

Impala

If you want close one-design yacht racing, one of the most active UK classes is a 28-footer that can be bought for less than £10,000, as **Rupert Holmes** discovers

While the Hunter Impala is not a new class – it was designed in the late 1970s – it is undergoing an impressive renaissance, with a growing one-design fleet that saw 15 boats at the 2013 nationals in Weymouth and as many as 20 expected at this year's event at the same venue.

Many of the new owners in the class are young people attracted by the close tactical racing – events are frequently won and lost by only a few boat lengths – combined with affordable prices. A race-ready boat can be found for under £10,000 and many change hands for significantly less, although the best boats can command £14,000. Many boats in the fleet, including all but two of the eight Hamble-based boats, are co-owned, which keeps running costs in check and helps to facilitate finding crew.

As well as competitive one-design and IRC racing, this 28ft yacht is also one you can take offshore, whether racing or cruising. A surprising number of owners combine both types of sailing, with one boat from Liverpool completing a successful cruise to Norway in 2011. The most successful boats in the fleet have also been known to take cruising seriously – for instance, Robert Boalch's

'Imelda', nationals winner in both 2012 and 2013, has also cruised to the Scilly Islands with his family on board. Other boats have cruised as far afield as Bermuda.

Concept

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

When new in 1977, the David Thomas design was seen as being lightweight, but without the eccentricities of its IOR-optimised contemporaries. As a result it has stood the test of time well, although the hull has less form stability than newer designs. While the keel doesn't have a large bulb, it does benefit from a lead shoe.

Construction was advanced for its day, but used robust materials that make the Impala a stronger vessel than many of the same generation. The bunk fronts that extend along much of the boat's length serve a dual purpose – they are also a key structural component that enhances longitudinal stiffness. Extensive use of woven rovings in place of the then-popular chopped strand mat helped to contribute further strength and stiffness, while keeping weight down.

Three of the later boats built were fitted with a winged keel, which provides more righting moment but doesn't conform to one-design rules. The rudders of early boats turned out to be a weak point and a number broke. The Mark 2 version is both stronger and gives enhanced control when sailing near the edge.

The addition of a single-cylinder Yanmar 1GM inboard diesel engine has done much to enhance the popularity of the class, although there are still a few boats with an outboard in a well. With the addition of corrector weights these can race in the one-design fleet.

