

## TRIPLE TEST:



## Musto Skiff • RS700 • Shadow

What's the ultimate high performance challenge? **Jeremy Evans** goes head-to-head with two skiffs and a cat in a solo sailors' shoot-out...

If we wanted a tough test, we certainly got the weather for it. The nearby sotonmet station consistently recorded 17-20 knots with 22-26 knot gusts, plus a few 30-knot slammers,

providing extremely challenging conditions. The sailors said it felt like 20-25 knots most of the time, with 17-20 knots during calmer patches.

Sea conditions were reasonably

forgiving, with good protection from the low-lying shore. We rigged and launched courtesy of Weston SC, which gave direct access to the huge playground of Southampton Water for trials on a

**RIGHT** Both the skiffs have carbon rigs, while the Musto Skiff and Shadow have fully battened mainsails.



windward-leeward course, with a second – more mellow – day at Hayling Island SC.

Assisting me on the test team were Weston sailors Chris Aston, an RS700 owner, and Olly Harris, who has a Shadow at the club, plus Musto Skiff sailor Dan Vincent from nearby Stokes Bay SC. We were joined by Tom Walker, an RS600 owner and Formula 18 Shockwave crew, who had no previous experience of any of the three test boats.

**Rigging and launching**

The Musto Skiff and RS700 both have super-light carbon masts, which makes it fairly easy for one person to rig the boat, although both have a more complex maze of ropes and wires than the Shadow. Racks on the Skiff are fixed, while 700 racks are adjustable from 1.92-2.33m for weight equalisation when

class racing – at a mere 65kg, Tom Walker sailed at maximum beam.

One perceived disadvantage of cats is they take up more space in a boat park, but the Shadow is only slightly longer and a couple of inches wider than a Skiff or 700 with racks extended. It also fits the legal width for trailing, so once the 'platform' (hulls, beams and trampoline) is assembled, there is no need to take it apart. Despite an elliptical aluminium section, the mast is light enough for one person to raise or lower – just walk it up or down with shrouds attached – and rigging is straightforward, with no wings to fit or adjust.

Unlike other cats, the Shadow has no spinnaker pole. Instead, the chute is under the trampoline and the spinnaker tack is pulled out to the wire bridle between the bows. The major benefit is



absolute simplicity, but spinnaker size is reduced and centre of effort is well aft, reducing lift on the bows.

Both the Skiff and 700 are light and easy to wheel around the boat park, but care is needed to avoid scary moments in gusty weather. With a fully battened mainsail, the Skiff felt so twitchy you had to stay close in case it blew over. Launching or landing a Skiff is never going to be easy and could be a major challenge for novices. The boat will fall

**ABOVE LEFT** With an experienced sailor at the helm, the RS700 was able to outpace the Shadow downwind in gusty conditions.

**ABOVE** The three boats actually take up a similar amount of room on land, when the skiffs have their racks extended.

## SPECIFICATIONS

**Musto Skiff**

<b>Design:</b>	Dr Joachim Harpprecht and Ovington Boats (2000)
<b>Length:</b>	4.55m
<b>Beam:</b>	2.35m
<b>Hull weight:</b>	44kg
<b>Sailing weight:</b>	80kg
<b>Construction:</b>	Epoxy carbon foam sandwich
<b>Sail Area:</b>	Main: 11.8sq m Asymmetric: 15.5sq m

**Price:** £8,496

**Contact:** [www.ovingtonboats.com](http://www.ovingtonboats.com)  
**Class Assoc:** [www.mustoskiff.com](http://www.mustoskiff.com)

**RS700**

<b>Design:</b>	N. Peters and A. Southon (2001)
<b>Length:</b>	4.68m
<b>Beam:</b>	1.92-2.33m
<b>Hull weight:</b>	56kg
<b>Sailing weight:</b>	79kg
<b>Construction:</b>	Epoxy GRP foam sandwich
<b>Sail area:</b>	Main: 12.8sq m Asymmetric: 16sq m

