

# DRAGONFLY 920 EXTREME



PHOTOS: JEREMY EVANS

What kind of yacht does 18 knots to windward or 23 knots offwind, and is so well behaved you could brew a cup of tea at the same time? **Jeremy Evans** takes a ride in a trimaran.

**S**o, you want a boat with civilised accommodation? A boat with some of the power and response of a high-performance dinghy or catamaran? A boat that can be cruised with the family anywhere you want, raced round the cans with a crew or further afield short-handed, and even taken offshore if you fancy an RORC event? Look

no further. A top class trimaran has it all. In fact it's a mystery why we don't all sail them.

The Dragonfly 920 Extreme is fast, in fact it's very fast. We took it out on Southampton Water with the wind up and down from 12 to 20 knots and got consistent speed readings in the high teens – sailing to windward, without trying. Offwind on a reach we clocked a best 23.3 knots ▶

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**Above** The 920 Extreme has a tidy, comfortable cockpit with every control clearly labelled. Mainsheet and genoa sheets come easily to hand for driver or crew. It's easy to move out on the trampolines, but mind the disconcerting gap between the tramp and boat. Unlike a monohull the Dragonfly has no stanchions and the crew stay inboard on the main hull.

(GPS approved) and there's no reason to suppose the boat couldn't make 25 knots with a little more knowledge. For a monohull to do that you'd be looking at twice the length, more than twice the crew and much more than twice the money.

## Design and development

Dragonfly trimarans are built in Denmark by the family firm of Quorning Boats, which was founded in 1967 and has been building them ever since. The oldest model in the range is the 26ft Dragonfly 800, of which more than 300 have been sold. It's been a long time favourite with enthusiastic British owners who have formed the backbone of the MOCRA (Multihull Offshore Cruiser Racer Association) fleet. Borge Quorning and his son Jens developed the swing-wing folding beam system, which was introduced on the Dragonfly 800 in 1989 and is now common to all the range. This allows the Dragonfly to berth in a monohull space in a marina, as well as being fully trailable. The system is used on the very latest 920 Extreme, billed as a boat for hi-tech cruising and racing, first launched in January 2003.

The Extreme is a development of the standard Dragonfly 920 with a taller rig, more sail area, deeper carbon rudder blade and centreboard, wider beam, longer and more buoyant floats, and curved beams that arch higher over the water so they are less likely to smack waves. The beams are folded back with an overlap at the stern, which explains why the boat becomes a little longer, and also looks a bit curious when parked in a marina. The rule is that you can motor with one or both beams folded in protected water. Once outside, both beams should be fully extended and locked, a simple 'wind them out' operation that takes not much more than a minute, either side.

The Dragonfly is unsinkable with plenty of foam and separate buoyancy compartments in its main hull and floats, plus no lead mine to drag

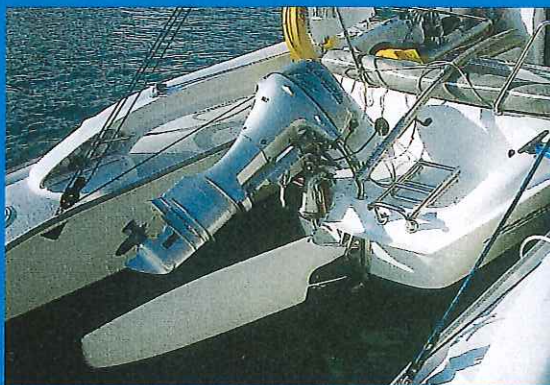
your boat down. You don't need to moor in deep water, half a mile off the beach with all the yachts. The 920 has a draft of less than half a metre with its carbon centreboard pulled right up, allowing you to literally park on the beach with no problems about drying out. You can pop the Dragonfly on a trailer and tow it where you want to go. The West Country, Scottish islands or South of France? No problem, though importer Mick Welch advises that you do need a hefty car – preferably 4WD – to tow the three ton load of the 920 Extreme plus trailer, and 55mph is about as fast as you want to go. He also recommends allowing half a day to get a 920 from trailer to ready to sail on the water, though the Danes who make them can do it in 75 minutes. Two people – perhaps the typical husband and wife sailing together – can do everything with the exception of lifting on the floats. This is a five minute operation that needs two extra pairs of hands which can invariably be found among bystanders on the slipway. At the end of the season you can park it at home. No need to pay those boatyard and marina fees.

