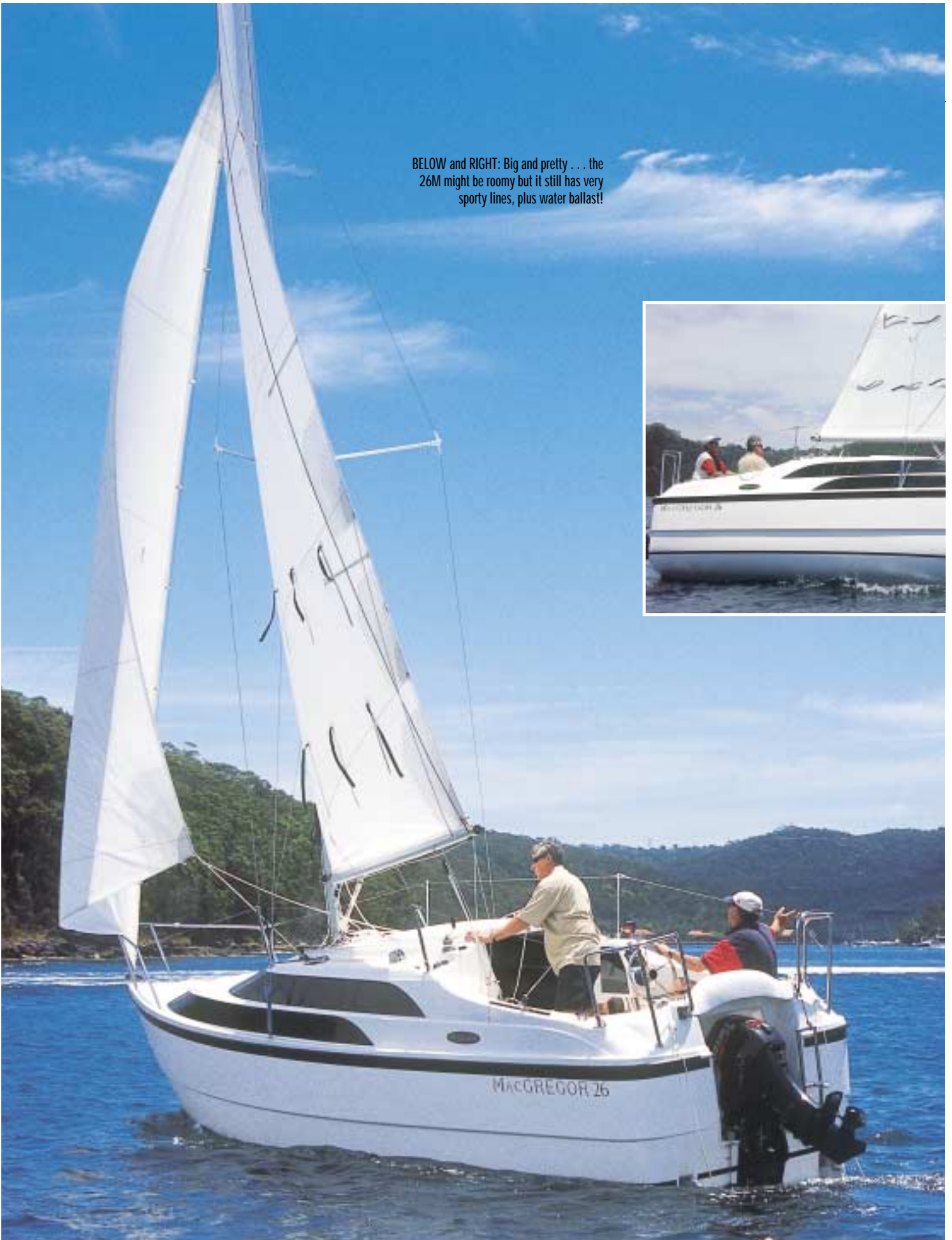


BELOW and RIGHT: Big and pretty . . . the 26M might be roomy but it still has very sporty lines, plus water ballast!



Power and sail



The US-built MacGregor 26s are selling like hotcakes here and overseas, with an amazing 18 sold in Australia in 2002 alone, six of them to *CH* readers. Caroline Strainig checks out the new 26M to see what all the fuss is about.

