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"Fun to sail, easily trailed, and big enough to live aboard for a fortnight"

PBO USED BOAT TEST Secondhand price guide: £2,000 – £3,000

John Mills bought his Pandora on a whim, but this inexpensive, slim-hulled classic has exceeded his expectations – perhaps because, as David Harding finds out, she was the lovechild of a true pioneer...

AT a time when production cruising yachts are being built by the thousand and looking ever more alike, the Pandora is a reminder of how volume building in glassfibre began more than 40 years ago. Her designer, the late E G Van de Stadt, was one of the pioneers in the new material, having established a reputation in Holland for innovative design and the creative use of plywood. "He did wonderful things with cold-moulded ply in conjunction with Cees Bruynzeel," said Alan Bourdon, who knew him for 40 years through his involvement with Southern Ocean Shipyard and Dehler Yachts.


Van de Stadt's wooden designs – many of which he built at his own yard in Zaandam – were among the first to sport canoe bodies, spade rudders and fin keels, features he also incorporated in his early glassfibre designs like the Pionier 9. "That boat was so well designed for GRP, while most others were designed like wooden boats built in glass" said Bourdon. "Van de Stadt was both an artist and a boat-builder, who understood the material and used it as it was intended to be used."

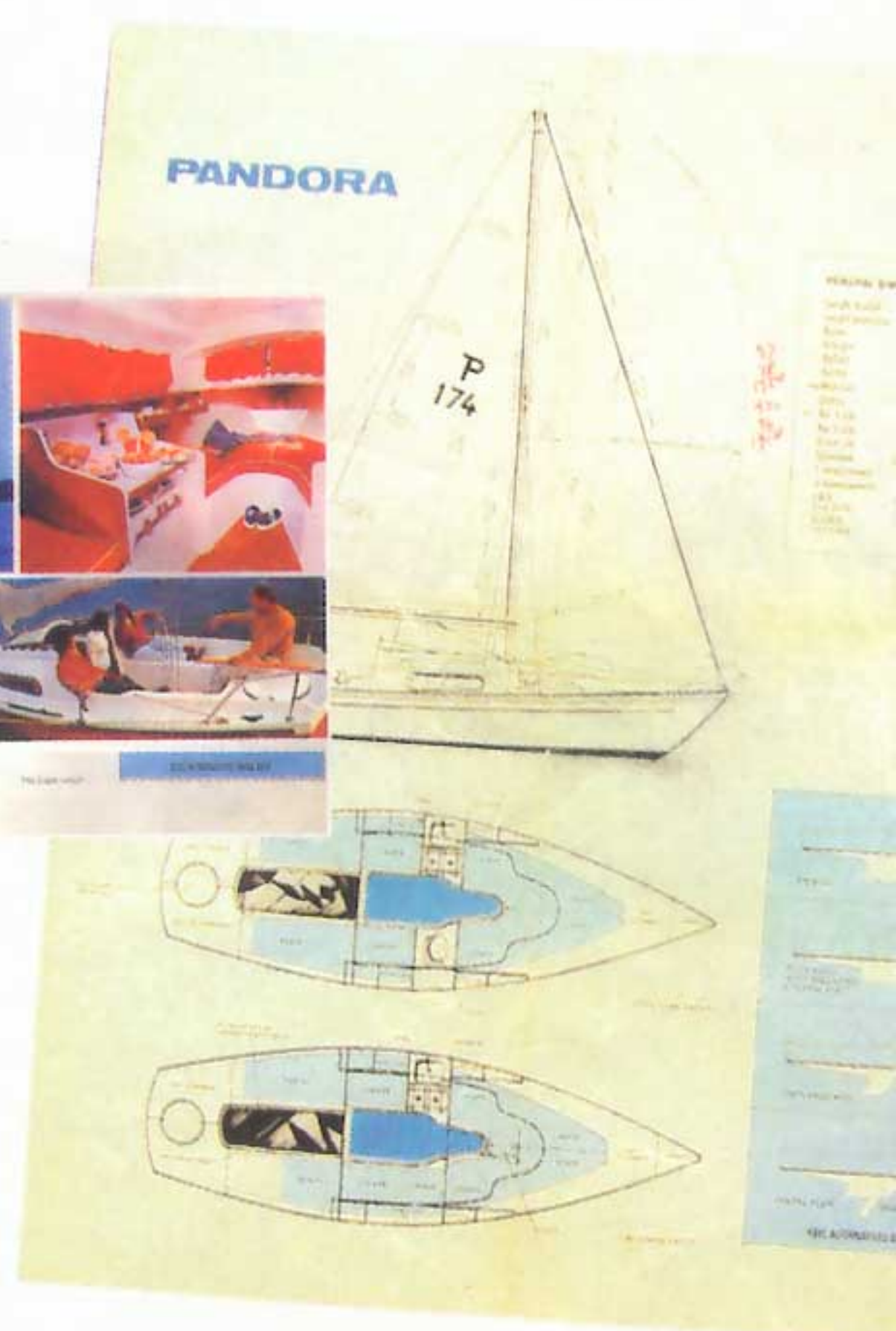
Although many of his designs started life in England, the Pandora was first built in the Netherlands in the mid-'60s as the Randmeer. Around 200 were launched before she came to England in 1967, produced by Grimsby Plastics and

