



Devoti D-One

When Luca Devoti designs a new dinghy class, the world pays attention, and the new D-1 is certainly eye-catching. **Andy Rice** took her for a sail...

Does the sailing world really need another dinghy? Especially a singlehanded one? In the past 20 years so many boats have come along to try and grab a piece of the pie, only to gain some foothold in a corner of the country, often just further diluting an already diluted market.

But strangely, the one sector of the singlehanded market that has gone almost untouched is the heavyweight division. No wonder that the Finn and the Phantom have such keen followings in the UK. If you weigh over 90kg, where else are you going to go, if you prefer to sit in, rather than stand on the side of boats? The only successful heavyweight singlehanders to be launched in recent times have all been trapeze boats – the RS600 and 700, and the Musto Skiff.

Clearly this was also the conclusion of Luca Devoti. He won the Olympic silver

medal in the Finn behind Iain Percy at the Sydney 2000 Games, and his are the Finns that have won every Olympic medal in the class since 1996. Devoti Boats were also behind the success of the Musto Skiff, but the Italian has been hankering to produce a singlehander more accessible to the large sailor of moderate skill, rather than super-athletic ability.

And so the concept of a new hiking singlehander for big boys started to form. In the summer of 2008 Devoti started to develop what would become – seven prototypes later – the Devoti D-One.

First impressions

I sailed the first production boat on Lake Garda in early July, having seen one of the final prototypes at the Dinghy Show back in March. It was a striking boat, a strange blend of the traditional and the modern, but I wasn't greatly enamoured by the look of the hiking wings. They just

looked a bit stubby. 'Why don't they extend to the transom?' I asked Devoti at the time. 'Because I want people to be able to throw them into the back of the car,' was his response. ▶

Specification

Design:	Phil Morrison/Devoti Sailing
LOA:	4.23m
Beam:	(hull only) 1.48m (min/max wings) 2.1-2.3m
Weight:	(hull & bowsprit) 65kg (all-up inc mast, wings, foils, sails) 88kg
Sail Area:	Mainsail 11sq m Gennaker 15sq m
Price:	£9,990

RIGHT We didn't have a GPS for the boat test, but Devoti says he's clocked speeds of 16 knots, and I wouldn't doubt it.



Fair enough. The whole idea of the D-One is for it to be car-toppable. Stripped of the hiking wings the hull is just 60kg. The two-piece carbon mast is no longer than the hull, which measures 4.23m long. So for travelling this really is a compact package.

Among many innovations on this boat, the most striking is the use of a free-standing mast to support an asymmetric gennaker. This is born partly out of Devoti's aim to make this boat as easy to rig as possible, and also his understanding and love of the automatic, gust-responsive nature of a una-rig such as the Finn's.

'Have you ever thought why a rig supported by wires is so difficult to tack or to get moving from a standing start?' Devoti asked me. Err, no I hadn't. So he explained that to achieve a balanced rig for sailing at speed, you have to accept a chunk of weather helm at low speed. I can't speak for the RS700 because I haven't sailed it, but there is certainly an

art to getting an RS600 or Musto Skiff safely through the eye of the wind and on to the new tack.

As Devoti explained, when you release the mainsheet on a bendy free-standing rig such as on a Finn or D-One, the mast goes upright, the front of the sail deepens, and just when you need a load of drive in the front of the sail for acceleration, that's exactly what you get.

On the water

So that's the theory. How about the proof of the pudding? Setting out for an evening sail from Torbole as the breeze was dying to a Force 3 or 2, I immediately felt comfortable in the D-One. Having pushed the daggerboard and dagger-rudder down into their cases (a bit more of an effort than I would have liked, and something that requires further but straightforward enough alteration), sailing the boat in a straight line was a piece of cake.

