

# meet the designers



## JACK KÖPER

JACK KÖPER is the man who designed South Africa's largest class of yacht, the Dabchick. There are more than 400 in the country. And when school yacht teams turn out in the Cape or the Transvaal you can expect more than 100 entries to spread their multicoloured sails.

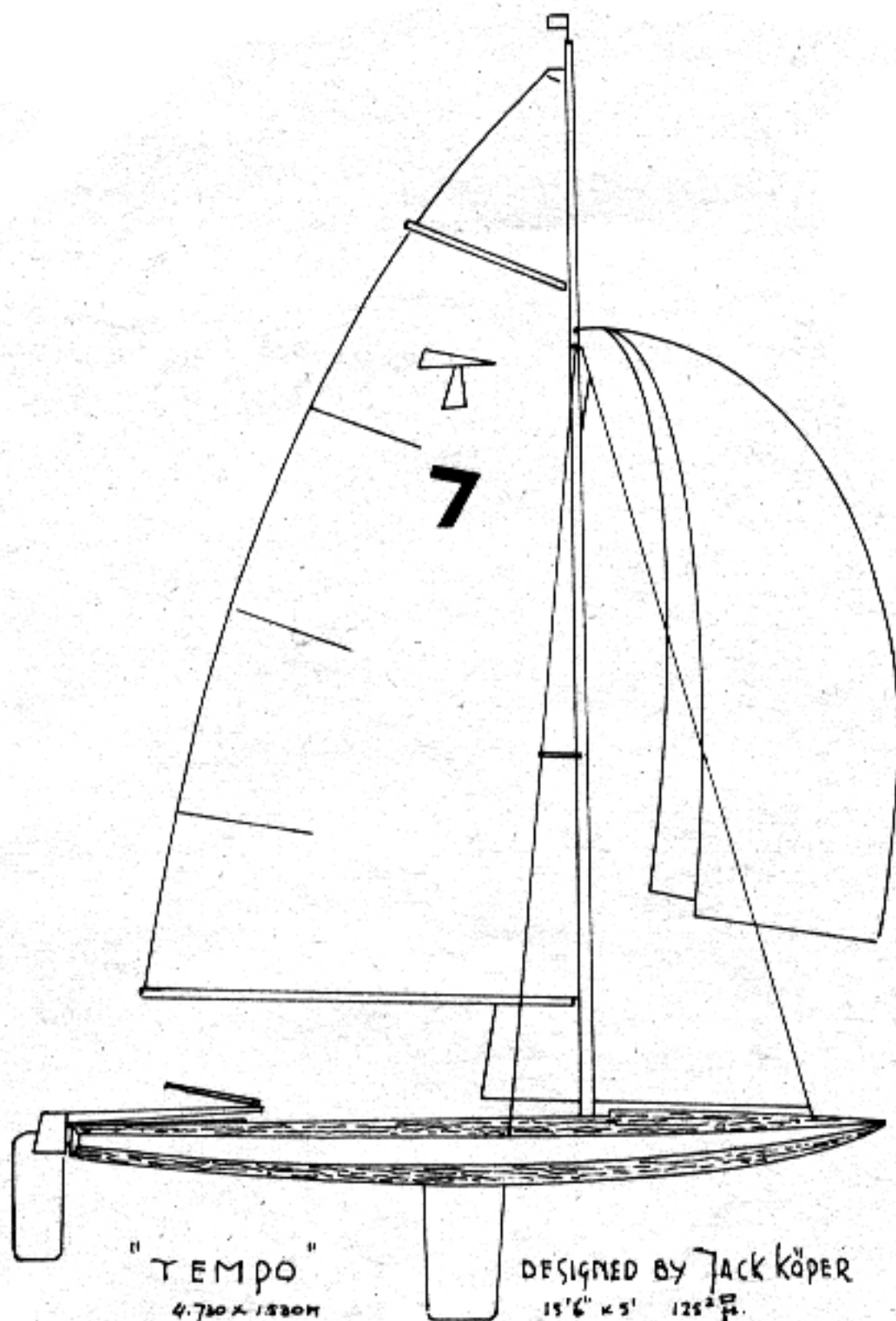
He has a quiet and very fond regard for the 'Dabbie'. It was the forerunner of two other popular yacht classes also designed by him – the Tempo and the Sonnet.

Any South African yachtsman knows these scows by name. You will see them race at almost any yacht meeting. And their popularity has travelled the globe.

Jack Köper could well look back and congratulate himself on a lifetime's effort. It did not, however, take a lifetime to conceive these remarkable little boats. He was 46 years of age when he designed the 'Dabbie' and at 55 he gave up his job as a printer to become a fulltime maker of sails.

