

As seen in

Sailing
MAGAZINE

i550

Sport boat

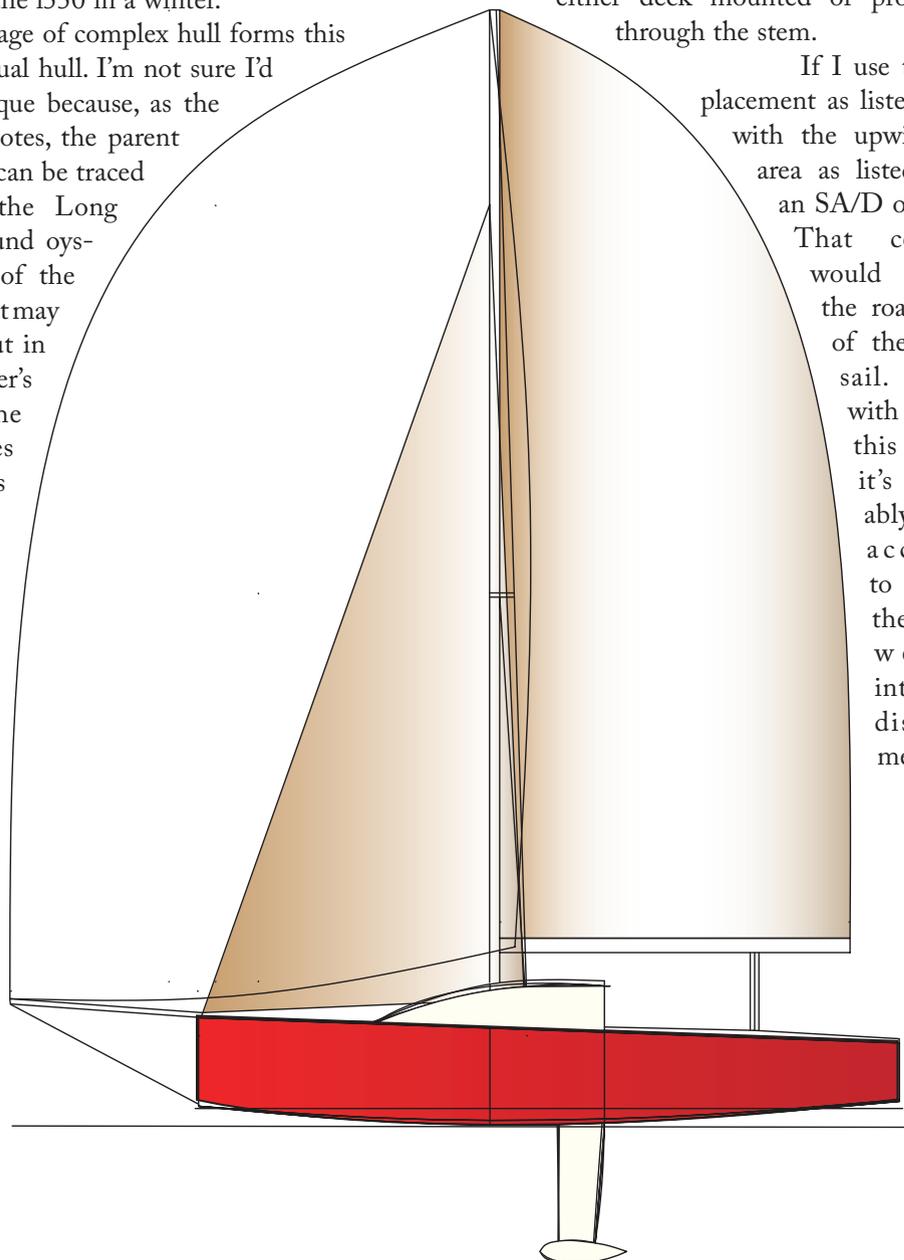
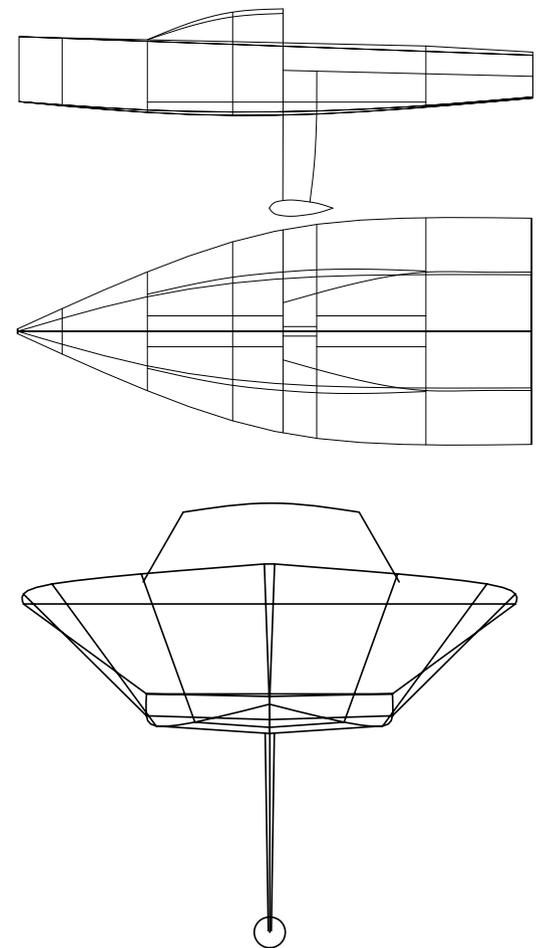
Modern sport boats are expensive. Tooling, the various plugs and molds required to mold a GRP boat, are expensive. Modern gear is expensive. Carbon fiber spars and high-tech sails can cost close to what an entire, race-ready Soling cost years ago. But designer/builder Christopher Beckwith has come up with an alternative to this high cost of sport boat yacht racing. It's called the i550 and the key to keeping the cost down is you can build this boat yourself with a modest quiver of boatbuilding skills. He must have hit the nail on the head because as I write this there are more than 110 sets of plans sold for the i550 and fleets are starting up all over the world. That is testimony to the ease of construction of this design and testimony to the quality of the finished product. If this were not a great boat people would not be building it. The designer says that someone with "no boatbuilding skills" can build the i550 in a winter.

