

# FLYING 15 **VS** RS K6



## Review category

Double handed keel boats

Wind speed: 15+ knots

Photography: Steve Bell / Fotoboat

These two boats are getting to the bigger end of being a dinghy with their keels, but despite one being asymmetric and the other symmetrical both target sailors who want to experience the speed and thrills of dinghy sailing without the spills. Our test team took to the water to uncover the parallels as well as the unique differences...



## The International Flying 15

Designed by the legendary Uffa Fox, 2007 sees the Flying 15 celebrate its Diamond Jubilee, showing that this classic symmetrical keel boat has maintained its reputation as a competitive two man racing boat. This could well be due to a proactive designer, class and builder as over the years the Flying 15 has moved with the times and modernised accordingly. This has seen the class establishing itself in a number of countries. The 2007 World Championships was testament to this with around 90 boats from 10 different countries attending. The UK sees an active open meeting circuit as well as Flying 15s appearing on club race start lines everywhere from inland waters to the sea. The largest fleets in the country are at Grafham Water and Hayling Island.



## The RS K6

Designed by Paul Handley, the RS K6 can be one of two things. It is a big dinghy with a PY and an active circuit alongside the successful RS Association, so has a fairly big calendar with the Fat Face and Gul sponsored events. However the K6 also has a small sports boat rating and an individual start at Cowes Week. Since its launch the RS K6 has been quietly building a reputation for great handling and performance. Fleets have been growing around the UK, especially in Lymington, Queen Mary and Chichester Harbour, and even abroad at The American Yacht Club in Long Island, where 17 are now on the water.

## The review team

**Peter Dann**

**Weight: 13 stone**

**Height: 6'2"**



Peter has a wealth of high performance asymmetric sailing behind him, including International 14s and the Laser 5000, as well as previous keel boat experience in a Dragon and the Flying 15 before moving into the K6.

**Caroline Gosford**

**Weight: 14 stone**

**Height: 5'6"**



History: Caroline has sailed a mixture of symmetric and asymmetric dinghies including Fireballs and International 14s before opting to crew a K6.

**Mark Wood**

**Weight: 16 stone**

**Height: 6'2"**



History: Mark moved from pro-windsurfing to dinghy sailing and has previously sailed a Laser 5000. He has sailed the Flying 15 for the past nine years.

**Sue Bannister**

**Weight: 11¼ stone**

**Height: 5'8"**



History: Sue is also from a Cadet, then windsurfing background but has been dinghy sailing Merlin Rockets, RS400s, Ospreys and Flying 15s for 16 years.

**Right:**

The draught of the fixed keel means you get a bit wet when launching the Flying 15.

**Far Right:**

You can launch the RS K6 in shallower water thanks to its lifting keel.



**Getting going**

On seeing the K6 and the Flying 15 fully rigged side by side on the shore, one of the biggest differences between the two boats immediately became apparent. The K6 boasted a much bigger rig and sail area than the Flying 15 and this was going to be reflected on the water in boat speed. Despite the bigger rig the K6 is around 25kgs lighter than the Flying 15; however our sailors found both boats were fairly easy to manoeuvre on the shore.

Rigging the boats exposed further differences. The Flying 15, being a symmetrical spinnaker boat, seemed to have a much more cluttered appearance inside the cockpit. This is further amplified by the fact that the Flying 15 has a smaller beam than the K6 by 0.3m. However Mark commented; "It only takes about half an hour to completely rig up the Flying 15 from start to finish, but like any boat you've got to know where bits and pieces go." The K6 is fairly comparable in the time it takes to rig; although it does not have as much rope work to thread and tie there are lowers and diamonds to rig and set correctly.

The rigs themselves on both boats are fairly light and both female members of the test team said that they are easily able to rig up on their own. Caroline remarked; "The K6 mast is carbon so you can literally pick it up with one hand. I can put the mast up by myself. You just need one person in the boat to slot it into the mast gate and then it just sits there. Sue said similar of the Flying 15 as there is a foot gate so you can pop the mast in on your

own and not worry about the shrouds.

When it came to launching Peter immediately noted that one of the biggest differences was how wet you get in a Flying 15; "You can launch the K6 just like a small dinghy and hop in whilst it's still quite shallow and then drop the keel as you get into deeper water. Whereas in the Flying 15 the fixed keel means you have to wade quite far into the water to float it but it is possible to have the mainsail up and sail straight from the trolley." Sue quickly added that this was just part of Flying 15 sailing and; "The Flying 15 is still very simple to launch, it is just like any other dinghy but you just have to accept you are going to get a bit wetter!"

