24/ The Ranger 26

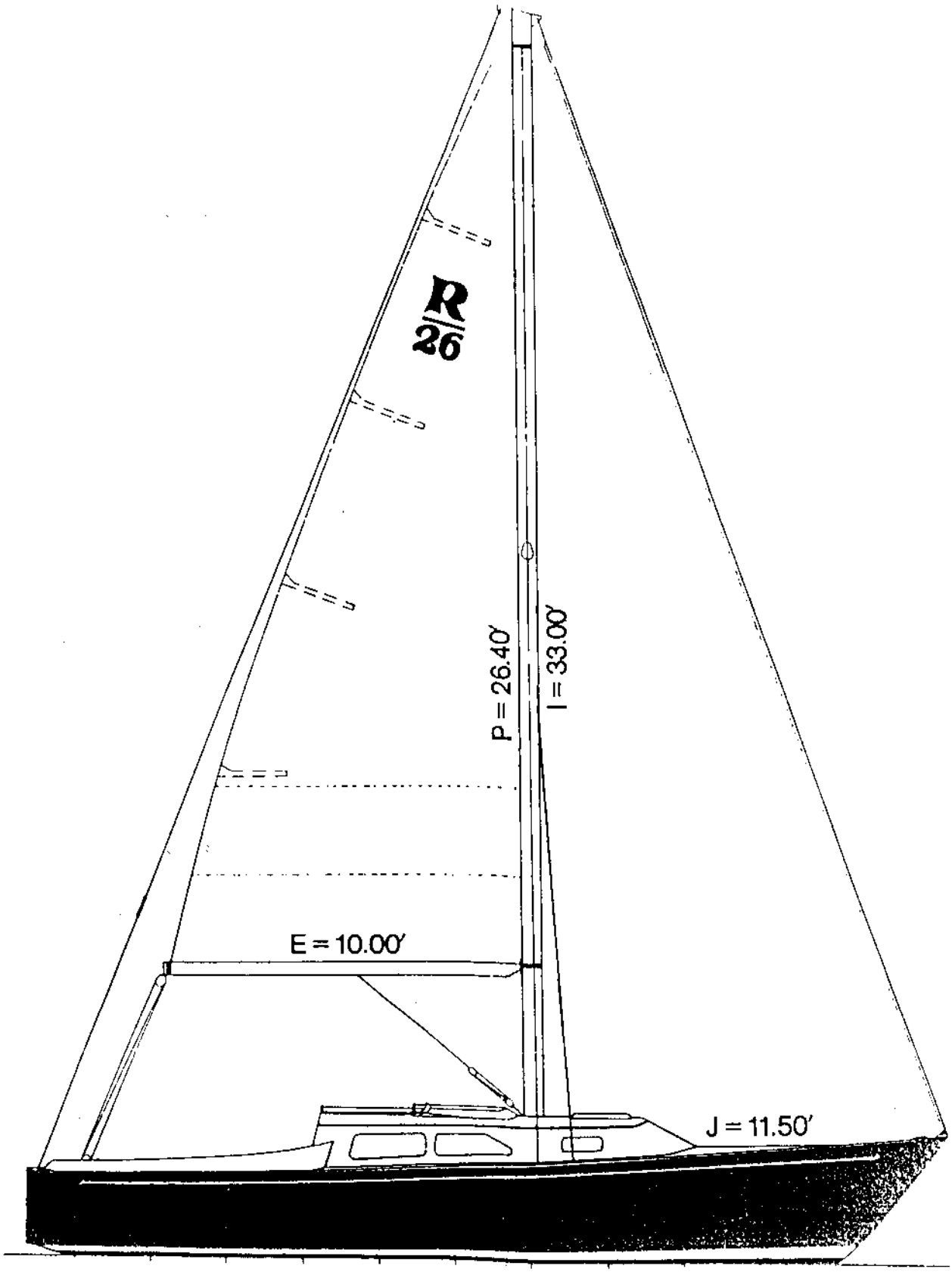
Not Much to Hold Her Back

Length overall: 26 feet 3 inches
Length on waterline: 21 feet 9 inches
Beam: 8 feet 8 inches
Draft: 4 feet 4 inches
Sail area: 322 square feet
Displacement: 5,860 pounds
Designer: Gary Mull
Year designed: 1968

