

Reader Boat: Cygnet 20

This new sailboat design from Australia is getting a lot of attention

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We had a lot of questions about the new Cygnet after Al shared some photos of his recently imported yacht, so we asked him if he could tell us a little more about the boat so far and share photos. —Eds



by **Al Freihofer**

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare wrote “All things that are / Are with more spirit chased than enjoyed.”

When I read this play with my students, they found great truth in the idea of “the waiting” being often more gratifying than ‘the doing.’ There was the frenetic run-up *before* Christmas, for example, or the breathless *anticipation* of a first date, or flashing those coveted front-row tickets before a big concert. But Christmas is over in a flash, first dates can be problematic, and that big concert often ends up being a jostling mosh pit. My students agreed that anticipation often can be better than the real thing.

But none of my students have (yet) anticipated and then christened their own Cygnet 20 from [Bluewater Cruising Yachts](#) in Australia. And since I’m retired now, I don’t have to argue this exception to Shakespeare. I’ve spent almost a year dreaming of this lovely little boat and now that it’s here, it’s *far* better than I had anticipated.





Last summer, after following the build process in his shop, I watched David Bradburn and his crew at Bluewater skillfully pack *Sonnet 29* into a 20' shipping container. (I'm a retired English teacher. My hull is Cygnet #29. Shakespeare's *Sonnet* #29 is my favorite. What did you expect?) On September 7th, the container was loaded onto a massive container ship which headed off to New Jersey by way of China and then Busan, South Korea, with one ship-change along the way. Marine tracking enabled me to follow *Sonnet's* progress inch-by-inch across my laptop while I (needlessly) fretted about the density of traffic or storms on the high seas. *Sonnet 29* arrived in New Jersey on 10/28, and I picked her up on 11/29. She was snugly tied to her trailer the whole way over, and so neat and secure was David's packing job that I decided to leave it all alone until the sailing season arrived in the Adirondacks in May. Trailering her north was a breeze. Even on the highway, she turned heads.



LOA	5.85m	19'3"
LWL	5.40m	17'8 1/2"
Beam	2.23m	7' 3 3/4"
Draft Hull	0.34m	1' 1 3/8"
Draft	1.57m	5' 1 3/4"
Displacement (Loaded)	1250kg	2,755lbs
Towing Weight (Not including trailer)	800kg	1,763lbs
Sail Area – Jib	7.15m ²	76.9sq.ft.
Mainsail	16.4m ²	176.5sq.ft.
Fuel	12lt	2.65gal
Fresh Water	20lt	4.4gal
Engine	3kw	4hp

As of this writing, Bluewater Cruising Yachts has sold 47 Cygnets, and *Sonnet 29* is the first Cygnet in the United States. David flew to the US at the end of April to familiarize himself with the US market, to arrange for showing my little ship at the Annapolis show in October and, to my delight, he patiently and most enjoyably coached me up on sailing in general and handling the gaff rig in particular...right here on my home waters of Lake George, New York. I'd owned a [Nonsuch 26](#) many years ago and while I enjoyed her immensely, she carried a single big mainsail, a big wheel, and big displacement for a 26' boat. By comparison, my Cygnet is a thoroughbred. A thoroughbred with a happy attitude. A thoroughbred who can race but who is also content to give pony rides.

The short of it is that *Sonnet 29* exceeds my hopes and expectations in every way. Attention to detail abounds. I elected the "pop-up cabin" and "tent enclosure" options, for example, because I plan to adventure in *Sonnet*, and these choices convert what is already a charming and comfortable cabin into a generous 'standing' room. The centerboard trunk takes up space in the middle of the cabin, of course, but it is topped with a lovely table with fold-out wings that seems more like thoughtfully selected furniture than a necessary intrusion. Seating five for dinner will happen. Expeditions with two or three friends sleeping aboard will happen, too. I've already napped in each bunk, just to try them out. And the answer is: Like a baby.



I need to keep reminding myself that this is an easily-trailerable 20-foot boat. I can trailer her to Lake Huron's North Channel—another long-anticipated dream of a destination—set her up in fifteen minutes, and live like a king. I can watch the bears rummage through the campsite I didn't have to occupy from the comfort of my cozy cabin.



I'm an avid long-distance rower (hence the "campsite" reference), so I selected the "rowing option" as well. I've been too busy sailing to take to the oars except for a short stint, and the ergonomics are decent. The carbon fiber Croaker oars and mechanicals are top-notch and easily store out of the way, and during my test row I sustained 2.6 mph without much effort. Rowing the Cygnet will be a lot of fun, a great way to get exercise or to pass time (and miles) during a calm, and an always-available option for mobility. But for serious cruisers, rowing won't likely be a full replacement for an auxiliary.

Sonnet 29 sails like a dream, and still I'm getting the hang of handling and trimming the gaff rig. This boat is a wonderful teacher. I find that I can set things up and leave things alone and sail well, or I can fiddle with the lines all day long and sail well, too, only better. The Cygnet has the kind of complexity that will really appeal to racers, but it's forgiving in a way that I need and like. *Sonnet 29* punches through waves with the authority of a much larger boat and from the tiller, looking out over that lovely bowsprit, I feel saltier that I have any right to feel.

The Cygnet's cockpit seats four with great comfort and would carry six for a shorter cruise. The seats are wide with nice storage underneath, the starboard side carrying a ventilated fuel locker for the 6 hp Tohatsu. All the lines lead aft. There are no winches—all cam cleats, easily managed—and two cleverly designed integral ballast tanks allow for fore and aft trimming as necessary. I've left the forward ballast tank full to compensate for my guests in the cockpit, and it works beautifully.

Finally, raising and stepping the mast is as easy as it looks on the [Bluewater website's video](#). The graphite mast, light and manageable, pivots easily on the tabernacle and can be guided with one hand on a line and one hand on the boat.



The Cygnet community in Australia is vibrant, tight, and growing rapidly, and these folks have a blast on their boats. David Bradburn and his team at Bluewater have really hit a chord here. They foster a spirit of adventure and the possibility with these capable little ships with deep knowledge, authentic warmth, and pride in their workmanship. Last November, when I slid back the companionway hatch on *Sonnet* for the first time, two little (stuffed) Koala bears smiled up at me from the starboard settee. I haven't stopped smiling since.



I'll be 72 in August. I'm looking forward to growing old with these little bears...and with *Sonnet 29*. •SCA•



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Rob Kunzig 57 May 12  Liked by Joshua Colvin

Nice USA bit on an Aussie production. I follow Paul and the guys in East Australia on youtube and have been eyeing this boat, comparing it to my old 03' Catalina Capri - nice layout! These photos tell more the tale but Paul's video shows her alive on the water. Exciting that she sails on Lake George! St Sacramento Island, site 9 is a heavenly place to be! and I've got to get back to it!! She's a beauty Al

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2 replies



Kees May 12 ❤️ Liked by Joshua Colvin

What a beauty! Thank you for the great article. It really shows the English teacher coming through. I appreciate a good word smith and my hat is off to your writing skill. I hope we will get a follow up article after you have had her a while. I am really curious about the rowing arrangements - where do you sit, or do you stand to see over the cabin?

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