

RS TERA



PHOTOS: JEREMY EVANS

The singlehanded Tera has been designed to get children and teenagers on the water at a low cost. **Jeremy Evans** discovers what kind of sailing experience can be bought for less than £1,000...

With designs as diverse as the Mustang 30, RS K6 and Feva to his credit, Paul Handley is better known for the quality rather than the number of his boats. The cruiser-racer Mustang 30 was first launched in 1988 and cleaned up at Cowes Week two years later. The K6 appeared almost 10 years on, was adopted as part of the RS range and is highly regarded by sailors who enjoy dinghy-style

performance when racing a keelboat.

The RS Feva took Paul Handley in a completely different direction – a modern kids' racing class with a rotomoulded plastic hull to make the price as cheap as possible. It has been extremely successful, becoming the RYA's asymmetric junior class and ISAF-recognised with around 1,500 boats sold in its first three years.

For this latest design, Paul drew on experience ▶

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Right The Pro sail option will be ideal for teenagers, giving enough power to get planing easily offwind.

with his own children to introduce sailing to youngsters in a low cost package. The result is the Tera, which so far as I am aware is the only sailing dinghy in Britain with a new boat price of less than £1,000 – albeit by a mere fiver!

You might expect a whole host of hidden extras to crank up the cost, but the basic Tera Sport really is 'ready to sail' at £995. The price includes a toestrap and protective boom padding, as well as a water bottle strapped on the foredeck. The only extras you might need are a trolley and cover, plus roof-rack bars for transport which still adds up to a very cheap introduction to sailing.

The Tera is manufactured in the UK by Teksport, a rotomoulding specialist in Nottinghamshire that produces a range of kayaks as well as the RS Feva and larger RS Vision (designed by Phil Morrison)



Right The rig options include an unbattened Dacron Mini sail for younger sailors or beginners.

which are well established as reliable products. Each Tera requires around half as much 'plastic' (33 kilograms) as a Feva to produce its polyethylene sandwich hull and deck moulding, since it is a considerably smaller boat designed to perform with solo sailors up to about 60kg. That helps make Tera not only the cheapest dinghy currently available, but also the lightest rotomoulded dinghy that's been built to date. It still promises to be strong, durable and almost maintenance free with small dimensions maximising the ratio between strength, stiffness and weight.

Launching and rigging

We collected the Tera from Hayling Island SC. It's first good point is that everything can be stored neatly underneath the cover. Not only the rudder and daggerboard, but also the rolled-up sail (or sails), boom and two-part mast.

The second good point is that rotomoulded dinghies generally feel quite heavy, but not the Tera, which is really easy to push around on its trolley. Most importantly, young sailors should be able to launch and retrieve the Tera without adult help, provided the surface is reasonable.

Young sailors should certainly be able to rig their own boat and the Tera is easy. The mast uses a standard Optimist bottom section with two different lengths (Sport or Pro sail) for the top section, all of which are sealed to help prevent inversion in a capsized.

Rig changes can be made very quickly. The luff sock slides over the mast, which is very light in both short and long mode, with the mast base twisted through 180 degrees to lock/unlock inside the hull.



Both rudder and daggerboard are moulded in polyurethane plastic, using similar construction to the foils on a Feva or Laser. The principal difference is that Tera foils have no aluminium reinforcement in the middle and are unpainted, with a standard yellow colour to provide UV protection. Despite such money-saving features, they look good and Paul Handley has no doubts they will be strong enough for the job. The rudder also features a neat SeaSure stock with a line to pull the blade up and elastic to hold it down. This works well, since you can tension the elastic enough to prevent the blade lifting on a fast reach, safe in the knowledge it will kick up if you touch the bottom.

Paul's experience with the Feva taught him just how much learner boats get maltreated. Sailing school students have a habit of dragging their boats up beaches or slipways with rudders still in situ, so they catch on the ground and cause cosmetic or structural damage at the transom. His response was to raise the rudder on the Tera and build a small moulded skeg into the back of the hull, ensuring the rudder cannot scrape on the ground.

Knocks on the head are a particular problem when children learn sailing. Rather than raising the boom, which lifts the centre of effort and consequently decreases stability, Paul has opted for a good layer of padding on the boom as a standard feature. This ensures any knocks will be soft – it's not long before beginners learn to duck during tacks and gybes – with no loose mainsheet to catch around unwary necks.

On the water

Paul Handley was brave to try and combine sailing performance with good looks and 'rowability'. Good looks are there for sure – the Tera seems likely to get the thumbs-up from both adults (who'll be signing the cheque) and young sailors (who'll have the fun). Making it rowable sounds like dumbing down, but is actually very successful. The Tera rows surprisingly well, feeling nippy,

purposeful and directionally stable. Good for parents or children and general messing about on the water, and far superior to the average inflatable yacht tender.

