



MINI RALLY

28~FOOTERS

*Our group report on seven
28-footers test-sailed in
the Solent. Photographs by
Malcolm White*

For two days at the end of the wettest and roughest January for 30 years, the weather relented to allow *Yachting World* to hold a Mini Rally in the Solent for 28ft (8.5m) cruising yachts.

Seven yachts participated, providing a broad spectrum which extended from the long-established, bilge keel version, of the **Sadler 29**, which represented the classical cruising approach, through the **Feeling 286**, **Jeanneau Sun-Dream 28**, **First 285**, **Gib'Sea 282** and **MG C27** to the race-bred **Laser 28**. Even the latter, though, had been given a Tandem keel and a shorter-than-normal cruising rig to make her more comparable with her sisters.

Light and fickle northerly airs prevailed throughout the first day. The fleet put to sea from Hamble Point Marina and the five assessors managed to adhere to a tight schedule, handling five of the yachts under both power and sail before dusk and a dying breeze put an end to the day's proceedings. The night was spent snug in Ancasta Marina in West Cowes.

The following day dawned grey with tumbling clouds threatening rain. A chill north-easterly kept the yachts' rails down and drove a rattle of spray across each foredeck. On this second day, each assessor had just two yachts to sail before the rally finished with all seven yachts berthed once more at Hamble Point.

Putting the yachts through their paces were *Yachting World's* Editor,

Opposite top, the Laser 28, Gib'Sea 282, MG C27, Sun-Dream, First 285, Feeling 286 and Sadler 29 in line-abreast, and right, from the bow



Dick Johnson, and Technical Editor, Peter Milne, whose thanks are extended to Stuart Quarrie, John Reeve and Tim Ellis who rendered invaluable assistance with notebook and pencil.

RALLY REPORT

Having had an opportunity for a close and critical appraisal of each yacht, it was interesting to note how one's order of preference had changed since the start of the rally when, without even having had an opportunity to step on board, one was making judgements on first appearances only.

As one accumulates more experience with a particular type, the importance of appearance dwindles and one becomes more concerned with how effectively each yacht fulfills its design brief.

Although the seven yachts were of similar overall length, they differed widely in their marketing approach. The **Sadler 29**, for instance, was the oldest of the designs, having been launched on the UK market some nine years ago, since when more than 250 yachts have been sold. She was intended as a safe and easily handled family cruiser where crew comfort and seaworthiness are of paramount importance.

Designed to a similar brief, perhaps, but later in the day and more influenced by racing yacht practice and a trend for more open plan interiors, came the four French-built fast cruisers, the **Sun-Dream 28** — which,

Opposite bottom, the Feeling and Sadler closest to the camera. Left, Technical Editor Peter Milne (centre) and the fleet in Ancasta Marina



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at 29ft 6in (9m) was the largest yacht in the rally — the **First 285**, **Feeling 286** and the **Gib'Sea 282**.

A little further up the performance scale and with a definite eye on the market for club racers was the Rob Humphreys-designed **MG C27**. At the top of the intended performance tree came the **Laser 28**. It should be remembered, however, that the original design is a few years old now and the example entered in the rally had been given a lower, cruising rig and the original, high aspect ratio fin keel had been replaced by a Warwick Collins Tandem keel. As far as the latter yacht was concerned, the judges had to consider just how well a yacht conceived as a hot club racer had changed its role to that of a comfortable, fast family cruiser.

Beauty, they say, is in the eye of the beholder and, where appearance was concerned, different yachts appealed to different judges. The **MG C27** found favour with almost everyone on this score and the **Sadler 29** was liked for its almost classic look, as well as its

nicely balanced ends and well proportioned rig.

Interestingly, the **First 285**, **Sun-Dream 28** and **Gib'Sea 282** elicited little comment as far as appearance was concerned, possibly because their outboard profiles are entirely in accord with those of so many other French-built production cruiser-racers. The looks of the **Feeling 286** were commented upon, however, most judges liking the yacht's almost bulbous stem and firm bilge which develops into a soft knuckle at the transom.

The Bruce Farr-designed **Laser 28** was the smallest of the seven yachts and most of the judges made mention of this. John Reeve felt that she looked dated.

Of much greater significance than looks, however, were the matters of layout, standard of building and finish and, of course, performance.

The interior of the **Sun-Dream 28** was liked and the wraparound forward windows of the coachroof drew favourable comment, as did the size of the after cabin. The judges liked the light-

ness of the interior, but Stuart Quarrie felt that the closed off forecabin had the effect of making the main saloon seem smaller than it really was. Dick Johnson liked the galley and the general standard of finish, but would have preferred to have seen less of an expanse of teak veneer at each end of the saloon.

