



Louis Ducharme sailing upwind aboard his Bras d'Or 11 on the Richelieu River behind Jeannotte Island. Note the textile rubrail designed to absorb shocks when docking.

## Bras d'Or 11

### A versatile mini-catboat

Necessity is said to be the mother of invention. Seeking a sailing tender which he could tow behind his 41-foot sailboat on Lake Champlain with no more resistance than a pneumatic dinghy, Louis Ducharme tended naturally to favour a catboat design with a substantial beam to guarantee stability. As Louis himself points up, the golden rule to bear in mind when designing a catboat is to provide for a beam measuring about half of the vessel's overall length.

The idea of setting up a small boatbuilding facility to bring the object of his desires to market gradually took hold, enabling Louis Ducharme to realize an age-old dream. Hence Atelier Nautique Richelieu was born. The plans for the Bras d'Or 11 are the brainchild of US architect Charles Wittholz and were acquired through *Woodenboat* magazine. A cold-moulded wooden prototype built in Nova Scotia served to fabricate the mould now used to produce the polyester hulls. HTM Composites of Neuville (Québec)

makes the hulls using the infusion technique, with deck and cockpit joinery outsourced to a workshop at Verchères (Québec), in cooperation with Jean-Guy Leblanc. Louis Ducharme also enlisted the services of Bruno Caroit to reconfigure the cockpit and fine-tune the ergonomics of this small watercraft designed as much for pleasure boating in sheltered water as for use as a tender.

To deliver the yesteryear charm of navigating a small, traditional sailboat, it was decided to use wood for the cockpit fittings and rigging. This hybrid building technique is employed by many builders of traditional sailing vessels redesigned for modern-day use. Cockpit seats and deck are made of mahogany marine plywood coated with epoxy resin, whereas the mast, boom and gaff are made of pine. The floor and rails are constructed of solid mahogany. For purposes of tradition and consistency, the miniscule front deck, which is traversed by the mast, is varnished. In a departure from the original plans, various elements were reconfigured and reserve buoyancy increased by inserting foam under the cockpit seats. Foam was also inserted in the small compartments fore and aft as initially specified by the architect to ensure insubmersability.

Inspection hatches provide access to the mast foot and rudder hardware, while allowing for aeration during winter storage. Readers will note that the wooden parts attaching to the fibreglass structure are glued and not screwed into place.

As the idea was to make the Bras d'Or 11 a small excursion craft suitable for boat camping, the vessel was outfitted with a series of removable panels which expand the seating area and create a sleeping surface. The builder also offers an optional rectangular tent with a frame designed to fit over the boom. When navigating, the wooden panels of the improvised couchette can be stowed alongside the centreboard trunk. However, a pair of wooden oars and requisite oarlocks are standard equipment, just like the rowing seat spanning the centreboard trunk.

The builder also chose to outfit the craft with an aluminum centreboard rather than a wooden one which would be more likely to sustain damage were the boat ever to bottom out in shallow water.



One has the distinct impression of stepping aboard a wooden boat. The centre rowing seat combines with the removable panels to create a sleeping surface in camping mode. Note the oars stowed alongside the cockpit seats.

The weight (7 kg) of the metal centreboard allows it to be lowered into place by the force of gravity. Don't look for mooring cleats, there are none. They have been replaced by openings in the cockpit seats through which the mooring lines can be threaded and secured with a knot.

The boat comes with one or other of a gaff or Bermuda (Marconi) rig. The test vessel, which is also the series prototype, boasts a gaff rig. It is therefore necessary to simultaneously manoeuvre two halyards to hoist the gaff.

There is nothing easier to navigate than a catboat. In fact, the smaller the vessel, the more fun it is to sail. You hold the tiller with one hand and the mainsheet with the other. Well canvassed, this little dingy is highly

responsive. It handles gusts well, aided by its inherent stability of shape. With more than 8 m<sup>2</sup> (80 sq ft) of mainsail, you must plan carefully when preparing to gybe, failing which the laws of physics are certain to leave you with a wet reminder of what not to do. In instances of the like, the step built into the rudder makes it easier to hoist yourself back into the boat.

The Bras d'Or 11 also comes as a kit, in which case the fibreglass hull is shipped along with the wooden components for DIY assembly. The DIY option is an interesting alternative and will save you just over \$2000. Sailing tender par excellence, the Bras d'Or 11 is also an ideal little vessel for exploring lakes, rivers and sheltered waterways on a modest budget.

## Bras d'Or 11

Length: 3.35 m (11 ft)

Beam: 1.52 m (5 ft)

Draught: 0.20 m/0.88 m (8 in / 2 ft 11 in)

Sail area: 7.4 m<sup>2</sup> (80 sq ft)

Weight w/ rig: 97 kg (195 + 45 lb)

Capacity: 4 adults

Maximum motor size motor: 2 HP

Model w/ oars: \$5500

Model w/ sail ready to use: \$9500

Kit w/sail: \$5000

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