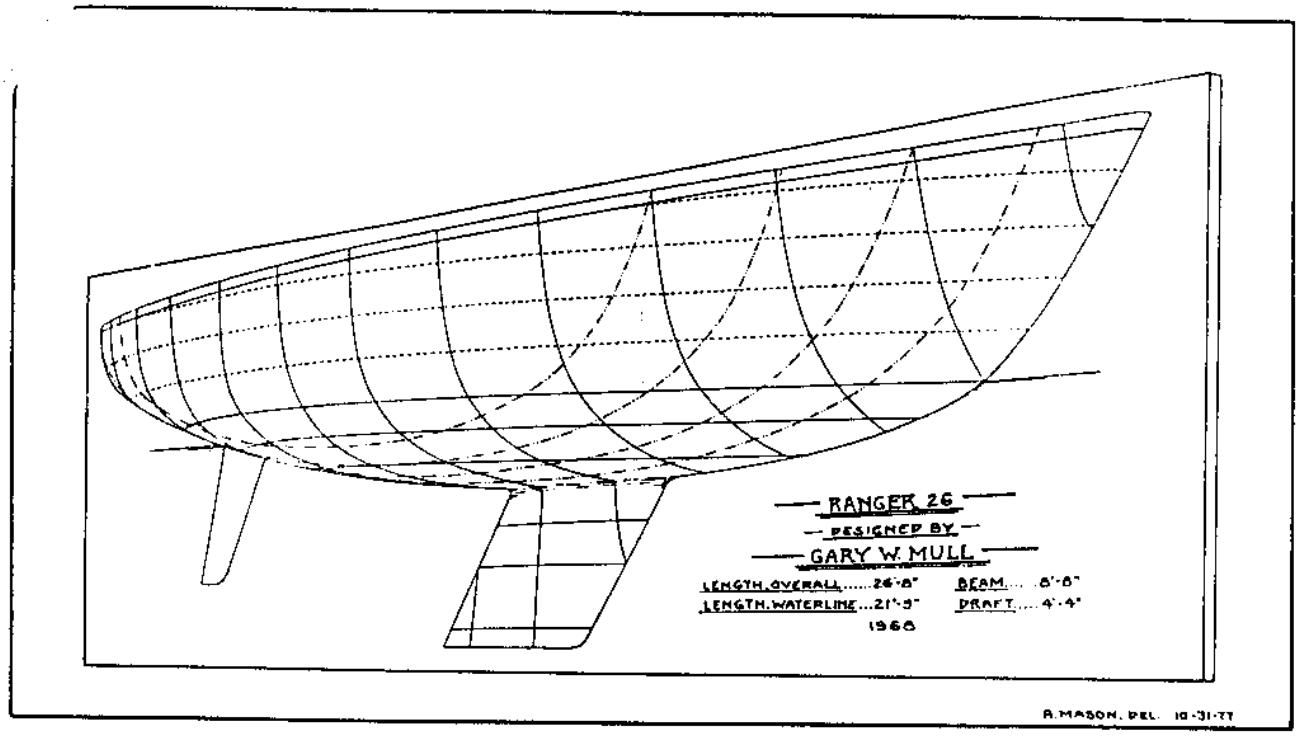
After racing from Newport, Rhode Island, to Bermuda and back in a Range, 26, William G. Homewood proposed an amusing plan for a home study course to prepare greenhorns for offshore sailing. Parts of the program are described as follows:

