# Life with a Tinker – a personal view

I am a Tinker enthusiast, because I believe in the concept. I do a number of club talks and afterwards people often say that they had previously been worried that a combined dinghy/lifeboat was in some way a poor compromise compared with a "proper" life raft, but they now understand why this worry is unfounded. So it seemed this aspect should be explained by an independent user who has also experienced life rafts.

My background is in sailing, testing equipment and writing about boats. I am a Yachtmaster Ocean, Instructor and Examiner (in both power and sail) and, until the incident described later, I had a preference for long distance sailing, deliveries and racing. As a result I have sailed many thousand miles and won some prizes, the most satisfying being the the handicap prize in OSTAR 76, the Singlehanded Transatlantic Race. So I have learned a bit about what does and does not work in bad weather and attended too many memorial services and funerals.

The saddest of these unnecessary disasters is explained, though certainly not excused, in the insert with this brochure. I believe this insert is crucial to anyone considering survival at sea, so if it has already escaped to a good home, please contact Henshaws for another copy.

While my first successful trial of a survival Tinker was in late '81, when I was Technical Editor at Yachting World, the concept really came alive for me during rough weather trials in early '84, partly because of the new big inflatable survival canopy, which lifted it's performance way ahead of any life raft, and partly because my companion was Graham Adams who had survived a life raft tragedy the previous year, when his colleague and our mutual friend Brian, had died within two hours of taking to the liferaft; another sad funeral. The life raft's inability to save them was disgraceful and Graham's conviction and demonstration that the Tinker design and construction avoided the life raft's shortcomings was the ultimate independent accolade. For me, the vital aspects were, and still are:

- The ease of sliding aboard a Tinker over the bow, compared with the extreme difficulty in struggling up into a life raft
- Likewise, and even more important, the ease of sliding an injured person aboard over the Tinker bow, compared with the near impossibility of lifting someone into a raft – a job which requires two people as a minimum (I hope there are enough people in the crew...), and thus puts the weight of three people on one side of the raft. In mere swimming pool conditions this guaranteed a capsize.
- Being able to right the Tinker from inside, avoiding the performance that killed Brian: raft inverts; struggle out; struggle to right the raft; struggle back in; raft inverts before you can get enough weight on the windward side; struggle out... over and over again. I am not surprised the poor man died; with that amount of exertion and the opportunity to inhale a lot of salt water, I doubt if I could have lasted the two hours he achieved. Why can you right a Tinker from inside? Because the inflatable canopy has much more buoyancy than the four compartment hulls (complete with their solid floor).
- The confidence in knowing that when I last used the dinghy, it was in seaworthy condition and that I could practise whenever I liked, without then having to go through an expensive repacking process, as one would with a raft. In fact the whole cost and uncertainty of annual liferaft servicing is avoided.
- The economy (and space and weight saving) of buying one first class item, capable of being both a good dinghy and lifeboat. And the word "lifeboat" reminds me that had we been carrying the sailing rig during the Azores Race, we could at least have sailed towards the islands, with a good chance of seeing one of them (they are high and the visibility is usually good), or a fishing boat It would certainly have done more to improve our chances of rescue than waiting for the race organisers to drag themselves into activity.

While these were the top priority features, I must say I did not mind the easy, straight, rowing ability (because the hulls protrude a little below the floor and thus provide the effect of a keel) or the enjoyable sailing. So I bought a Tinker and have used it for all long and short trips ever since.

## Success stories

"Fine in theory", you may well say, "but what proof in reality?" Well, so far we know of three successes and no failures, whereas we have all read stories of empty deflated life rafts being recovered. The spectacular three day bad weather event was Cliff Blaylock and his two injured crew, where the Tinker proved itself in awful conditions.

Most recently a quartet of seventy year olds swam to their Tinker when a motor cruiser caught fire in mid Channel; it's most unlikely they would have been able to struggle aboard a life raft, so Cold Shock or drowning would probably have finished them off before help arrived.

Just remember about that, the next time you look at a life raft. Neither of these events raised the headlines they deserved, which instead were heaped on Andrew Webster and I after spending six days in my Tinker because we had to abandon my boat and the 406 EPIRB filled up with water before it had time to transmit a position.

Andrew had no previous experience of Tinkers before that fateful Azores Race, but I am not surprised he is convinced about them now. And, by the way, my boat even went to the next Tinker Open Meeting after we got home from that experience; it was strange sailing it in smooth water, with land in sight.

You have every right to wonder if this is all true: I can only offer that you borrow my Tinker (Henshaws will give you my number) to discover its virtues for yourself. You will find this quite a contrast compared with attending a survival course, where you need to be taught how to try to tame a life raft.

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