

SONATINA

Former Capetonian Chris Koper is surely 'a chip off the old block'. Koper, who now lives in Canada, comes from a sailing family. As a teenager, he helped his late father, Jack Koper, build a hugely successful line of dinghies - the Dabchick (a venture that led to the family opening the first sail loft in the country, in 1956), the Tempo and, finally, the Sonnet.

Chris told the Ontario Sailor magazine that the first six Dabbies, built in the family garage, were launched at Zeekoevlei YC with great fanfare. Chris and his brother Gerhard built their own.

"We learned to sail on odds and sods," he recalled, "and my Dad said he would find a solution. When my Dad's dinghy came along, it just blew the market open. It was an easy-to-sail boat, and appealed to kids."

Koper, who moved to Canada with his wife in 1969, told how his father sold the plans for the dinghy for a dollar, and said that the basic requirement for building was plywood - three sheets, 4' x 8'.

In Canada, Chris always had the idea of working on a new sailboat. But there was a family to raise, and a career in human resources to keep him busy. A trip back to SA when his father died a few years back, seemed to provide the spur, especially when he watched a regatta featuring those dinghies his father had introduced so long ago.

Soon he was redesigning his father's famous Sonnet, stretching it to 14 ft, and adding a few other modifications. He called it the Sonatina, and it wowed those who saw it at the Toronto Boat Show.

Chris, who recently visited South Africa, believes there could be interest in his boat in this country.

"The Sonatina features several changes that make her a light wind flyer as well as responsive in a breeze. She represents a different character of sailing dinghy, even though working from the starting point of the Sonnet. The design is well proven in a blow, and easy to build, but her very stable and underpowered sail plan mean that her great popularity is confined to the Western Cape."

Explaining some of the changes to the boat, Koper says: "The Sonatina is 15cms narrower on deck and 19cms chine to chine. The bottom panels are double-curved plywood, giving it more easily-driven lines. The gunwales have been raised so that the sides are 21cms deep at the maximum freeboard position, and the side decks sit nearly flat.

"Rick Nankin of North Sails has redeveloped the sail shape and profile to suit the new design features. The main is 41cm taller and 10cms longer on the foot; the jib is 50cms

taller. The foils are also significantly deeper. Amazingly, these changes are almost exactly the same as measurements my father wrote on an extra sail-plan drawing that he left me.

"These changes, and several others, have completely revised the character of the boat, and she is now a fine light-weather performer. The intent is clearly not to compete with the Sonnet, but to create a niche in a new environment."

Chris has also started work on the Chickadee, a development of the Dabchick.

For more info on the Sonatina, e-mail Chris at: chriskoper@hotmail.com