"First, at home, you should go into the bedroom fully dressed and pour a bucket of water over your head. Put on your foul weather gear and harness. Prop up one side of your head on the bed to an angle of 20 degrees, then pour a bucket of water over the pillow and bedding . . . Engage the services of a forklift (and operator) who will lift one corner of your house up into the air six feet and then let it drop down with a bang. He should do this all night long, intermittently without warning. Now go to bed. After one hour of sleep it will be time to get out of bed, open the sliding door to the balcony, and peer out (checking the sails). At this moment a friend, well hidden, should throw a bucket of water onto the back of your head. Your jacket hood must be in the off position, as this will allow the water to run down your neck . . . . . As you turn to go back Into the bedroom another well-hidden friend should club you over the head with a two by four. This simulates head blows from bulkheads. . . . "

Judging from Bill Homewood's training program, it seems that his Ranger 26, named *Union Jack*, was a rather wet and uncomfortable boat on her Bermuda trip. But let us consider the conditions. For two and a half days, Force 7 winds, gusting above 40 MPH, were on the nose or forward of the beam, and the seas were described as being "reminiscent of the Swiss Alps." *Union Jack* was driven hard under a double-reefed main with a 90 percent jib and later a 50 percent jib. Homewood said his boat would repeatedly shoot up a wave and land with a resounding crash on the other side. *Union Jack* was leaking quite a bit at the hull-deck connection, but when you consider that the Ranger 26 is a moderately light fin-keel (weighing less than 6,000 pounds) that was never intended for rugged offshore, she did amazingly well. She not only held together and proved easily manageable by a crew of one; but also she



The sail plan of the Ranger 26 shows the unusually high main boom, which helps the rating a bit and enables the effective use of a permanent vang. The high boom also helps prevent the crew from getting beaned, but Bill Homewood might think an occasional blow from the boom would be good training for ocean racing.



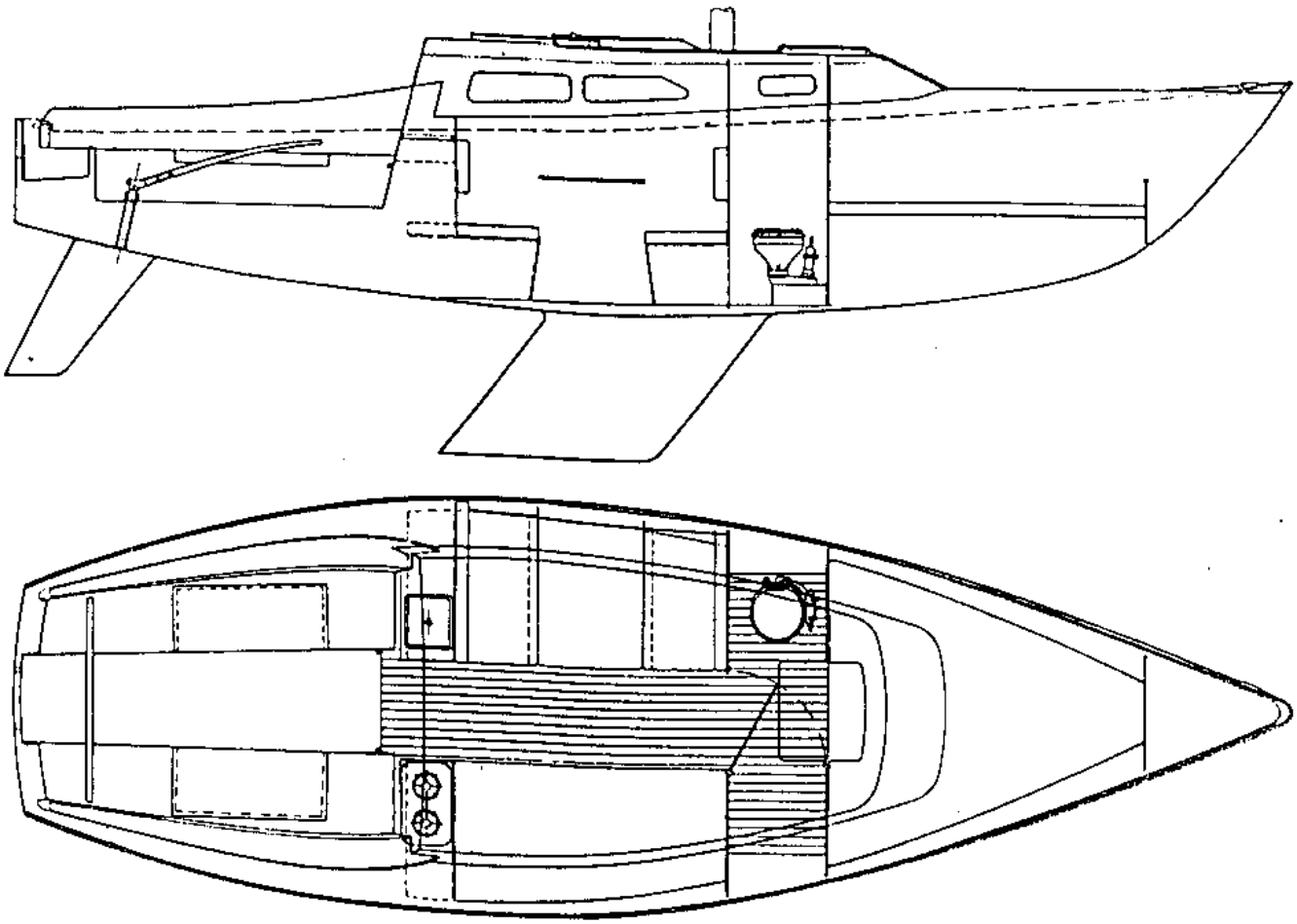
It is easy to see from this perspective of the Ranger 26 that she will ride over the seas rather than plow through them.

