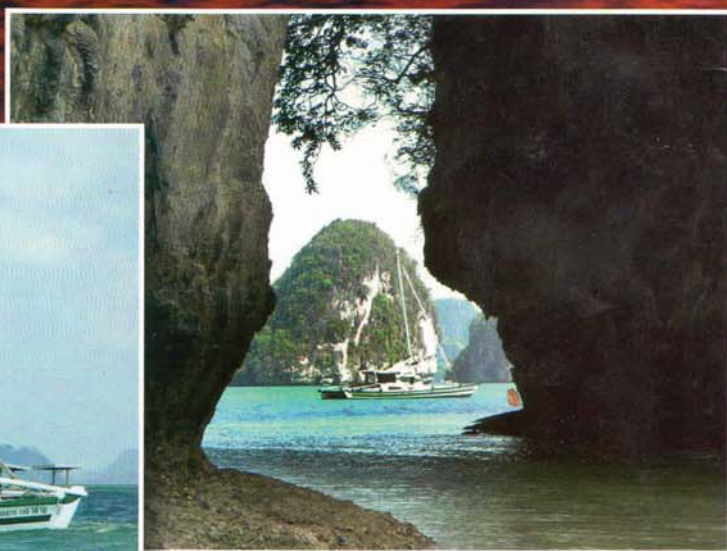



Thai TAKEAWAY

Sailing a Wharram Tiki 30 catamaran in South Thailand is all about open-air living, fast passages and go anywhere ability. Oh, and hot food of course. Dan Houston took his camera



Left: Sailing under the spinnaker and bimini. Above: Seen from inside a Hong (island lagoon). Main: Sunset with fish traps



Riding to anchor in the dawn off a rocky island outcrop, or Ko, at Laem Taeng in Southern Thailand certainly banishes the cares of an English winter. And the hushed peace of this unspoilt cruising ground is only broken by the far-off diesel drone of a long-tail fishing boat as a fisherman and his wife get an early start to visit their bamboo fish traps just upstream. In fact we haven't seen a yacht for two days now, and we'll only see one or two, as we push into the river system of Krabi and Phangnga provinces.

The main reason that it's just us and the local shoal-draught boats is that this area of marine national park is way off the cruising map; yachts tend to stay 40nm to the west, and their draught can prevent them getting into the fascinating rivers. We're here because we only draw 70cm; we're on a catamaran: a plywood James Wharram Tiki 30, which we were invited to borrow, for the purposes of an article.

I have to come clean about catamarans: for all their swift-large-platform long-legged-cruising ability – not to mention that Dame Ellen pizzazz (once you're spending lots of money)... I don't like 'em.

Outriggers

Well, I like Hobie Cats, and Darts, and have sailed them a bit off beaches around Gibraltar. I also find stories of the Polynesian (and, to some extent, the Indian Ocean) outrigger canoes fascinating. But the big western white plastic catamaran, with its chunky amas supporting what can only be described as a floating drawing room – complete with white leatherette furniture and matching deep pile wall to wall carpet? It seems as inappropriate at sea as wearing flares riding a bicycle. And when I heard of one breaking its moorings in a late 1980s Nova Scotian hurricane, flying up into the bridge of a ship... well that prejudice, of looks and seaworthiness, was all but sealed.

■ SAILING A WHARRAM



Following withies into mangroves at Ko Lanta Yai

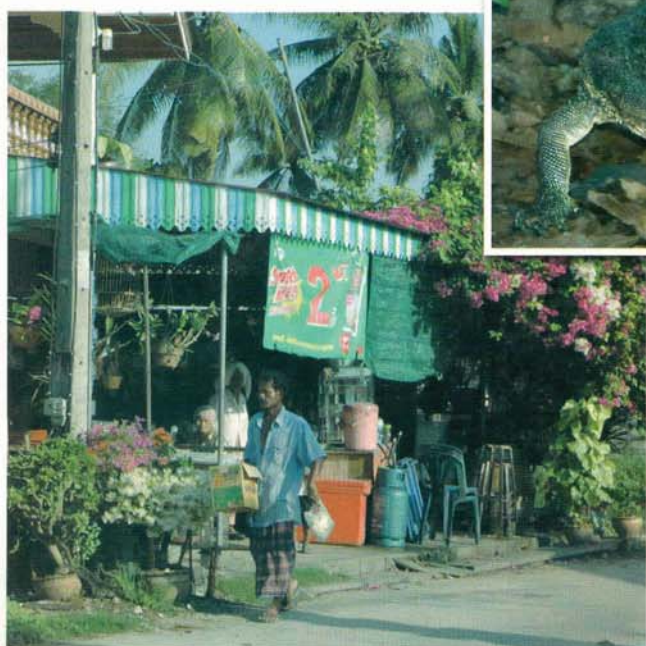


Planning the next day's adventure on the chart

Open-air life: we quickly got used to the spacious wide platforms. Note the lashings at the beam ends, which are what hold her together