**Price:** £7,995

**Contact:** [www.rssailing.com](http://www.rssailing.com)  
**Class Assoc:** [www.rs-association.com](http://www.rs-association.com)

**Shadow**

<b>Design:</b>	Yves Loday and Reg White (2002)
<b>Length:</b>	4.80m
<b>Beam:</b>	2.40m
<b>Hull weight:</b>	25kg
<b>Sailing weight:</b>	99kg
<b>Construction:</b>	Kevlar reinforced foam sandwich
<b>Sail Area:</b>	Main: 12.95sq m Asymmetric: 10sq m

**Price:** £8,995

**Contact:** [www.swell-catamarans.co.uk](http://www.swell-catamarans.co.uk)  
**Class Assoc:** [www.shadowsailing.org.uk](http://www.shadowsailing.org.uk)



over if you hold the bow, so needs to be held firmly from the side, making it difficult to insert the daggerboard and rudder. This was perfectly demonstrated by Dan Vincent who gave a masterclass on how to sail a Skiff on the water, but capsized trying to get it on the trolley!

The RS700 was not as lively as the Skiff on its trolley, helped by a semi-battened mainsail and slightly larger hull. It will still provide a challenge launching or landing in a breeze, which is all part of the learning process with this style of boat. And although these boats are singlehanders, you will need a spare pair of hands to help with the trolley, plus a third pair of hands to help launch and recover in wind and waves!

Once you've got the hang of using a pair of cat wheels (oversize tyres for all-terrain), the Shadow is surprisingly easy to wheel around, thanks to very light weight and a naturally stable platform. Despite a fully battened mainsail, it never felt ready to blow over, which could be a major bonus if you need to sign or are waiting for space on the slipway. Just be sure the mainsheet and downhaul are disconnected so there is no power in the sail. Launching and landing the Shadow were drama-free, thanks to the luxury of a stable platform. This allowed the helm to sort boards, rudders and all those things in a fairly relaxed manner.

### On the helm

Considering its unforgiving appearance, the Musto Skiff felt light, responsive, easy to steer and unexpectedly stable. The rig was easily controlled with downhaul and kicker providing a lot of depowering and not too much load on the mainsheet. Having to step from the hull to the rack and then onto the wire made trapezing a

lot trickier than on the Shadow, with lots of sheet adjustment and even some rudder movement required to avoid falling to windward or being blown over to leeward in gusts and lulls.

The 700 felt equally light and responsive on the helm, with effective rig controls led out to the wings. You get the same challenge of stepping out on the rack, but the 700 seemed to be slightly higher out of the water than the Skiff, making it a touch more forgiving in lulls and gusts. With no great load on the mainsheet, the rig felt powerful enough to drive the 700 rapidly upwind in chop.

The twin rudders of the Shadow felt light and responsive, giving the boat a nice controlled feel, more reminiscent of a dinghy than a cat. Getting out on the trapeze was easy, with the cat providing a very stable platform and no fear of windward capsizes. Unlike the two monos, the Shadow seemed uncluttered by ropes and elastics, making it easy to



move around the boat without getting caught. Considering the size of the mainsail, the mainsheet and traveller were easy to trim with control ropes from the rear beam.

### On the wind

First-time Musto Skiff sailor Tom had a 1:1 tuition session with Dan crouched behind the mast before being let loose singlehanded – no mean feat with gusts close to Force 7! Despite the conditions, Tom loved sailing this boat upwind, saying: 'It went like a dream, easy to get planing and high enough out of the water not to get dunked by every lull!'

Tom also tacked the Skiff without problems, but recommends you need to get on the new wire quickly. Familiarity with the equally flakey RS600 was clearly an advantage – most folk will find it a challenge to learn to tack a Skiff without capsizes.

Tom sailed the 700 in lighter winds, when it performed beautifully, feeling a bit heavier and more 'boat like' than the Skiff, partly due to more mellow conditions. He found it easy to tack, with no problems getting stuck in irons, which can easily stall the RS600. As with the MPS, plenty of practice will be needed to ensure a 700 remains upright in breezy conditions, particularly during tacks or lulls.