The rudder is beautifully balanced,

finger-light to steer, in stark contrast to a Laser or Topper for example. I've never sailed a Finn, but Devoti tells me that sailing the D-One gives me some insight into what a Finn is like to sail upwind. Aesthetically the D-One bears many similarities to a Finn when travelling into the breeze. That big sail plan, stretched across almost the full-length of the hull, with a mast carried at a rakish angle, the boom sheeted close to the leeward deck, the full-width mainsheet traveller, and the high hiking-position.

The low boom and the high hiking-position are evidence that the D-One is no dedicated follower of fashion, but Devoti is adamant about the practicalities of his return to a more traditional aesthetic. I've always marvelled at how those lithe Europe sailors and strapping Finn blokes managed to wriggle their way under their low booms, but having now done the same in the D-One I'm less in awe. It's another function and naturally occurring benefit of the una rig. As soon as you release the mainsheet tension, the mast pops forward, the boom pops up and you have room to move under and through to the new windward side. If you can get under a Laser boom, you'll have no problem with the D-One. And as Devoti indicated earlier, the rudder remains balanced and stalling through a tack is a non-issue.

Although I didn't sail the D-One in more than a Force 4, it was enough to give me the sense that it's possible to sail the boat upwind quite happily without having to hike the hell out of it. Whereas with a Laser or a Topper you have to keep on working the boat in big wind and waves merely to guarantee making headway, the D-One is so well balanced and the rig so automatically depowering that you keep the mainsheet sheeted and just blob on the wing.

However, if you do want to hike, then it really isn't too bad either – as far as hiking goes. As a man with dodgy knees, Luca Devoti has paid a lot of attention to the ideal hiking position. The wings are angled for comfortable hiking, there is a Finn-style adjustable-length toe strap which can be altered while sitting out, and the high position means you can even sail the boat heeled to windward without dragging your bum in the water.

Sheeting on the 11sq m mainsail was hard work, at least to get it sheeted in as hard as Devoti was telling me to from the coach boat. 'Cleave the mainsheet and play the traveller,' he told me. So I did. This is not a vang-sheeting boat – i.e. you can't just wang the kicker on and play the

mainsail to keep the boat flat. The vang would never be able to replicate the high loads of the mainsheet, so instead the aim is to set the mainsheet and make the traveller your primary control.

This didn't come naturally to me, but actually what I found is that the rig seems to do all the work for you. I ended up hanging on to the cleated mainsheet as a hiking support and just steered the boat. The mast and the sail (for which Devoti gives great credit to Richard Lovering of Hyde Sails) did all the work for me. It seemed to go just fine in 'set and forget' mode, although I'm sure in competition you'd soon find things that wanted to tweak for that last ounce of speed.

Because sailors like setting up their boats differently, Devoti has built the boat to accommodate a few areas where you can play around with things. For example you can vary mast heel position, mast deck position, and the fore and aft position of the daggerboard case. This, plus the two-position weight equalisation system, should mean that the boat incorporates a competitive weight range difference of at least 10 to 15kg.

The narrow-or-wide wing threshold is at 86kg body weight, with the heavier sailors pushing in their wings by 10cm each side, while the lighter sailors carry 8kg of lead correctors beneath the

traveller in the centre of the boat. This might seem a coarse system by comparison with some other weight equalisation systems that we've seen, but my experience of the 49er weight equalisation was that it worked reasonably well and that there are some who regret removing it from the Olympic skiff now that crew weights are becoming ever more focused on a single number.

At my body weight (slightly over the 86kg threshold, but I'm not telling you how much!), there was plenty of the power in the boat even though I was 'cheating' by sailing on max wings. So my guess would be that the competitive range for this boat will start in the early 80kgs and finish just short of the big 100.

Off the wind

The provision of a 15sq m kite downwind means that heavy bodyweight is still justified in anything more than a Force 3. Even in a Force 3 I found the fastest way downwind was 'arcing up' the boat as high as possible and building the apparent wind as much as possible, hiking the boat about as hard off the breeze as into it. We didn't have a GPS for the boat test, but Devoti says he's clocked speeds of 16 knots, and I wouldn't doubt it.