A totally different approach has been achieved in the **Sadler 29**. The accent here is on snugness rather than an open plan layout. The design is a decade old, but it has stood the test of time.

John Reeve commented upon the generous berth length and the fact that leecloths were fitted, and Dick Johnson felt that the head compartment was the best in the fleet. Being of more traditional design, the Sadler was the narrowest aft and, sensibly, no attempt had been made to include an after cabin in place of the more satisfactory quarter berth, the head of which forms the navigator's seat.

The interior of the **Gib'Sea 282** was liked by all the judges. Each commented upon the feeling of space below and the excellence of the linear galley opposite the dinette. Dick Johnson thought that the head compartment was a particularly good piece of design — quite the reverse of the wobbly cabin table which, we understand, is being redesigned as a matter of urgency.

Yet another layout was demonstrated by the **Feeling 286**. Here the Yanmar auxiliary had been housed beneath the cabin table. The benefits were ease of access to the engine itself and the extra space available in the after cabin having removed the engine from the usual position under the companionway.

On the debit side, however, it is not possible to create a double berth in the saloon and there is no convenient space to tuck in a calorifier to provide hot water in the galley or the shower. Only a two-burner stove and grill is provided as standard, but there is room to gimbal a full-size cooker.

Everyone liked the light and airy saloon of the **MG C27** and appreciated the comfortable headroom. John Reeve liked the chart area with its generous area of bulkhead to take instruments. He also liked the leecloths provided for the settee berths in the saloon.

The double-berthed after cabin, however, does not work out so well because there is not room for the occupant, squeezed beneath the cockpit, to roll over. The head, also, is not a happy piece of design because it is

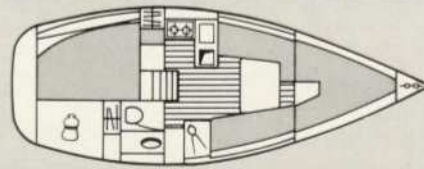
FIRST 285



Hull length	27ft 7½in	8.42m
LWL	24ft 3in	7.40m
Beam	9ft 9¼in	2.99m
Draught	5ft 3in	1.60m
Displacement	6,173lb	2,800kg
Ballast	1,764lb	800kg
Sail area	449ft²	41.7m²
Engine Volvo 2001	9hp	6.71kW
Berths	4/6	

Price: £22,342.

Contact: Beneteau UK Ltd, PO Box 5, Hamble, Southampton SO3 5PJ. Tel: Southampton (0703) 454022.



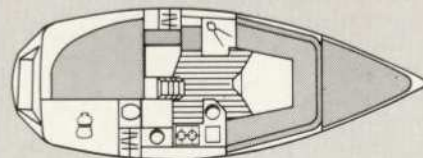
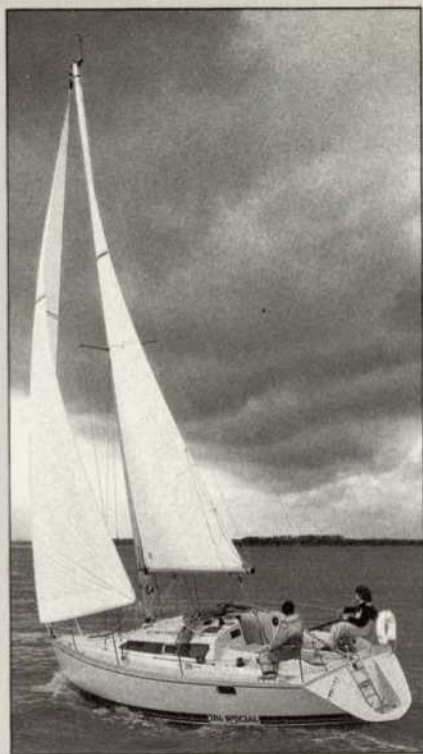
FEELING 286



Hull length	28ft 6in	8.69m
LWL	23ft 5in	7.14m
Beam	9ft 10in	3.00m
Draught	3ft 9in	1.14m
Displacement	5,500lb	2,495kg
Ballast	1,738lb	788kg
Sail area	463ft ²	43.01m ²
Engine Volvo 2001	9hp	6.7kW
Berths	6	

Price: £22,900 ex VAT.

Contact: Plain Sailing, Hamble Point Marina, School Lane, Hamble, Southampton. Tel: Southampton (0703) 453900.



light oak and all door architraves, laminated fiddles and surrounds to stowage openings were in darker afrormosia. The overall effect was most pleasing.

The standard of finish below was the best of the seven. The twin sliding doors closing off the small forecabin is a neat solution, but Stuart Quarrie felt that having a single, large hanging locker would be a better solution than the three, too-small lockers which are fitted at present.