This monitor lizard, above, was fearless at Ko Rok Nok
Left: Bougainvillea, colourful flowers, outside a store in Ban Khok Krabi



But here's something. And it's the rub. Having sailed this 30ft (9.14m) plywood Tiki 30 design, logging around 300nM in the Andaman Sea in Thailand for two weeks in February was one of the best sailing experiences ever. The sense of speed it gives, coupled with its excellent stability and ability – with that 70cm draught – to literally go anywhere has made me something of a cautious cat convert.

I still think seeing a big bulbous plastic cat in some haven sanctuary like Cornwall's Helford River is ugly, but then modern monohulls have much the same effect.

There's something about the seaman-like lines of the Wharram designs that has great appeal. And James Wharram's book *Two Girls Two Catamarans*, about sailing his homemade 30ft *Tangaroa* (p32) across the Atlantic in 1956, is a classic sailing adventure of hardship and freedom. *Tangaroa* is quite possibly the ugliest



Above: The accommodation and galley areas. This picture: Beaching the cat at Ko Rok Nok



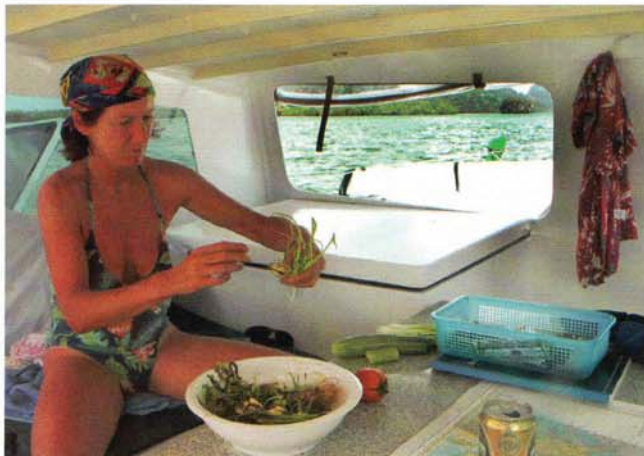
important small boat ever built, but over the years James refined the lines with his Tiki range until they look positively sweet. They are still based on the deep vee-shape amas, which allow the jig-saw home-builder to open up a couple of plywood sheets either side of a keel and proceed to build a boat, using tools like stretchers and the Spanish windlass. But they are certainly not the agricultural boats some say they are.

They are, if anything, quintessential dream boats, promising palms and balmy sunsets and naked girls; they encapsulate, if you like, the appeal of warm eastern climes and the erotic magnetism of the Pacific Islands – something that has been instilled in the psyche of European sailors since James Cook's crews returned from their Tahitian adventures in the late 1700s. Wharram uses this in his sales literature; two things you'll always see drawn in a Wharram plan are Palm trees and, well, tits.

The Tiki 30 which we sailed was built to the highest standards locally, on the island of Phuket, in Southern Thailand, by a Liechtenstein cabinet-maker-turned-local-boatbuilding-legend called Gunther Nutt. Gunther uses plywood, but with a good deal of epoxy filleting to achieve radiused edges and smooth lines – there's barely a jagged corner on the boat. I had joined Adrian Morgan and wife Rona for the trip and for the first few days we had guests, James and Bella, who are backpacking round Thailand. With five of us the comforts of the Tiki were obvious from the start – there is plenty of room.

