

*The history of Sadler Yachts has been much reported over the years, both in the yachting press and by word of mouth. But, over thirty-four years, many of the facts have been distorted and omitted, rather like a game of Chinese Whispers. As someone who was there at the very start, and encouraged by Lucie, Martin's partner, I think it's time for me to tell the story as it really was.*

It all began in 1972. Martin had just completed a three-year course in Practical Boatbuilding and Boatyard Management at Southampton College. The course included practical working experience, and Martin spent that time at Jeremy Rogers in his rapidly expanding Lymington boatyard, building Contessa yachts. Having worked on the shop floor for a total of eighteen months, Martin was hoping that he would be offered a managerial position when the course came to an end but this wasn't to be. So it came as no surprise to me when he came home one day and announced that he was going to start his own boatbuilding business.

We'd only been married a year and our capital consisted of just a few hundred pounds, saved for the deposit on our first home. Not to be put off, Martin set out a detailed business plan to produce the moulds and prototype for a 25-foot fast sailing cruiser with the hope of raising the necessary capital from business contacts, friends and family.

But with no borrowing power and no track record, it became obvious that we had to make a start before we could attract any interest from potential investors. We could just about afford the materials for some basic moulds and Martin had the practical knowledge and skill to do the job himself. What did we have to lose?

Martin decided to build the largest boat he could manage to produce single-handed and one that anyone could sensibly sail anywhere. Twenty-five feet seemed an ideal size.

At this time we were living in a large rented flat in Bournemouth. The flat was far too big for just the two of us so, with the agreement of our landlord, we sub-let three of the rooms, which more than paid our rent.

We also had a garage but it was only 21' x 8' 6" and not nearly big enough for our project. But Martin is not easily defeated and, after a discussion with friends over a few beers, he decided to lengthen the garage by opening up the doors and building a temporary structure around them using 4 x 2, chicken wire and polythene sheeting. The width, however, was more of a problem. The boat's beam was to be 8' 9" (In later years, Martin could always amaze people by remembering the birth weight of our daughter – 8lb 9oz!). Because of the tumblehome, the deck would just fit, but it was impractical for the hull as there had to be room to work around the topsides. After some thought (and no doubt a few more beers) Martin realized that he would have to have a split mould to release the hull around her tumblehome and so decided he would build the two halves of the hull pattern and mould separately and join them together later when we could find larger premises.

All we needed now was a design. Martin's father, David Sadler, had already designed the well known Contessa 26 and 32, and he agreed to produce some drawings for our new 25-footer. At the same time, he had also been commissioned by a local firm, Awson Marine (builders of the plywood Waarschip), to design a 27-foot GRP yacht. Perhaps he felt that Martin's 25-footer was too close in size, so he drew a 24-footer and called it Contessa 24.

By this time, I was pregnant with our first child (Wendy) so the yacht was lofted in the nursery, and Martin scoured the demolition yards for cheap timber to start construction.

### The Sadler marque is born



*The first Sadler Yachts logo,  
designed by a friend*

In the early 1970s, there was a large number of people building their own boats or fitting out partly completed kits, all trying to obtain trade discounts, and Martin found it difficult to persuade suppliers that he was a bona fide trader, so he decided to establish a limited company to show that he meant business.

Family and friends came up with a list of names for the company, which was eventually short-listed to Poole Bay Yachts Ltd and Sadler Yachts Ltd. The name didn't seem obvious at the time because the name Sadler was not well known. Even the design of the successful Contessa 32 had been attributed to Doug Peterson in one of the brochures!

Sadler Yachts Limited was incorporated in January 1973. Martin was Chairman and Managing Director; I was Company Secretary; and David was invited to be a non-executive Director.

### There's no one quite like Grandma

Almost a year into the project and Martin was getting frustrated by the rate of progress. He was still working 30 hours a week as a GRP laminator in Lymington, and the rest of the week and weekends he spent on the Sadler 25 (as we had now named her).

It was usual for us to have Sunday lunch with my parents and they were well aware of our situation, especially with me now being pregnant and about to give up paid work. "We'll lend you some money", my mother announced one day. And they did. The £1,000 was enough to keep us for a whole year!

### The hull mould is completed



*Martin at work in the garage*

It was now August 1973 and, with our family loan, Martin could now work full-time on the project. He was totally absorbed in his work and had no doubt of its success. I remember once catching a glimpse of him through the polythene sheeting. He was pretending to be in the cockpit of an ocean-going yacht, riding the giant waves and fighting a force 9. But my arrival with the morning coffee broke the spell. The shimmering yacht changed back to an empty shell, the tiller was once again a broomstick and the salt air was filled with dust. But it was these daydreams that kept him going.