Is it a sailing boat? Is it a power boat? Just what the heck is it?! Well, actually, the correct term is "power-sailer", but regardless of what you call it the MacGregor 26 is guaranteed to turn heads wherever it goes.

Built in the US, this voluminous and shapely boat is designed to combine power and sail features in a value-for-money package and the result is one of the world's most in-demand boats. Sales of the last model, the MacGregor 26X, topped 5000 and early indications are that the 26M released in 2003 will be just as successful.

Look, layout and sail plan

Sleek lines and bright white gelcoat dominate, as one would expect of a yacht that hails from sunny California. The cockpit is not huge but spacious enough for lounging around with friends on those long lazy afternoons.

The seats are comfortable and foot bracing for the helmsperson good.

The walk-through transom is narrower than the previous model to allow for extra foam flotation, but there is still adequate boarding space next to the 50hp.

Sail-plan-wise, the traveller is low down next to the companionway and halyards and sheets come back to jammers and winches on the cabin top.

A main and jib come as standard. There is a choice of two reefing points but only one reefing line. If you ensure you rig the one you're going to need before you set off, you can reef from the cockpit.

There are no side decks per se and the cabin top comes right down to the gunwales, but it is still easy to step up on to the cabin top and head for'ards.

Down below

Space, space, glorious space. If you're one of the many of us looking for a boat that can accommodate the family in

comfort, the 26M is hard to go past. You can easily imagine spending a weekend on her with spouse and children without filing for a divorce upon your return.

There is a roomy double berth aft under the cockpit, a spacious saloon with two large settees that double as berths, adequate galley, enclosed head (with portable toilet) and a vee-berth for'ards. Saloon standing room is a generous 1.82m.

The layout and hull shape have been altered slightly from the previous model to make it a bit more open and improve sailing performance. This means that the galley has been moved for'ards and the vee-berth is slightly shorter.

The trailer, rigging and launching

An innovative metal pole setup takes the hard yakka out of raising the mast and the rigging process looked not to be too cumbersome, although it was the first time this 26 had hit the water and because of it the whole process was a little more time-consuming than normal. The manufacturer advertises 10 minutes once you have it down pat.

The boat is legal width and light enough to be towed by a six-cylinder car. Hydraulic override brakes come as part of the standard package.



Halyards and sheets come back to jammers on the cabin top.



New Boats: MacGregor 26M



Mum and dad's bed under the cockpit.



A mirror on the galley wall makes the already larger interior look even more spacious.

Launching is a breeze because of the relatively flat bottom, as is retrieving with the powerful outboard – you drive on to the trailer rather than manoeuvring the boat by hand.

The only obvious negative is that the trailer is painted rather than galvanised, which means it is potentially at more risk of rust if the paintwork gets damaged.



Under power the 26M zooms along at up to 17kts.

How she sailed

Well, if you haven't sailed Middle Harbour in Sydney on the inside of The Spit, you ain't seen nothing yet when it comes to fickle winds. Sailing in these semi-sheltered waters surrounded by hills and houses is guaranteed to have you craning your neck at the sails full-time and our outing was no exception.

Speed-wise, in 15kt winds with a reef we hovered between 4-5kts. However, that's really not a fair indication of what the boat can do because wind gusts and shifts had us constantly altering course or easing the main, not to mention the wash from passing power boats. The rack-and-pinion steering and small wheel also took some getting used to and it was easy to oversteer until accustomed to it.

Stiffness-wise, we did need the reef, but the water-ballast system worked well, filling and emptying within minutes. For serious racing or regular sailing in heavy weather I thought some additional fixed ballast would help the boat sail flatter and therefore more efficiently. Check out the options with the distributor if you decide to go this path. More weight would obviously impact on performance under power.

Distributor Phil King has sailed another 26M in varying conditions and said he had found its performance far superior to that of the 26X. In 12-15kts of wind hard-on he had recorded 5.6kts, 5.8kts slightly eased and 7.8kts reaching.

King said the new model also pointed much better than its predecessor, tacking around 80° as opposed to 90°. He attributed this to an improved, more rounded hull shape and the new rotating mast, which altered according to the wind and made the leading edge of the sail much more effective.

Downwind in stronger winds he said the 26's light weight and powerboat underbelly allowed the boat to get up on top of the water and plane, leaving displacement yachts in its wake. In trials in the US in 25-30kts of wind an owner reported the boat achieved 14kts downwind flying an asymmetrical spinnaker.