called the Trotter Pandora – hence the amalgamated T and P in the sail insignia. When Grimsby Plastics came to a halt in 1970, the moulds were taken over by Rydgeway Marine who, over the next 20 years or so, were also to build the Pegasus 700 and 800, Prelude, Prospect and Pirate among others. Rydgeway's first move was to make a few modifications to the deck moulding and change the name to the Pandora Mk I, while continuing to offer a choice of four keel configurations – fin, twin, triple and centreplate. Three years and 150 boats later, Rydgeway's Gordon Harris gave her a more substantial overhaul – out went the keel stub and in came a deeper, higher aspect-ratio fin drawing 3ft 9in instead of the original 3ft 3in. At the same time, the triple keel option was abandoned and the rig modified in line with IOR fashion – the mast grew, the boom shrunk, and the genoa's area increased. A higher coachroof and cockpit coamings plus the addition of an outboard well were the other major changes and the Pandora International – as she then became known – continued until 1976.

The last re-vamp saw the birth of the Pandora 700, the name reflecting not only her new length of 7.01 metres thanks to the retroussé stern (and the associated inboard rudder)

but the launch of the 700th boat. With an even taller, skinnier mainsail, a genoa nearly 30sq ft bigger than the original and a sliding galley to open up the accommodation, she remained in production until October 1991, when the last one – a twin-keeler – left the factory.

Ten years earlier, Gordon Harris and Kevin Taylor had bought Rydgeway from Lawrie Weller (later of Boating Scene). "Every time we changed the design, it got faster and faster," recalled Taylor who, with Harris, is still building the Pegasus 700 and 800 at Oulton Broad, near Lowestoft. As for engines, they were nearly all outboards, he said – they fitted no more than a couple of dozen inboards, all of them RCA Dolphins. Rydgeway built a total of 686 Pandoras which, added to those already afloat when they took over, brought the total number to around 900. Van de Stadt's later developments of the design include the Splinter – built by SOS – and the Spirit 24. 



Pandora Mk 1 in close up

LOA	21ft 10in (6.65m)
LWL	18ft 9in (5.72m)
Beam	6ft 11in (2.11m)
Draft – fin	3ft 3in (0.99m)
– twin	3ft 0in (0.91m)
– triple	2ft 3in (0.69m)
– centreplate	2ft 3in – 4ft 6in (0.69 – 1.36m)
Displacement	2,427lb (1,100kg)
Ballast	980lb (444kg)
Sail area (main & 100% foretriangle)	194sq ft (17.65m)
Engine	2 - 4hp outboard (some petrol inboards)
Designer	E G Van de Stadt
Builder	Rydgeway Marine

Pandora: pros and cons

- Excellent sailing performance
- Comfortable motion
- Choice of keels
- Good value for money
- Wet in a seaway
- IOR-style rigs on later boats
- Less accommodation than modern equivalents

Outboard engines are usually stowed in the stern locker.

Rig height was increased on the later boats.