### The hull mould is completed

His tenacity and natural optimism paid off and, by September of that year, both halves of the hull mould had been completed. One half lay in our drive, nearly blocking the access to our front door, and some of our neighbours were beginning to get annoyed because it was a bit of an eyesore. To everyone's relief, some of our friends eventually helped to lift the two halves into the road and bolt them together. The moulds were then loaded onto a borrowed car transporter and taken to Rossiter's Boatyard in Christchurch, where they were stored on the banks of the River Avon whilst work began on the deck.

The deck pattern and mould came together during the winter of 1973-74. It completely filled the work space with no room to walk around, but fortunately there was a door at each end of our garage! It was by no means an ideal workshop and, during the winter gales, it was quite usual to find Martin standing on the toilet in the middle of the night, peering out of the small window to check that it hadn't collapsed completely and crushed his beloved masterpiece.

Up until now, Martin had been working on his own, and he relied on a small army of good friends to move the moulds from one location to another, or to turn them over during the moulding process and fit-out. But, as luck would have it, one of our tenants, Lester, was also a boat builder, and he began to spend his spare time helping Martin. (He eventually gave up his job and became our first full-time employee).

### Still more space was needed

By January 1974 we were counting down the days to the launch of our prototype. She had to be ready for as much of the coming season as possible in order to achieve maximum publicity – and, of course, my mother's loan would dry up in the August leaving us without an income.

Although it had been possible to complete the deck at home, Martin needed to find larger premises to mould the hull. A search through Yellow Pages found Farmer Brown who had space in an open-ended barn in Burton, Christchurch (now a housing estate). Because the hull had to be moulded during the winter, he stacked bales of hay along the sides and one end of the barn to keep out the winter chill. After a day's moulding, he covered the mould with a heavy tarpaulin and used a hired space heater to provide the required temperature, while he sat in the car in the dark for hours before he could turn the heater off and go home!

The materials for the prototype had yet to be funded so, when construction of all the moulds neared completion, Martin persuaded David that he meant business. Progress on the Sadler 25 moulds was in advance of David's other design, the Quest 27, and he agreed to finance the materials for our first boat, to be repaid when she was sold.

Finally, the hull and deck were joined together in Farmer Brown's barn, and structural bulkheads and basic accommodation furniture were fitted. The Sadler 25 was nearing completion!



*The open ended barn in Christchurch where the Sadler 25 was moulded.  
Martin's mother, Tessa is in the foreground*

## Launch Day – 17 August 1974

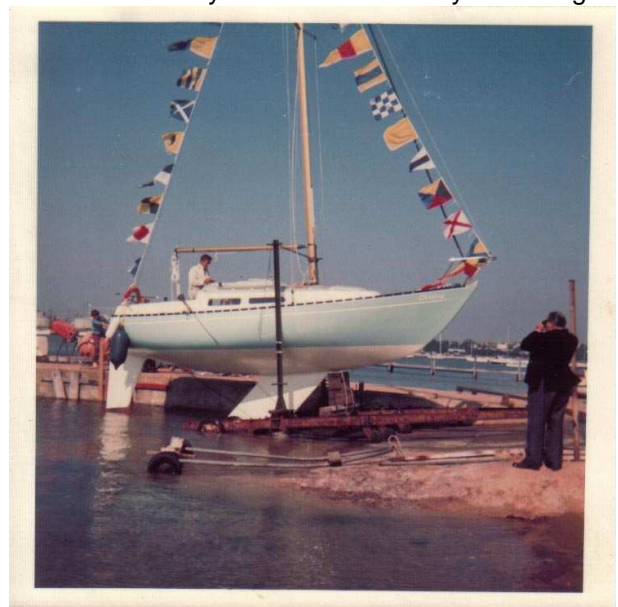


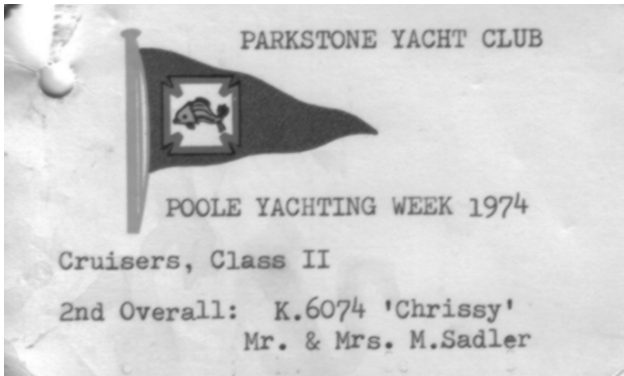
*Photo courtesy of Daily Echo Bournemouth*

The final fit-out took place at Parkstone Yacht Club in Poole. Martin hired a crane to lift the hull from its trailer onto the keel, as there were no such facilities at the club at that time; they used to move keel boats around on greasy planks and slide them down the slipway.

