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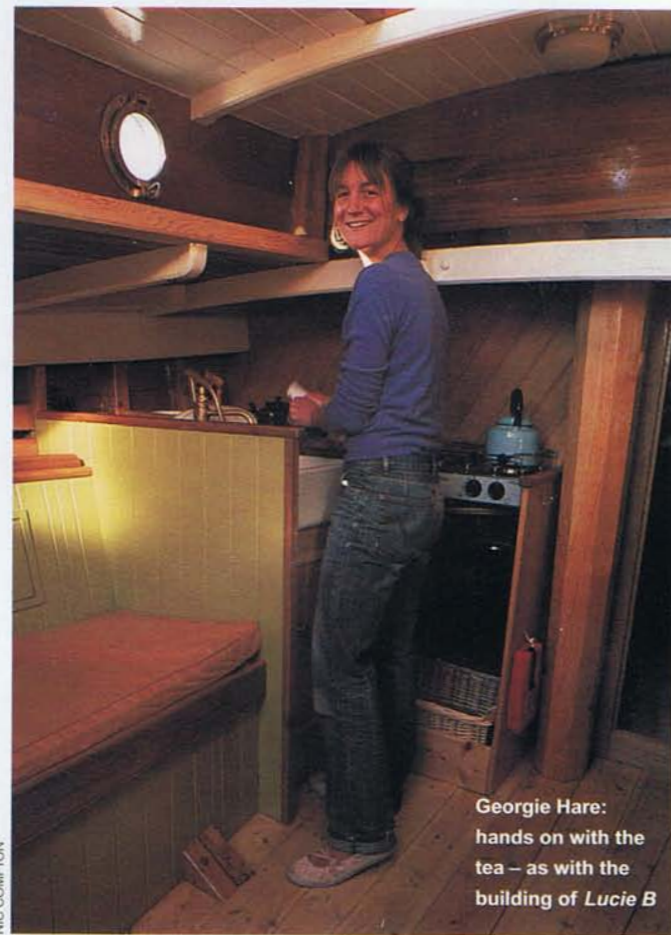


SMACK TO THE FUTURE

Ashley Butler's second smack *Lucie B* is sailing, just four months after the laying of her keel. Nic Compton reports on the first commercial project for the newly-established Kentish boatbuilder who always builds in the traditional way — by eye

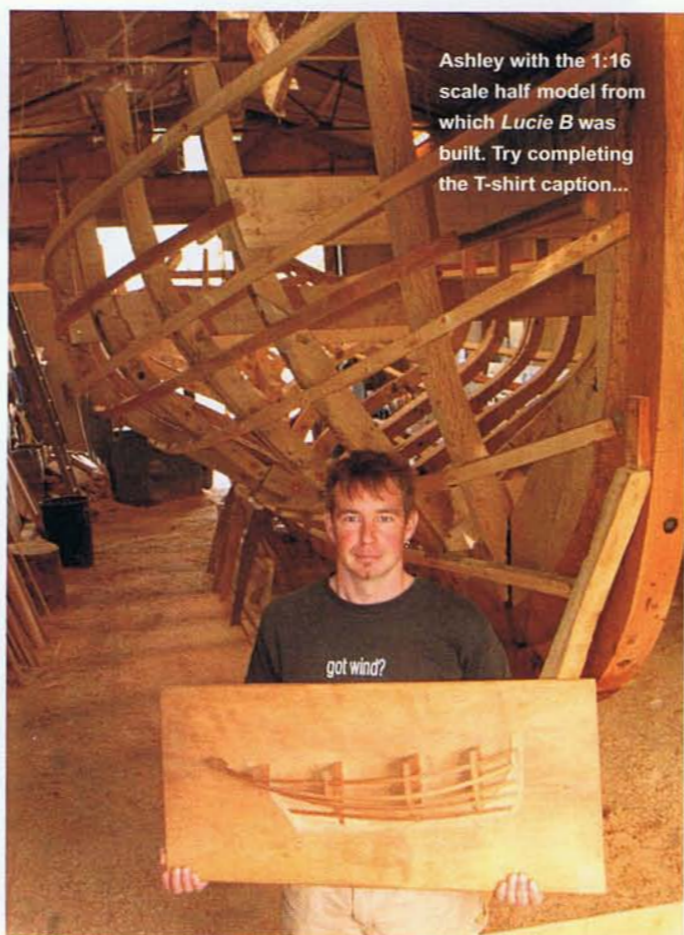


Ashley Butler (right) and Dave Showel put themselves in the frame during building



Georgie Hare: hands on with the tea – as with the building of *Lucie B*

NIC COMPTON



Ashley with the 1:16 scale half model from which *Lucie B* was built. Try completing the T-shirt caption...