Deck layout and rig

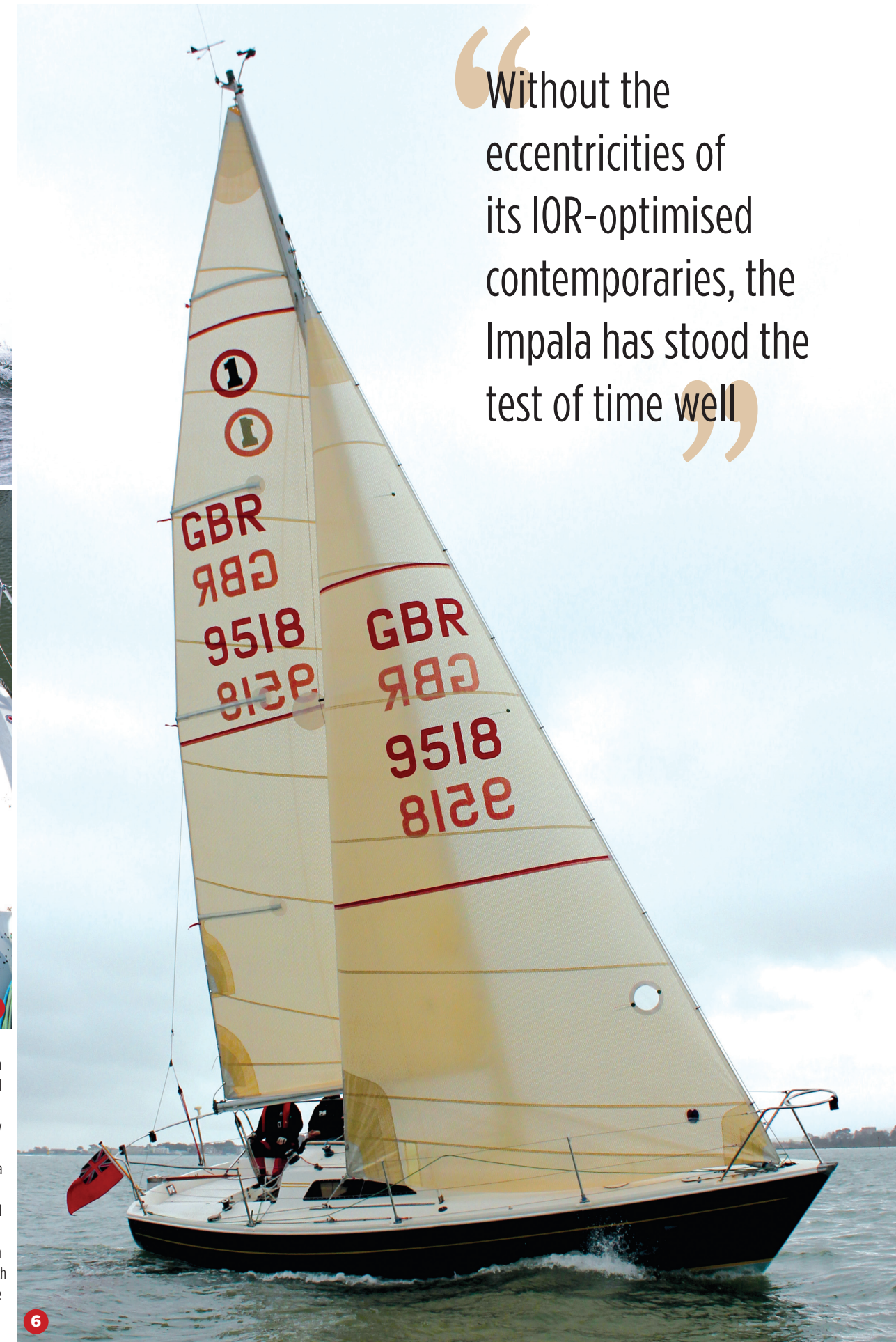
★★★★★☆☆☆☆

The simple fractional rig has single swept-back spreaders and is easy to tweak, yet appears to be bullet proof – failure of the spar is almost unknown. A narrow sheeting base allows the use of large (up to 140 per cent) overlapping genoas in light airs.

Unlike many cruiser-racers, the number of different levels in the cockpit is kept to a minimum, with the helm able to cross the boat in tacks and gybes by walking over the top of the lazarette lockers. This, combined with the wide side decks, makes it easy to move around the boat in manoeuvres. By the standards



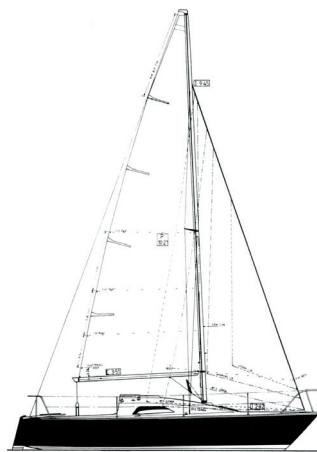
1 The boat is much better mannered downwind in a blow than its IOR-inspired contemporaries 2 Deck layouts are generally easy to update 3 The interior has impressive space for a raceboat of this size 4 Mainsheet trim is critical to keeping the boat on its feet upwind 5 A common change is to fit a full-width mainsheet traveller 6 The fractional rig is robust yet easy to tweak



“Without the eccentricities of its IOR-optimised contemporaries, the Impala has stood the test of time well”

SPECIFICATIONS

- LOA** 8.56m
- Beam** 2.82m
- Displacement** 2,520kg
- Mainsail** 21.5sq m
- Genoa** 20.1sq m
- Spinnaker** 38sq m
- www.impala28.co.uk





of cruiser-racers, the foredeck is also largely unobstructed and there's a large anchor locker with double doors right forward.

Our test boat has a largely original deck layout, with just a few key changes, but others have been brought up to date, largely by replacing lines led to clutches with efficient purchase systems led to individual cleats. Other common changes include a full width

previously raced a Sonata, but was attracted by the fact he could stand up inside the Impala and by the convenience of the inboard diesel engine. He keeps the boat in Poole, using it occasionally for cruising but primarily for racing, including offshore events. 'Happy's' sails are by Sanders, while Doyle, Westaway, OneSails and Banks are also popular sailmakers in the class.

ABOVE Close-hauled in up to 10-12 knots of wind the boat handles beautifully with large number 1 genoa

boat would certainly have felt stiffer with a full complement of crew.

