

GOOD OLD BOAT™

The sailing magazine for the rest of us!

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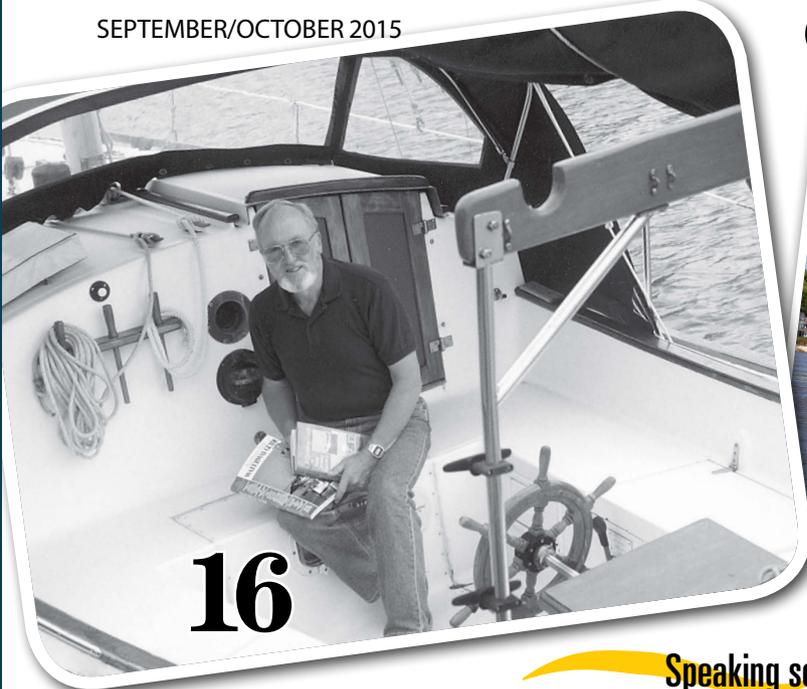
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On the cover ...

Morgan Wade checks the set of the whisker pole on her family's good old 28-foot Cape Dory, *Zephyr*. Chesapeake Bay photographer and proud father David Wade caught this scene while sailing with Morgan and her sister Molly off the Turkey Point Lighthouse.

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CAPE DORY 27

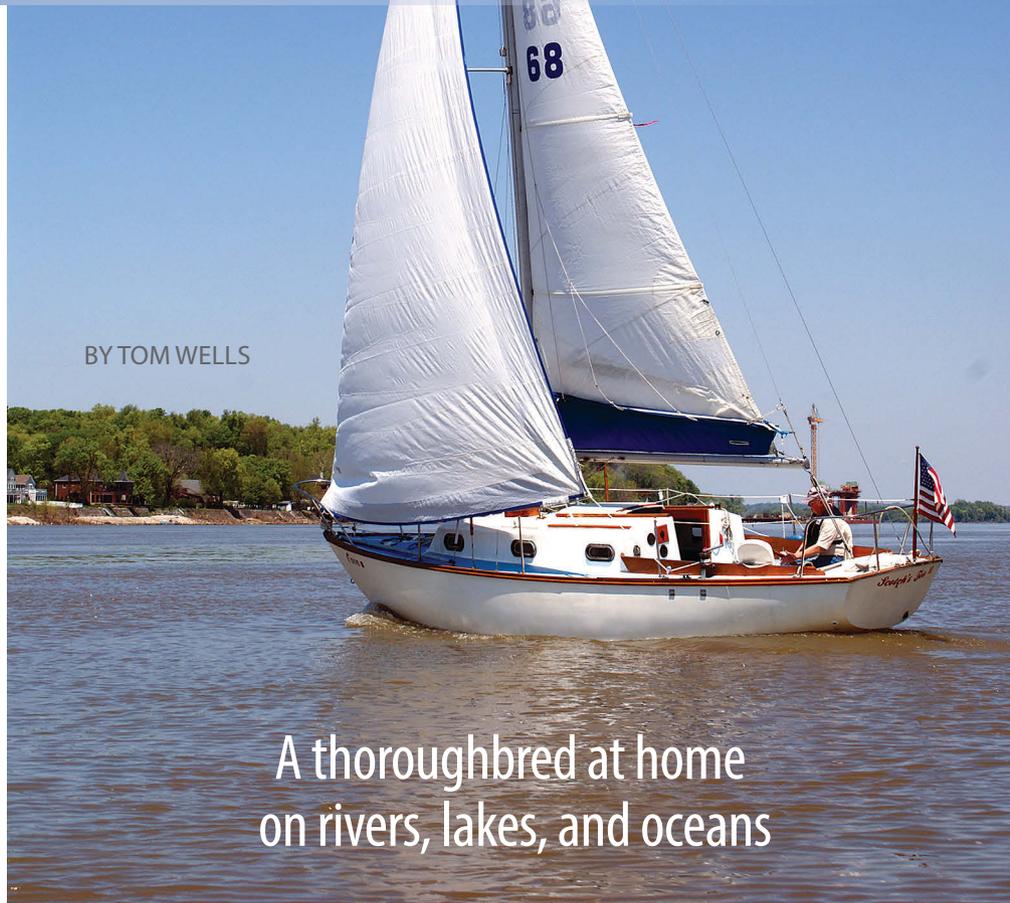
Phil Bills began sailing in 1960 when he was 15. He grew up in Delaware, Ohio, north of Columbus, and sailed the Douglass & McLeod Highlander among other boats. After earning his college degree from Eastern Kentucky University, he embarked on a successful career in planning and engineering, but sailing was always present in his life. He berthed his first “big” boat, an O’Day 23, at Limestone Bay Yacht Club on the Ohio River east of Louisville, Kentucky, and named it *Scotch’s Too*. The name came from a beloved dog named Butterscotch, or “Scotch” for short. The dog loved being aboard, and Phil’s wife, Phyllis, remarked, “The boat is Scotch’s, too.”