Power

Under power the 26M excels, cruising at up to 17kts. The 50hp Suzuki engine (an optional extra) is also extremely quiet. A detailed breakdown of fuel consumption at various RPMs is available from King upon request.



Summary

The designers have done a great job in juggling the demands of power and sail, but obviously some tradeoffs have had to be made. For me, the major attraction of the MacGregor 26M lies not in its ability as a sail or power boat but in its versatility. When the kids start whining, the wind

swings to a 25kt howler on the nose, or you just fancy a bit of water-skiing, all you have to do is douse sail, raise the keel and rudders, switch on the 50hp and sit back and watch the world go by at a rate of knots. It's a feeling that even diehard sailing fans could very easily get hooked on.

BIGGEST SELLING POINTS – WHAT THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS

Distributor Phil King of Synergy Yachts: "The MacGregor 26M is an attractive-looking boat offering ease of ownership and exceptional value for money from a time-tested US manufacturer of more than 37 years' standing. The boat is extremely roomy yet easy to tow (1600kg including boat, trailer and motor), launch and retrieve.

"The easily driven hull shape gives the boat speed through the water under power or sail and the rotating mast section allows the boat to point well. The 15° dead-rise allows the boat to motor at over 15kts without the pounding in choppy water experienced in the previous model.

"With the strengthening Aus dollar I believe the 26M is the most affordable trailerable yacht ever to hit the Australian market in this size range."

SPECIFICATIONS

Dimensions: LOA 7.87m, LWL 7.06m, beam 2.36m, draft .30m (minimum)/1.75m (maximum). Mast height above deck 9.12m, cabin headroom 1.82m.

Designer: Roger MacGregor

Builder: MacGregor Yachts Inc, Costa Mesa, Calif. US

Construction material: GRP

Keel: Daggerboard

Limit of positive stability: 112°

Engine: Suzuki 50hp four-stroke (extra)

Fuel-tank capacity: 2 x 30 litres = 60 litres, but motor usually come standard with a single 23ltr tank

Engine capacity: Up to 50hp

Sails: Main 15.8sqm, jib 12.1sqm, genoa 19.1sqm, asymmetrical spinnaker 32.5sqm.

Deck hardware: Ronstan blocks, rope clutches, jammers and triple-deck organisers, Lewmar winches (No 6, two of)

Hatches, windows and ventilation: Fixed polycarbonate windows, front hatch (opening), main hatch (sliding)

Standard radio: GME VHF or 27 Meg with 2.5m aerial (optional)

Standard electronics/electrics: 12V 80 AH battery, four interior lights, six-gang-fused switch panel, steaming light, navigation lights

Mast: Alloy, non-tapered, rotating

Rigging: SS wire, lowers, uppers

Headsail furler: Schaeffer Snap Furl or Profurl (optional)

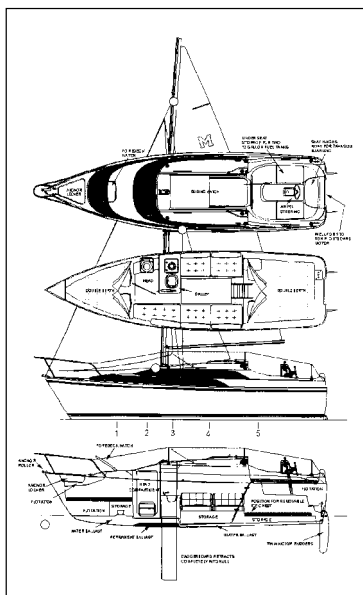
Wheel/tiller steering: Wheel, rack and pinion

Anchor: N/A

Water-tank capacity: 56 litres

Hot and cold water: Cold

Saltwater to galley: No



Stove: Origo 2000 (alcohol/methylated spirits, single burner)

Refrigeration: 60-litre removable ice box

Options on test boat: 50hp Suzuki outboard, Suunto 95mm bulkhead compass

Price: \$58,980

Delivery time: two weeks (stock boats), 12 weeks (ex-factory)

Australian distributor: Synergy Yachts (Australia), 36 Kingsford Street, Fairy Meadow NSW 2519, ph 0409 048 175, (fx) 02 42 259 954, email synergy_yachts@ozemail.com.au, website www.MacGregorexport.com

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