

# Westerly Konsort



She's been unfairly described as a 'floating caravan', yet she's nimble, lively and roomy – which is what most of us want in a boat, says Dick Durham

PHOTOS: BOB AYLOTT



**ABOVE: A transom-hung rudder is simple, robust and easier to fix than a through-hull rudder stock if it breaks**

There aren't many 29-footers that can sleep seven crew at a pinch and have 6ft of standing headroom throughout. While she's no performance cruiser Westerly's popular Konsort had much to offer the leisure sailor when she was introduced in 1979, as she does for the cruising yachtsman of today.

The topsides of *Rafiki*, a Mk II bilge-keeled Westerly Konsort, loomed over the pontoon, as her owner, Rob Pike, invited me aboard with the cheerful

comment: 'Welcome to my floating caravan.' I had to keep reminding myself that this cavernous sloop was only 29ft in length, in fact a tad under that. She sleeps six, or seven at a push; you could carry enough stock in her lockers to run a decent-sized chandlery; and Rob, who cruises with his wife, two children and dog has served roast dinner for 24 in her cockpit! *Rafiki* was built in 1986 and has cruised both sides of the channel under Rob's command.

### Performance

Sheltered by ancient woodland to starboard and shipping containers

to port, we could not feel the south-westerly breeze until we motored clear of the incongruous marine Arcadia of Eling at the head of Southampton Water. Rob, using the outhaul on the coachroof, soon had the in-mast furler in play and the flat mainsail and her massive curving 150 per cent genoa drawing, and soon *Rafiki* was dipping to the gusts.

The immediate sensation of sailing a Westerly Konsort is her buoyancy. She's light, bouncy, and feels high on the water. Suddenly this hulking, barrel-like craft had come alive with motion. Lively to steer, she tacks in her own length but care is needed

### Westerly Konsort – Performance on test

Point of sail	Apparent wind angle	Apparent wind speed	Speed through the water
Close Hauled	40°	13 knots	4.5 knots
Fetch	60°	7.3 knots	3.5 knots
Beam Reach	90°	8.6 knots	4.3 knots
Broad Reach	120°	6.2 knots	3.1 knots
Run	180°	4.7 knots	2.3 knots

*The Westerly  
Konsort offers  
a lot of boat for  
her length*



to keep her straight. Her directional stability is down to concentration on the hinged tiller and I found myself over-correcting in stays as the helm is super responsive. I also found her more responsive on port rather than starboard tack. Rob explained this was because the cockpit locker is on starboard and is stacked with heavy kit, which 'sits her down in the water better,' on port tack.

Similarly, while goosewinged in flat water, I felt the potential was there for a crash gybe, as her helm is sensitive. But this is a helm on which, once learned, anyone could stand a lengthy watch without fatigue. →

## The owner

Rob Pike, a 36-year-old freelance recruitment agent, has sailed since he was a child. He cruises *Rafiki* with his wife Katie, two children and a dog from Eling Sailing Club in Hampshire, of which he is commodore. They have taken the *Konsort* to the Channel Islands, Brittany and Normandy.

Rob is a former Royal Marine commando and while in the services, he made an Atlantic crossing from Rio de Janeiro to Cape Town in a Challenge 67.



We hove to (a rare virtue for a bilge-keeler) and I found that with the genoa half-sheeted to weather and the main left free, she would back and fill in a sort of fore-reaching, see-sawing motion at 1.5 knots.

Motoring back to her berth she cruised at 5 knots on 2,000 revs and Rob told me he can push that to 6.5 knots at 2,800 revs. In cruising mode she'll burn just 1.5 litres of fuel per hour, even though she throws a 14in x 12in three-bladed prop. As for going astern, it's as simple as going ahead – in a way more so, as when under power while going ahead you can feel the propwash kicking at the rudder unless you are steering dead straight. Konsorts were not fitted with fuel gauges so Rob, having once run out of diesel in the Little Russel Channel, keeps a jerrycan of spare fuel aboard.

If this is how caravans sail, why haven't we all got one?

### At the helm

She is skittish, you cannot leave the helm for a second as she will go off track instantly. But then, there is no need to leave the helm as all running rigging – genoa and cruising chute sheet on Lewmar 30 self-tailing winches, plus the mainsheet – are within arm's length in a deep, safe



**Her cockpit is roomy but secure and well set up for solo sailing**

cockpit. The tiller is hinged at the stock, so it can be raised vertically as you tack and change sides.

