

Originally posted in the forums on July 7th, 2011 by member tom_gwynn

I got my original 3.5 in the summer of 1975, almost as soon as they made them. My original boat, (hull # 11 if I'm reading the cc number correctly) had sail #65. The 3.5 was billed as a kids boat for the under 140 lb sailor and back then I fit the bill perfectly, weighing about 100 lbs. I think my dad got the boat out of pity - I didn't have enough weight to hold the family Hobie 14 down, and I certainly didn't have enough weight to right a 14 when it went over. That meant I couldn't solo-sail and had to (ewwww!) crew for my older brother. :-x

To say I have fond memories of the 3.5 is an understatement. That little boat meant freedom in a way most kids don't get until they get their first cars. All of a sudden the whole of Long Island Sound was mine. Well, as much as a day's sailing could take me anyway. I still have my original boat though she is awaiting repairs to her transoms. When I went away to college I forgot to drain the water left from a summer's sailing in the hulls and the water froze, cracking the transoms. (Note to 3.5 owners - always drain the hulls before winter).

The 3.5 was basically a scaled-down version of the Hobie 14. If you are looking at a photo of one from the front it is very difficult to tell it apart from a 14 unless there's something in the photo to give it scale. Seeing one in the flesh I've had more than one person tell me "It looks like a toy model of a 14". Looking at a 3.5 from the rear the differences between the two boats are much more obvious, because the 3.5 had wooden rudders and different lower and upper rudder castings. Different kickup system for the rudders as well. I've heard some people describe the rudders as mahogany and they were certainly stained a dark mahogany color but from their lightness and tendency to split I believe they were originally redwood. I'm told the 3.5 shared rudders, castings, mast step and mast with the Hobie 12, but I've never seen a 12 close-up so I'm not sure. Making new rudders out of 3/4" board stock is not difficult for any competent woodworker and it's something I had to do from time-to-time as I'd crack them on our rocky New England shores. I'll see if I can get a rudder pattern posted.

Another difference between the 14 and the 3.5 is that the 3.5 has circular pylons, rather than the teardrop-shaped ones the 14 has. As Halliské has already noticed, the 3.5 also lacks the circular mast sheve of the 14 and instead has a frankly anemic little pulley riveted to the mast top. Doubtless this flaw would have been corrected had the boat remained in production longer. We used it until it broke, then replaced it with a four layer wooden mast extension that held a stainless eyebolt and pulley for the sail halyard. This was a much more a satisfactory solution for us.

Other than that, the 3.5 is rigged and tramped exactly the same as the early-model 14's. The two boats handle very similarly, and that includes their flaws as well as their virtues. Like the 14, the 3.5 is difficult to tack through the wind, is pitchpole-prone and requires a righting line and training to get her back up when she goes over. But the 3.5 is also extremely rugged, reliable and seaworthy. I'd take mine out in small craft advisories that would leave the many Lasers and Sunfish in our corner of the Sound scattered like confetti and she always brought me home.

In my opinion the 3.5 sails best at about 120 lbs of crew weight. Much below 110 and you have too much trouble righting her. Much above 140 and she starts getting doggy. I've sailed them with up to 200-210 lbs, but then the hulls start playing submarine. I've heard of people up to 250 lbs taking one out, but you're definitely at the limit of the boat then.

Despite the 3.5's smaller size and lower mast/ sail area I would often win races with my brother on the 14 as long as the winds were light to moderate and close to the surface. Higher winds favored the 14's taller mast. A 3.5 will generally beat a Laser and a Sunfish isn't even worth taunting. It flies a hull just like a 14 (get *aft* quick or go for a swim over the bow). It doesn't surf as well as the 14 though, probably due to the 14's greater weight. I sailed on Long Island Sound and have no idea how one would handle true ocean conditions. The highest waves I personally sailed in came up about between the third and fourth batten on the sail, so probably about 10'-15' swells.

What can I say? If you fit her, she's lovely little boat. :-D