Phil replaced the O’Day with a J/29 named *Scotch’s Too II* and began racing in the active sailing community on the Ohio River. That lasted until 2001, when a website listing caught his eye. A beautiful Cape Dory 27 was for sale on nearby Lake Monroe in Indiana. He was fascinated, and before long the boat was his. Phil renamed her *Scotch’s Too III* and has sailed her from Limestone Bay Yacht Club since that time. In April 2015, Phil invited my wife, Sandy, and me to take a good look at *Scotch’s Too III* and try our hand at Ohio River sailing.

Cape Dory Yachts

Andy Vavolotis began building the Cape Dory 10 to his own design in East Taunton, Massachusetts, in 1963. The boat was essentially a rowing dinghy with a cat rig for sailing. His initial success was boosted in 1967 when he introduced the 18-foot Carl Alberg-designed Typhoon (see *Good Old Boat*, July 2015).

Cape Dory Yachts began producing larger cruising yachts in the early 1970s. It introduced the Cape Dory 27, another



BY TOM WELLS

A thoroughbred at home
on rivers, lakes, and oceans

Carl Alberg design, in 1977 and built 277 examples over eight years.

The company continued to expand its line of cruising sailboats until the late 1980s, producing models ranging from 25 to 45 feet, and in the late 1970s also began building powerboats. Production ceased in 1991 and the name was sold to a New York company that intended to continue building the powerboats. That company ceased operations in 1996.

Andy Vavolotis moved to Maine, taking with him the company’s Spartan Marine Hardware division. He also retained the molds for some of the larger models, and sold the boats as the

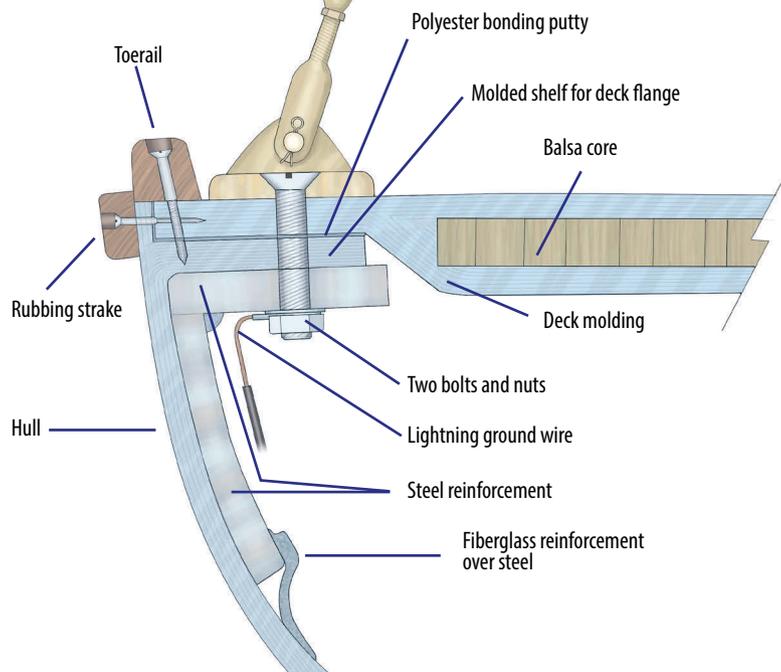
Robinhood 36 and 40. The Robinhood Marine Center in Georgetown, Maine, remains in operation today.

