should you try to put the boat upside-down. The pin is however fused to break should you put it up the beach and is also breakable under maximum winch load. There is a Mylar slot gasket that is glued on the outside to block the slot with the keel down that will be a maintenance task if racing competitively, in common with most dinghies.

A coachroof covering most of the foredeck is cleverly broken up with some nice sharp molding detail giving a central sunbathing area. As well as giving room inside the boat the coachroof also ensures that the boat is unstable should it end up upside down! There is a teak toe rail that runs forward from the shrouds and a small forehatch for ventilation.

The asymmetric spinnaker is stowed in a chute down the port side of the deck

that starts with a metal hoop close to the forestay and has a mesh bottom for drainage. The pole runs through two metal mounts under the chute with the tack of the spinnaker permanent attached.

All controls are focused around the aft end of the coachroof: pole outhaul, 2:1 jib sheets, 6:1 kicker, 4:1 cunningham and the furling line for the headsail using Ronstan fittings. Class rules do, however, allow fittings to be changed and purchase to be increased to make sure it doesn't become a muscle competition! The gennaker downhaul is the tail of the halyard in common with most dinghies and the gennaker sheets are lead forward from the aft turning blocks to ratchets to put the lines in the hands of the crew. The mainsail has a bridle at the back and then is led forward along the boom and down to a ratchet cleat in the middle of the boat available to both the helm and crew. Where possible a fuse is incorporated into the attachment of the fittings to try and ensure that it is a small item that breaks rather than a larger component that is harder and more expensive to replace.

The boat is constructed from five moldings, these are hand lay-up using polyester resins to allow flexibility in build choice and ensure costs are kept competitive. The boats are then outfitted in-house to allow quality to be closely monitored. The centerboard case supports the cockpit floor above and there are molded stiffeners either side. There is a transverse stiffener under the mast post and a bulkhead midway under the double berth which doubles as a sealed buoyancy chamber with a further two aft either side the centerboard case to make the boat unsinkable.

Simplicity really the catchphrase for the whole boat and the cockpit is no exception. There is molded non-slip and two teak kick strips that are easily removable with an Allen key to allow the sole to become a flat pitching ground for a tent. There is a nice rounded coaming, which combines with toe straps to make you feel secure on the side of the boat. The toe straps were kept deliberately short to try and limit full-on hiking but the tea are contemplating reviewing this.

The boat sports twin rudders that are linked with a tiller bar and one central extendable extension. There is a dinghy hatch in the center that allows the installation of a detachable outboard bracket able to take up to an 8hp motor in strong tidal zones.

There are no specific stowage places either below or on deck, although there are a number of alternatives for sealing the main hatch either using hard lockable

washboards or a stretchy Neoprene cover.

Rigging and launching

Being the dimensions of an F18 the Seascape 18 is the biggest size allowed in most dinghy parks to give dinghy overheads when it comes to storage. Only drawing six inches with the keel up it is easily launched from a slip either with the aid of a winch or a car. The alternative is a triple point lift system for crane launching.

The winch for the keel is operated from the cockpit and doesn't need much muscle if working correctly. Andraz advised it is best not to have the keel completely down, but raked back about 5-10 degrees. This also keeps some load on the winch that prevents it moving in the box.

The rig is simple, with mast, boom and bowsprit made of mandrel wrapped carbon although the lay-up in the mast is tailored with added UD carbon on the sides to ensure it bends longitudinally and an aluminum track bonded on the aft face. It has no spreaders with single shrouds coming down to stainless plates on the deck edge. It is deck mounted on the aft end of the coachroof and easily raised and lowered by one person. Ronstan pivoting cleats are used for the halyards, these all run outside the mast

allowing the tube to be sealed. The bowsprit has a bobstay to take out some of the vertical bending loads on the pole.

Rake is really the only change available for the rig set up: early testing showed that loose stays are fast, relying on loading the mainsheet to provide forestay tension. Seascape is currently working on a tuning guide to get people up to speed quicker.

The mainsail is a fully battened high aspect square top sail with one set of reef points, the jib has vertical battens on the leech to allow it to be furled. These are normally supplied as Pentex but the class allows different sailmakers and the sails on my test boat were Dacron.

On the water

Climbing aboard, the boat is very stable. Unfortunately at our Stickl Sportcamp test venue the afternoon breeze struggled to build to traditional Lake Garda standards leaving us playing in 4 knots of wind. Upwind the boat slips along nicely, it is natural and simple to helm and crew weight can easily trim the boat both transversely and longitudinally to minimise the wetted area. The boat reacts well to roll gybes and tacks even when the wind dies completely – a group of three Laser sailors currently hold the record at 4 knots! ▶

TOP LEFT A high aspect square top main kept the boat moving even during faint breezes.

MIDDLE LEFT The wide flat cockpit features removable kickstrips to allow for cockpit camping.