GEORGIE HARE

Butler & Co, set up with his girlfriend Georgie Hare – so the boat had to be built within a certain time frame to be viable. On top of that, a few weeks into the build, Ashley and Georgie piled on more pressure by signing up for the Southampton Boat Show – a mere five months away. It was an immovable deadline, and, if the boat wasn't ready in time, they stood to lose thousands of pounds in exhibition fees, not to mention a potential sale. Not only that but, as theirs was a floating berth, the boat would have to be sailed there – so there wasn't the option of taking a semi-complete boat to the show and calling it 'work in progress'!

It was mid March when I first saw *Lucie B* in build. The centreline and half a dozen frames were in place, with a few ribbands wrapped around them. The boat's partial skeleton

"I hope the public like her – I feel like we're entering her for Boat Idol!"

sat in the middle of the shed – essentially a converted barn – with the plumb stem towering 12ft (3.7m) above the ground. In an adjoining shed, a clinker dinghy that Ashley was building as a birthday present for Georgie was taking shape over a set of moulds. It all looked impressively purposeful and, again, I had to admire Ashley's total confidence in his actions. After all, it

was only his second boat and no one had tested it for stability or 'sailability', yet there he was throwing thousands of pounds of materials and half a year of his life building what was essentially an unknown quantity. Wasn't he scared?

"It was more of a worry with the first boat, *Sally B*, but the more people told me I couldn't do it, the more determined I became to do it!" he says. "This time round, I'd already proven it could be done, so it was more a question of whether we could get it done on time – and working out how to build that darned counter!"

The process of creation is a strange one for the builder, or artist, concerned. It invariably involves months of dogged work, solving an endless series of minor problems with little time to appreciate the object being created until it's all over – by which point it's the last thing on earth you want to look at! To paraphrase Thomas Ellison, "boatbuilding is one per cent inspiration, ninety-nine per cent perspiration".

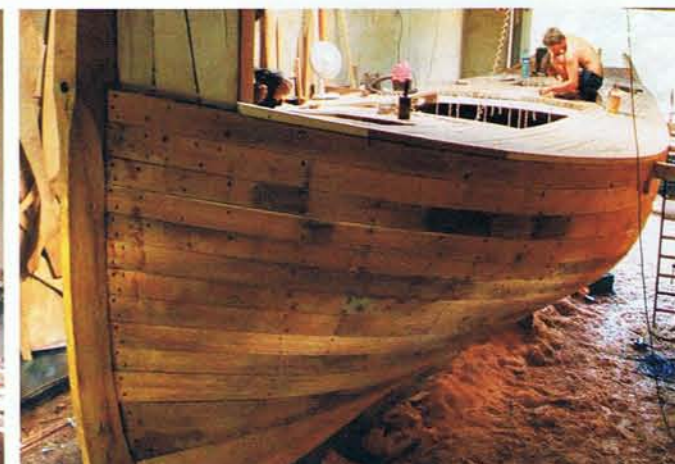
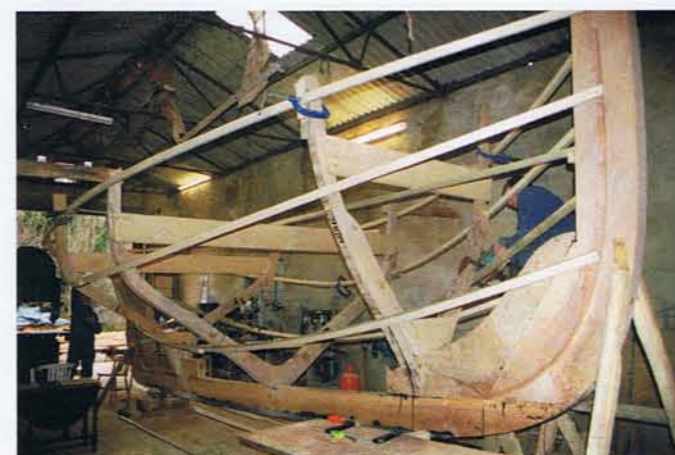
When I came back to visit Ashley and Georgie six months later, *Lucie B* was a complete, finished entity. The lines of dozens, if not hundreds, of boats that Ashley has observed over the past 20 years had