On the test day the K6 launched with just the jib out and hoisted the mainsail once afloat and the keel was lowered. Mark wondered if this was the norm in K6 sailing. Peter replied; "It depends. When it's breezy or you are sailing straight off a beach it can be easier to go out just under jib and play it safe until the keel is down. However if you can launch along a pontoon, then it is easy to drop the keel, hoist both the main and jib straight away and sail off."

The test team seemed to agree that although the K6 had a lifting keel and the Flying 15's was fixed, both were very versatile and could be launched from nearly anywhere easily. This could be aided by the fact that neither boat has a fully battened main sail and therefore manoeuvrability during the launching process is not made too precarious by a powerful main sail. ▶



**Left:**  
The RS K6 is at its best on a broad reach.

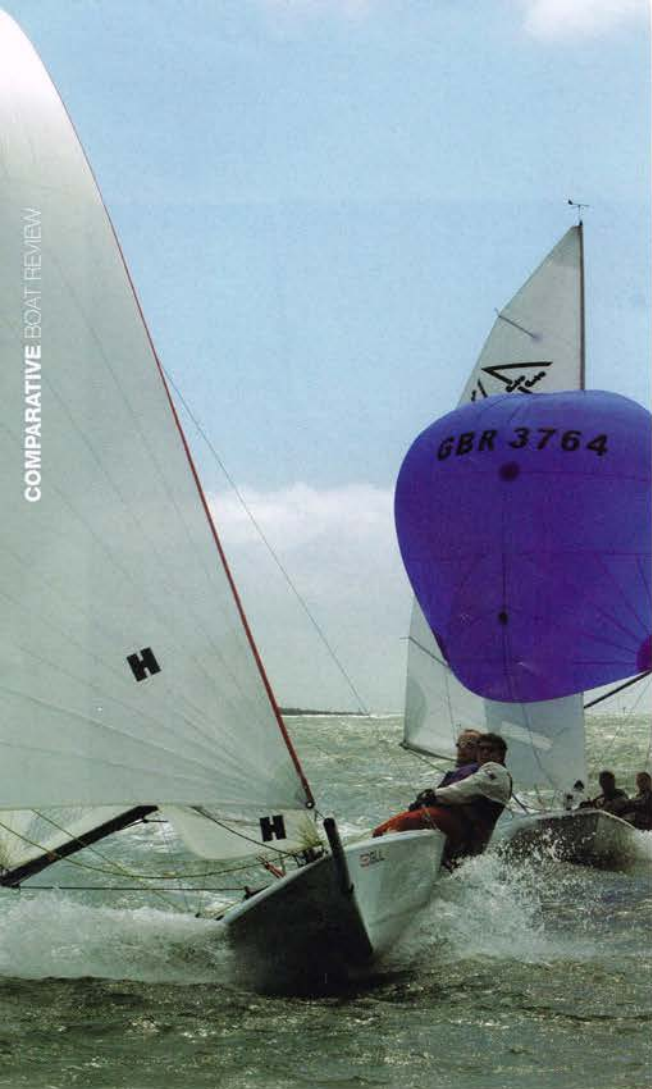
**Top left:**  
Flying 15 on a beam reach with the kite up.

**Top right:**  
Comfortable hiking on the RS K6.

**Above:**  
The Flying 15 can carry the kite at a higher wind angle.

**Right:**  
The RS K6 flat out.





**Left:**  
The big K6 kite meant it had the speed edge going downhill.



**Left:**  
The Flying 15 has the smaller kite by 11.8m<sup>2</sup> but still shifts!

## Breeze on!

The blowy conditions of the test day really allowed all the sailors to get a great taste of what both boats were like to handle and get a feel for their responsiveness. Everyone quickly agreed that the faster boat both upwind and downwind was the K6. Mark laughed; "That wasn't a surprise to be honest! The sail areas are so very different and so are the boats."

## Straight line speed

With the K6 being faster you might expect it to be the wetter ride, but our team found out quite the opposite! Caroline exclaimed; "You definitely get wetter in the Flying 15, especially on a reach!" All agreed and Peter clarified the matter with an anecdote; "I was at the K6 Inlands at Queen Mary and it was stupidly windy. We were going downwind when I looked at the speedo and we were doing around 18 knots, I turned to my crew and we were both completely dry! We thought, this isn't right! But the K6 has quite a high freeboard." Sue added that; "The Flying 15 has a much lower freeboard but it makes it very exhilarating being so close to the water and having so much spray." Mark put in; "Yes it's actually quite nice – you certainly know you've been on a exhilarating ride."