showed remarkable speed in completing the single-handed leg to Bermuda in 5 days, 7 hours, 47 minutes, and completing the double handed leg returning home in 5 days, 15 hours, 55 minutes. Her respective finishing positions for the two races were second in class/third in fleet and first in class/second in fleet.

Designed by Gary W. Mull in 1968, the Ranger 26 is built in Costa Mesa, California, by Ranger Yachts. An article in *Yachting* magazine (February 1969) related that Gary Mull was the first designer to have one of his model yachts surf in the Stevens Yacht Institute testing tank. The Ranger 26 has this unusual ability to surf or at least surge, and yet she is an all-around performer with upwind as well its downwind excellence, One of the many successful Ranger 26 skippers, John Tsirimokas (otherwise known as John X), described the performance of his boat as follows: "She's very good in light stuff, holds her own in medium winds, and comes alive again in heavy wind."
Bill Homewood wrote me that his Ranger 26 is well balanced and handles very well in most conditions, but that it is important to properly match her sail to the wind conditions. Over-canvassing even moderately can cause her to knockdown or broach to.

Bill wrote that he is "*very, very* pleased" with Union Jack's performance, but he is not overjoyed with her construction. Her main problems on the Bermuda trip came from the leaking hull-deck joint and a weak main bulkhead. For such rugged sailing, she seems to need more than the numerous self-tapping screws that hold the deck and hull together. Personally, I would prefer a bonded and bolted joint. Homewood says he knows several Ranger 26 owners who have had trouble with the bulkhead that supports the mast. He recommends reinforcing the bulkhead with a stainless steel girder. As I said before, the boat is not really intended for distance ocean racing, but I would like the reinforcement even for sailing in sheltered waters, for there is always the possibility of being caught by a bad squall, and any kind of serious racing can subject a boat to a lot of stress.

