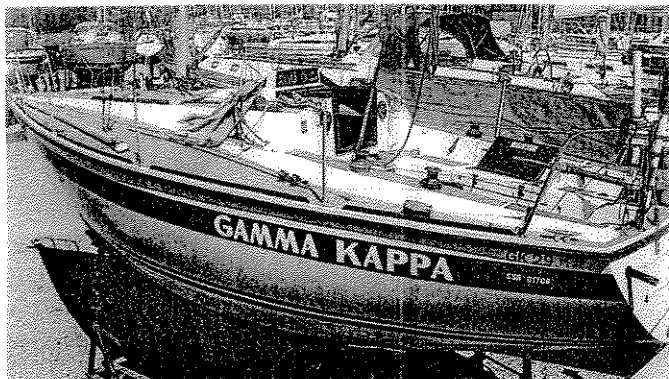


Second look



Westerly GK29

An IOR-inspired cruiser-racer



The GK29's racing heritage is evident in the deck layout

Nowadays, the term 'cruiser-racer' embraces a multitude of hull forms and rig layouts. In the mid to late 1970s it referred almost exclusively to quite serious racing yachts designed around the IOR rule, more racer than cruiser. The second half of the decade saw a boom in club racing and a consequent increase in demand for stripped-out racers whose suitability for cruising was definitely a secondary consideration.

Production builders began to offer the type of yacht which previously had been built to commissioned designs and in small numbers by specialist yards and, somewhat surprisingly at the time, even Westerly was swept along in the rush. Renowned for its solid, unspectacular cruising boats, Westerly took to this new market with enthusiasm and turned to Laurent Giles for its first attempt at an uncompromising racer, the GK24, rated at 1/4 ton. Its success was such that Westerly later went back to Laurent Giles for a larger version.

The GK29 half-tonner appeared in 1978 to instant acclaim. With a professional crew on board the prototype did very well on the racing circuit and orders flowed in. But, true to its tradition, Westerly hedged its bets by broadening the appeal of the yacht. They wanted it to be a good all-round sailing boat, fast enough to attract the racers and steady enough, and priced well enough, to lure the more performance-orientated family cruiser. To this end two versions were built, the stripped out racer and the 'family racer'.

The transient nature of boating, or more correctly racing, fashion can be gauged from the fact that of the 182 GK29s built, virtually all were launched

in 1978 and 1979. Only a handful rolled off the shop floor in 1980, and in 1981 Westerly called it a day, as newer designs seduced the club fleets. The family racer version of the boat is the one which will interest most cruising people and it differs substantially from the racer. The latter had a larger rig, a keel-stepped mast which was more than 2ft taller, a deeper keel with lead ballast instead of the family racer's shallow-draught cast iron keel, and a rather basic interior with the accent on light weight.

A good-looking yacht with her low coachroof, powerful lines and transom-hung rudder, the GK29 was at the time of her inception considered quite a lively performer, though by today's standards she is moderate in all directions. The racing version likes a bit of weight on the gunwales to keep her upright when driving hard to windward, but the shorter rig of the family version makes her altogether more docile, though still great fun to sail. Easily driven, responsive and fast in light airs, she provides a lively ride in brisker conditions. She is well ballasted and her heavy weather capability is good.

For a racing concept, the GK29 makes quite a useful cruising yacht. The almost flush-decked look belies the room down below, where she has standing headroom and a generously proportioned saloon. Layout is standard stuff, with a quarterberth and chart table aft and to port, facing the galley. Two settee berths flank the drop-leaf table (pilot berths were also fitted to the racing version), and access to the V-berth forward is through a rather small heads compartment. Stowage in the saloon is fairly basic, with deep shelves

outboard of the settees in lieu of lockers.

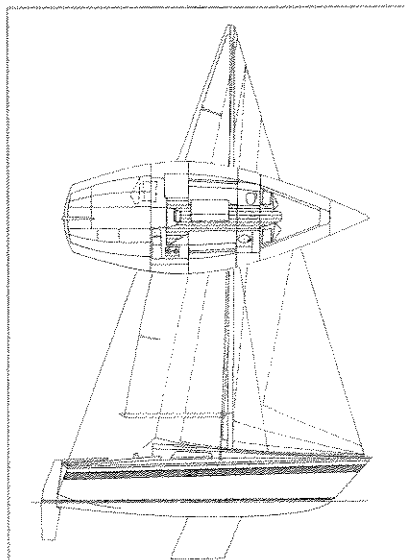
GK29s were powered by lightweight 12hp Petter diesels which gave good service; fuel capacity was a healthy 15 gallons, and there was tankage for 30 gallons of water. Virtually all the boats are being cruised nowadays, though they still make good club racers. PN

Survey

Tony Staton-Bevan writes: The most common defect I have found on the GK29 is deflection and movement of the plywood reinforcement bonded to the inside of the hull over the keel. A common modification is to fit more substantial GRP top hat section floors, but their design and location is important.

Other defects, in common with many craft of this age, are loose P-brackets and blistering on the hull below the waterline.

However, despite these defects and their intentionally lightweight construction, they tend to be far more robust than many other cruiser-racers. □



Dimensions

LOA 29ft

LWL 25ft 7in

Beam 10ft 3in

Draught 5ft 3in/5ft 8in

Displacement 6,900 lb

Ballast 3,000 lb

Sail area (family racer) 520sq ft

YM boat test No

Owners' Association: Westerly

Owners' Association, c/o K Fisher,

Middle Alton, 11 Church Road,

Millford, Godalming, Surrey GU8 5JA

Second opinion: Yes

Price new £15,400 (1979)

Price guide £15,000-£17,000