registered in his brain, been analysed and compared over and over again, and then distilled into the lines of his smack, before being interpreted as a 3D model and then once again reinterpreted full size. It's a wonderfully nebulous process that's more akin to creating a piece of sculpture than a functional means of transport.

Yet, when I saw *Lucie B*, she looked entirely practical. On deck, the woodwork was well crafted, the paintwork neat and the rig tidy – but none of it fussy. Even the sturdy galvanised-steel fittings, custom-made by Colin Frake, spoke of centuries of development; a craft studied, practised and channelled by a metalworker with decades of experience of local craft. Everything has purpose and reason; nothing is accidental.

Below decks, Ashley has abandoned the classic, old-worldly feel of *Sally B* and returned to the more open, contemporary feel of *Ziska*. The joinery is less intricate but it makes an easy place to crash on a weekend or longer cruise. There's standing headroom under the coachroof and a generous fo'c's'le-cum-sail store.

But the real treat was seeing her under sail. Although it was only the Swale, the conditions were nothing if not perfect – a crisp northeasterly breeze with bright autumn sunshine and clouds scudding across the sky. *Lucie B* cantered across the



PHOTOS BY GEORGIE HARE

Top left: Basket nears completion; Top right: Laying the deck with eight-year-old air-dried iroko; Bottom left: Planking. Bottom right: Caulking the deck; Below: Richard Hunn (foreground), Dave Showel and Ashley

water like some precocious young filly, stem held high and proud, sails pulling eagerly at the reins. The substantial 'shoulders' on the boat – so much more pronounced than on *Sally B* due to the long, fine run aft – pushed a distinct bow wave, which then swept down the hull alarmingly quickly and was discarded neatly astern, leaving barely a wash. It was a delight to watch, and the boat's sailing performance has already served Ashley and Georgie well in some rough weather – including a Force 6 off Dover on the Southampton trip.

It was just six months since I had seen the boat in frame, yet since that time not only had Ashley completed her, but he had already made the 400-mile voyage to Southampton and back – an astonishing achievement by any standard. Meanwhile, Butler & Co has started work on the 45ft (14m) Whitstable smack *Favourite*, which is being restored with Heritage Lottery funding as a monument to the Whitstable fishing heritage. A new 26ft (7.9m) Itchen Ferry is next on the blocks, to be built 'on spec' once *Lucie B* is sold. It's a pretty choice of design, and one that's bound to prove popular among South Coast aficionados. What's more – and I can't help feeling this isn't entirely coincidental – there's not a counter stern in sight. What will the smack lovers make of that?



Diary of a smack in build

November 2004: Made the half model while helping rebuild the smack *Maria* in Essex, writes Ashley Butler. I use a scale of 1:16, so 1/16in on the model equates to 1in full size. It's easy to work with. First, I draw a waterline on the backboard, then fix keel, stem and sternpost, shaped depending on how I want the boat to behave. If the boat needs to be nippy and quick in stays, I put more rocker on the keel and more rake in the ends; for a more docile boat, the opposite.

Next I fit the midship section and transom frame and bend the sheerstrake around. There are some rules of thumb to remember, like height of the stem above waterline, which should be the same as the girth of the transom frame from sheer to sheer. Then I put a section in the bow to fill out the sheerstrake and one aft to pull it in, and wrap two battens above and below the bilge, and two more through the run. Once the half model's made, I look at it over the course of a few weeks and make small changes until I'm completely happy with it.