The Shadow had a clear advantage upwind, pointing high, sailing fast and consistently reaching the top mark well ahead of the monos. In difficult conditions with plenty of slammers, it sailed through gusts and shifts a lot more easily than the 700 or Skiff. The Shadow is more sensitive to fore and aft trim on the wire, but with correct positioning the boat picked up an impressive speed. Tacking was unexpectedly quick and with

a bit of practice could be almost as rapid as the 700 or Skiff, with minimal chance of capsize!

### Off the wind

Following Dan's demonstration of managing a Musto Skiff downwind in Force 5-6, Tom gave an impressive display with only two capsizes! Tom reported: 'The bear-away was astonishingly painless, although weight was needed on the wire until the boat was pointing firmly downwind. Controls were easy to adjust with an especially smooth kicker. My fears that hoisting a kite whilst steering with your back leg would be impractical were unfounded – hoists did not pose any major problems. Once on the wire with the kite up, the Skiff really does scream downwind at incredible speed (Tom's best was 17.5 knots), but I never really felt out of control! Gybes were predictably tricky, but I'm sure could be mastered with practice!'

Meanwhile, Chris Aston was going all-out on his 700 to stay ahead of the Shadow. All good things come to an end, so Chris took an almighty wipeout, landed on the leeward rack and broke the end fitting. We reconvened to sail the 700 on a much more mellow Force 3-4 day. Tom reported: 'The 700 felt very similar to the Skiff downwind, although closer to a conventional 'boat' if you prefer to sit on the side. Perhaps it's slightly more forgiving, with more buoyancy in the bows when sailing through waves, but not that forgiving as I found to my expense during a gybe – plenty of practice will be required to stay upright when you race! Bearing away was not a problem and controls were easy to let off. The pump action kite hoist looks complicated, but is very effective, with the big bonus that you can hoist the kite and steer at the



same time, also allowing the helm to stand up and hoist more quickly.'

It was a surprise to discover that the monohulls could outpace the multi downwind, when the Skiff recorded a top speed on the GPS of over 19 knots, with Dan Vincent looking completely relaxed on the wire. Olly Harris, who has a lot of experience with the Shadow, took an early swim and decided to sit in and sail conservatively with the kite. Tom Walker, who was totally new to the Shadow, went straight on the wire and blazed across the water with the kite, followed by an almighty pitchpole.

As Tom explains: 'To put it mildly, the Shadow was exciting! I found it difficult downwind, starting with the bear-away when I was nervous about burying the leeward bow, which did not seem especially buoyant. Following the bear-away, it takes time to adjust mast rotation, lift both daggerboards and let off the downhaul, followed by a quick



hoist – with no problems with snagging, despite being launched from next to the mast. I was amazed at the extra speed this relatively small kite produced, but soon discovered it was better to hike and get a good brace position in those gusty conditions.'

In more moderate conditions, Olly felt confident the Shadow might have been pushed harder to outpace the Skiff and 700. It also has a clear advantage during drops and gybes, thanks to a much more stable platform.

### Capsize

All three boats were flipped over at some point, with everyone but Dan going for a swim. Given that many people will find the Musto Skiff easy to capsize, it was good to see Tom had no problems stowing the kite and righting the boat, with an easy pull-up between the windward rack and hull.

Chris encountered the common problem of becoming progressively more knackered when he capsized the 700, which Tom thought could be a little

**ABOVE** The RS700 is slightly heavier and felt more solid upwind, whilst also being easy to tack, with no problems getting stuck in irons.

**RIGHT** Shadow had a clear advantage upwind, but is more sensitive to fore and aft trim.

**TOP** The Musto Performance Skiff is light and responsive on the helm.

**ABOVE** The Shadow can be righted singlehandedly by even relatively light sailors, but if you part company during a capsize it will blow away downwind.