Today there are hundreds of Tempos sailing in Germany and Holland and a regular demand for plans to build more. The class has been extended to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States.

The Dabchick is enjoying popularity abroad, too, in England, the United States and the Caribbean – and 'Dabbies' can be found in other parts of Africa, including Zambia and Mozambique.



Readers of South African boating magazines finding their way to Britain have already ordered plans of Jack Köper's latest boat, the Sonnet.

A twist of fate put Köper up among the world's top small boat designers, for at the age of 9 he became terrified of sailing.

'My father took me on a river near my birthplace of Haarlem in Holland and we were sailing on a 12-foot dinghy. I was dead scared. Water came over the bow and I thought we were going to capsize. I kept out of sailing boats for years after that.'

Instead, Jack Köper took up... rowing! 'At 22 I had to give up sailing for health reasons and it was then that I turned to sailing again. I bought a sharpie and won the first race I had ever sailed in.'

'This was most encouraging, of course, but I didn't know one rule from another.'

He came to South Africa in 1936, married a Dutch girl and returned to Europe, serving with the Netherland Government in England during World War II.

Back in Cape Town he skippered a Sprog on Zeekovlei and won the national yachting regatta at Knysna in 1950.

Shortly after this he imported the 20-foot Flying Dutchman with another yachting personality, Dr Ken Warr. The FD shells arrived in Cape Town in April 1952, and it was to start a thrilling new era in dinghy competition.

'Dr Warr did a lot to promote the Flying Dutchman class,' said Köper, usually by discussing the merits of the FD while filling teeth,' he added lightly. 'I tried to help the class catch on by building the FD as cheaply as I could. The first one cost me R320 to build. Today it costs R2,000.'

A strong Sonnet class has materialised in South Africa headed by a Sonnet committee keen on keeping the dinghy strictly one design, although fittings are sometimes discussed and improved upon.

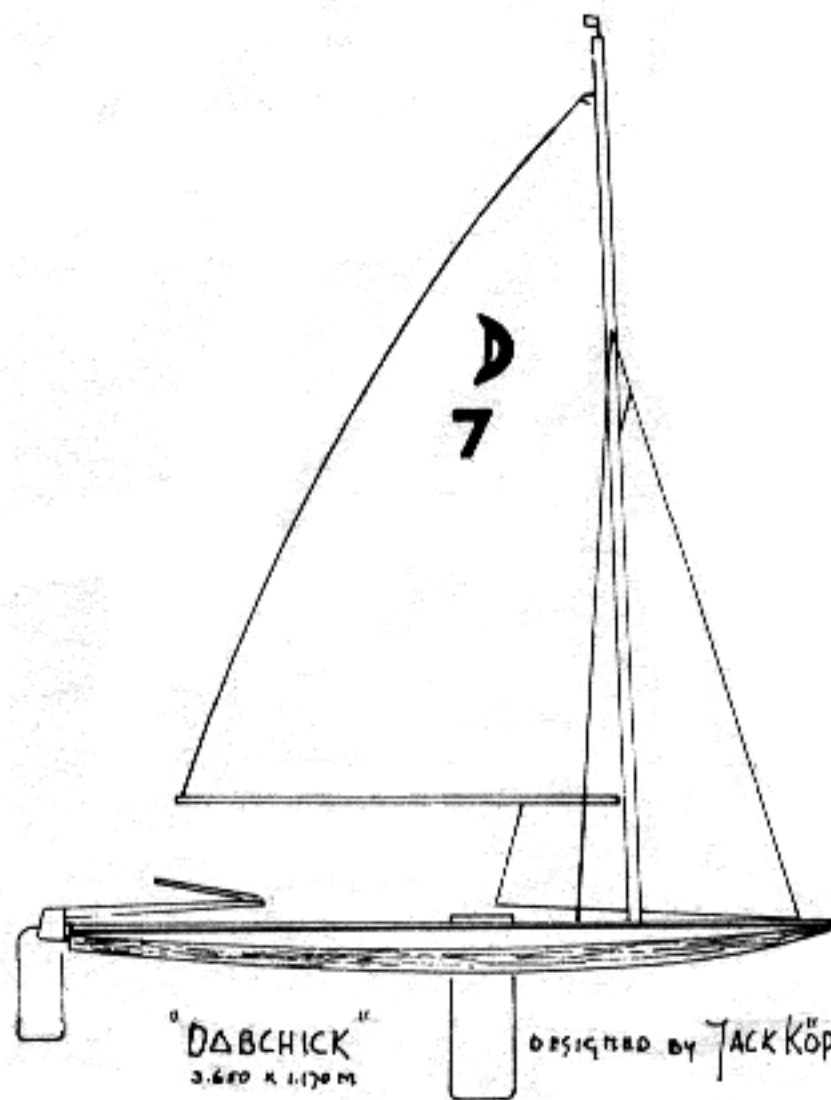
For the three classes, Fibreglass and plywood are used in construction.