Going upwind in the K6, Mark was surprised by the light helm, compared to his Flying 15 where there can often be quite a bit of weather helm. Mark and Sue found that when in the K6 hiking out did not make quite the same amount of difference as it did in the Flying 15. This was because when the K6 heeled over, hiking out meant that the crew were in effect directly above the lead bulb keel, so the keel was doing the majority of the righting movement, whereas the Flying 15 responds much more readily to hiking as it does not have a bulb keel. Sue commented; "I've found that if the Flying 15 is not sailed flat on a reach, for example, the boat will start to load up. Like any boat it is at its best when flat and much more responsive to plane."

Zooming downwind created a few more issues for our test team, mainly due to the different downwind angles the helms were used to sailing. A near complete broach in the K6 meant symmetrical sailors Mark and Sue soon found out that in the asymmetric you certainly do not need to stay as high as you might think.

Mark said afterwards; "Straight away when we set the K6 kite, I was trying to stay high to stay on the wind and the power came on. I quickly remembered we were in an asymmetric boat with a large spinnaker and started trying to dump the kicker but it was difficult and we went over!" Both Mark and Sue agreed that both the boats require different downwind sailing styles. Whilst the Flying 15 sticks to more traditional race courses, the K6 tends to do windward/leewards as the higher angles don't suit it. Peter agreed saying; "The K6 is quite unlike a dinghy or skiff in that sense. An International 14 or another asymmetric you would sail lower to slow down and lose a bit of power. But in the K6 you can keep the power on much deeper."

In contrast it became apparent that the Flying 15 was the much more responsive and twitchy boat and as a result was much more reactive to kinetics. Mark

explained; "You're constantly looking for gusts to react to all the time. In that sense the Flying 15 is much more rewarding as once you get a gust you can really get the boat up and going. Whereas in the K6 you are going faster but you don't realise as it doesn't react, accelerate and respond in the same way." The team put this down to the Flying 15 jumping between displacement and planing modes, whereas the K6 tries to plane the whole time.

Mark raised another point about the acceleration of the boats; "On other asymmetrics I've sailed when the kite goes up and you sheet in the acceleration is huge, but you didn't have that in the K6." Caroline agreed and commented; "It doesn't load up at all. It is fast but it doesn't feel that quick at times. There is a speedometer to remind you though! Today we were doing well over 13 knots downwind."

### Through the bends

Although there were no big dramas when tacking and gybing on the test day, the manoeuvres certainly exposed some of the biggest differences between the boats and the crew routines necessary to pull them off successfully.

When it came to tacking the Flying 15 for Peter he found that he had completely forgotten how big the jib was and what effect it can have through the tack. Mark agreed saying; "You can gain a lot by tacking a Flying 15 properly." Peter and Caroline were more used to the self-tacking jib on the K6 so it was a bit of a change for Caroline to all of a sudden have to deal with jib sheets again! Mark confessed; "Personally I'm not a fan of self-tacking jibs, except on high performance asymmetrics, and I could not really see the point of it on the K6. Obviously you can still make adjustments along the jib track, but if you are doing that anyway it would be similar to having a jib sheet." Peter said; "We often make adjustments to the self-tacker, and in a breeze the crew would always have the sheet in their hand just in case. Although I think if you are cruising in a K6 having a self-tacker would be nice as you could not have to worry about it."

Gybing, as always, threw up a few more issues. Caroline exclaimed; "I had forgotten the complexity of a symmetrical boat!" Mark explained; "The Flying 15 is a classic symmetrical boat; you have to be in harmony with your crew, you've got to talk to each other, you've got lots of string, for example, twinners and you have to do things in a certain order to be competitive." Sue reiterated; "Different people do things in different orders but you do need a routine, especially in the gybes." The team thought that it is the same to an extent in the K6, however as Peter explained; "It is much more to do with moving together in the asymmetric K6. When we got in the Flying 15 we were in string overload! It took us a while to prepare for each hoist, gybe and drop, whereas regular 15 sailors probably don't even think about it." Sue found this comment quite interesting; "Although both Mark and I sail Flying 15s, we haven't sailed together before, and we found it fine. Obviously knowing the boat helps."

Gybing the K6 was found to be fairly easy in comparison, however this could be put down to the easier asymmetric system and more 'unrefined' technique



of pulling through the new sheet. Mark enjoyed going into a gybe on the K6; "It reminded me of my windsurfing days, it is very rewarding and you could commit to the gybe with great ease." Peter also sees this as one of the K6's best points; "I think it is great too. After years sailing International 14s where going into a gybe in breeze can be daunting – a K6 is great, it just slips through and you've got a big bit of lead beneath you!" ▶

#### Top:

The moulded K6 cockpit makes hiking very comfortable.

