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**By Land
Not by Sea** Chesapeake Light
Craft Teardrop



CHESAPEAKE LIGHT CRAFT TEARDROP

by **Tom Bowdler**

John C. Harris, the “boss” at Chesapeake Light Craft (CLC), designed and built his first boat at age 14. CLC began shipping kits in 1994 and have now manufactured over 30,000 which have been sent to builders all over the world. Their kits enable assembling bits of wood into a functional and beautiful shape and the wood-epoxy construction method results in boats that look like works of sculpture and can last for generations.





In 2014 Mr. Harris found the concept of a teardrop camper irresistible, so compact and light that it could be towed behind his Mini Cooper. He asked himself, “what if we take the same

boat building materials and techniques we’ve been refining for 25 years...and build a teardrop trailer...and the same sculptured approach that we bring to boat design?” I visited the result at their headquarters in Annapolis, MD recently and here is my report.

The first impression was over the top; a sculpted expanse of shiny varnished okoume plywood shaped as a modernistic version of a 30’s or 40’s teardrop trailer. The woodworker in me was impressed. But since our teardrops are small, function and space utilization are more important than beauty so we’ll dig deeper.

John designed the cabin around a 60”x80” queen size mattress with the intent that two adults up to 6’6” in height “can stretch out in great luxury”. At 6’ tall I had plenty of room both laying down and in the sitting position and the large doors made getting in and out very comfortable. The CLC display model is decked out with many interior amenities including a 12-volt electrical system with LED lights, charging ports,

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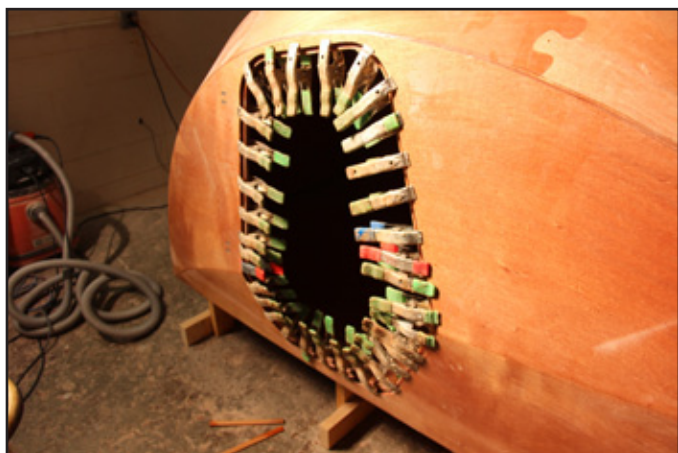
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THE BUILDING PROCESS



switch panel, stereo with speakers, plastic paddle fans and a fantastic fan in the roof vent. Coupled with the “mushroom vents” at the four corners, significant airflow for ventilation could eliminate the need for air conditioning except in the hottest

climates. The walls are lined with mini closed cell foam for insulation and a comfortable padded effect.

The galley is placed traditionally under the gas strut assisted rear hatch. There is an



optional shelving unit available which provides organization and copious amounts of storage for galley items while leaving a 19"x60" flat workspace available for meal prep and cooking. The display unit has a cutting board and single burner butane stove on this surface. A 12-volt deep cycle battery which powers the trailer is tucked under the paper towel roll holder. It is apparent that this trailer was designed by boating people who are used to making the most of limited space and employing materials and parts meant to withstand wet conditions.

Along that line the fit and sealing of the doors and hatch should be mentioned. The latches activate metal rods which engage metal receivers drawing the movable panels tightly against robust weather stripping. A prototype was towed across the U.S. in stormy conditions with no leaks!

What do you get with the complete kit? All the wood parts are cut on CLC's CNC router machine from marine grade okoume plywood and all fiberglass, epoxy and copper stitching wire is included. Door and galley latch assemblies, hinges, acrylic windows, bezel for the roof hatch and a spiral bound illustrated step by step shop manual come with the kit. CLC is working on a construction video since all the steps to build the cabin were recorded while it was being assembled. A slot-together plywood female mold to form the roof curves is part of the package. They also sell a wood only kit or you can buy just the plans to truly do-it-yourself.

The main item not included is the trailer on



which the cabin will be mounted. I was told that they started with a Harbor Freight trailer then worked with the Trailex company to design a trailer specifically for this application. They personally use, recommend and sell Trailex trailers. A significant advantage is its aluminum construction preventing rust formation. Just about any trailer that would accommodate the weight and size of the cabin could be utilized.

Other options include the kitchen shelving module, tongue box, roof rack for boats or bikes, and interior foam insulation lining. John told me that they probably won't stock electrical system components though a list of them and a wiring diagram may be available. Marine grade components were used on the display model and RV versions of them can be sourced by builders at much less expense. Mr. Harris says that CLC will encourage builders to personalize their trailers but that structural modifications to the basic monocoque structure are not advised. They are considering build-your-own classes at their factory for the teardrop like they do for their boat kits!

When evaluating a trailer, I like to go through an imaginary day of use and in doing so I discovered some areas that I would want to improve were I traveling in the CLC teardrop. There is no storage for clothing or supplies other than in the galley. They could be carried in the tow vehicle or, if like me you are not 6'8" tall, there is room at the foot of the bed for plastic containers or soft luggage. There is a shelf on the interior side of the galley wall

and that could be supplemented by cabinets or storage nets that an enterprising builder could add. There is not room in the galley for a cooler which CLC suggests placing in the tongue box or the tow vehicle could house it. The galley hatch does not employ a strip-type hinge and there is a separation on the top and sides when it is open so meal preparation in inclement weather could be a challenge. An EZ Up or 30 second tent that many teardroppers carry would easily solve that.

Overall I am quite impressed with this Chesapeake Light Craft teardrop trailer. I enjoyed my visit to CLC and my chat with John Harris and wish them great success with this venture. Please visit their website www.clcboats.com for much more information and photographs of the building process and a gallery of the completed trailer. You might even be enticed to build one of their beautiful boats to carry on the roof rack of your teardrop.