I've always thought than any decking beneath a tiller is wasted space and clearly so did Laurent Giles, as the Konsort has none: the cockpit sole runs directly back to the transom. This is excellent for the helmsman, who has ample room to operate in all conditions and can trim the rig effectively on all points of sail.

### Design & construction

The Westerly Konsort was the last design Laurent Giles drew for Westerly Yachts and apart from the Centaur, was the most successful. Between 1979 and 1992, 704 Konsorts,

(which means 'good friend' in German where they were popular), were built. There were bilge keel, fin keel and drop keel versions. Later, 108 Westerly Konsort Duos were built: a motor-sailer with a huge deckhouse and more worthy of the 'caravan' label.

The Konsort has the famous Westerly 'knuckle' bow: a kind of wave-throwing chine on the topside just below the rail and her coachroof, while substantial, does not dominate the overall look of the boat as she has high-topsides on a canoe-

type hull, of which little is actually wetted surface.

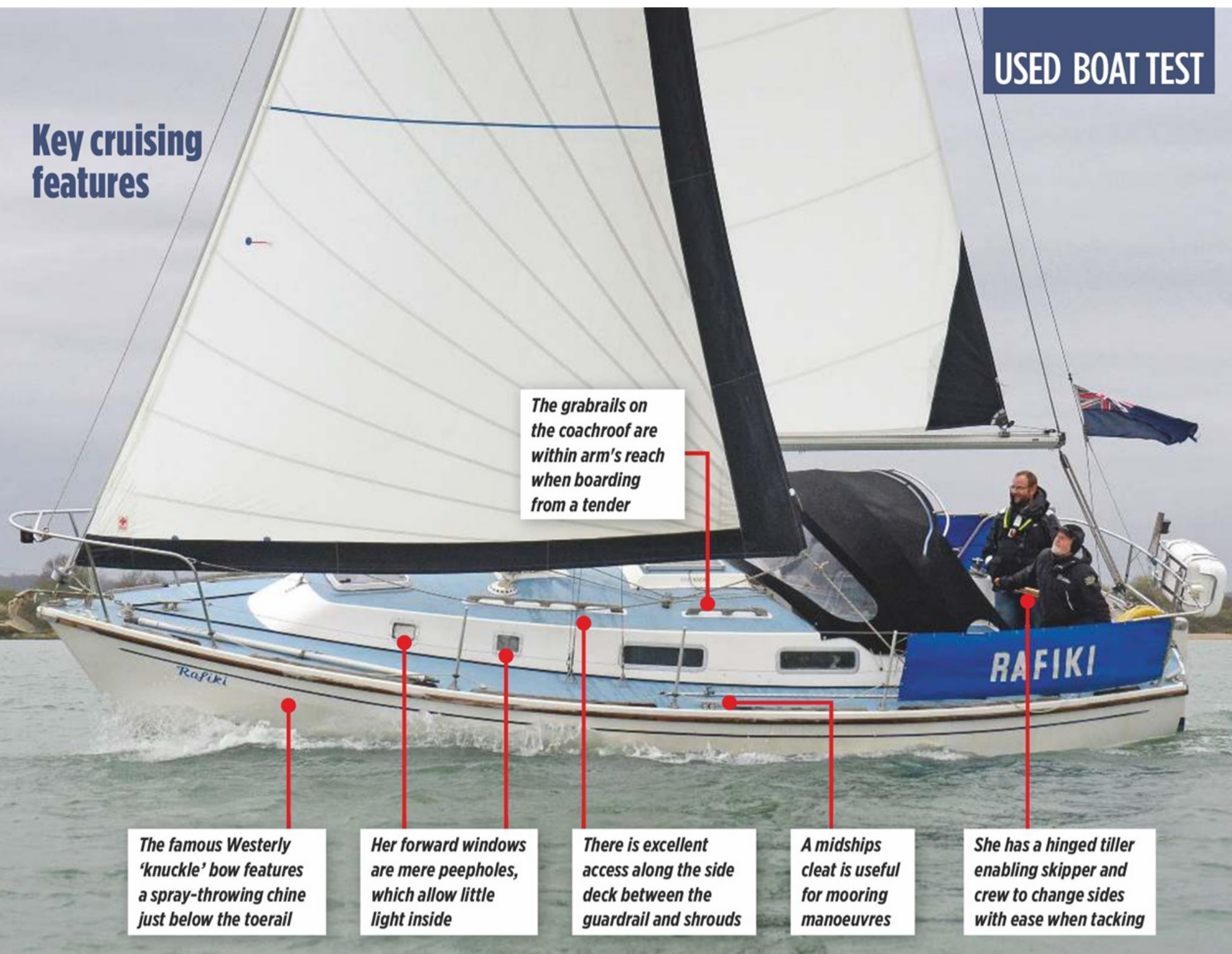
It's reported that some of the early Konsorts had a problem with the bonding of the foredeck, and others were not fitted with enough bilge floors, which run athwart the hull, causing flexing when she's dried out, so it's well worth checking you are buying one with cross-members in situ, or at least make an offer which reflects the cost of having them installed. That said, they are very strong. When Rob cut through the hull to fix a skin fitting he was amazed at the thickness of the lay-up.