#### Above:

The K6 struggles to sail as high as the Flying 15 on the reaches.

“...the Flying 15 is a classic symmetrical boat, you have to be in harmony with your crew, you've got to talk to each other...”

**Above and right:**

The RS K6 cockpit (left) has a fairly rope-free appearance in contrast to the F15 (right).

**Layout, rig and controls**

Each boat was very different in layout. The enclosed deep cockpit of the Flying 15 means this is very much a 'sit in' boat, compared to the uncluttered wide K6 where in effect sailors 'sit on' it. The larger cockpit shape and size of the K6 means that it can easily accommodate three people, and is often raced in this way. However as Peter pointed out; "The Flying 15 is small enough that the helm and crew can do stuff as a team and it makes moving together easier, whereas in the K6 the open cockpit means you may well be spread out a bit more."

The friction in many of the systems on the full-of-string Flying 15 surprised Caroline. Mark found a similar thing when he stepped into the K6; "It was such a difference - there was just nothing there in the sheets or control lines." However it was noted that on both boats all adjustable control lines were easily accessible to adjust. Sue laughed; "I only tried to pull the K6 keel up once I think!"

The conversation moved onto the rigs and how adjustable these were. Peter thought; "Both boats were quite similar in terms of what you can adjust on the water. There is kicker, cunningham and outhaul." Sue and Mark chipped in that in addition to this the Flying 15 mast ram is adjusted a lot on the water. Sue summarised that; "The Flying 15 is definitely much more tweaky than the K6. We can adjust the jib cars, whereas you can only adjust the self-tacking jib track. Tweaking the Flying 15 can make real significant differences when sailing competitively."

**Overload**

There was a little debate about the loads in the spinnakers. The Flying 15 kite, being considerably smaller, was easier to trim. Sue found; "There was a little more load in the K6 kite than I was expecting, since the other loads had been so light, but it was still very easy to manage. I was expecting it to be like a Laser 5000 or something where I would have to dig in and hold on, but I didn't at all." Caroline agreed and explained that she could trim the K6 kite with one hand if necessary. Peter thought that due to the light loads both boats were ones that can be sailed with smaller crews easily.

Hoisting and dropping the spinnakers in both boats required a different routine. Sue explained; "The helm pulls the kite up and down in the Flying 15 whilst the crew is by the mast organising the pole, so sometimes when rounding a leeward mark the crew might start pulling the main in." Caroline made clear the K6 procedure of the crew both hoisting and dropping the kite. When on the water in the Flying 15 Peter had a

**Right:**

Superb conditions on the day to test two fantastic boats.



moment where he thought he was back in a big powerful asymmetric dinghy; "When it came to dropping the Flying 15 kite, I was in full on International 14 crew mode, legs apart, big arms - and it had gone before I knew it! It's a tiny kite! But it is perfect for the boat, you wouldn't want anything bigger."

**Luxury?**

The conditions of the day meant that all the sailors certainly had a good go at hiking out in each boat, and all found the K6 to be the more comfortable. Caroline said; "The rolled sides are really sculpted around hiking out." However one point that all the team agreed on was that they did not like not being able to adjust the length of their toe straps on the K6. Although this is possible, the K6 used for the test did not have adjustable ones. Mark and Sue both prefer to change their hiking position on a regular basis; "We find that in bigger seas in the Flying 15 you need to lengthen toe straps so you can move back and out." Despite both test boats being hiking boats all members of the test team said that perhaps it would have been nice to have a trapeze on the K6, and that it seemed like it would have been quite a natural addition to the boat. Who knows what we'll see in the future!

Regardless of the K6 being more comfortable to hike, Mark importantly said; "The Flying 15 feels like the kind of boat you want to hike more in, it responds much more and is more rewarding." Again this could well be because when hiking in the K6 the crew is effectively in the same position above the lead bulb keel and no further out.

**Who for?**

It is clear that both boats have been designed with enjoyment in mind, despite the 55 year age gap between the two designs. The K6 offers skiff style sailing without the risk of taking a dip, as well as being able to enjoy a chilled out cruise around the harbour. The Flying 15's classic design from Uffa Fox has stood the test of time, has maintained its reputation as an exciting, competitive two man racing boat and still remains to be one of the most widely sailed dinghy in the UK as well as worldwide.