1 March 2005 The keel's laid! It's a piece of 4 1/2 x 13in (115 x 330mm) iroko, with oak stem and iroko sternpost. Attached underneath is a 2in (50mm) lead keel band, made of scrap lead melted in a pot and poured into a steel track.

4 March The frames are fitted in the same order as on the half model – midship section first, followed by forward section and then transom frame – except that we don't put on any battens until all three frames are in place. I sent templates to Barchards and they have some nice oak turns so all the frames can be made in one piece, except the transom frame, which is made from three futtocks.

12 March Ribbands next. The number of ribbands we put in depends on the shape – the more shape there is, the more ribbands we need, particularly at the turn of the bilge. They follow the line of the planking,



Left: Georgie paying the seams in red-lead putty; **Right:** Aerial view shows the lovely run of the deck; **Below left:** Fairing the hull; **Below right:** Splicing the standing rigging



PHOTOS BY GEORGIE HARE

so it's a case of looking at the shape of the hull and imagine bending a straight line around it and where that would go.

14 March With the basic 'basket' in place, we can fill the gaps between frames, particularly unsupported areas. Frame spacing depends on the boat's scantlings, which you work out from experience and from looking at other boats. On this boat the frames are 4½in (115mm) thick at the bilge, tapering to 3in (76mm) at deck level.

8 April Fitted the sheerstrake – she's starting to take shape!

11 April Cut rabbet in the keel and fitted the garboards.

28 April Garboards and broadstrakes are in; time for the ballast – a mixture of scrap lead and concrete. It weighs several tons, so easier to put it in now than lift into the boat later. As much weight as possible is concentrated around the mast step to reduce pitching at sea.

3 May While the iroko for the planking dries, we get on with fitting the oak deck beams, bowsprit bitts, mast partners, bulkheads, engine beds and cockpit well. The rudder trunk is made up of four solid pieces of oak – one of which is the sternpost – with a round hole cut out and then splined and bolted together – quite a tricky bit of work.

27 May Planking – there are 16 planks to fit each side and, because they're iroko, most have to be steamed. A pair of us should be able to fit two planks per day, but everything takes longer than expected. Also, we don't have a thicknesser, so the planks have to be planed on the inside and then faired off on the outside once they're in place.

20 June Start riveting the square copper nails – it's endless!

6 July Machine the 1½ x 2¾in (38 x 70mm) iroko planking for the deck and start fitting it. I want good old galvanised square boat nails for the deck, but don't think they're marketable, so it's stainless steel.

15 July Rich and Murray caulk the deck.

18 July Bulwarks are made from two heavy planks steamed around stanchions temporarily fixed to the sheerstrake. Lower plank is 2in (50mm) thick and drifted through the covering board into the sheerstrake. Second plank, 1½in (38mm) thick, is spiked into the first.

7 August Start on cabin sides, companionway and skylight. It's fiddly and time-consuming compared to the hull; good change of pace.

10 August Greg fits the engine.

15 August Fit the coachroof beams. There's only one full one: the rest are half-beams, which must be dovetailed into the cabin sides.

18 August My uncle Jim moves hull to Iron Wharf.

19 August We hung the rudder today. John made it of solid iroko with four planks bolted together with bronze bolts and drifts. He also made the Douglas-fir mast, which is stepped today.

20 August Launch day! Sixty people come to Iron Wharf, yards from where I did my 'apprenticeship' 12 years ago. Georgie breaks the bubbly and christens the boat *Lucie B* after her late cousin. The boat is towed to Hollowshore Boatyard and we have another party!

21 August Sleep all day.

22 August It takes us a whole day to splice on the standing rigging from TS Rigging – and 45 minutes to put up all the running rigging!

28 August Start fitting out the interior – galley first. There's not much time left, so fancy joinery isn't an option.

7 September *Lucie B's* trial sail – this time I can see her from a distance by going in Georgie's dinghy. It's surprisingly moving. She handles more like *Ziska* than *Sally B* and looks pretty good, I think.

10 September Set sail for Southampton. I hope the public like her – I feel like we're entering her for Boat Idol!!