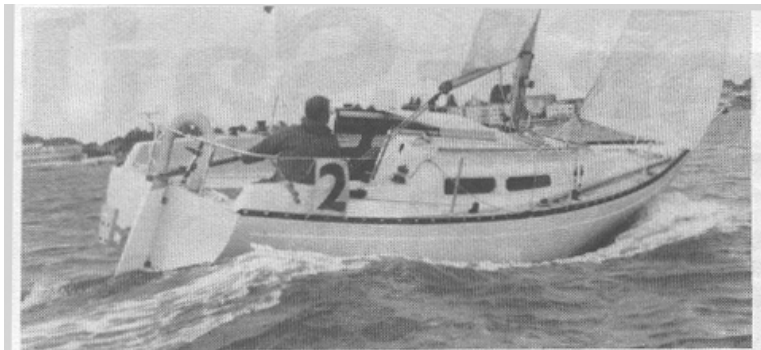
The pressure was now on to have the boat ready for Poole Week in the August – only two weeks away. David helped with the rigging, and finalising the preparation for Launch Day. We were not only launching our first boat, but this would be the first time that the existence of Sadler Yachts would be brought to the attention of the public.

Launch Day arrived – just in time for Poole Week. With a few friends and family gathered, the boat, which was to be named “Chrissy”, was wheeled to the water’s edge and a make-shift platform was made for me to stand on to perform the launching ceremony. It’s a Sadler tradition that their boats get the full treatment when first launched and I was given detailed instructions of where to aim the bottle. But the most important thing was to SMASH IT! I remember throwing the bottle against the bows with all my strength. Glass and champagne flew everywhere as the reporter from the local newspaper caught the moment on his camera. “Chrissy” accelerated down the slipway and into the water.



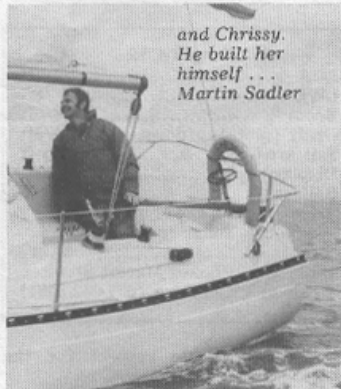


Over the next few months, “Chrissy” proved her sailing qualities and achieved five first places in Poole and in the Solent. But our money had run out and Martin had to take odd jobs, including ‘Grip’ for a local film company, and assisting a surveyor friend by holding his tape and pole while on site.



## ONE MAN BAND

**C**ONSERVATIVE by nature, we on PBO usually shy away from prototypes and prefer to wait until a new design is in full production before reporting it in the magazine. But there are exceptions, as you may have noticed—and the Sadler 25 is certainly one of them—writes RODGER WITT.



and Chrissy.  
He built her  
himself . . .  
Martin Sadler

Designed by David Sadler of Contessa fame and built, single handed, by son Martin—he even made the moulds—the prototype represents two years planning, dreaming and sheer hard work.

A really attractive boat—“I’m fussy about aesthetics” says Martin—she

SADLER 25	
LOA .....	25ft
LWL .....	19·2ft
Beam .....	8·9ft
Draft .....	4·6ft
Displacement .....	4000lb
Ballast .....	1950lb
Sail area .....	343 sq ft
Builder .....	Sadler Yachts, 34 Stourcliffe Avenue, Bournemouth (40072)

should appeal to those who want a fast cruiser with good accommodation at a reasonable price. And you must admit, £4,752 including VAT, sails, fittings, Vire two stroke inboard and all the bits and pieces, is more than reasonable for a boat of this calibre. Even more tempting to practical boat owners is the £1106 price tag for a hull and deck joined together.

With a canoe body, which means the fin keel is a separate addition—broad beam and high ballast ratio, Chrissy, Martin’s first and only Sadler 25 so far, has evidently proved pretty fast. But cruising types will be just as interested in the four berth layout with separate toilet compartment—and the range of inboards one might squeeze in under the cockpit.

But, so far so good—and I for one am more than looking forward to reviewing the next Sadler 25, later this year.

### We hit the headlines

That launch had been given good coverage by the Bournemouth Echo and this led to a number of sales enquires. The yachting press had noticed, too. One day, when Martin had been working in the garage on a new keel plug (the original was twisted), through the foggy polythene ‘doors’ he saw a bearded figure approaching. “Is this Sadler Yachts?” the man asked, with a wry smile. It was Rodger Witt from Practical Boat Owner magazine, who had come to report on our new venture. After a coffee in the office / nursery, he went on his way, laden with specifications, price lists, history, our aspirations and achievements, and some photographs, assuring us that he would include something in his column.

