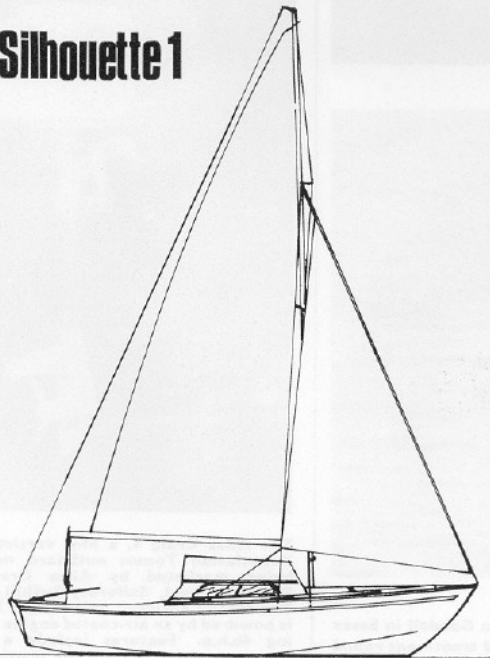


# a tale of two Tuckers

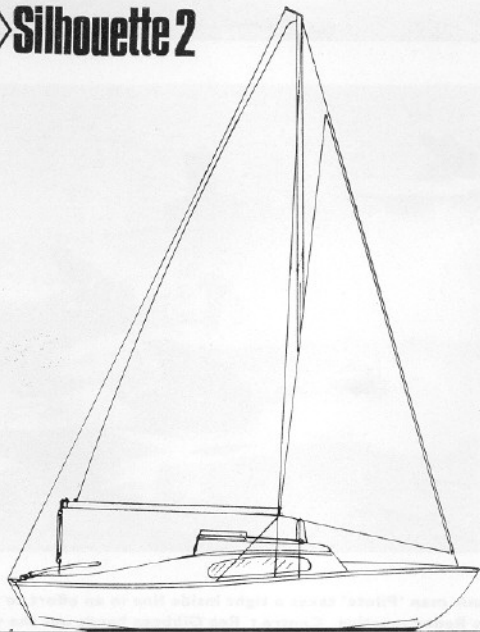


Caprice I

➤ Silhouette 1



➤ Silhouette 2



WHEN ROBERT TUCKER designed his first *Silhouette* cabin cruiser he had in mind a pocket yacht which would be cheap and easy for the amateur to build from plans. That was in 1953. Today there are more than 2,000 *Silhouettes* in circulation and the demand for this remarkable little boat is such that readers still ask us for copies of our test on the original craft.

How did this happen? Robert Tucker feels his original design came out at a fortunate time—it caught the first of the flood tide in favour of small cabin yachts and the use of plywood as hull material. The hard chine hull form was one which an amateur builder could tackle with a very fair chance of success.

The first *Silhouette* was a boat 16ft. 6in. overall with a 6ft. 1in. beam and a draught of 1ft. The yard price for a complete boat with sails was £250 in those days and the home builder, working from the plans and buying timber rather than a kit, could build it for as little as £85.

Another feature which had a strong appeal was the use of twin bilge keels in place of a central keel—not a new idea, but Tucker was probably the first to adopt it commercially. The great advantage of this arrangement is that a twin keel boat will stay upright when aground and is much more easily handled when brought ashore for refitting or trailing. Comparative trials showed that the twin keeler would sail to windward almost, if not quite, as well as a single fin boat and, given sufficient beam, her



Caprice 2

## ▷ Silhouette 4



## ▷ Caprice 3



stability was quite adequate. The first Silhouette had good accommodation for two adults and had a double, or broken, sheerline, the fore and cabin side decks being raised above the level of the stern and cockpit side decks.

The success of the first Silhouette encouraged Tucker to produce a slightly larger version and in 1955 he drew the Mark II. Dimensions were increased to 17ft. 3in. x 6ft. 7in. x 1ft. 8in. and the profile was altered to give the boat the distinctive serpentine sheer.

To increase stability the Mark II was given a central ballast keel between the two bilge keels and the rudder was mounted on a separate skeg under the stern. With all this ironmongery beneath her hull, the Mark II Silhouette was not a fast boat but could be safely cruised offshore and, according to the designer, there have been only three recorded capsize in the history of the class. Although the Mark II was again designed for the home builder, yard built versions were produced by Hurley Marine Ltd.—the original price was £265 for the first wooden Mark II's. Later it was brought out in glass fibre and is now priced at around £525. The Mark I is no longer in production but sail numbers reached 80 while the Mark II has passed the 2,000 level.

A Mark III Silhouette has now been drawn up by the designer and it is intended to show this version, built by Hurley Marine, at the next Boat Show at Earls Court. With the same basic dimensions as the Mark II, it will have a round-bilge, glass fibre hull with two ballasted bilge keels. With offshore racing in mind he has also designed a Mark IV Sports version called the S20 which will have a hard chine ply hull with increased overhangs giving it an overall length of 20ft. and a larger sail area. It, too, will have ballasted bilge keels in the form of steel fins with cast iron bulbs. Costing around £650, the S20 will also make its first appearance at the Boat Show.

Having designed the Mark II Silhouette in 1955, Robert Tucker turned his attention in the following year to designing a slightly larger boat which, by eliminating the central ballast keel, narrowing the beam, and placing extra weight in the bilge keels was designed to have a speedier performance particularly to windward. This was the Mark I Caprice, a hard chine plywood boat which measured 18ft. 4in. x 6ft. 1in. x 1ft. 9in. The two keels weighed 190lb. each, there was no central keel, and the rudder was mounted behind a skeg. The original building price was £297.

The Caprice proved to be fast and a sea-kindly boat, but it did not oust the Silhouette in popularity. In 1961 Tucker produced a Mark II Caprice in which he increased the cabin space by extending the coach roof on to the foredeck. Overhangs were also shortened to give a longer waterline, and the weight of the now-asymmetrical bilge keels increased to 308lb. apiece. The Mark II was offered at £398 complete and today costs £550. Tucker states that it shows a 10% increase in speed on the Mark I. Both Caprices are suitable for amateur building from plans. Plans for the Mark I cost £6 6s.—the same as those for the Mark II Silhouette—and the Mark II plans cost £9 9s.

At the 1967 Boat Show further editions of the Caprices are to be introduced including a Mark III version—a round bilge twin keel boat in glass fibre which will cost around £750. A Mark IV version, named the Capriccio, has also been evolved for the connoisseur who is interested in offshore racing. The Capriccio measures 21ft. 8in. overall, 6ft. 4in. beam, and 2ft. 6in. draught. It has a seven-eighths rig of 137sq. ft. on a hard chine, ply hull weighing 1800lb. including the twin keels, and will have only two berths but includes a large galley and chart space.

## Capriccio



Silhouette I