'So, she's bulletproof, then?' I said, smiling deliberately in the knowledge that this former soldier had made two

**She has quite a lot of windage and the large sprayhood adds a bit more**



## Key cruising features



*The grabrails on the coachroof are within arm's reach when boarding from a tender*

*The famous Westerly 'knuckle' bow features a spray-throwing chine just below the toerail*

*Her forward windows are mere peepholes, which allow little light inside*

*There is excellent access along the side deck between the guardrail and shrouds*

*A midships cleat is useful for mooring manoeuvres*

*She has a hinged tiller enabling skipper and crew to change sides with ease when tacking*

tours of Afghanistan and one of Iraq. 'Yes, it's pity we didn't have them instead of Land Rovers,' came his instant response!

### Sailplan

The rig is fairly small by today's standards. She's a masthead sloop with cap shrouds, lowers, a babystay and a split backstay. The mainsail is sheeted to the back end of the cockpit. Slab reefing was standard, but Rafiki has been retrofitted with in-mast mainsail furling.

If she's a little undercanvassed that suits Rob fine, for although he does race the boat with some success, he's a cruising man with a wife who only 'tolerates' sailing and tells me he does not need to reef until the wind reaches 20 knots or above.

### Deck layout

The Konsort's most notable feature is her cockpit locker. There is only one, to starboard, as the port side accommodates a quarter berth. This matters not as the starboard locker is so vast that, on *Rafiki*, even though it was filled with a four-man inflatable, a spare 30 litres of fuel, a

kedge anchor, a gas-fired barbecue, bosun's chair, shore power cable, fishing rods, warps, and outboard, to name just some of the kit, I was still able to climb inside it to inspect the engine access hatch. There is space to hang a liferaft outside the pushpit.

The sheet tracks are fitted proud of the deck and are potential toe-stubbers, but the decks and coachroof are wide and easy to get round – crew can walk forward between the shrouds and the guardrail with ease – and there is good working room on the foredeck for headsail changes.



**A fine bow chine high in the topsides is designed to deflect waves**

### Living aboard

Rob stands at six feet in height and has headroom throughout his boat. The forecabin is a double berth with a V-section and with that section removed, yet more stowage space is revealed. In fact, Rob keeps a full-sized Hoover and dehumidifier in this spot. The forecabin also has fiddled shelving each side.

The forehatch gives plenty of light in the daytime – very welcome – as the square coachroof windows are mere peepholes. But at night, with two small lights, the forecabin is not greatly illuminated.

On this Konsort, the notorious Westerly droop is apparent with the vinyl headlining bulging like hanging porridge. The adhesive and foam backing tend to wither over the years, leaving the headlining attached by its edges.

The heads compartment is even gloomier and appears to be in need of extra ventilation. It is fitted with a pull-out washbasin. Opposite the heads is a large hanging locker space.

Lighting is much better in the saloon, which has larger windows plus a neon light at night. →



**The Konsort's voluminous saloon has two parallel settee berths. The port-side berth can be converted to a double**

The seating is two parallel berths, the port side one converts into a double.

The fixed table with leaves on both sides has central stowage for six bottles of wine; Rob has seated 10 sailing pals around it for dinner.

### **Chart table**

Forward facing on the port side, the chart table has a 10cm (4in) deep drawer beneath it for pilot books and will carry a half-sized Admiralty chart. The navigator's seat is on the forward

end of the quarterberth bunk. I don't object to this, but even at 1.72m (5ft 8in) I found myself banging my head on the edge of the protruding inside of the cockpit sole.

The instrumentation is scattered: a switchboard beside the companionway, radar over the chart table and VHF radio at the top of the companionway.

### **Galley**

The small L-shaped galley is very basic. Personally, I approve. As long

as you can make tea, fry bacon for a sarnie or simmer soup, life is sweet for the cruising man.

The galley's equipment comprises a two-burner gas cooker on gimbals with an oven and a grill, a single stainless steel sink with mixer taps, and a fridge freezer tucked under the bridgedeck.