A glance at the perspective drawing of the Ranger 26 shows why she is so fast. There's just not much under water to hold her back. Her

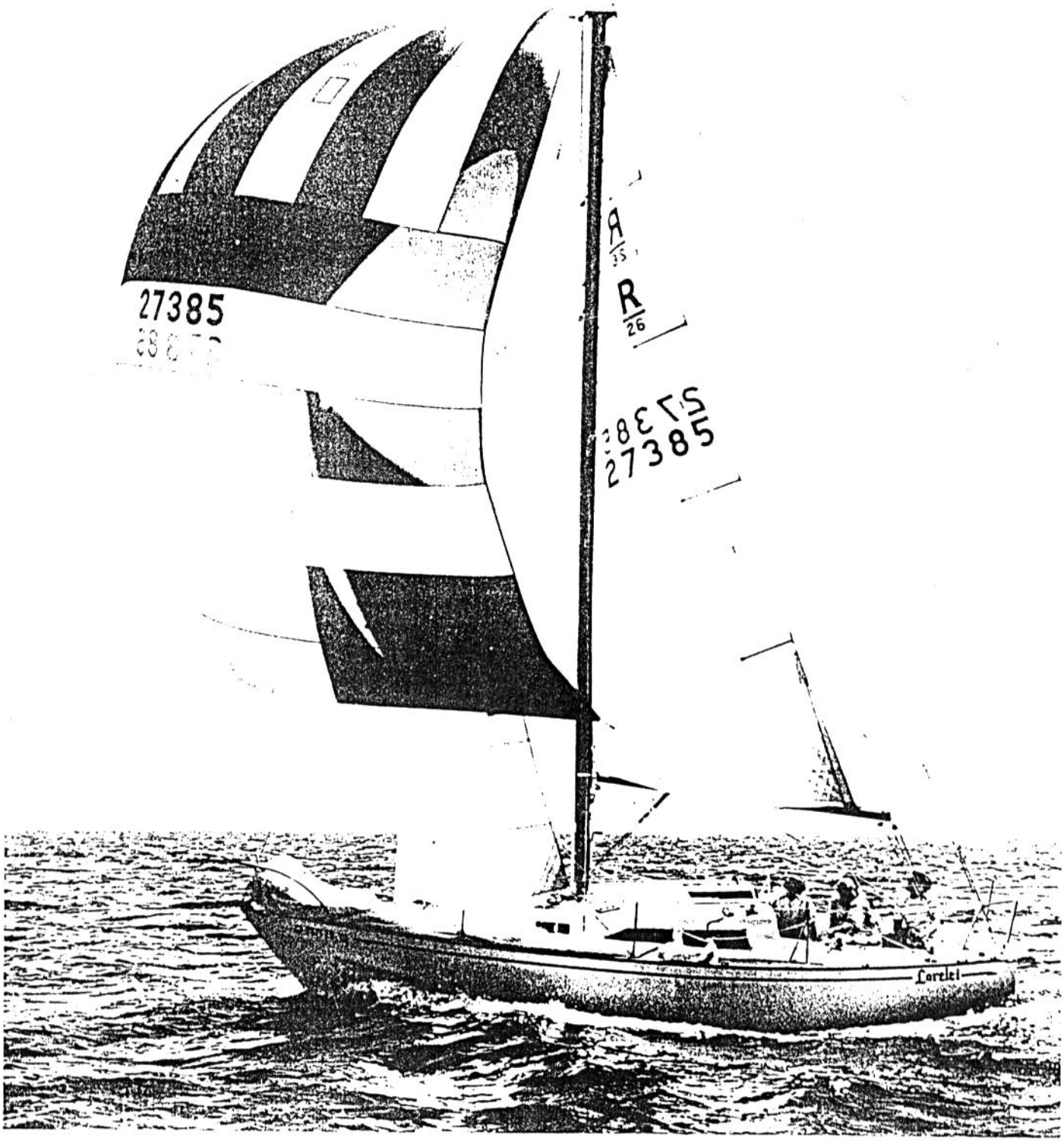


The ample beam of the Ranger 26 allows a lot of room in the main cabin. Notice on the profile plan that, although the spade rudder is swept back, the rudder stock is nearly vertical.