It turned out to be a breakthrough. We had most of a page devoted to us in the February issue, including a couple of photographs.

Enquiries followed thick and fast. Then, in October 1974, the all-important first order dropped through our letterbox, together with a cheque for £1,000 from a Mr Bob Roberts of Twickenham.

We were in business!

*The article by Roger Witt, which appeared in the February 1975 issue of Practical Boat Owner*

By December 1974 we had orders for three part-complete boats, including one for David. We had sold “Chrissy” to the retiring sales manager of Brookes and Gatehouse, who renamed her “Rampant”. I wonder where she is now? She is recognisable by her bulbed and slightly twisted keel.

## Production of the Sadler 25 begins

It was becoming essential for us to find new premises as the farm where the hull mould had been built was already deserted in preparation for a new housing development. We managed to find some premises in Cynthia Road, Parkstone – some dis-used pigsties that had been built in 1947 and the current housing estate had been built up around them. (Two years later, when neighbours and council complained about the change of use, we were able to argue that boat builders were preferable to pigs!)

So, in January 1975 we vacated the barn at Burton and transported the hull mould to the pigsties, along with the deck mould, which had been built at home in our garage. By April, we were employing three boat builders and the future looked bright.



*Sept 1974 Martin and our 11-month old daughter Wendy at the helm of Chrissy*

But then the Labour government announced in its budget that they were to impose 25% VAT on luxury goods, including boats. Were they trying to spoil Ted Heath's fun? They very nearly spoil ours!

What seemed like a death sentence at the time, turned out to be godsend. The tax was not imposed immediately and, in the few weeks between the announcement and its implementation in May, we took seven orders, invoiced and paid for in full to avoid the higher rate of VAT.

By the end of 1975, we were employing six boat builders and had built ten boats. We had also built new moulds to replace the originals which, by necessity, had been light.

The improvement in the quality of the mouldings fitted in nicely with the announcement that Yachting World magazine was to hold a One of a Kind Rally for yachts between 20 and 25 feet. The first boat from these new moulds happened to be sold to Martin's good friend, Mike Deacon, who was willing to lend us his boat – providing he could come along to the Rally, too!

## Preparing to Take Off

The Rally was held on the Suffolk Stour, and based at Levington Marina. We borrowed a Range Rover and trailer from a friend to transport our borrowed boat "Maggie" to the venue. The Rally involved sailing up and down the river with the judges on board and at the helm. After having a good look over the boat, the judges made a few pleasing comments, and then we all went home.

I remember the day when the complimentary copy of the June 1976 Yachting World arrived at our home office and Martin and I immediately turned to the Rally report:

*"In the Sadler 25, we saw an exceptional craft and she shares first prize"*

We were so excited it was a while before we could read the rest:

*"She was the only boat to receive full marks for deck layout ... She also scored well for her appearance, which was delightful, and even more for her handling qualities."*

This wonderful praise from Yachting World ensured that we had long queues to view our boat at our very first appearance at the Southampton Boat Show in the September of that year. We took twelve orders at the Show, along with many genuine sales enquiries. And while Martin was still reeling from the excitement and success, he was awarded yet another prize – a new baby daughter (Alison) who was thoughtful enough to arrive a week late after the Show had finished!

By the end of 1976, Sadler Yachts employed eleven full-time staff, and had built about twenty-five boats, 70 per cent of which were only part-complete (kit) boats. We also took on our first European dealer in Holland, who wanted a complete boat every month.

Now that we were properly up-and-running, we were at last able to vacate the pigsties and move into proper industrial premises in Dawkins Road, Poole, with its own suite of offices. It was around this time that David retired from his civil service job to join the Company and start on his Sadler 32 design.

Sadler Yachts had taken off and we were heading for the top!

*Christine Sadler August 2006*

## **Growth of Sadler Yachts**

Incorporation of Sadler Yachts	1973
Sadler 25 'Chrissy' is launched at Parkstone Yacht Club, Poole	July 1974
First order received from Mr Bob Roberts	October 1974
Production starts on Sadler 25 in ex-pigsties in Poole	Jan 1975
Sadler 25 wins One-of-a-Kind Rally	June 1976
First Boat Show (Southampton) exhibiting Sadler 25	Sept 1976
Move into first proper factory premises, 25a Dawkins Road, Poole	1977
Launch of Sadler 32	May 1978
Moved to larger factory premises, 29-31 Dawkins Road, Poole	Jan 1979