Hoisting the kite was easy, either



ABOVE Sailing the boat in a straight line upwind was a piece of cake.

LEFT The low boom and the high hiking-position are evidence that the D-1 is no dedicated follower of fashion

DINGHY TEST



arm-over-arming it while steering with one knee, or in the fruitier breeze sitting on the wing and one-arm hoisting. Gybing was easy to get wrong in the early stages, resulting in a few capsizes. But with the sealed mast the boat did a good job of sitting on its side while I pulled the kite back into its chute, and then hopping on to the mast and over on to the centreboard. Once you get the hang of the boat and the rate of turn right, gybing becomes pretty straightforward, although doing it with any kind of grace would take more practice.

Upwind and downwind the boat was very dry, but on a beam reach there's a load of spray, probably not as wet as a Laser but not far short. This is partly due to the full-bowed sections of the D-One, which Phil Morrison designed into the hull to make it a genuinely seaworthy boat. A boat for all weathers and all seasons, much like the Finn.

The verdict

But then there's the price: £9,990, that's a lot of money. Then again other Devoti

production boat. He hasn't skimped on fittings, it's beautifully fitted out with Harken, and everything works.

I would say the appeal of this boat would be for any large sailor who wants a moderately challenging boat for the minimum of hassle. Getting one of these boats off the top of a car and fully rigged ready for racing really shouldn't take much more than 15 minutes. The motto for this boat is 'Putting the fun back into sailing'. In terms of maximum fun for minimum hassle, this boat does a damn good job. Aesthetically, on shore it's not the prettiest boat, but on the water when it's actually sailing it looks the part. And it certainly sails the part. ■

boats such as the Finn and the Musto Skiff have never been cheap, but their owners have found them to be high-quality boats that last a long time, with very few warranty issues.

Devoti has prototyped the D-One to death, to the point where he is confident of pinning his reputation on the



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ABOVE LEFT The whole idea of the D-1 is for it to be car-toppable. Stripped of the hiking wings the hull is just 60kg.

ABOVE RIGHT You can vary the mast heel and mast deck position. This, plus the two-position weight equalisation system, should mean that the boat incorporates a weight range difference of at least 10 to 15kg.

Answer Back

From Luca Devoti

Throughout the history of racing dinghies, a few designs simply stand out as 'sweet'. Upwind, the Finn is that kind of boat, and when my partner Roman Tepy and I set about creating the D-One, we were determined to capture that same sweetness while adding more speed and excitement, both upwind and down. We weren't interested in following the latest fashions or fads; instead of the ultra low freeboard popular today, which creates a wet and difficult-to-sail boat, the D-One has more freeboard and a better hiking position, making it more comfortable and forgiving while being faster than any other hiking singlehander. Instead of moulded-in wings and a fixed bowsprit, we chose to make the D-One as simple to travel with as she is to sail; a fully retractable bowsprit, removable wings small enough to pop in a car's boot, a hull light enough to easily toss on a car's roof, and a two piece mast. Instead of the resin and glass used by other dinghy builders, we opted to build the D-One mostly out of carbon, ensuring decades of life for each boat, and stiffness that simply cannot be matched by glassfibre boats. While her looks are certainly 'different,' they are a result of our decision to keep the compromises out of the D-One, and a few minutes with the D-One will bring smiles to any sailor's face; form following function is a beautiful concept.

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Finn

Olympic singlehander with a strong circuit in the UK and beyond.

LOA: 4.5m
Beam: 1.47m
Hull weight: 145kg
Sail area: 10.6sq m
Guide price: £13,399



Phantom

Popular heavyweight singlehander with a strong UK circuit.

LOA: 4.42m
Beam: 1.64m
Sail Area: 9.75sq m
Weight: 61kgs
Guide price: £6,849