'I designed each boat with definite aims in mind,' said Jack Köper.



"SONNET" DESIGNED BY JACK KÖPER

4.370 x 1.530 M 14'4" x 5' 90" sail area



"DABCHICK" DESIGNED BY JACK KÖPER

3.600 x 1.170 M



# The 'Super Dabchick'

## Not Just For Beginners

'The Dabchick is primarily for youngsters, the Tempo is a super Dabchick, an out and out racer, and the Sonnet is for learners and advanced yachtsmen.

'My intention with the Sonnet was to have, firstly, a stable yacht. For single yachtsmen it could be sailed with the mainsail, but for a crew the centreboard case is made in such a way that you can move the centreboard to balance either rig.

'She is also quite beamy for stability.

'She is also easier to build than the Tempo, requiring only five sheets of plywood. The keelson and topsides are of solid wood. The building record for the Sonnet is 16 days, however, it normally takes the builder three months working at weekends.'

In spite of some resistance overseas, the publishing plans of the South African products in the same publications which used Köper's previous boats, the Sonnet won an honorable mention at the international Shell prizegiving for industrial design.

The most exciting sailor of the three is the Tempo, a one-design hull featuring cockpit freedom and carrying a trapeze and spinnaker.

As his scows became bigger there has been mounting pressure from fans of his designs for Jack Köper to build bigger boats. 'Maybe one day I'll get around to doing a keel boat,' he says casually.

But these days Jack Köper prefers to sink his talent into sails. 'It is still a creative art,' he says. Like everything else he has done, he learnt sail-making through books, trial and error.

Designer, builder, sail-maker — Jack Köper, the boy who once feared water, is today the complete man of sail.



SONNET

## HOW WE BUILT

## OUR DABBIE

By GUNTHER and GERHARDT VOYÉS

WE WANTED to build a Dabchick, but a good one. So we looked at the other Dabbies and talked to owner-builders and tried to tap their brains.

Our idea was to learn from others' mistakes and to get to know the weak points so that we could overcome them.

The decks on factory-made Dabchicks, we found, were generally too weak. Fittings were often not secure enough, especially the rudder fittings. And the joints were apt to spring leaks, especially the deck joints.

These, we must stress, are building faults, and nothing to do with design.

Putting our facts together we decided to use mahogany-marine ply on top and underneath for strength in spite of the high mass. Spruce wasn't available so we used meranti for the other sections.

We added frames under the mast step and at the neck joint and reinforced the deck with strips of one-inch ply glued over the edge.

For all fittings we glued blocks of wood at the appropriate positions.

As glue we used two-component epoxy resin throughout which proved to be fantastic in strength as both a filler and sealer. We did not use a single nail or screw on the centreboard casing, the frames or the deck. Only the chines and bottom were fixed to the frames with brass screws and nails.

All other parts were glued and pressed.

As we did not want to spend extra money on tools we made do with an electric drilling machine with some minor attachments like a rotary rasp, a sanding plate and a sponge rubber sanding pad. We also used a hand saw, jack plane, hammer, screwdriver, rasp and a couple of clamps.

With some pieces of threaded rod, a few pieces of solid timber strapping and wooden wedges we managed to glue and press the larger components.

We allowed deck and bottom to protrude over the shine. Using the rigid sanding disc with flooring paper we trimmed the protruding glue and ply back flush with chines, bow and stern.

Sanding of deck and bottom was made easy with the sponge pad. Between coats of varnish we used 280 grit waterpaper and plenty of water.

For varnishing we used two component polyurethane (Glatex 8) varnish, giving four coats.

Over eight weeks we spent about ¾ to one hour each evening and used the Sundays for the bigger jobs.

The Dabbie is best sailed single-handedly but there is still a lot of fun to be had with a crew on board. In three years it has had its fair share of collisions with other boats or rocks but it is still totally waterproof and in sailing trim.

Readers of ABB may be interested to note the costs of building the Dabbie three years ago:

Timber, R40; glue, brass screws and nails, R10; fittings, R50; boom and mast, R20; set of sails, R65; total: R185.