

Skiff test

Farr 3.7

Singlehanded trapezing in 20-30 knots is not for the faint-hearted but there's no better way to get the measure of a new skiff, as **Peter Barton** found out

The tail of Hurricane Katia was set to swipe the UK and I was excited to be testing Daryl Wilkinson's Kiwi import, the Farr 3.7. 'I am up for it if you are,' I boldly replied to Daryl when he checked in. 'It can't blow that hard at Burghfield, can it?' The show must go on and the Y&Y test team were committed and stood firm.

As I awoke to the trees swaying and branches creaking I did have a moment of apprehension. As it turned out, sailing the Farr 3.7 at Burghfield in up to 32 knots was a pleasure... it was getting there though the debris on the motorway that was the hard part!

The beauty of the concept is its simplicity: one person, no spinnaker, a small lightweight hull and carbon spars that can be fixed if they do ever break. Having trapeze wires to avoid any uncivilized excessive hiking made the physical challenge so much more manageable and enjoyable for me.

Daryl's motivation to import a new class into the UK was that he wanted an exciting singlehander that he could have fun in on small lakes. Larger trapeze boats can be too

big for the smaller lakes and the fluky winds can make trapezing very tricky. After some research and favouring the way things are done down under, Daryl discovered the Farr 3.7 in New Zealand. Designed by Bruce Farr in 1971 the 3.7 is a singlehanded trapeze version of his successful 12 and 18-foot skiffs, with hard-chine, rounded sections, full bow, a straight run and a generous beam but without the racks that have become the norm on more recent UK designs.

Hulls are predominantly made of plywood and are light and one-design. The minimum weight of 50kg and reasonable design tolerances allow enough margin for home building to be both successful and competitive, which also serves to ensure the longevity of boats. Several of the oldest boats remain competitive today. The addition of carbon spars and updated sail designs with modern cloths have helped keep the boat current, aiding both performance and the ease of sailing.

The mast is one area that allows for some individualism. Various mast configurations are found at the front of the fleet from rotating diamond rigs, fixed spreaders and even Tasar-style over-rotating wing masts. Daryl's mast rotated, but had neither spreaders nor diamonds which no doubt aided my depowering and the rig's gust responsiveness in the breezy conditions.