With the sail plan well balanced the Impala is a joy to helm, with a positive feel. As the rudder loads up you get plenty of warning before it loses grip on the water. In flat water around 6 to 6.2 knots upwind is achieved by the top boats in the fleet, with the rest only very marginally slower.

Downwind the Impala's well-balanced hull shape doesn't suffer from the vices associated with the many IOR inspired designs of its era and most owners have stories of hitting 13-14 knots or more in a strong breeze. In lighter airs the one-design spinnaker is relatively small, so some owners have opted for a larger sail for use when racing in handicap fleets.

“A race-ready boat can be found for under £10,000 and many change hands for significantly less”

mainsheet traveller and adding cars for a No. 3 jib inside the shrouds. The boat was designed at the outset for the genoa sheets to be cross-winch to allow the sail to be easily trimmed from the windward rail.

Under sail


★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Our test boat, 'Happy', has been owned by John McQuillan for eight years. Like a number of other owners in the class he

Upwind and on reaching courses, the most obvious difference compared to modern high stability raceboats is that the mainsheet trimmer is constantly at work, even in the smallest gusts and lulls, tweaking the power generated by the sail so that the boat is always on its feet but never over-powered. There's a 500kg crew weight limit and it's certainly helpful to have six people on the rail in a good blow. We therefore suffered a little during the test having only four people on board and the

Accommodation

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

The Impala has a practical interior, with maximum headroom of a touch under 1.8m, a double forecabin separated from the saloon by a compact, but self-contained heads compartment. Immediately aft of the main bulkhead are the galley and nav station areas. The navigation area centres around a large fold-down chart table that maximises seating space in the saloon when stowed. 

The main section of the saloon has a pair of super-long settee/quarter berths, above and outboard of which is a pair of folding pilot berths. The latter have been converted by some owners to additional easily accessed stowage, however, there's already good stowage elsewhere, including under all the bunks and a small hanging locker in the passageway between the saloon and the forecabin.

Much of the interior joinery can be easily removed, which facilitates refinishing the interior woodwork of a boat with a tired interior, and the vinyl headlinings are similarly easy to replace.

Verdict



While the Impala may not excel in every one of the individual areas, it is incredible value for a very versatile boat with the benefit of close one-design racing. The active class association also helps owners to keep costs down – for instance travel bursaries, including loan of road trailers and towing vehicles, are offered for boats that have to travel more than 100 miles to the national championships. A frequently used and fully-race specified boat can be run by two co-owners for around £2,500 per year each.

In addition to the growing south coast racing fleet, others are emerging in Plymouth, on the River Severn and elsewhere, including a fleet of 12 regular competitors in Hong Kong. With an IRC rating of around 0.889, Impalas also score enviable results in handicap fleets. With 155 Impalas built over a six-year period, there's scope for many more to return to the racing arena. ■

RIGHT The one design spinnaker is small by modern standards, but some boats have added a larger one for IRC racing



COMPARISONS



Sigma 33

Larger, heavier and more expensive than the Impala, but another one-design that rates well under IRC and benefits from the option of entering Category 2 races such as the Rolex Fastnet

LOA	9.9m
LWL	8.0m
Beam	3.2m
Draught	1.7m
Displacement	4,000kg
Ballast	1,680kg



Laser 28

In many ways a very similar concept to the Impala, but a lighter and slightly more recent design, with a more modern interior, but without the attraction of class racing

LOA	8.66m
LWL	7.19m
Beam	2.89m
Draught	1.52m
Displacement	1,790kg
Mainsail	19.95sq m
Headsail	13.94sq m

ANSWER BACK

From: Jo Lloyd, class captain

2014 is the Impala 28's 35th anniversary year. Right from the first launch in 1979 the Impala has literally been a winner both on and off the racecourse. Today, Impalas are still very affordable, very competitive and sheer, unadulterated good fun to sail. Impalas become much loved by their owners: two boats bought in 1979 remain with their original owning families and 20-year-plus ownership isn't uncommon in the class. That's why Impala owners regularly hear: 'I wish I'd never sold mine' and variations on 'I hate you lot; you're unbeatable.'

Our Nationals are in July, there are affordable 'ready to race' boats for sale on the class website and we'd love to see as many Impalas as possible on the start line. So if you can't beat us, join us!

Contact: www.impala28.co.uk