shallow bilge, wide beam, and flat run aft help give her the ability to surf. Given the right conditions, it seems that the boat can almost plane, for Bill Homewood reported a 24-hour run of 183 miles, which is truly remarkable for a boat with a waterline length of less than 22 feet. There is no skeg to help the boat track, but the bolted-on fin keel is fairly long at its bottom, and this may very well be helpful to directional stability, incidentally, the keel shape allows more or less constant curvature on each side for reasonable lift with minimum draft, and of course the long bottom keeps the center of gravity low. The free standing spade rudder is quite swept back, but the rudder stock is nearly vertical, and my feeling is that this is helpful to steering control when the boat is heeled.

The Ranger 26 carries ample sail for a boat of her displacement. The main boom is unusually high, and this feature seems counter to modern Theory as seen on the latest 12-meter boats. The *America's Cup* racers have their main booms so low that the deck acts as an end plate to inhibit air flow under the boom from the sails high pressure side to it's low pressure side. On the other hand, there is another theory that when a boat is heeled, the windward rail causes much turbulence, and a high boom is preferable to keep the foot of the mainsail in clean air. At any rate, the high boom on the Ranger 26 keeps the crew from getting "beamed" when tacking or jibing, it enables an efficient on-center boom vang to be permanently rigged, and it helps keep the rating reasonable.

Another possible benefit of the high boom is that is sometimes allows effective use of a staysail under a large jib. One of the most successful R-26 skippers, Walter Fink, frequently used a double headed rig on his Ranger 26 *Kalkum,* An overlapping staysail can easily be carried under a



A Ranger 26 running off under radial head spinnaker and tallboy staysail. Even though she is moving very fast, the quarter wave seems to be quite flat.

high clewed reaching jib, and occasionally the staysail is even effective under a genoa, due in part to the high boom which minimizes the harmful effect of backwind against the mainsail. The height of the mainsail allows a low-cut staysail to be sheeted well inboard to open up the slot between the two headsails, incidentally. Bill Homewood carries a double grooved headstay, and he has worked out a system whereby he can change jibs quite easily singlehanded.

In addition to being fast, the Ranger 26 is also a comfortable boat. There are two cabins with a large double berth forward and a four-person dinette on the port side aft with a berth opposite on the starboard side. Seats for the dinette face fore and aft only, so they are difficult to use when the boat is heeled on the port tack; nevertheless, the table can be lowered quite easily so that the dinette can be converted to a berth, which makes a better seat when there is a considerable angle of heel It would be nice if the head could be completely closed off from the forward cabin, but this is a lot to ask for a boat of this size. At least there is a door between the two cabins, and this makes the head private with respect to the after cabin. For a 26-foot boat, the galley is sizable, with a reasonable ice box, stainless steel sink, and two-burner stove. Although the stove faces the "wrong way" so that it can't gimbal properly, a one-burner Sea Swing stove can be mounted.

The cockpit is comfortable, and there are ample lockers under the seats for stowing sails and other gear. The well is self-draining but the companionway sill is quite low, so it should be fitted with a heavy lower slide for any offshore work. The boat is powered with an outboard motor. A small cutaway in the transom allows the outboard to be mounted low enough to properly submerge the prop and there is a safety well just forward of the transom to give protection from following seas. For the most rugged sailing, however, I might want a filler piece to close off the cutaway, because even though the safety well has drains, it's forward end is considerably lower than the top edge of the transom.

All told, the Ranger 26 is a remarkable little boat. She is not only fast, handy, and comfortable, but she is also quite attractive to the eye. Although she may have some construction weaknesses for offshore sailing, she can be beefed up. At any rate, *Union Jack* was strong enough to withstand the rugged trip to Bermuda. Bill Homewood certainly had complaints, but his problems were not really grave with respect to safety. According to his unpublished, jauntily written account of the passage, the boat was wet and uncomfortable during the worst weather. but he implied that there was no more serious problem than when the zipper on his fly rusted shut. I suppose that can be serious enough.