

BRITAIN'S BIGGEST SAILING MAGAZINE NORTH OF THE SOUTH

# yachting life

www.yachtinglife.co.uk Volume 29 Issue 04

DECEMBER 2004

Topaz  
**OMEGA**  
**TESTED**

Independent Test Report  
**FORTH Head To Head: Topaz OMEGA v RS Vision**

**RS VISION**

**F**OR SOME time, both dinghy giants Topper and Laser have turned increasingly towards the training and cruising market. And more recently RS, after many years of producing fast racing designs, have turned towards training and fun boats.

They too have seen the advantages of rotomoulded polyethylene, starting with the Feva, which has gone down well at sailing schools. Its bright livery appeals to youngsters learning to sail, quite apart from its sailing qualities.

Now it is the turn of RS to bring out their own family sized rotomoulded design, the Vision.

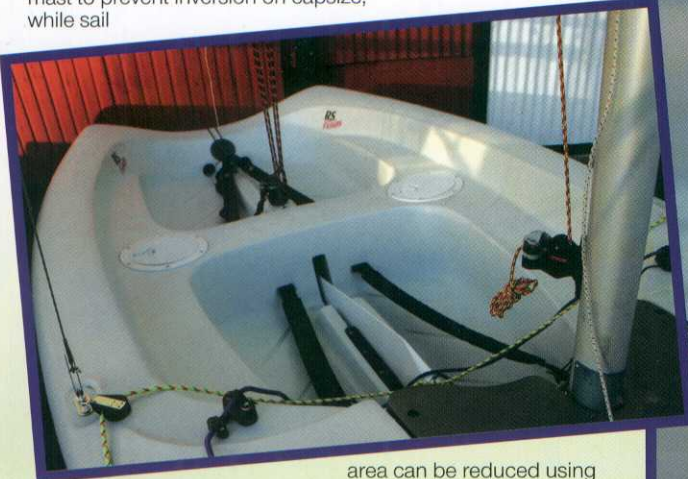
Can RS repeat the success of the Feva with a bigger rotomoulded boat?

Aimed at much the same market as the Topper Omega, the Vision shares many features. Rotomoulded for value for money, it comes with an asymmetric kite and has a high boom rig, using a GNAV to provide maximum headroom.

Like the Omega, it can be fitted with a flotation device up the mast to prevent inversion on capsize, while sail

# headt

Topper and RS go head to head  
**Alan Henderson** puts both boats to the test  
 rotomoulded polythene boat



area can be reduced using the furling jib or the reefable main.

The Vision includes righting lines to assist recovery after a capsize. It's well equipped and has options of adding trapezes or an outboard bracket.

Many features are similar in these two boats. However, the Vision has a weight advantage on the Omega, coming in at 15kg less in weight, and is much lighter than other competitors like the Wayfarer. Being lighter, it needs less sail, so has a smaller main and jib than the Omega, but has a similar, generous asymmetric.

On the water, the major difference is the feel of the cockpit. It may be almost the same length as the Omega, but the Vision feels much smaller, and much more like a racing dinghy. It's a shallow boat, with far less freeboard than the Omega, and is a boat you sit on, not in. Rather more like a Laser 2 than a cruising boat such as a Wayfarer.

To compare with a common racing boat, it is a similar size to an RS400, but feels smaller inside. The rig of course is more medium performance than a 400, but the Vision retains the racy feel of its RS stablemates. Not surprisingly with RS's heritage, the Vision sails well upwind and down.

In the Vision, you actively use your body weight when it heels in the gusts. This racier feel may be more attractive to private buyers who want to do more racing than cruising. Speedwise though, it had little advantage against the Omega in the test conditions.

The Vision holds promise as a race trainer, and it could be a good boat on which to learn trapezing before moving to skiffs like the 29er. But this boat is no Wayfarer or Stratos replacement, having less space and lacking the reassuring character of its bigger, and more stable competitors.

On a light weather day, our team of four people tested the Vision and Omega against each other. Both boats are aimed at a similar market. But in this duel, there can only be one winner.

The Omega hits the multipurpose teaching/cruising/racing market on the nail. The Vision would suit buyers looking for a medium performance, good value for money racing boat, but it has a narrower appeal to the other markets. The Omega is a genuine multi-purpose boat, which will make many sailing schools happy.

The launch of these two rotomoulded boats shows that it is now quite possible to build large boats, not just little singlehanders, in polyethylene to produce boats at huge savings against comparable GRP boats. The sailing school, holiday company and cruising market is set for a big shake up, and no doubt both of these new classes will sell into these markets.

Low maintenance, great value for money and good sailing qualities represent a winning combination.

Thanks are due to the Bosun's Locker at Port Edgar, who kindly provided both boats for the test. They supply both boats, and are offering test sails. To arrange, call 0131 331 4496.



RS Vision	
Length	4.6m
Beam	1.75m
Main	9sq.m
Jib	3.2sq.m
Gennaker	12.6sq.m
Hull weight	125kg
Price inc all sails, cover and combi	<b>£5,300</b>

# head **TOPPER OMEGA**

head on the Forth as  
of their new family sized,  
ts through their paces.