BOTTOM LEFT The toe strap lengths are designed to prevent all-out hiking, but being unpadding are a bit harsh on bare feet.

TOP RIGHT The hull is flat and wide with chines fading out from the shrouds.

BOTTOM MIDDLE The spinnaker chute and bowsprit are stowed on the port side, while the foredeck houses a roller furling jib.

BOTTOM RIGHT Hoisting is clean and relatively easy.

Specifications

Designer:	Samual Manuard
Builder:	Seascape
LOA:	5.55m
Beam:	2.4m
Draught:	0.15-1.5m
Displacement:	470kg
Sail Area:	Upwind 23sq m Downwind 46.5sq m
Guide price:	€17,900 ex VAT ex Slovenia, UK delivery +€1,000



PHOTOS: NEAL PAWSON



TOP Despite being beamy, the hull sections allow crew to minimise wetted surface by shifting weight to keep you moving in the slightest puff.

MIDDLE LEFT A kayak-style Neoprene hatch covering is available.

MIDDLE RIGHT The Seascape has twin slot-in rudders.

ABOVE The boat floated high in a capsizing test with the hatch well clear of the water.

Hoisting is clean and relatively easy, although care has to be taken when gybing as the new sheet can get caught under the shroud shackle and the long foot length of the spinnaker benefits from a tug down on the leech to pop the luff out of the gybe. With the gennaker up the helm is quite neutral, the toestraps are reassuring if unpadded. The Seascape

18 is the type of boat that soon encourages you to venture away from boring race angles of up and downwind, instead enjoying power reaching that displays its Mini Transat pedigree. Andraz explains that it is their plan to experiment with a range of courses at class events to reflect this and keep fun at the forefront.

The next morning enabled me to take the Seascape out in a Force 5 with the Dietze father and daughter team. Hoisting the spinnaker off the mooring we were soon punching into short steep waves whipped up by the breeze. We shifted the weight all the way aft but the bow still buried every now and again sending cold lake water washing aft before the bow popped back out. The aft bridle on the mainsheet helps the helm feel secure in the boat preventing them from being pushed out the back of the cockpit. The load on the kite is more than I expected, possibly due to the low aspect and long foot of the sail. The control lines are quite small and hard on the hands, gloves are definitely recommended!

The twin rudders allow perfect control and the helm proved no problem for 16-year-old 29er sailor Verena, although they won't save you from everything as we soon found out. Gybing was simple enough at the front end for anyone familiar with asymmetrics, although coming out a little sharp and high with 505 sailor Andreas a little late on the mainsheet we did a broach test! The boat floats high and dry and once all the sheets had been released she soon dropped back on to an even keel.

Pushing it higher and riding more on the side of the boat the bow stayed up riding its own wave. The drop into the chute went without excitement, one person easily covering the job, releasing

the halyard with the slack taken up in the retrieval line and then part way in the drop releasing the pole outhaul.

Upwind you can't escape the fact that it is an 18ft keelboat, you pull in the sails, hike out and drive. The outhaul is easily tensioned along the boom, cunningham snugged and the non-overlapping headsail is easily controlled in the tacks. The helm is quite neutral with lots of push as well as pull to keep the boat going over the waves until you bang the mainsail right in. This then gives you a nice amount of weather helm and noticeably straightens up the forestay allowing you to point 40 degrees off the true wind. In the waves the windward rudder can dip in and out of the water giving you a bit of a messy feel on the helm but you soon get used to it.

The toestraps did come up for comment from our two dinghy sailors who, although wearing suitable footwear felt that padding might be nice and that they would be more comfortable if longer.

The verdict

The Seascape 18 is a neat, cleanly finished, but simple Sportsboat that is great for no-messing-about, fun sailing. It is not a tweaky boat but with 120 already sold they have clearly benefited from thoroughly researching the market and investing time and money to refine the product. They have worked hard to broaden the appeal of the boats to a range of ages, and have fleets enjoying close racing across Europe offering a wide horizon of race venues easily accessed with a simply trailed and fast rigged boat.

The Seascape 18 would be great for a couple - when the sun is out and the breeze light, fill a cool box and nudge the boat up the beach for the night! ■

Open 570

Another twin rudder boat with big fleets racing in France and West Coast USA. Not really designed with secondary usage in mind with the bow just providing storage.

LOA: 5.7m
Beam: 2.53m
Draught: 1.75m
Displacement: 510kg
Sail Area: Upwind 25.3sq m
 Downwind 52sq m

Melges 20

Baby sister of well established 24, with strong fleet racing in US and Italy, single rudder and hi-tech construction

LOA: 6.1m
Beam: 2.13m
Draught: 1.37m
Displacement: 520kg
Sail Area: Upwind 24.2sq m
 Downwind 56sq m

Answer Back

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