So clambering aboard – easy with the 24in (600mm) of freeboard aft – our first impressions are that the space will do very well. The 7ft x 9ft central cockpit has padded seating on either side, which converts to airy berths at night. To starboard Gunther has built an ingenious double

berth, which pulls out in seconds, while to port, forward is the 100-litre fridge. We put ice in this to kick-start the cooling process and it holds all our provisions for the first 10 days. The cockpit has a hooded cuddy with open large ports forward. This is a Gunther addition, like the central pod of the cockpit itself, which is suspended between the amas with rubber dampers to absorb the movement of each hull. The boat is built to the Polynesian principle with the hulls lashed, using para-cord, to four cross beams. The Polynesians probably did it because they had no better way, but James Wharram employs the principle because it allows each hull to flex a little as a wave travels under the boat. The resultant stability is often proved when sailing in Force 4 conditions, where a full box of matches will stay put, up-ended on the cabin table, for hours. We never lost anything from the table through wave action.



Each hull is split into sections, with a sleeping area for two (friendly) people in the widest central sections. Forward of the double berths are smaller 6ft (1.8m) lockers, which, at a pinch, could be used as berths; we use them for gear stowage. Aft of the berths at port is the handy galley, with sink, double burner grill and shelving for crockery and tins. This can get warm in the tropical midday heat but with its large open hatch directly above the stove area we soon get used to the cooking arrangements. Correspondingly to starboard is the head, with a port aft into which you can bring the deck hose if you want privacy for a shower. The after deck lockers are used for drinking water in 40-litre drums (starboard) and boat gear (port). The cockpit has a well to lower the ultra-reliable Yamaha 9.9hp outboard; we cant it out of the water when we are sailing. Under the seating to starboard is a 100-gallon fuel tank, with a simple dipstick gauge. We use the engine freely, especially in the river systems and when we want to get somewhere in no wind. She pushes along effortlessly at 5 knots under power and the alternator charges the ship's batteries. In two weeks we use around 60L of petrol. And we kept the fridge on the whole time.

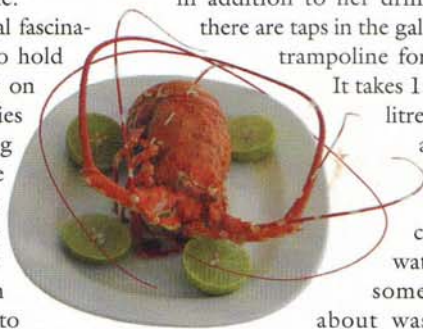
The fridge holds a special fascination for us and we tend to hold it open for ages, deciding on whether to use green chillies or red, or... just browsing really. It's run by two large 50-amp solar panels on brackets off the aft beam and we are amazed by how it keeps going. Even when one day we sail off and onto a mooring and then don't use the engine the next morning either, the panels are still able to put puff in the batteries.

The two pumps – one for drinking and one for domestic water – are also luxuries

With a cucumber costing about 8p, we ate cheaply (from the big fridge!)



Far left: Washing up was easy on the aft platform. Left (and inset): As fresh as it gets! The editor sings a lullaby of life to this spiny lobster in the pot



aboard. I'd expected to be filling bin-liners with water, hoisting them on a halyard and then sticking a marline spike in them for a three-minute freshwater shower. But the boat has two 125-litre tanks of fresh water in addition to her drinking water, and there are taps in the galley and on the aft trampoline for a deck shower.

It takes 15 seconds to fill a litre bottle and that's an adequate rinse after swimming. Initially we're cautious with water – Adrian says something to Bella about washing her long hair – but we need not be; many villages have water hoses and you can fill up for about 150 bahts (around £2).

The roll-up bimini aft awning forms an excellent and essential sunshade from

around 10am through to 4pm. The basic Tiki 30 comes with bimini only and although the cuddy gives the boat a slightly chunkier appearance with those forward ports making her look like a *Star Wars* Imperial stormtrooper, it provides an excellent cover while getting used to the sun.

Under sail

The Tiki has a simple sail plan, with a loose-footed mainsail with dinky gaff, giving it a high aspect, and roll out headsail. Much is said about catamarans' reluctance to go to windward and we certainly practise sail trimming when sailing upwind. The headsail is essential and has two sheet settings: one onto the side decks and one 'inboard' on the coachroof. Using the cars is a good idea and we probably need barber hauls to pull it into the correct shape as well. The main is also on a traveller and we need this, too. There are times, cruising, when that

Tiki 30

specification

LOA: 30ft (9.14m)
LWL: 25ft 5in (7.75m)
Beam: 16ft 4in (5m)
Draught: 2ft 3in (70cm)
Sail area: 385sqft (35.8m²)
Disp't: 2,200lb (1,000kg)