Construction details

If you absolutely had to hit something with your sailboat, owning a Cape Dory 27 would be an asset. The hull is a thick hand layup of solid fiberglass, and that includes the full keel with its encapsulated ballast, an Alberg design

The Cape Dory 27 *Scotch’s Too III*, sailed by Phil Bills on the Ohio River, shows off the low sheerline and balanced overhangs, today considered “classic,” that are characteristic of the designs of Carl Alberg.

Cape Dory 27 hull-to-deck joint and chainplate



standard. The solid hull and the absence of vulnerable keel bolts mean that, even in a grounding, any damage will most likely not be catastrophic and might only be cosmetic. Osmotic blistering has occurred on a few hulls, but most owners report no major problems.

The decks were hand laid using end-grain balsa core. For the hull-to-deck joint, Cape Dory employed an inward-turned flange on the hull to support the mating outer edge of the deck. The hull extended above this flange to match the thickness of the deck, thus leaving no exposed entry for leaks. The hull and deck were joined using polyester bonding putty and screws through a teak toerail into both sections. A matching teak rubbing strake was installed with screws through the short portion of the hull that extends above the flange and into the deck edge. The result is an attractive and fairly trouble-free joint.

The chainplates are manganese-bronze castings through-bolted to steel backing plates that are augmented with lateral steel stiffeners along the hull. The backstay chainplate is similarly built, as is the stemhead fitting. Like most bronze fittings on the boat, they

were produced by Cape Dory's Spartan Marine Hardware division.

Cape Dory did make heavy use of gelcoat and some owners have found crazing and cracking in areas under high stress. The balsa-cored decks are also prone to occasional water intrusion and should be watched for any developing soft spots, including the area where the rudder stock penetrates the cockpit sole.

The rudder tube is glassed into the hull and the cockpit sole, which is reinforced locally with heavy laminations. The rudder stock is capped by the tiller head on most boats, although pedestal steering was an option.

Rig

The Cape Dory 27's aluminum mast is deck-stepped above a compression post and supported by single upper shrouds, double lowers, and single spreaders. The single backstay attaches to the bronze chainplate centered at the stern.

The mainsheet is attached to the end of the aluminum boom and leads to a single-line traveler that spans the aft end of the cockpit.

Barlow #23 bronze self-tailing primary winches are mounted on

the sidedeck outboard of the teak cockpit coamings, which are protected from line chafe by stainless-steel rubbing strakes along their top edges. Aluminum T-tracks mounted on the toerails allow the genoa sheet leads to be adjusted. A small utility winch on the starboard cabin trunk serves halyards led aft through rope clutches.

On deck

When you step aboard the Cape Dory 27 you notice that it has the solid feel of a much larger boat. That's due to the boat's heavy displacement, nearly half of which is made up by the encapsulated ballast.

The foredeck is a fairly narrow but clean working space. Chocks with retainer pins lead docklines to a pair of cleats inboard and centered about 3 feet aft of the stem. There is no anchor roller or anchor locker. Some owners have added a roller, but chain and rode would need to be stowed elsewhere and connected when anchoring. *Scotch's Too III* has a pair of solar vents installed on either side of the cleats, but they are not standard. The stainless-steel bow pulpit provides security. Single lifelines supported by stanchions mounted just inside the teak toerail extend aft to the stern pulpit, where they are attached with pelican hooks so they may be removed for dockside access.

A sizable hatch is fitted at the forward end of the cabin trunk where it's over the V-berth and a single dorade vent lies to port of the mast step. Short T-tracks with standup blocks on the cabin-trunk edges provide tight sheeting angles for a small jib.

Aft of the mast, the sea hood for the sliding companionway hatch rests on teak trim that forms the hatch slides. Halyards are led from the mast through

Resources

The Cape Dory Sailboat Owners Association is an active organization and an excellent resource. Specifications, manuals, literature and other information for all Cape Dory models may be found at www.capedory.org.



No serious provision is made on the foredeck for anchoring, at left, but the cleats and fairleads are adequate. The blue non-skid has held up fairly well on *Scotch's Too III*. The toerail and rubbing strake are attractive and useful. Teak cockpit coamings, at right, are indicative of the quality of materials Cape Dory Yachts employed. There's good stowage beneath the seats, which are long enough to lie down on.

a deck organizer to starboard and aft to the rope clutches. Teak grabrails are installed on each side of the aft part of the trunk, but do not extend far enough forward to double as toerails for work at the mast. Three bronze opening ports on each side of the cabin trunk assure good ventilation and light below.