**LEFT** The Shadow's relatively small kite still packs a serious punch downwind, but the boat takes a little time to set up for the hoist: adjust mast rotation, lift both daggerboards and let off the downhaul.

trickier than the Skiff to pull upright – you can't climb between rack and hull when the rack is 'in' for heavyweights or 'out' for lightweights with a central bar.

Tom pulled the Shadow up from two capsizes without a lot of trouble, including a full inversion, which was impressive and reassuring with his 65kg! Righting the Shadow may take a bit longer, but could be less tiring because you can stop for a rest on the hull. However, Tom was catapulted well clear of the Shadow by his major pitchpole and had a hard swim to catch the boat before it started blowing downwind.

### The verdict

The Musto Skiff is currently the most popular UK class of the three, with 65 entries at the 2008 nationals at Whitstable SC, while the RS700 attracted 44 entries to their championships at Haying Island SC, and the Shadow saw 20 at Brightlingsea SC.

Both the Skiff and 700 have a strong racing circuit in the UK and special events in Europe. The Shadow class is smaller, but has the opportunity to race under SCHRS (measurement handicap) against different cat classes.

With a price range of £7,995-£8,995 in ready-to-race mode, there is not enough price difference. The Shadow is most expensive, mostly due to the cost of building two hulls reinforced with Kevlar. Extras are also a little more expensive, not least a set of Cat Trax (big wheels).

These are three totally thrilling boats that reward the high performance sailor. They all provide a challenge, which will be rewarded by plenty of practice with gust control, tacks, gybes, hoists and bear-aways. You need to be in good shape to handle them: very fit for the Skiff; almost as fit for the 700; and still fairly fit for the



Shadow. You should only sail in a club environment with rescue cover – at least until you become fully confident.

Tom rated the Musto Skiff as his personal favourite. 'I am a massive fan of this well thought-out and all-round excellent boat, which is aimed at the out-and-out, slightly mad, experienced sailor.' The 700 provides similarly dynamic performance, but could suit slightly heavier or older sailors who want a boat that is slightly more forgiving,

though by no means easy to sail!

Tom rated the Shadow as, 'An effective compromise between a cat (quick in a straight line but slow through corners) and a dinghy (quick through corners but not so quick in a straight line.' It sailed beautifully upwind, but was very frisky downwind when dealing with Force 5-6 slammers. In more reasonable conditions, it would surely be a lot easier to get out on the wire, but should not be recommended for anyone with a fear of flying! ■



**TOP** Our RS700 tester put in an almighty wipe-out, which damaged a rack fitting.

**RIGHT** The Shadow had pace on both skiffs upwind.

**BELOW RIGHT** The Musto Skiff proved relatively easy to right because you can climb between the rack and hull.

### The manufacturers say...

'Thank you to all the guys who got their feet wet at the weekend. We're really pleased with the response the Shadow has been getting. As the fastest growing singlehanded catamaran fleet in the UK the Shadow is set to be a great club and circuit racer. 80% of the time a cat will be faster downwind, its speed in the test was curtailed due to heavy winds and rough waters. Overall speed on a cat is much faster.'

**Henry White at Swell Catamarans**

'The RS700 really is an achievable challenge. The cockpit shape and kite pump system inspire confidence at crowded windward or leeward marks, and the forgiving hull form was designed with tricky conditions in mind. The performance equalisation ensures the widest competitive weight band – from 70-100kg. The class is friendly and supportive, with regular training and a great circuit.'

**Nick Peters Director, RS Sailing**

'With World Championships attracting 90+ boats from 11 nations our ISAF International class has been designed to produce an elegant yet simple dinghy with blistering performance that is highly enjoyable to sail. This has been augmented by a structured programme of professional coaching seminars and the superb Stenhouse training DVD.'

**Paul Manning, Musto Performance Skiff Class Secretary**



Thanks to Bill Catt, Jim Mundy and Weston SC for providing superb facilities for this test. Weston SC welcomes a wide range classes, with more than 150 races over 11 months of the year. See [www.weston.org.uk](http://www.weston.org.uk)