

“I saw three ships come sailing”

The old song says it for us as we announce three new sailing ships. Three new evolutionary ships, designed for a rapidly evolving world. That revolutionary new technology is reinventing the wind-powered ship is self-evident, vital if we are to flourish as a race. There remains, however, a valid argument for building on tried and tested solutions, particularly on smaller ships – more evolution than revolution.

In the twilight of the great sailing ships dramatic advances were made. Compelled by competition, the last Windjammers fitted powered winches, water ballast, and raised walkways on their steel hulls. Cargo capacity rose dramatically as crew numbers fell but they were no match for steamships, Suez or Panama. But if we revisit those basic evolutionary principles and apply them to 21st century ships, our abiding formula, then we and other players in the small ship sector have much to contribute, we can and will punch above our weight – the world surely needs clean new ships of all sizes.

Enter our three, the first of which is a reworked version of our Clipper 100, designed from the outset for mass production. Essentially an early 20th century steel ketch with a finely tuned hull, electric auxiliaries and solar panels wherever we can fit them. Over three years we’ve worked on every single aspect of the ship from efficient cargo handling to the ship’s boat (sail-electric of course) to washing machine placement. The devil is in the detail. She’s now slightly bigger, carries more cargo and the topsails have been reinstated. Lithium batteries will power the engines but crew-powered block and tackles can still stand in for faulty winches. The same common-sense parameters are applied to the second ship, our all new three-masted schooner. This one will take 6 TEUs, a couple of 40-footers and assorted pallets. The new Clipper 160 can also accommodate twelve passengers. The working sail area of 770 square metres will be tamed by a crew of ten and passengers will be obliged to help or a “gang-plank” clause could be invoked. Like the Clipper 100, I’m talking about serious mass production. The business case is simple. Standardise key components, build them to last and build lots of them. Economies of scale lower the building costs dramatically and smaller yards worldwide can assemble them. Utilise the very best of manufacturing technology but for these smaller ships don’t push the boundaries too far. Think WWII Liberty Ships with fine ends, efficient rigs and dagger boards. So, zero emissions, zero fuel costs and economically viable manufacturing – the case is watertight.

All this frenzied activity on the Ellard drawing board was powered up by an invitation from the Cerulean Project, a South Pacific decarbonising initiative on behalf of eight very worried island

communities. Faced with industrial strength competition from global design powerhouses we thought it was all way above our heads but we were encouraged to submit our thoughts and plans. We are offering a range of boats from a 3-pallet 12-passenger lugger to the schooner, all of which can be built on the islands. Further, all of them can be serviced or repaired with basic equipment and minimal fuss.

Now cutting edge technology is a thing of wonder and all sensible advances are essential for our future, but increasingly complex materials and systems may not translate too well when you've had an altercation with a remote coral atoll. There is however, one more ingredient to add to the mix – aesthetics. For over 30 years I've designed and built small electric and sailing boats and I've always tried hard to produce boats that look like boats, not boxes. So our new clippers will never have flat sheers, sawn-off sterns and "brutalist" superstructures. I'd like to think our customers would be proud of the ships as they see them sailing in. A good example is the humble Thames Barge, a superbly efficient sailing ship and a joy to behold. We too aim to bring a little joy to the seascape.

The third new ship in our range could not be more different. A 14.5 metre fibreglass-hulled catamaran with a lugsail rig. Echoes of the 15th century seagoing Junk rig and the Pacific Crabclaw sails, but with alloy masts and carbon-fibre yards. The fibreglass hulls are, in effect, stretched micro cargo ship hulls with nice easy entry and exit lines and sensible square sections in between. The superstructure is all aluminium. On test the prototype 14.5 metre cat did 6 knots with 2 small diesels merely ticking over. That's one easily driven hull, perfect for sail or electric propulsion and available off the shelf, for mass production. The lug rig is perfectly suited to cats whose wide beam allows for multiple sheeting points and downwind the lugger's inherent "lift" is exploited for those balmy trade wind voyages. I'd really like to do these in kits so I can call them Kit-Cats, or in the event of chocolate coated lawsuits, Cat-Kits. More details on our websites: <https://scruffie.com> and <https://gosailcargo.com>

Derek Ellard, Go Sail Cargo, derek@scruffie.com