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Mighty is the Midget

For space, comfort and flexibility in a hull just 8m (26ft) long, the Midget looks like a winner. **David Harding** sailed this Dutch double-ender, that's new to the UK, to see if she delivers what she promises

In a world dominated by giant boat builders who introduce new models every few years, it makes a change to find a family-run firm that's been quietly building the same 26-footer for a quarter of a century.

Gebr. de Kloet have a yard on their own small island in Kortenhoef, south-west of Amsterdam, and that's where they build the Midget 26: a round-sterned heavyweight with a long keel, enormous beam and more than a hint of Colin Archer about her lines. The builders claim that her pedigree can be traced back 200 years to the fishing boats of the Danish north coast, where conditions can be tricky and only the fittest survive.

That the Midget has coped with the ups and downs of both the economy and the seas of Northern Europe for so long says much for her ruggedness and enduring appeal. But what is it that has led to more than 150 of these sturdy little ships finding homes over the last two-and-a-half decades, during which time countless other designs have come and gone?

Her reputation for seaworthiness must have much to do with it. That in itself, however, would probably not have been enough, though it's true that many of the designs we now consider to be classics have proved their ability in heavy weather. Just look at the Folkboat, Contessa 26, Vancouver 27 and Vertue, for example.

For a boat to keep selling at the rate of one every two months for 25 years, something more is needed.

And in the case of the Midget, that something is space – lots of space. While the other boats we've just mentioned are narrow in the beam by modern standards, the Midget is about as wide as they come: the distance between her gunwales is no less than 2.95m (9ft 8in). This beam is carried for much of her 7.85m



Lots of beam and ballast, combined with a modest sail plan, makes for minimal heel in most conditions



Built since 1980, the Midget has changed little; the bowsprit and the seats in the stern rail are among the few additions

PRICE: £52,942

(inc VAT, ex-works)

(25ft 9in) length, creating a cavernous interior with room for two double cabins in the stern and a comfortable seating area around the table in the bow that converts to another, giant double.

There's yet more, because the absence of significant flare in the topsides leads to a beam that's almost the same at the waterline as on deck. Add a chunky coachroof for plenty of headroom, and it's no wonder the Midget pulls in the punters: once you've stepped down the companionway, it's hard to believe that you're on a 26-footer.

Horses for courses

For all the undoubted attributes of this hull form, it would be unfair to the Contessa and Co. to suggest



Small, solid, hand-built boats are a rarity these days, but the success of this Dutch cruiser proves there are still people for whom quality, character and robustness are more important than size

that the Midget offers everything they do but with the bonus of all that extra space. Most crucially, perhaps, such a beamy boat can never have such a good righting moment: the vanishing angle will be lower and the inverted stability rather higher.

The second fundamental difference is that her weight, wetted area, underwater profile and sail plan inevitably hand the performance advantage to the slimmer boats: blue-water sailors

might prefer greater speed and pointing ability so they can cover more miles and, if necessary, beat off a lee shore without an engine.

Even a quick glance at the figures tells you the Midget is no speedster: her displacement/length ratio is 294 and sail area/displacement ratio less than 13.

As ever with boats, it's a matter of establishing your priorities, understanding what you're looking at and accepting a compromise. The Midget appears to be a tough,

capable and impressively roomy cruising yacht, and one that should look after you if you're caught out in rough weather, but she wasn't conceived for ocean sailing. Neither is she a motor-sailer, clearly being a good deal sprightlier than the Fisher 25, Husky 24, Fairey Fisherman, Colvic Watsons *et al.* She's somewhere in between, and her success demonstrates the demand for boats like this.


So, after our theoretical analysis, how does she sail? I had a chance to find out on the first boat to be sold in the UK, *Teucer*, owned by Daniel Romer-Lee. We chose a day with a decent breeze of between 10 and 16 knots, though its northerly direction meant flat water and the confines of the harbour led to plenty of tacking – not what a long-keeler is really made for.

When hove to, on the other hand, you appreciate all that keel area: she sits almost dead in the water, but the massive rudder on the stern still allows her to be gybed round and sailed on with no adjustment to the sheets.

Once under way, the boat made good progress with the wind on or abaft the beam, pushing high fives on the log at times and maintaining her course with a minimum of intervention from the helmsman: all we had to do was counteract the slight pull on the tiller and leave her to it.

Upwind speed was respectable, too, peaking at just over 5 knots. The other side of the story was our tacking angle of 100°, so our VMG was a less-impressive 3.2 knots. That was in flat water, and you should bear in mind that a boat with such a bluff bow will need to be sailed substantially freer in any sort of a seaway.

As you might expect, the process of tacking itself was gentle, the boat coming through the wind in her own time and exhibiting no quirks. The only problem was the lead of the genoa sheets on to the winches, caused by the combination of high cockpit coamings and genoa cars that are near the after end of the tracks when the sail is fully open.