OVER THE years, Topper have brought out a host of new designs of boat, but the company's best seller has remained the original Topper. The first volume boat to be rotomoulded, the Topper's success has led Topper International to gear up to the design and production of other and bigger like-moulded boats.

Topper has built up a family of Topper Topaz rotomoulders, from the little Taz up to the medium size Magno. Topper's expertise has grown as it has moved steadily up the size scale, and now they are ready to apply their moulding techniques to a big dinghy for the first time.

The Omega is the result, and it is quite capable of replacing the current learning boats like the Wayfarer and Stratos. The polyethylene construction gives the Omega a big price advantage against its longer established competitors, and the knock-proof nature of the material should also mean much less maintenance than on GRP boats.

With a lower purchase price and less maintenance, it already sounds heaven sent for sailing schools and holiday companies. But does it sail well, and would it cope with many different uses, such as motoring under outboard, or sail cruising?

We tested the Omega under sail to find out. In an F2, it sailed well, both upwind and down. It's a spacious boat, with a high freeboard which gives it a large volume inside. The high boom and the GNAV also helps promote this

feeling of space, and it is definitely the type of boat that you sit in, rather than sit on.

It's a craft that can give newcomers to sailing a feeling of security, and which can cheerfully accommodate a crew of four. It has good natural stability, and comes ready to take an outboard bracket.

Talking of safety, the Omega also comes ready to reduce sail easily when you wish. The small jib comes with a furler, while the mainsail can reef using a zip system.

The 15sq.m of white sail area is quite generous for a cruising boat, so easy reefing will be useful, and the helm can opt to fully or partly furl the jib on its roller as well as reefing the main, giving plenty of options to trim the sail area when the wind becomes brisk.

Being a multipurpose boat, it can also be fitted with a trapeze, so getting more weight out to windward, rather than reducing sail, is another option on the Omega.

It's a well equipped boat, with good quality hardware throughout, and the cockpit self drains effectively.

This is a nice upwind performer, and picks up well in the gusts without heeling over much, again feeling secure, while still going quickly.

Performance wise, it is probably around Albacore speed upwind, but its gennaker powers it nicely along the reaches. Hoisting the kite is a single rope operation, with the pole going out as you hoist the halliard, so hoisting and dropping is simple.

With the kite flying, it is a surprisingly quick performer, with enough performance to enthuse racers as well as learners.

Both main and gennaker set well. The small jib comes equipped with a quite unnecessary two to one purchase system, which weighs down the leech. Buyers should remove the 2:1, to benefit from quicker and easier tacking and gybing of the jib.

That trivial point is my only quibble with the boat. Topper's previous boat for this market segment several years ago was a lack lustre effort. This time, Topper have got it right first time, no question.

It sails well, and comes ready to go, with all the right kit. There is loads of space, it feels secure, and there are options like the outboard bracket and trapezes which can help you get more out of your boat. And of course, it is fantastic value for money against its GRP rivals, saving upwards of £2,000 against most competitor classes of similar size.

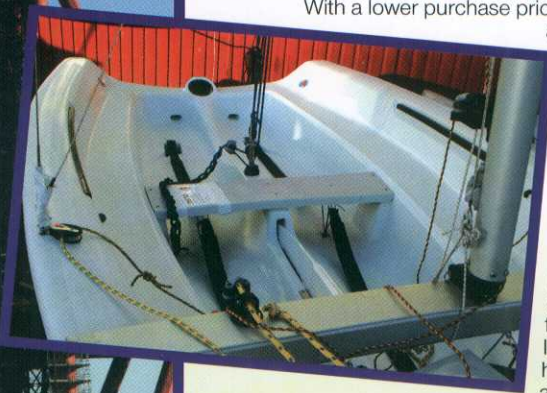
So can a polyethylene boat compete against its GRP sisters? You bet it can. It is just as good to sail, and much cheaper.

For the holiday companies and sailing schools which will be major buyers, its price and its longevity should be a big advantage. For them, the Omega's ability to carry a four man crew comfortably will be another big plus for teaching, while its good performance, its gennaker and its trapeze option will allow pupils at sailing schools to use it for more advanced classes, as well as just for starting to sail.

The boat is big enough to replace a Wayfarer, and its value for money will ensure that it often will.

For private buyers, its flexibility is impressive, and while it could cruise and motor comfortably under outboard, I would happily race it too, something I didn't expect.

The Omega is a resounding hit in my book. If you are thinking about a family boat, or a boat to buy for your club or sailing school, the Omega should be well up the list of options.



Topper Omega	
Length	4.70m
Beam	1.88m
Main	11.5sq.m
Jib	3.5sq.m
Gennaker	12.75sq.m
Hull weight	140kg
Price inc all sails, cover and combi	£5,495

[www.toppersailboats.com](http://www.toppersailboats.com)

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Yachting Life, December 2004

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