A twin-cabin layout was also offered, with the forecabin separated by a bulkhead.

The keyhole companionway is a prominent feature of many Van de Stadt designs.

Triple-keel Pandoras draw 12in less than the early fin-keelers Twin and centreplate versions were available too

Pretty, pacey and practical...

BOAT buyers are traditionally a cautious bunch, who spend a good deal of time studying, comparing, testing and evaluating before parting with their cash. Understandably so – especially when it's a sizeable sum. But things sometimes work out just as well without too much deliberation, as John Mills found when he chanced across a Pandora in Scarborough with a For Sale sign hanging from the rigging.

Although he'd never owned anything bigger than a Topper dinghy – and wasn't even looking for a cruiser at the time – the sight of the little Pandora in need of a new home spurred him into action. "I said to myself that if it was cheap enough, I'd have it!" he told me. "The asking price turned out to be very reasonable, and the boat was small enough to be easily handled

by one person. Those were two big plus points. Besides, if it all went wrong, I wouldn't stand to lose a lot of money."

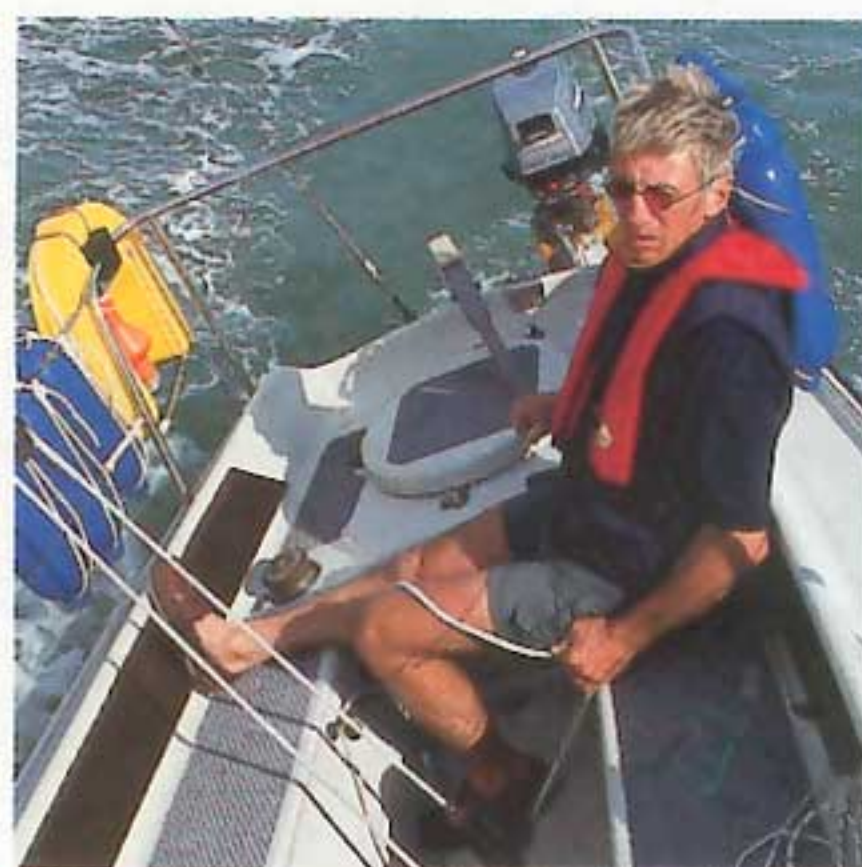
Another important factor was trailability, he explained, so he and his wife Christine could explore different sailing areas. And that's exactly what they've done, this year towing *Balkisn* down for a 2½-week holiday cruising around the Solent from a base at the Elephant Boatyard – a rather different environment from her £250-a-year drying marina berth in Scarborough, where John is a member of the lifeboat crew.

Finding four-star petrol on the waterfront for the 21-year-old Brit Imp engine, though, is a problem wherever they go – which is why John tends to use it only for close-quarters manoeuvring, otherwise relying on the tender's 4hp Mariner outboard on a transom bracket when the wind dies. Either way, I soon found that the Pandora's slippery hull needs very little power to

drive it. And I was particularly impressed by the quiet, smooth running of the Imp, which pushed her along at an easy four knots on little more than tick-over and made most small diesels seem very noisy by comparison.