As a result, the sheets approach the winches from too low an angle and tend to get wrapped around the base rather than the drum itself. We found that snarl-ups could be minimised by starting with a single turn around the winch and ensuring that the sheets were kept under tension at all times, but such precautions didn't guarantee freedom from problems. A little re-thinking is called for. 



Passage is easy and secure along the side decks



The boat made good progress with the wind on or abaft the beam, pushing high fives on the log and maintaining her course

On a more positive note, perhaps the most notable aspect of the Midget's performance was the minimal heel: the combination of all that beam, a modest spread of sail and nearly a ton-and-a-half of ballast encapsulated in the keel makes her one of the stiffest boats I've sailed.

Front to back

Concentrating on the performance and efficiency of a boat such as the Midget would be to miss the point, because you wouldn't buy her if you wanted the ultimate in slick handling or rapid passage-making ability. Nonetheless, the hardware and sail-handling systems are important, so let's have a look around the rest of the deck.

Starting at the bow, we find a short bowsprit incorporating a step, the anchor roller and a bracket for the removable bi-colour bow light. The forestay with its Furler roller-reefing system is anchored to the stem, ahead of a chunky cleat each side. Between the cleats is the anchor locker and the Muir windlass (manual standard, electric option), which feeds the chain into the locker via a hawse pipe.

Thanks to the bluff bow, the

foredeck is particularly roomy. Secure footing is ensured by an effective rubbery non-slip finish; it covers the whole of the deck and coachroof except the hatch garage.

In keeping with the belt-and-braces approach that seems evident throughout the Midget, the mast is supported by in-line cap shrouds, forward and aft lowers and twin backstays. The caps are taken right out to the gunwale – hence the wide sheeting angle – and *Teucer* had the optional mast-lowering system, with the bottlescrews sitting atop stainless steel struts to keep them at the same height as the mast's pivot bolt in the tabernacle.

The spars themselves are supplied by a local Dutch maker and appeared to do the job, though the boom is a smaller section than that found on most modern boats of similar displacement and it's unusual these days to see no internal lines: the outhaul is a fixed lashing and the two leech reefing pennants are led externally to cleats at the boom's forward end. Reefing the mainsail involves going to the mast and using the tack horns for the luff unless you choose the optional single-line system led back to the cockpit.

ABOVE: with the sheets eased, the Midget cracked along at a respectable pace

ABOVE RIGHT: because of the aft cabins, the cockpit isn't particularly deep – but it's roomy, and protected by high coamings



Sails are from a Dutch loft, LVB. They're a good shape and made from cloth that looks durable, even if the leech of the genoa was already showing the stretching typically associated with radial-cut sails in Dacron.

Should you stick with reefing at the mast, as has Daniel on *Teucer*, you will have to cope with the main halyard being led aft, as are the topping lift and kicking strap. But making your way forward from the cockpit is easy enough: the decks are a reasonable width and the 60cm (24in) guardwires provide good security. The stanchion bases are bolted through the upstand on the deck moulding outboard of the moulded toerail, above the teak rubbing strake that covers the hull-to-deck joint.

At the after end of the coachroof on the port side are three Spinlock XAS clutches ahead of the Andersen 10 single-speed winch. The primary winches on the coamings are two-speed Andersen 23 self-tailers and most of the rest of the hardware comes from HYE in Holland – except the stainless steel fittings. They're made by de Kloet, who don't just build boats: their other activities include repairs, refits and stainless steel fabrication. If they need something in stainless, they make it themselves.

Room to relax

Back in the cockpit, you sit on slats made from 35mm (1 3/8in) solid teak, which also covers the sole and can easily be removed for cleaning.

The most noticeable feature at this end of the boat is the width of the



The upright on the port side of the bowsprit is for the bow light, which can be removed and stowed below

seats: at 51cm (20in), they're wide enough to sleep on if you feel so inclined (and happen to be less than 1.83m/6ft tall). When sitting, you can brace your legs on the opposite seat as long as you don't want to lean back against the coaming at the same time.

Problems with the genoa sheet lead notwithstanding, single-handed sailing isn't a problem: the winches are within easy reach of the helm and so is the mainsheet, on its traveller with plunger stops across the after end of the bridgedeck. It makes a change to see a bridgedeck at seat height rather than a low sill: it's among the many features on this boat that confirms she was designed to be used at sea in less than benign conditions.

Cockpit stowage is provided by three lockers – one each side and one in the stern. The depth of those either side is limited by the after cabins if you have twin doubles in the stern, so warps and fenders can be accommodated but inflatable dinghies and the like are best stowed in the full-depth lazarette.