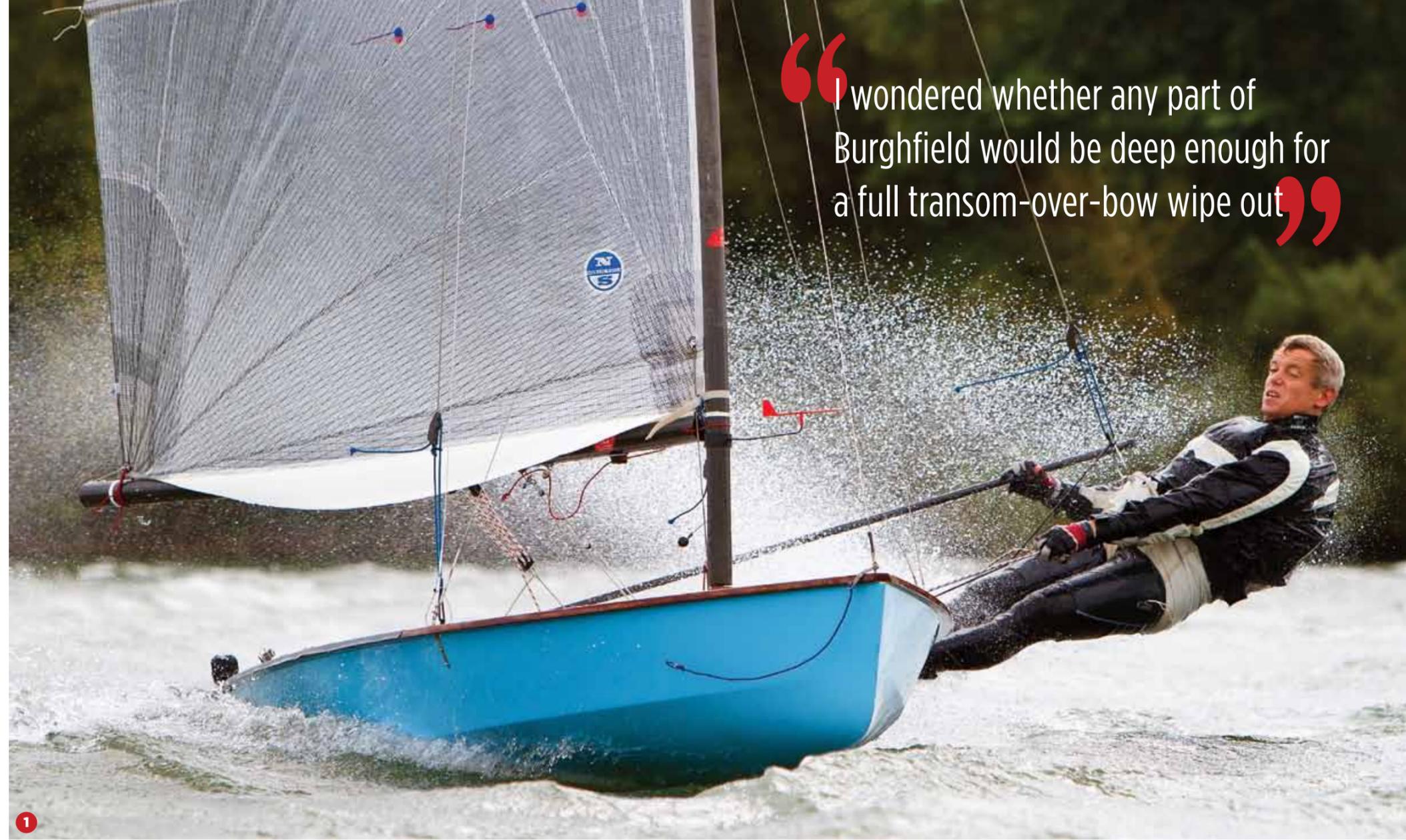
Rigging and launching

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Rigging is quick and simple. Attaching the trapeze adjuster to the trolley handle forms a simple 2:1 boat breaker and enables the forestay to be attached with the necessary rig tension. In true skiff fashion there is no main halyard, only a light release string. This saves on both tip weight and compression. So you simply strap the boat to the trolley with a fitted throw-over strap and tip her over – using a pad to protect the gunwale from the ground – then insert the mainsail into the mast track from the top downwards. A string loop at the top of the sail clips into a spinnaker-pole end fitting at the mast tip. This clip is attached to a light string inside the mast that can be tugged either at the top of the mast or at deck level. So the sail to be dropped without the need to tip over again ▶

SPECIFICATIONS

- LOA** 3.7m (12ft 2in)
- Beam** 1.52m
- Sail Area** 8.8 sq m
- Mast length** 6.1m
- Crew weight** 50-80kg
- Hull weight** 50kg (with fittings)



“I wondered whether any part of Burghfield would be deep enough for a full transom-over-bow wipe out”



1 Going for speed rather than pointing angle upwind on the plane. 2 A spinnaker-pole end attachment at the mast tip holds the sail head aloft saving weight and compression at the mast tip. 3 xxxxxx. 4 xxxxxxx. 5 Pointing upwind once enough speed is on. 6 xxxxxxxxxx. 7 xxxxxxx.

PHOTOS: IAN TOM GRANT/78°

1 Full cunningham and kicker tension helped flatten the sail and open the leech to deal with the gusts. 2 Hiking down a broad reach she was responsive and not too wobbly.



thereby aiding easy recovery, which is crucial in a singlehanded boat.

Launching was easy enough by virtue of the hull being both light and small. It was easy to handle even with the wind piping into the high 20s. Without racks to get in the way it was easy to drop the daggerboard into its case and the cassette rudder into its cassette whilst standing in waist-deep water. Bungees provided enough friction to hold them at half-way. Drifting away from the shore she sat

wobbly. With a bit of pro-activity I was in control of my lively little steed.

Then I went for the trapeze. On a broad reach you can either choose to hike with the toe straps or use the trapeze and wire as high as is necessary if little leverage is required. Both have their merits in different circumstances, but high trapezing is certainly more fun! As I heaved her up a fraction and dropped on the wire for more leverage and a faster course she came alive like a playful

going to be a fruity move. A decisive turn whilst keeping my weight committed was successful, all be it with some momentary leeward heel during the roundup. Step forward, kicker and cunningham on hard, down on the wire and ready for upwind. Like you would expect with any perky short-waterline boat upwind, speed is of the essence rather than pointing. Only once you have her humming flat out and properly in the groove can you contemplate greedily edging her into the wind. At 76kg I felt I had ample leverage to plane to windward with the wind in the mid-20s, and only occasionally would I have to dump some mainsheet. The kicker and cunny do wonders to fully-battened sails with flexible top masts in terms of flattening the entry and opening the top leech.

In fully breezy conditions boats are harder to tack with full kicker on. The centre of effort is a long way back and the leech catches the wind on the new tack. This can trip you up or hold you head to wind. When I did get stuck head to wind with no jib to blow the bow off, a fairly painful reversing move was required. Many high-performance boats like the kicker to be eased to make tacking easier and when it is fully breezy the Farr 3.7 fits this category. So, kicker off and then decisive steering whilst you still have speed. A little heel to windward as you enter the tack will also enable the drag of the rig to help the turn. When exiting a breezy gybe, extra technique was required to compensate for the lack of racks in terms of the 'S' steer – maintaining a downwind course until you are ready to heat her up again.