Even so, it was nice to switch off the ignition and head out of the Hamble into a 14-knot south-westerly under full main and No. 2 genoa. *Balkisn* proved to be a beautifully balanced and forgiving boat to sail, romping upwind at an easy 4½ knots, slicing her way cleanly through the short chop and carrying only a smidge of weather helm until she was close to putting the lee rail under. Not that she was remotely tender – like many slim-hulled boats, she heeled fairly readily to around 15° before digging her shoulder in, stiffening up and powering forward.

To be fair, the lack of a traveller combined with an under-powered (2:1) mainsheet and dodgy jamming block meant that we





Down below

■ Given her modest beam and 54in headroom, the Pandora's interior felt remarkably roomy. *Balkisn* had room for a chemical loo beneath the forecabin berth but was built with an open-plan layout, whereas boats with the toilet in the bow normally had the forecabin separated by a bulkhead. Its alternative position was opposite the galley.

Thanks to the interior moulding, some potential stowage is wasted – there was no access to the space under the port quarter berth, for example – but John and Christine still managed to find enough

room for a fortnight's-worth of kit. Otherwise, creature comforts are modest but adequate – the compact galley with its sink fed by a rigid five-gallon tank in the stern, a reasonable number of shelves and lockers, and plenty of space to stretch out in horizontal mode.

One unusual feature was the open engine installation – it was separated from the accommodation only by the companionway steps. Since Brit Imps were never apparently fitted as standard by the builders, it must have been a later addition.

couldn't get the mainsail's leech working as well as I'd have liked. Nonetheless, she tacked through around 85° on the compass and kept up an impressive pace considering she was dragging one propeller the whole time and two on port tack, when the outboard's became immersed too. What's more, the rigging was a little slack and both sails looked as though they were probably the 1979 originals. In racing trim, I could imagine a fin-keeled Pandora giving many bigger and newer boats a serious fright.

One leg or three?

Balkisn is one of the three-legged examples, with a central fin and two high aspect-ratio bilge keels. But I'd probably never have detected the presence of these additional appendages had I not known about them, since they produced none of the normal bangs or thuds.

In short, she was an absolute delight to sail – smooth, stiff,

responsive, well-balanced and, importantly, a lot of fun. You'd need a decent sprayhood or a good set of waterproofs in any kind of a seaway, but I've no doubt that she'd charge her way through the waves with the best of them. John, in fact, ended up doing just that on his way to logging nearly 200 miles during his holiday, beating to Poole from Lymington in what he described as fairly brisk conditions. "There was a lot of spray about," he said, "but the boat took it very well."

She was equally happy when put through the normal 'circuits and bumps' routine, heaving to, making to windward under each sail on its own, and bearing away from hard on the wind with the sheets pinned in. The bearing-away test, though, was nothing compared with what was to follow.

As we reached along with high 5s showing on the log, I casually mentioned to John that we'd probably have at least 7 under spinnaker. "Fancy trying it?" he asked. "It's



down below somewhere." That was putting serious temptation in my way. Should we give it a go? The wind had picked up to around 18 knots by then, there were only two of us, and it soon transpired that we were lacking much of the necessary kit. Nonetheless, I couldn't resist the opportunity to push things a little and see how the boat responded – so, after improvising with some blocks and lengths of line, we eventually got the kite up and took off at 6.6 knots, the alarm on the log sounding continuously until John silenced it. "I set it at 6," he explained, "because I thought we'd never go that fast!"

Although Pandoras are still actively raced, their ability to hold a spinnaker on a close reach in marginal conditions is probably important to a relatively small number of potential owners. Some of us like exploring the limits and doing the nautical equivalent of making the tyres screech occasionally, but it would be unfair to enthuse about her ▶

Abersoch – home of the Pandora

■ Thanks to more than two decades of successful selling by Abersoch Boatyard – one of Rydgeway Marine's dealers – Abersoch has probably the biggest concentration of Pandoras in the UK. Although no longer boasting the fleet of 60-plus that turned out in the heyday of the class, the South Caernarvonshire Yacht Club is still home to around 25 boats. In addition to regular club racing, they also host the annual Welsh Pandora Championships.