In this age of complex hull forms this is an unusual hull. I'm not sure I'd call it unique because, as the designer notes, the parent hull form can be traced back to the Long Island Sound oyster boats of the 1800s. That may be true, but in Christopher's hands the hull does have its unique elements. The boat is excessively beamy on deck with an

L/B of 2.11. That's probably the lowest L/B I have measured in these reviews. But that ultra beam is only at the deck. From the deck the flat sides cut away to a very narrow BWL. There is a single chine and what appears to be a flat bottom on this simple hull. But the bottom is not dead flat. There is a small degree of arc to the bottom. This makes the boat structurally stiffer and less likely to flex in waves. The D/L is 66.63. There is a 180-pound bulb on the end of a deep, retracting fin. This is just enough weight to make the i550 self-righting. Draft is 5 feet. The rudder is an outboard-mounted, high-aspect-ratio design, but it does not show on any of the drawings I received.

The rig is simple. There are 15-degree swept double spreaders with the upper spreaders at the hounds to support the masthead chute. There is enough sweep to the spreaders to allow this boat to go without a backstay and this opens up the rig for a main with a huge roach, or you can go with a fat-head mainsail. Upwind, like a dinghy, the roach or leech of the main provides the support a backstay would normally provide. An aluminum mast helps keep the cost down. The boat can be rigged with an articulating bowsprit, either deck mounted or protruding through the stem.

If I use the displacement as listed along with the upwind sail area as listed I get an SA/D of 43.82. That certainly would include the roach area of the mainsail. But with a boat this small it's probably more accurate to include the crew weight into the displacement. So



I figured three people averaging 175 pounds each for a sailing displacement of 1,325 pounds, and this brings the SA/D down to a still very healthy 31.3. Either way you calculate it, this is a very high-powered little boat and in many ways this design bridges the gap between planing dinghies and keel sport boats.

The stitched, glued and glassed 1/4-inch plywood hull would make a great project for father and son, or a couple of buddies with nothing to do during the winter months.



LOA 18'; LWL 17'6"; Beam 8'6" (overall), 4'7" (at waterline); Draft 5'; Displacement 800 lbs.; Ballast 180 lbs.; Sail area 236 sq. ft.; SA/D 43.82; D/L 66.63; L/BWL 3.93

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OBE: \$2,250 (kit), \$25,000 (complete)
Our Best Estimate of the sailaway price

Reprinted from Sailing Magazine, 125 E. Main St., Port Washington, WI 53074