Small items you need to keep close at hand can be tucked into the coaming lockers

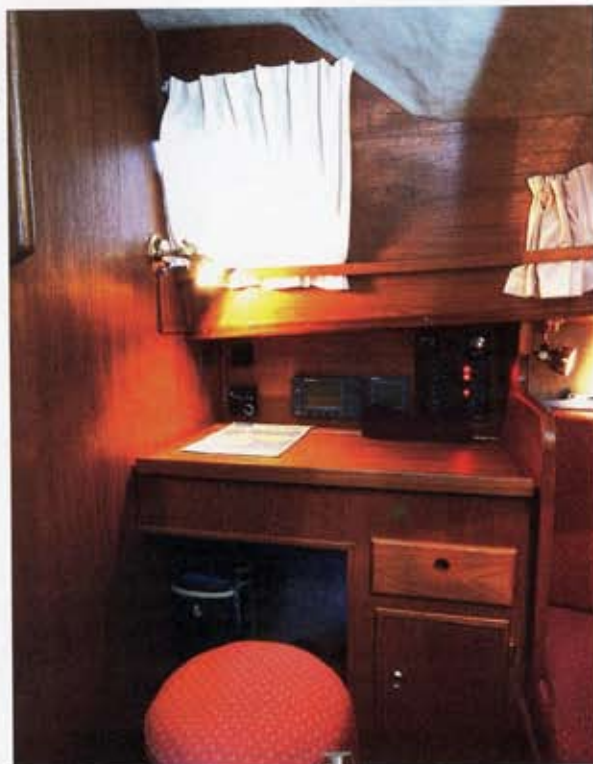
At the after end of the cockpit is the panel for the twin-cylinder, 16hp Vetus engine. The standard installation is now a twin-cylinder 13, with a three-cylinder 25 as an option (£1,975).

Our 16 horses harnessed to a three-bladed fixed prop pushed the boat along at 5.2 knots against a head wind and brought her to a standstill in impressively short order. Even so, I might be tempted by a little more power given that the Midget isn't exactly a flyer to windward. Without it, progress into a head wind and sea could be on the slow side.

In close-quarters manoeuvres, she's better than you might expect of a long-keeler, being steerable in astern and describing a respectably tight circle in ahead.

Accommodating ways

Whatever the Midget's other qualities, the one that's most noticeable on brief acquaintance is



A swing-out stool provides seating at the chart table, which has welly stowage space beneath

The standard engine is a 13hp Vetus; a 25hp option is available



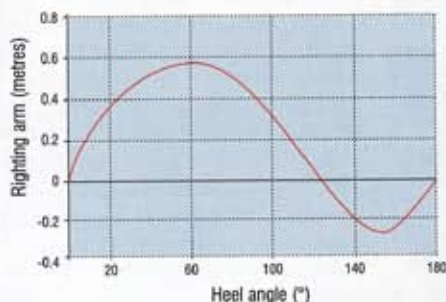
Ballast is encapsulated inside the full-length keel

SPECIFICATION MIDGET 26

Length including rudder and bowsprit	8.05m (26ft 5in)
Hull length	7.85m (25ft 9in)
LWL	6.85m (22ft 6in)
Beam	2.95m (9ft 8in)
Draught	1.25m (4ft 1in)
Displacement	3,400kg (7,495lb)
Ballast	1,400kg (3,086lb)
Sail area (main and 100% foretriangle)	28.24m ² (304sq ft)
Displacement/length ratio	294
Sail area/displacement ratio	12.69
RCD category	B
Engine	Vetus 13hp diesel
Headroom (saloon)	1.83m (6ft)
Designer	de Kloet
Builder	Gebr. de Kloet, Holland

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Other boats in the range: Midget 31