But sailing is the *raison d'être* of a Tera, so for starters we tried it with the stylish Pro sail, a see-through Mylar main with red stripes and full length battens, on the longer mast. An offshore wind was blowing a gusty Force 4 off Hayling Island, but you can see Frances Peters (aged 15 and around 50kg) was having a blast and plenty of fun. She flipped the Tera on request and had no problem getting it back upright, with any water disappearing rapidly through the drain hole in the double bottom cockpit. Her brother James (13 and around 45kg) had a go with the smaller Sport sail, a white and yellow Dacron main with short battens, and got the Tera equally well powered up.

They both made it look like a dinghy with good racing performance for seasoned sailors – which is true – but the other side of the coin is that Tera should be usable by lightweight novices. Alastair Handley (12 and around 40kg) fitted the bill with the 2.7sq m Mini sail, made of white and yellow Dacron with no battens, which is a useful add-on for novices in stronger winds. It clearly provided Alastair with a fairly stable, stress free sailing experience in quite difficult conditions.

The age range for Tera sailing will probably start at around seven, with young teenagers optimum for Pro rig performance. But adults can have fun as well. Paul weighs around 70kg, which he reckons is on the limit of effective 'self-draining' through the hole in the centre of the cockpit. If water starts coming in rather than going out, you simply put in a bung. I'm a tad heavier and we both enjoyed a Tera blast. It was a pleasant surprise to get planing quite easily, while upwind it tracked along well with relaxed tacking and gybing. The cockpit is quite comfortable and roomy, even if you are adult sized. Recommended maximum load is 100kg, meaning an adult and child can sail (or row) the Tera together, although without the zing of its singlehanded performance. ▶

Above left Upwind the Tera tracks nicely and was well powered up in Force 4.

Above top Rigging and launching is easy enough for children to get sailing unassisted.

Above Capsize recovery proved no problem, with the Tera's self-draining hull emptying quickly.

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ANSWER BACK

from Paul Handley

The aim of the Tera was to create a modern-looking, exciting yet easily handled, singlehanded dinghy specifically for young sailors. With sales approaching 200 boats after only a few months from the launch the Tera formula seems to be a winner!

The Tera is all about fun – quick to rig, light to launch, lively and responsive to sail and great looking. Most children who've had a chance to try one seem to love it. Sailing clubs and schools have also been strongly attracted to the boat. It offers durability, a choice of sail sizes to suit various sailor weights and experience levels, plus easy capsize recovery and a self draining cockpit. Exceptional value is a bonus!

If the early response to the Tera is anything to go by, you can expect to start seeing Teras in schools and clubs all over Britain pretty soon.

On the water the rudder system worked well, or would have if we'd secured the tiller by its pin! No problem – the Tera is stable and I did not suffer the indignity of an involuntary capsize. The daggerboard is reasonably easy to lift, but won't cause problems if you hit the shore with the blade still down – as for sure beginners will!

Above The foils are unpainted, but a small moulded skeg at the hull, ensures the rudder cannot scrape on the ground,

The verdict...

This boat is clearly tough, easy to own, surprisingly fast and stable, which are all good reasons why RS have added it to their range. ■

*Thanks to Hayling Island Sailing Club for providing facilities for this test.
For more information visit www.hisc.co.uk*

RS TERA specifications

DESIGN:	Paul Handley in 2005	
LENGTH:	2.87m	
BEAM:	1.23m	
HULL WEIGHT:	35kg	
SAIL AREA:	3.7-4.8sq m	
PRICE:	Tera Sport	£995
	Tera Pro	£1,195

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COMPARISONS... Where does the RS Tera fit in? Here are some alternatives...



■ **Taz**
Sailing school favourite with loads of buoyancy, room for two small or one larger person, optional jib, tough construction, and lively performance.

LOA:	2.95m
BEAM:	1.2m
HULL WEIGHT:	40kg
SAIL AREA:	
Main	4.39sq m
Jib	1sq m
GUIDE PRICE:	£1,375*



■ **Optimist**
The dinghy of choice for racing grommets. Clark Mills can't have believed what would happen when he designed the Optimist in 1947. Hugely popular.

LOA:	2.3m
BEAM:	1.13m
HULL WEIGHT:	35kg
SAIL AREA:	
Main	3.59sq m
Jib	-
GUIDE PRICE:	£1,495*



■ **Open Bic**
Stylish new dinghy from France's leading windsurfer brand dubbed 'the kid machine, looks très chic with probable pitch towards racing.

LOA:	2.75m
BEAM:	1.14m
HULL WEIGHT:	45kg
SAIL AREA:	
Main	4.5sq m
Jib	-
GUIDE PRICE:	£1,899*