The sidedecks are uncluttered and are wide enough for crew to pass easily between the lower shrouds and the cabin trunk. They extend past the cockpit, where they join the aft deck. A hatch in the aft deck gives access to a storage locker.

In the large and comfortable cockpit, the 75-inch-long seats are suitable for napping or reading while at anchor and the teak coaming provides a short backrest. A full bridge deck adds security in a seaway and both cockpit seats have lockers beneath them. The tiller may be

stowed vertically to clear space when in port. The engine controls are on the port side of the cockpit well.

Belowdecks

The Cape Dory 27 has a traditional interior with plenty of attractive teak. Standing headroom in the saloon is a full 6 feet at the centerline. Teak grabrails are located to port and starboard. The overhead is finished with a fiberglass liner that conceals wiring. Acorn nuts cap the exposed ends of a few through-bolts that secure cabintop fittings. Teak-and-holly cover plates in the sole, which is part of the fiberglass pan, allow access to the bilge.

Some of the boats were equipped with a bulkhead-mounted folding table, but *Scotch's Too III* has a table that mounts on two removable stainless-steel posts. Sockets in the sole and

on the underside of the table are offset from the centerlines of both, so the table can be mounted to extend close over the port settee to serve as navigation space or turned 180 degrees to be on the centerline between the settees for dining.

The electrical panel and electronics are located to port over the small galley, which has a two-burner alcohol stove with a teak cover plate that makes extra countertop area when the stove is not in use. A small icebox is behind the stove and some owners indicate it requires more insulation.

A small stainless-steel sink is fitted to starboard of the companionway and storage compartments are built in below the sink and outboard of it. When the top companionway step and the main step panel are removed, the engine is readily accessible for service.



The galley is partially under the bridge deck and spans the cabin, at left, and the electrical panel and basic electronics fit tidily on the bulkhead. On *Scotch's Too III*, the table fits on stainless-steel posts, either close over the port settee, at right, or centered between both.



Divided by the companionway, the compact galley has an alcohol stovetop to port, at left, and a sink and icebox to starboard. The 6-foot by 6-foot V-berth, at right, is even more commodious with the filler cushion. Teak ceilings covering the hull sides look and feel shippy.

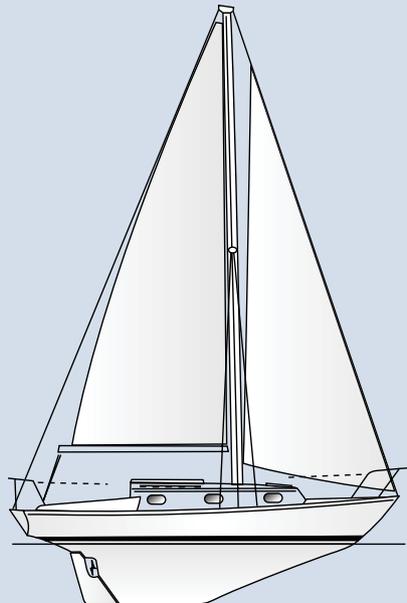
A teak door in the the forward saloon bulkhead provides privacy for the head and the V-berth area. A small head compartment to port is just large enough for the marine toilet, which is mounted facing inboard, but no vanity sink is provided — the galley sink is dual-use. A large hanging locker opposite the head drains to the bilge and can be used for wet gear.

The V-berth is a full 6 feet long and 6 feet wide at its aft end, and a removable insert makes the full width usable for sleeping. Teak ceilings on both sides lend a finished appearance and there is a small storage

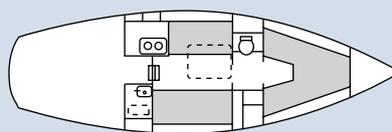


The single-cylinder Yanmar diesel is under and behind the companionway steps. It's a little loud, but it can be started with a hand crank in an emergency.

Cape Dory 27



Designer	Carl Alberg
LOA:	27 feet 1 inch
LWL:	20 feet 0 inches
Beam:	8 feet 6 inches
Draft	4 feet 0 inches
Displacement:	7,500 pounds
Ballast:	3,000 pounds
Sail area :	354 square feet
Sail area/disp. ratio:	14.8
Disp./LWL ratio:	419
Water	10 gallons
Fuel	25 gallons
Holding tank:	6 gallons



compartment in the forepeak with a louvered teak cover.

Under power

Scotch's Too III is powered by a single-cylinder Yanmar YSB8 diesel. A connecting fitting allows a hand crank to be used to start the engine in an emergency. The engine is a bit noisy, as are most one-lungers, but it starts and runs reliably and powers the boat adequately. Phil says it has been relatively trouble-free.