John Reeve liked the neat design of the head compartment, which he judged exceptionally easy to clean, and Stuart Quarrie commented on the effective design of the electrics panel beside the chart table. The after cabin was light and roomy, but why not take the foot of the berth right aft to the transom and set a fixed port in the transom indent to increase the feeling of light and space?

In the two days of the rally, there was time for the judges to spend little more than one hour handling each

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tucked beneath the intrusion of the forward end of the cockpit starboard seat.

The most innovative interior in the fleet must belong to the **Laser 28** with its minimal joinery and adoption of soft pocket stowage throughout. Stuart Quarrie commented that, although at first glance useful stowage volume seems limited, there is, in fact, plenty of space to tuck away all the detritus accumulated by a normal crew.

The overall effect, however, is not as welcoming as that of the more conventional treatment. The chart table is a flimsy affair and the navigator, sitting at his post on the head of the quarter berth must fit his own head into a recess formed beneath the cockpit coaming. An attempt to enlarge this space has been made since the original design, but the region is still pretty restrictive.

The after end of the head compartment is left open as a crawl-in to stowage right back to the transom. There is plenty of stowage space here for fenders, warps and ancillary deck gear, but, as John Reeve commented, everything has to be fetched by somebody first getting into the compartment and then backing out to hand required items up into the cockpit.

Perhaps the accommodation that was most admired for ambience was that belonging to the **First 285**. All face veneers of bulkheads, cabin and locker doors were a pleasant, figured

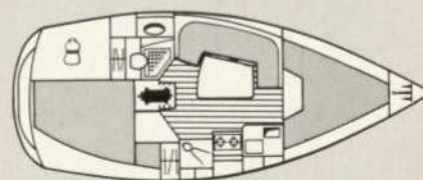
GIB'SEA 282



Hull length	26ft 3in	8.00m
LWL	23ft 3in	7.09m
Beam	10ft 4in	3.15m
Draught	4ft 5in	1.35m
Displacement	5,592lb	2,700kg
Ballast	1,874lb	850kg
Sail area	462ft ²	43m ²
Engine Yanmar 2GM	20hp	15kW
Berths	5/6	

Price: £23,950 ex VAT.

Contact: Caravela Yachts Ltd, Hamble Point Marina, School Lane, Hamble, Southampton. Tel: Southampton (0703) 455454.



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yacht before leaping lightly over the rail to put the next boat through its paces. The tight programme did, however, allow each judge the opportunity of comparing the performance of each yacht in quick succession.

The first day's sailing was conducted in light winds and flat water, but a stiff Force 5-6 easterly on the second day showed just how much fun the modern small yacht is to sail in a breeze.

Under power all the yachts were exceptionally easy to handle. Noise levels were acceptably low even at high cruising revs and most could achieve almost seven knots in flat water. The large rudders ensured that everyone came under effective command when going astern just as soon as way was established.

In the light airs that prevailed for the first day, Stuart Quarrie considered the **Laser 28** to be a delight to sail. Dick Johnson subscribed to this when handling the yacht in stronger winds and reported speeds in excess of ten knots when reaching with all the laundry spread.

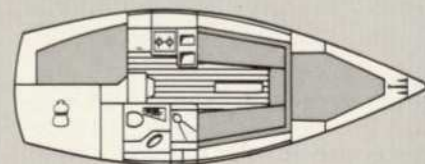
MG C27



Hull length	27ft 6in	8.38m
IWL	23ft 6in	7.16m
Beam	10ft 0in	3.05m
Draught	5ft 5in	1.65m
Displacement	5,750lb	2,608kg
Ballast	2,472lb	1,121kg
Sail area	413ft ²	38.37m ²
Engine Volvo 2001	9hp	6.71kW
Berths	6	

Price: £20,937 ex VAT.

Contact: MG Yachts, Hamble Point Marina, School Lane, Hamble, Southampton SO3 5NB. Tel: Southampton (0703) 454064. Telex: 47235.



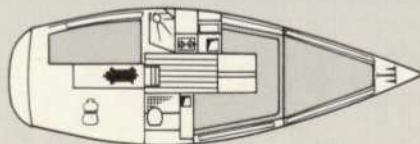
LASER 28



Hull length	28ft 5in	8.66m
IWL	23ft 7in	7.20m
Beam	9ft 5 1/2 in	2.89m
Draught	3ft 2in	0.97m
Displacement	4,660lb	2,118kg
Ballast	1,760lb	800kg
Sail area	346ft ²	32.14m ²
Engine Yanmar 1GM	9hp	6.71kW
Berths	5	

Price: £22,197 ex VAT.

Contact: Performance Sailcraft Europe Ltd, Laser Centre, 6 Riverside, Banbury, Oxon. Tel: (0295) 68191.