### **Maintenance**

*Rafiki* was originally fitted with a 20hp Bukh DV2OME engine, but that's been replaced with a 30hp Yanmar 3GM. The top and front of the engine are easily accessed via a lift-off companionway from which vantage points fan belt, oil filter and impeller can be got at. The aforementioned side door in the starboard cockpit locker, which even someone of Rob's tall frame can climb into, allows access to the underside for drainage plugs, and the back end to tend the stern gland. Rob has fitted a patent drip-free gland thereby making the greaser redundant.

An excellent seamanlike feature is the exposed shroud plates, which any rigger can access via a cave locker for replacement or maintenance.

The companionway's first step – the top of the engine box – has a useful mini compartment for emergency tools such as knives, adjustable spanners and spare line and tape.



**There's a wet locker opposite the heads. Note the sagging headliner in the forecabin**

# Westerly Konsort

GRAPHICS: MAXINE HEATH



## FACTS AND FIGURES

- **Price** £12,000 to £25,000
- **LOA** 8.78m (28ft 10in)
- **LWL** 7.77m (25ft 6in)
- **Beam** 3.27m (10ft 9in)
- **Draught** 0.99m (3ft 3in)
- **Displacement**  
3,862 kg (8,516 lb)
- **Ballast** 1,451 kg (3,200 lb)
- **Ballast ratio** 37.6%
- **Sail area**  
47.65 m<sup>2</sup> (513sq ft)
- **SA/D ratio** 19.7
- **Diesel** 67 litres (14gal)
- **Water** 120 litres (26gal)
- **Engine** Diesel 30hp
- **Transmission** Shaft drive
- **Designer** Laurent Giles
- **Builder** Westerly  
Marine Construction
- **Owners' Association**  
[www.westerly-owners.co.uk](http://www.westerly-owners.co.uk)



*The interior fit-out allows easy access to the shroud chainplates*



*The basic but practical galley vents via the companionway*

## OUR VERDICT

### What's she like to sail?

The Westerly Konsort seems to be a bigger boat than she really is. At a fraction under 29ft in length, her appearance is deceptive because of her generous volume. It's not until you take the helm that you realise you are not really sailing a 34 footer, even though it may look like it!

She is light on the helm, super responsive but by the same token she's not directionally stable. She has a superbly secure cockpit for offshore sailing: easy to use solo, yet with buckets of room for a full crew.

She may be a little under-canvassed but her hull, which has little wetted surface, is easily driven in light airs. When the wind pipes up, reefing is not necessary until winds reach the top end of a Force 4.

Her voluminous sprayhood can take half a knot off your boatspeed upwind, so it's often worth folding it away if you have a long beat to windward and it's not too cold.

### What's she like in port and at anchor?

She's a cinch to manoeuvre under power and goes astern almost as predictably as ahead – handy if you're between the tightest of marina finger pontoons. You might want a step fender or soapbox to step off from the deck to the pontoon as her topsides are rather high, and there is no bathing platform for easy stern access.

With a single bow roller, there's no second roller available for mooring lines, and with her anchor deployed she will sheer around in a breeze, her high windage overriding her wetted area. But as with all bilge-keel boats she comes into her own drying out up some lonely creek or settling on a half-tide beach.

Her long cockpit benches are comfortable for lounging and there's space for sunbathing on her wide, flat cabin top. She has a transom-hung ladder for bathing.

Her big cockpit lends itself to a removable enclosure, which can offer a 'conservatory' for sheltered sailing in foul weather and on warm nights, two extra crew could bed down on the cockpit seats.

### Would she suit you and your crew?

She's not a fast passage-maker, but she's lively, nimble and responsive. She's an eminently practical boat for coastal cruising with plenty of living space and ample room for a family, or even a full crew of five adults, including oodles of stowage. Not that you'll need a crew – she's also an easy boat to sail singlehanded, with all sail controls to hand.

If you're a keen cook, you may find the Konsort's basic galley restrictive and lacking in workspace. That and the rudimentary heads are drawbacks for those seeking luxurious comfort. However, the huge volume below decks more than makes up for this. You get 6ft standing headroom pretty much throughout; comfortable, wide and long berths – even the quarter berth can take two adults at a push – and a saloon table that could hold a banquet.

Twin-keel and drop-keel Konsorts are well worth considering if you want to save money on mooring fees, as they're ideal boats to keep on a cheap, drying mooring.

### Would she suit your style of sailing?

CREEK CRAWLING



COASTAL PORT-HOPPING



OFFSHORE PASSAGE-MAKING



TRADE WIND VOYAGING



HIGH-LATITUDE ADVENTURE