## Sailing

A trimaran doesn't lean over. Some people say they enjoy heeling over while bashing to windward, but I can't see it. We all know dinghies need to be sailed flat, and for trimarans it's much the same except the design does it for you. A gust hits and the leeward float pushes down, with so much buoyancy that the boat drives forward. You don't need to grab handholds or fret about reducing sail. We had everything up and the boat felt easy in a 20 knot breeze. For comfort you would slab-reef the mainsail (one line does it all) and put a few rolls in the genoa if the breeze got much harder.

The 920 Extreme we tested had only been raced once, in the 2003 Round the Island race when it won the multihull cruiser class by a clear hour. It came complete with trimmings that





**Left** A 10hp Honda 4-stroke with steering connected to the tiller is mainly for berthing - the 920 will be faster under sail in very light winds. There's room for a deflated tender in a huge locker under the cockpit floor.

**Far left** The interior has the high quality style that's associated with Scandinavian boats. Two berths forwards and two berths in the main cabin are separated by a bulkhead and separate heads. The table is the centreboard case, controlled by lines on the coachroof.

**Left and far left** The 920 Extreme fits neatly in a marina with floats folded. Note the solar panel on the foredeck which keeps the battery topped up.



PHOTOS: JEREMY EVANS

range from central heating in the cabins to a stylish set of Kevlar Tape Drive sails. The accommodation looks comfortable enough for four, with two cabins, separate heads compartment, galley and the type of high level finish you associate with Scandinavian boats.

We sailed with Mick Welch, Dick Batt (who made the spinnaker) and James Stewart who has won most things on the MOCRA circuit with a Dragonfly 800, but is currently proving unbeatable with his new standard 920. Sailing the Extreme felt a little curious for all of us, because it was not dramatic. The speedo just stayed consistently in the high teens upwind, and then went to 20 knots plus offwind with a best speed of 23.3 knots for the day and a fine plume of spray off the float indicating plenty of forward progress. At that moment I could have wandered below to make a cup of tea or read the paper. The boat felt stable and unfussed, with everything channeled into sailing unreasonably fast. It's easy on the tiller, easy to gybe or tack, with no problems. You obviously need to watch where you're going, and you also need a grip on high performance multihull characteristics which relate closely to handling an asymmetric dinghy.

What about sailing through waves in a boat that could do 25 knots? Mick Welch reckons it's not a problem downwind. While monohulls are rolling and broaching, you can sail pretty much as fast as the waves which helps smooth them out. However, upwind you would need to back off to prevent the boat flying off wave tops, cutting your speed to suit the conditions and to stop anything breaking.

## Any drawbacks?

There must be drawbacks. With three hulls, four beams and a sophisticated structure that needs

to be as light as possible to make it go, trimarans are expensive to build. The one we sailed (with extras including heating, canopy, and spinnaker gear) is yours for £120,000, which sounds like a load of money if you're looking at nine metre monohulls. But there's no comparison since the Dragonfly 920 Extreme is a totally different boat. Then there's the indoor accommodation, which frankly can't compete with the wide open spaces of a modern cruiser. The main hull of a trimaran needs to be slim for maximum performance; on the Dragonfly 920 width is also constrained by the maximum legal beam for towing and 3.2 metres puts it right on the limit.