Tim Ellis felt that the cockpit seats were a shade narrow and Dick Johnson would have preferred the mainsheet to have jammed at the lower block rather than being taken to jammers mounted on the inboard edge of the cockpit seats.

The **Gib'Sea 282** handled well under sail in both light winds and heavier airs, although she was not as fast as the racier **MG C27**, **Laser 28** and **Feeling**. Unfortunately, the nylon rudder bearings had swollen and were binding on the stock to give a very stiff feel.

Both Stuart Quarrie and Dick Johnson would have preferred the mainsheet brought aft where it could be more conveniently handled by the helmsman when short-handed and without having to resort to the winch to obtain sufficient power when sheeted for windward work in a breeze. The existing system makes it difficult to fit a cockpit dodger that can be rigged when sailing in rough weather.

Without exception, the judges liked the handling of the **Sun-Dream 28** under sail in both light and heavy airs. Dick Johnson commented that she was one of the smoothest to steer, but Stuart Quarrie felt that there was a little too much clearance in the bearings of the stock which is mounted, unusually, against the aft face of the transom. John Reeve felt that she was very fast in the stronger breezes.

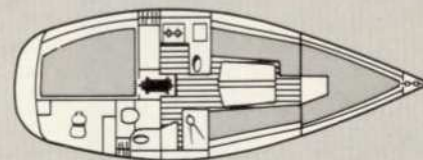
SUN-DREAM 28



Hull length	27ft 1in	8.26m
LWL	24ft 7in	7.49m
Beam	10ft 4in	3.15m
Draught	5ft 4½in	1.64m
Displacement	5,950lb	2,700kg
Ballast	2,539lb	1,152kg
Sail area	475ft²	44.13m²
Engine Yanmar 2GM	18hp	13.41kW
Berths	6	

Price: £24,900 ex VAT.

Contact: Euroyachts Ltd, Clyde Place, Glasgow. Tel: Glasgow (041 429) 3766. Telex: 779315 and at Hamble Point Marina, School Lane, Hamble, Southampton. Tel: Southampton (0703) 455607.



The **Sadler 29** was, marginally, the slowest yacht in all conditions, but this was totally expected considering that the yacht was the shortest on the waterline and had the greatest design displacement — she was almost a ton heavier than the **First 285**, the second heaviest. The **Laser 28**, the lightest yacht in the fleet had a displacement which was just 56.8 per cent that of the Sadler.

The **Sadler** was, however, very pleasant to handle on all points and in both light and heavy airs. It is easy to see why the yacht has such a following among owners with young families. Stuart Quarrie disliked the thump between the bilge keels when the yacht was beating in a fresh breeze, but that is a characteristic of that configuration.

The handling of the **Feeling 286** under sail came in for favourable comments from those that sailed the yacht in both light and strong winds. She was fast, well mannered and well balanced. Stuart Quarrie, however, found her a little too lively to make the

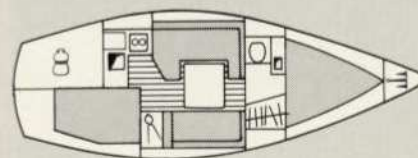
SADLER 29



Hull length	27ft 5in	8.36m
LWL	22ft 10in	6.95m
Beam	9ft 6in	2.90m
Draught	3ft 8in	1.12m
Displacement	8,200lb	3,720kg
Ballast	3,400lb	1,540kg
Sail area	400ft²	37.16m²
Engine Volvo 2002	18hp	13.4kW
Berths	6	

Price: £23,000 ex VAT.

Contact: Sadler Yachts Ltd, Salterns Marina (PHYC) Marina, Salterns Way, Lilliput, Poole, Dorset BH14 8JR. Tel: Poole (0202) 700011. Telex: 418118.



best family cruiser. John Reeve and Dick Johnson, on the other hand, thoroughly enjoyed the yacht's responsiveness.

One of the fastest in the fleet was the **MG C27**. The yacht's potential is probably even better than that of the **Laser 28**. The handling was very good indeed, but there was too much friction in the rudder bearings. The biggest criticism was not having sufficient counterbalance on the rudder profile. Correct this and the yacht's handling would be transformed.

SUMMARY

By the end of the rally it had become abundantly clear that yachts which had appeared, with the exception of the Sadler, to be similar, were markedly different in many respects. By its very nature, all yacht design is a matter of compromise: no single yacht will satisfy everyone's requirements.

What the rally did establish, however, was that, criticisms notwithstanding, each of the seven yachts tested was a shrewdly aimed concept.

Aggressive competition exists between the major producers of the smaller production yachts and there is no doubt that designers and builders are working exceptionally hard to secure their chosen corner of the market. It is the buyer who reaps the benefit.