Most of the boats, says class captain Steve Colclough, are Internationals and 700s, the latter being faster in light airs and giving the International time on handicap. But nobody races anything other than fin-keelers – even if they'd be competitive with a time allowance, the odd twin or triple-keeler that used to race was apparently so far behind the fleet that it was effectively racing in a separate class.

One reason for the Pandora's continuing appeal – apart from her value for money, says Colclough – is the need for only two or three crew, as opposed to the four or five heavyweights needed by many of the new sportsboats. Another fleet apparently sails at the Hong Kong Yacht Club.



Trailing and sailing

■ With her fixed keel (or keels) and displacement of just over a ton, the Pandora is not a boat you'd normally choose to launch yourself from a slipway – owners generally have them craned in and out. As for the all-up towing weight, John Mills said that *Balkisn* on her trailer tipped the scales at 1.65 tons. He tows her behind a 2.5l BMW.

Other boats to look at



SPLINTER
PRICE RANGE: £3,000 – £4,000

A development of the Pandora built by Southern Ocean Shipyard in Poole, the Splinter is slightly faster and has an inboard rudder.



HURLEY 22
PRICE RANGE: £3,500 – £6,000

With a choice of twin keels or a long fin, Ian Anderson's tough little cruiser is substantially heavier and more of a miniature offshore yacht.



CORRIBEE
PRICE RANGE: £2,750 – £4,000

Also available as the Coromandel with a junk rig and full-width cabin, she's tiny down below but sails well.

▶ remarkable handling while ignoring her many other attributes. After all, we were sailing a real classic, a well-built, good-looking little cruiser with a first-class pedigree that contrasts sharply with many of the unattractive, poorly-designed and cheaply built offerings from the '60s and '70s. Van de Stadt's small boats were invariably beautifully proportioned, looking like scaled-down offshore yachts rather than blown-up day-sailers. In fact if you were to remove the equipment that gives the scale away, it would be hard to tell whether the Pandora was 21 or 31ft long. Such elegant styling means that you lose space below and get a little wet, but she's a proper little yacht with the sort of sweet lines which, sadly, are now all too rare.

Looking forward

Another blessing of the Pandora's low coachroof is that it's easy to move around and see where you're going. Space in the cockpit is similarly unrestricted, thanks to the 8½ft (2.5m) between the bulkhead and sunken after deck. Three people could easily sit to windward, and four wouldn't be a crowd for day-sailing. For racing, I'm told, two is the favoured number in lighter breezes, with a third being added when the wind picks up.

Further aft, lifting up the circular hatch reveals a sizeable lazarette and *Balkisn*'s two-gallon petrol tank tucked away under the deck. A couple of drains make sure that water doesn't collect around the hatch, but the central cockpit drain

is rather less effective. Thanks to the depth of the sole, it only works with the boat on the mooring – you tend to find your feet getting wet under way, so John keeps it bunged up with a cork that has to be removed when he goes ashore.

Further forward, the short mast-head rig is well stayed with the forward and after lowers taken, like the cap shrouds, out to the gun-wales for strength and simplicity. Once ahead of the mast, we find a solid forehatch (circular, as you'd expect) and a single stemhead roller, with the chain disappearing through a hawse pipe.

Try as I might, I could find precious little to criticise. Like many boats of her age, *Balkisn* would benefit enormously from some new sails and upgraded deck hardware – but, as John pointed out, you could easily spend as much on a re-fit as she cost to buy in the first place. The whole idea, he said, is that she's an economical way to get afloat and explore different sailing areas. And she's big enough to live aboard in tolerable comfort (assuming you're not too far from a shower block) for a couple of weeks at a time.

When I sailed with the Mills, they were also looking for something between 26 and 29ft to moor permanently on the south coast – John's original stamping ground – while keeping *Balkisn* for sailing from Scarborough and wherever else they fancy. After all, when you can buy and run something like a Pandora so cheaply, is it really such an indulgence to have two