Daryl's rudder is a straight section and incredibly light on the feel. This was great at speed but almost too light when moving slowly. A feature of the 3.7's design is the raking daggerboard where, similar to a RS700, the top of the daggerboard box is oversized fore-and-aft. This enables you to adjust the rake of the board and maintain the effort balance in different conditions and mast rakes. Interestingly, I note that Bruce Farr's original 1971 design was for both a raked rudder and daggerboard.

One failed technique of mine on the day was bearing away in a gusts while simultaneously hiking and being hooked on – trying to get the best of both worlds if you like. As it was I didn't get the best of

either and being hooked on while in the boat meant I couldn't get my weight back. I could only watch helplessly, with a twinge of regret appearing across my lips, as the bow nosed down closer and closer to the lake's surface. I wondered whether any part of Burghfield would be deep enough for a full transom-over-bow wipe out and hoped Daryl's carbon skills would be sufficient for the necessary repairs. The boat accelerated to match the speed of a passing Fiesta on the adjacent M4, but the moment passed quickly and I need not have worried – the bow is a forgiving shape and once accelerated she popped up nicely.

Committed to providing readers with a thorough test I popped in a (second) capsized just before returning to the slipway and dismantled to assess the height of the daggerboard above the water level. It was quite high, due to the light hull and buoyancy in the wide side decks. With one arm over the board it did come down a little to be easier to climb on. As with any skiff-style boat where the rig is large relative to the lightness of the hull you can expect the hull to blow downwind of the rig on windy days and tips from the Kiwis confirm this. The 'Eskimo roll' technique successfully combats this little challenge. Both of these issues are well within the required fitness and agility levels required to sail the boat so should not provide an issue to potential Farr 3.7 sailors, but they are worth consideration.

I think Daryl is right when he suggests a weight range of 50-75kg in the UK. I am at the top end of this and coped fine in the breeze that was generally 15-30 knots. For open-water conditions a heavier sailor would be fine. For lake sailing, in our UK conditions, a 50kg sailor would manage most of the time and thus the Farr 3.7 would make a great fun trainer boat for young trapeze helmsmen (and women). A big advantage here relating to both training and fun is that

this is a singlehander. There is no crew to dampen your movements so the singlehanded helmsman has to move that much more quickly and accurately which can only serve to improve his or her speed, agility and technique.

A smart progressive development by the class in recent years was to embrace the possibility of individual owners wanting to build new boats to include bowsprits and spinnakers, without alienating them from the existing class. The necessary alterations in design were managed within the (uni-sail) class rules by allowing those boats to weigh in lighter with extra distributed correctors in place of their removable bowsprit and spinnaker. This allows them to race on equal terms in uni-sail mode without increasing their weight in spinnaker mode.

Interested? Personally I would love to go to a Farr 3.7 open meeting, whatever the wind strength. There are three options for interested potential owners:

- Build one yourself. Plans and autoCAD files are available. Import the components as necessary.
- Have a UK builder build you one.
- Import one from New Zealand. While this adds to the cost it is not prohibitively expensive.

For more information see the NZ class website at www.3-7class.org.nz or follow Daryl's progress on his blog at www.ukfarr37.blogspot.com

Watch online

Watch some great footage of this test online at www.yachtsandyachting.com/tests

“standing in a foot loop on the gunwale of this very small planing hull, I might as well have been foot-steering”

well-mannered on a medium reach with the kicker fully off while I got organised. Rudder down and pinned, centreboard down, kicker on, bear away, sheet in, toe straps located, here we go!

First blast

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The initial blast down Burghfield in hiking mode was fully up to my expectations. A bit of broad-reach hiking and planing was followed by some straight running and feeling the balance through the mainsheet and rudder. She was certainly responsive and not too

puppy dog full of energy. There was a rogue APF windsurfer skyving work on the lake and it occurred to me that this had to be sailing's nearest equivalent of short-board windsurfing. There I was, standing in a foot loop on the gunwale right at the back of this very small planing hull, which I might as well have been foot-steering. The bow was fully popped up and almost looked close enough to reach forward and touch. The only difference was that I was holding a mainsheet rather than a wishbone.

In the conditions on the day the transition from broad reach to close reach was always

COMPARISONS



Contender

The Contender is an all round bigger and heavier boat requiring more helm weight than the Farr 3.7. The low boom is less well suited to short-course racing on shifty lakes.



RS600

The RS600 took this sector by storm in the late 1990s. Whilst very rewarding to sail the 600 is a hard task master with its larger fully battened rig and the lack of stability in its rounded hull. The 600 again appeals to a heavier weight range than the Farr 3.7.

ANSWER BACK

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