The helm is neutral when powering ahead, when the long full keel keeps the boat tracking straight with little need for corrections with the tiller. There is some prop walk to port in reverse and throttling back doesn't begin to correct it immediately. With some practice it is possible to back under control.

Under sail

We scrubbed our first attempt to go sailing due to a combination of strong winds, spring flooding, and an associated strong current on the river, but the second date proved ideal. We headed out of Limestone Bay Yacht Club onto a gentle Ohio River into winds that varied from 7 to 10 knots. John Kiesel, who sails his Catalina 25, *Naiad IV*, on the river, skipped the chase boat for the under-sail photography, a center-console Carolina Skiff.

After the photography session, I transferred to *Scotch's Too III* to experience the helm. Wind in the lower ranges is not ideal for this boat, but she proved to be a bit quicker than I expected. Going to windward through several tacks we averaged 4 to 5 knots and were able to sail to an apparent



The head has a marine toilet to port and hanging locker to starboard. A privacy door in the main bulkhead closes it off from the saloon but not from the V-berth.

wind angle of around 35 degrees. It appeared to be closer on one tack than the other, but that was likely due to some current effect. The tiller has a nice solid feel and the influence of the full keel is noticeable. Letting the tiller go did not result in any sort of wandering or abrupt course changes. The boat tacked smoothly and came through the wind easily.

Easing the sails and falling off onto a beam reach produced slow but steady acceleration. Our GPS showed a maximum speed of 5.5 knots going across the slight current. We eased sheets a little more and dropped down onto a run, even sailing by the lee with the sails set wing-and-wing for a brief time. The boat was steady and well under control at all times. On each point of sail, the helm was solid and crisp and the boat never showed any sign of tenderness. It's a solid, comfortable sailboat.

Cape Dory 27s are not widely raced, but they should perform to the PHRF rating of around 243. That compares favorably to the Tartan 27 centerboard boat at 243 and to the Pearson Triton, another Alberg design, at 252. Phil races *Scotch's Too III* in the charity regattas and does quite well.

Price and availability

A search found five Cape Dory 27s currently on the market at asking prices from \$7,500 to \$15,800. The average, \$12,420, is a good price for a solid, capable boat. With 277 built, it is likely there will be at least a few on the market at any given time. 

Tom Wells is a contributing editor with Good Old Boat (and he has also earned the honorary title of Troubadour through his musical contributions at boat shows). He and his wife, Sandy, have been sailing together since the 1970s and own and sail a 1979 Tartan 37, HigherPorpoise.

Comments from owners of the Cape Dory 27

"I owned a CD 27 from 1978 until 2009. The build quality was a solid B/B+. The interior fiberglass liner pan made any changes to deck hardware complicated. Electrical wiring was simple, with fuses, not breakers. The hull seemed very solid, the rigging and mast were simple and solid, but the winches were undersized for the 120 percent jib. It was totally underpowered with a Yanmar YSB 8. I always felt confident that the boat could handle any trouble that I got myself into and I loved her salty New England look — a beautifully proportioned boat."

—**John Buchbinder**, Point Judith, Rhode Island, and Brooklyn, New York

"I love how solid she feels. She can stand up to anything that we are going to run into in the Midwest. With winds above 15 knots, we put one reef in the main and still fly the 150 percent genny. As the wind picks up, the genny gets rolled in a bit. What do I like the least? Backing up. With a cutaway full keel, backing up depends more on wind direction than rudder position."

—**Tim Roberts**, Harbor Point, Missouri

"We would tuck in a reef above 20 knots and an occasional second reef above 30 with a few turns on the jib furler, but we always felt in

total control and very confident in the boat's ability to stand up to the conditions. Although we had plenty of sails, the only ones we used were a mainsail with lazy-jacks and two reef points and a 120 percent Yankee on a roller furler. Although the CD 27 did not point as high as the fin-keel/spade-rudder boats because of the full keel and the inability to trim the headsail close, we would regularly hit 6.5 knots or more close reaching and could go to windward pretty well."

—**Stephen Gaal**, Portland, Maine

"The original icebox is practically useless; ice melts in a short time. With the full keel, trying to back under power is nearly impossible — she has a mind of her own. The original electrical system is insufficient for today's needs."

—**Cliff Gates**, Galesville, Maryland

"The boat is quite tender initially, like most narrow full-keel boats, but will dig in and track well at about 12 to 18 degrees of heel. There is a fair but not overwhelming tendency to weather helm, and the tiller is not as light on the hands as some other boats I have handled, but it is responsive and one feels a solid connection to the rudder."

—**Roy Vestrich**, Charlotte, Vermont