Some people also criticise multihulls for turning over. Well, they can. Some years ago the legendary Danish sailor Paul Elvström ran his Dragonfly 800 into a UFO at speed. It ruptured the leeward float, which flooded and capsized the boat. The designers set to work to redesign the floats which now have more separate compartments and have passed all 'unsinkability' tests. A 920 Extreme could still capsize through crew error. To give an example, another Dragonfly 800 capsized in English waters, sailing in waves with full main and kite in 25 knots of wind. The owner went below, leaving one guy alone in the cockpit who had no experience of sailing a trimaran at speed. So when a big gust came he luffed rather than bearing away and the boat was blown over sideways. It's just a question of having the right experience, and going carefully while you acquire it.

I would be delighted to own a 920 Extreme, but there are a few good reasons why it won't happen: £120,000 sounds like a lot for a 30-footer, but you can pay more - one happy owner has opted for carbon sails and blue hulls which

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helped elevate the price by another £5,000. However, it is a fantastic boat and such fun. Two people could cruise it confidently and the big rig is ideal for lighter wind locations with virtually instant reefing available. In addition to single line control, the ball car system on the mainsail luff has so little friction that you can reef with the boom out, sailing downwind.

Mick Welch says the optimum 920 Extreme racing crew would be just three people – though there's room for a fourth to join the fun – with pretty much everything done from the cockpit apart from launching and landing the kite off the trampoline on either side. The accommodation may appear a little tight, but a huge cockpit tent creates a complete extra cabin. You can even use the companionway hatch as a stylish cockpit table – the Danes have really been clever. ■

**Below** The 920 Extreme doesn't look fast, but that's the trick of a good design. No clouds of spray or violent movement – just speed in the required direction.



PHOTO: JEREMY EVANS

## ANSWER BACK

from Michael Welch at Multihull Promotions Ltd

I think the new Dragonfly 920 is fantastic – it's the boat I have been waiting for, lighter, wider, with elegant curved crossbeams. Readers may think the performance on the test sail was exceptional – it wasn't! This is now the norm and it is great fun. Whilst the standard boat is not slow – as James Stewart has demonstrated by easily winning the Royal Southampton YC Winter series – the new Extreme has moved the model up a gear particularly in light conditions.

Many people – current owners, potential clients, and the press – have now sailed in the new model and all have been impressed, it is easy to achieve exceptionally good performances. Several people have commented on the 'Extreme' name because there really is nothing extreme about this boat except its comfort. She is easy to sail singlehanded and the speeds reached on the test sail required no special effort other than concentration from the driver.

Racing aside, she is easy to sail by the family and whilst she will attract attention, the ease of handling makes even the average sailor look good. The high average speeds extend the range for the cruising sailor and allow more flexibility to avoid bad weather. With the outboard linked to the rudder handling under engine is simple.

You mention a downside of the boat is price, however, the price quoted [for the boat Jeremy tested] is for a fully equipped boat with heating, solar panels, stereo sound system etc, including VAT, commissioning and delivery to the UK.

### 920 EXTREME SPECIFICATION

DESIGN:	Quorning Boats
LOA:	9.2m, plus 1.75m removable bowsprit
FOLDED LENGTH:	11.1m
BEAM:	7.8m
FOLDED BEAM:	3.2m
DRAFT:	0.4m-1.55m
SAILING WEIGHT:	2,188kg
SAIL AREA:	MAINSAIL: 43sq m
	GENOA: 25sq m
	SPINNAKER: 90sq m
PRICE:	£97,000

### THE OPPOSITION...

Where does the 920 Extreme fit in? Here is an alternative...



#### FARRIER 33-R

Ian Farrier's folding trimaran designs are main rivals to the Dragonfly range and equally popular on the MOCRA racing scene. The latest Farrier 33-R Sport Racer, built in Australia, makes extensive use of carbon with a 14.38 metre wing mast and slim main hull to maximise performance.

GUIDE PRICE:	£136,350
LOA:	10.06m
BEAM:	7.14m
SAIL WEIGHT:	2,680sq m (full load)
SAIL AREA: (UPWIND)	66.65sq m

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