

A Sailboat for Everybody

The RS21 is intended to be a fast, safe keelboat for sailors of all abilities



LOA: 20'11" / **Beam:** 7'3" / **Draft:** 4'6" / **Displ.:** 1,433 lbs.

There were plenty of large boats in the water at the recent United States Sailboat Show in Annapolis, Maryland. They were fun to tour and drew large crowds. However, Soundings Senior Editor Gary Reich and I found

something different on land: the RS21 from British manufacturer RS Sailing.

The builder describes the RS21 as “a new 21-foot keelboat,” a label that made me skeptical about its chances of finding an audience. Sailing continues to be described by some as an activity that is too slow, too boring, too hard to learn and too expensive for younger generations. Another small keelboat struck me as an unlikely candidate to address those challenges.

However, the company also says that “the boat was created so that anyone can sail, and will want to sail.” That part of the pitch sounded interesting. So, we took a closer look at the RS21.

It was sitting high up on its trailer, tucked in a far corner of the boat show. With its chined hull, retractable bowsprit and carbon-composite mast, the RS21 at first glance looked like a fast sport boat for high-performance sailors. But Todd Riccardi of RS Sailing North America quickly set us straight.

“The boat is better balanced than a sport boat and will not spin out, even in 30-knot winds,” he said. “It’s intended for beginners to One-Design racers. It’s a boat for everybody.”

To that end, instead of hiking straps the boat includes “granny bars” for the skipper, and lifelines to keep the crew on board.

The keel, which weighs 650 pounds and makes up almost half of the boat’s 1,433 pounds, should make it more forgiving to sail. The RS21 is not light for a keelboat of this size, but it should be safer and easier to sail for less-experienced hands. (For comparison, a Melges 20 weighs 1,146 pounds with a 450-pound keel.) With a draft of 4 feet, 6 inches, the keel should provide plenty of righting moment, even against a 175-square-foot

racing main, an 83-square-foot racing jib and a 375-square-foot gennaker. The boat's cockpit is large for a 20-footer. RS Sailing says it can be raced by two to four people and can accommodate six people for sail training.

The builder put a heavy emphasis on sustainability and simplicity. The hull's coring is made of recycled plastic bottles, and to reduce its carbon footprint, the RS21 is sized to fit six boats to a 40-foot shipping container. The mast comes in two parts, and the keel and stanchions are removable, allowing multiple hulls to be stacked for transport, and to save space for winter storage. The optional Torqeedo electric drive is energy-friendly and eliminates the need for petroleum-based fuels.

RS Sailing placed the Torqeedo engine in the mainsheet base halfway between the keel and the rudder, where it can be raised and lowered through the hull. In the raised position, a bottom plate below the propeller seals the Torqeedo flush inside the boat. On deck, the Torqeedo then slides into a protective hoop above the mainsheet base. Two batteries can be stowed inside a waterproof hatch forward of the mast.

The RS21 is aimed at club racing. It comes in two models: the One-Design with Mylar main, jib and asymmetrical spinnaker for \$39,220, and the Club model with a smaller Dacron main and jib for \$34,950.

Only time will tell if the RS21 will catch on in the United States, but if it does, it should be a fun way to introduce more people to sailing and keep them interested for years to come.

By: Pim Van Hemmen

This article originally appeared in the January 2019 issue.

Link: <https://www.soundingonline.com/voices/a-sailboat-for-everybody>