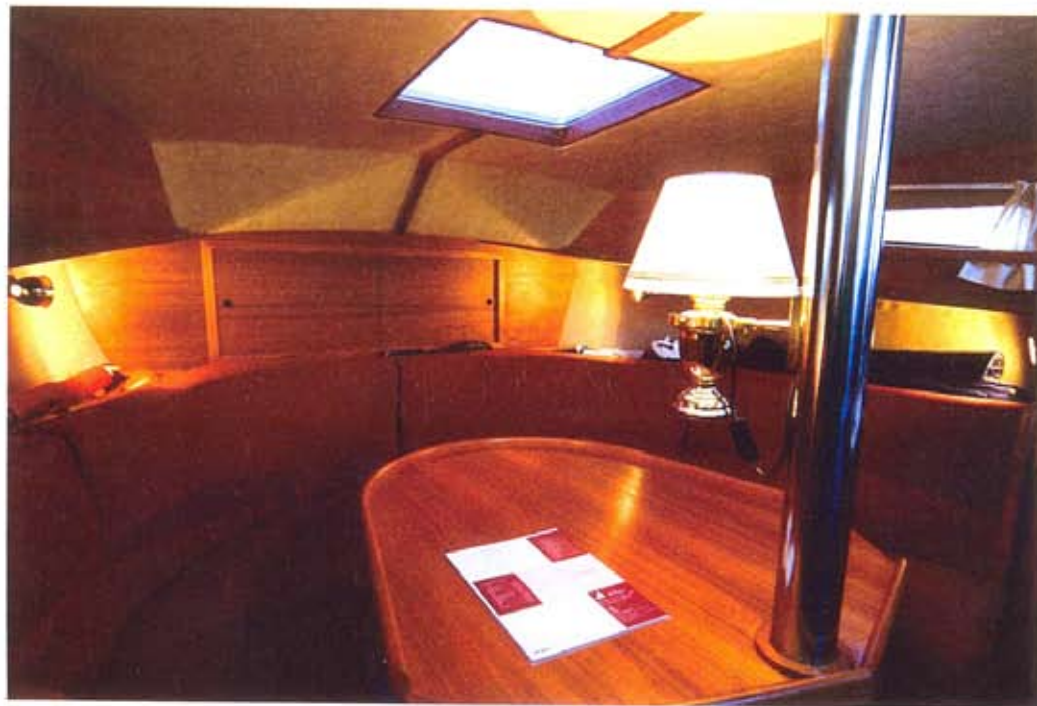
The GZ curve shows the maximum righting arm at 60° and an AVS of 120°

Variations in cabin layouts are possible



Headroom in the after end of the cabin is 1.83m (6ft)

The seating area converts to a double berth



Points that stand out down below are the absence of sealant, good use of space, easy access to the systems and a welcoming feel

the amount of space below decks. In her unassuming way, this boat was a real trend-setter back in 1980, being among the first of her size to fit an after cabin (or two) beneath the cockpit.

She also broke with convention by having no forecabin, instead using the space ahead of the mast for the saloon. If you need more berths, you can drop the table to create an extra double.

Between the cushioned areas each end is the galley to starboard and the heads to port – the latter providing access to the port aft cabin if you choose the twin doubles in the stern. Alternatives include one cabin on the centreline or offset to starboard, in which case the heads grows to twice its size and slides aft. On *Teucer*, Daniel had the port cabin made the larger of the two by offsetting the fore-and-aft bulkhead to starboard, leaving the starboard side as a generous quarter berth open with the saloon.

Since each Midget is custom-built to order, you can have more-or-less whatever you like in the stern; there are no interior mouldings, so the only constraints are those imposed by the need for structural bulkheads and the position of the engine.

I was mildly concerned by one

aspect of the arrangement on *Teucer*, whereby someone using the heads can lock the door to the aft cabin (a sensible precaution, I would agree) but the cabin's occupant has no means of escape should the door remain locked after the heads is vacated.

That apart, the layout seems workable and the aft cabin comfortable, if a tad short on berth length at just 1.85m (6ft 1in). I'm sure de Kloet could find a way to stretch it.

Beneath the berth are the batteries, calorifier, holding tank, and the diesel tank with a shut-off valve on its forward face. Access to the aft end of the engine is good, and the shallow rise in the exhaust pipe to the water injection point is unlikely to present a problem because of the short run between the engine and water trap.

The other side of the heads is the athwartships chart table (76 x 48cm/30in x 19in) with its own swivelling stool and an open-fronted welly bin beneath.

Seating around the saloon table occupies the forward third of the boat, where there's plenty of stowage under and outboard of the seats and in the large bow locker.

The joinery, in teak throughout, is

ABOVE: a lamp on the compression post is a homely touch in the saloon

TOP RIGHT: the galley is light and airy, being next to the companionway and under two large windows. There's also a vent in the deckhead

RIGHT: access to the port aft cabin is through the heads. Just make sure you don't get locked in!



solid and neatly finished. Points that stand out down below, partly because there are no internal mouldings, are the absence of sealant, good use of space, easy access to most of the systems and an unusually warm and welcoming feel. She's a boat that really makes you feel at home down below.

One of a kind

The Midget is certainly different. Small, solid, hand-built boats are a rarity these days, but the success of this Dutch cruiser proves that there are still people for whom quality, character and robustness are more important than size.

Daniel, in fact, moved down from his previous boat, a Hunter Channel 32, because he wanted something easier for him and his wife to handle. But an ordinary production yacht was not what he had in mind: he wanted one that was different, and when he saw the 26 at the Southampton Boat Show, he knew he'd found what he was looking for.

As long as there are buyers with the same priorities, de Kloet might well continue to build the same boat in the same way for the next 25 years.



If you have two cabins in the stern, the heads is of modest proportions. The sink slides out over the toilet