Mark thought; "The K6 would be a great boat to sail or cruise around the harbour (say Chichester Harbour), but it's not necessarily designed for that, with its racing circuit and Cowes Week start. On the circuit I assume you do windward/leeward courses, this could be a bit of a shame as the boat is fantastic on a reach." Peter advised; "That's why people do Cowes Week I think,

there is round-the-cans racing. Racing aside though, the K6 is really a joy in a harbour with the family; you can do big speeds without the danger of manoeuvres that you think could go wrong, and with lots of space." The team decided that the Flying 15 was designed as a two man boat hence it probably would not be used for day cruising. As a racing boat, its pedigree is undisputed. When the Flying 15 was designed and launched 60 years ago it was at the cutting edge of dinghy development, and it has not only stood the test of time but evolved to remain one of the most widely sailed fleets in the UK. The K6 obviously benefits from 60 years of advances in technology, material and dinghy design, but the fact that these two boats can still be compared is testimony to the Flying 15!

### Heavy weights?

Although there are recommended crew weights for both boats in the test it was discussed that these are very flexible. Sue clarified; "There are Flying 15 sailors who are in the top 10 for world qualifiers ranging between 23 stone and 30 stone. They are competing at the same level and they are not really making drastic changes to their rigs, showing that the Flying 15 is pretty flexible and depends on how you sail it." Mark added; "The strange thing is that being too heavy or light for the boat only really comes into effect in the medium airs around 15 knots. When it is windier or lighter everyone seems to be on a level playing field again."

The K6 has a recommended average crew weight of between 180-210kgs and depending on the sailors' size and choice the boat can be sailed with two or three onboard. There are no weight restrictions.

### Wrapping it up

The test team came to the conclusion that there is a place in the sailing market for both these boats, although very different places. Our reviewers decided that the Flying 15 feels much more like a big dinghy, whereas the K6 has more of a sportsboat feel. The Flying 15 is celebrating its Diamond Jubilee this year, 87 qualifying boats around the world attending the 2007 World Championship and the class is coming up for 4000 boats, showing a strong following and support for the class. The K6 is much newer, however it is building up a presence fairly quickly with substantial fleets in Lymington and Queen Mary and even in the USA with 17 boats in Long Island. ▶

## Final thoughts

### Peter

Today has been a real happy trip down memory lane. I loved sailing a Flying 15 and it was great to be back in one. However in the K6 I think I've really found a boat that I can have as much fun in as my International 14 days!

### Mark

I was impressed with the K6, I thought it was light, exciting and exhilarating and it's got a place in the market, and I can see why people sail them and what the attraction is. However if I was given 17K to buy a new boat I would stick with the Flying 15 as it gives me the close competitive racing I enjoy.

### Sue

It was great to have the opportunity to sail the K6, it was fun and exciting. However my passion for the Flying 15 remains with me at the end of this test day.

### Caroline

The contrast between the simplicity and stringlessness of the K6 to the Flying 15 was the biggest eye-opener of the day for me.

	RS K6	Flying 15
Year of design	2002	1947
Length (m)	5.8	6.1
Beam (m)	1.82	1.5
Sailing weight (kg)	280	305
Rec. crew weight (kg)	180-210	165-180
Main and jib (m <sup>2</sup> )	19.7	13.94
Spinnaker (m <sup>2</sup> )	26 (asymmetric)	14.2 (symmetric)
PN number	920	1025
Builder	LDC Racing Sailboats	Ovington Boats
Crew	2 or 3	2
Hull construction	Epoxy GRP foam sandwich	Foam sandwich
Keel	GRP vertical lift with encapsulated lead bulb	Fixed cast iron fin keel
Website	www.rs-association.com	www.flying15.org/gbr
Cost new	From £14,950	From £16,500





# Right **to** reply

**Riki Hooker, Sales Manager, RS Sailing**

As K6 owner Peter Kirkby once commented about the boat; "It's the iPod of the dinghy world... understated, very desirable and totally seducing once you actually get your hands on one". Ok, he is in marketing, but it came from the heart and he got his cheque book out!

It is right to think of the K6 as a big dinghy. It has that same light and responsive feel you get from modern high performance dinghies, but without the threat of a swim. This allows 'time poor' sailors to compete with less pressure on putting practice hours in on the water - make a mistake and you lose a boat length or two, whereas in a skiff you'd have been in the tide and out of the race. It also gives tactical upwind racing and an absolute blast downhill as the testers discovered.

The K6 is perhaps one of our best kept secrets. It has never had the massive marketing, sponsorship and media blitz enjoyed by some other keelboats, but in reality it is quietly building a following of passionate owners who cannot understand why everyone is not doing it. Numbers are growing in several places, including the USA, as mentioned in the test. The first K6 America's Cup (proper name pending) is scheduled for this autumn, when European sailors will fly over to compete in a round robin series using the local fleet's boats.

If the idea of a smooth ride at warp speed while close racing in a great looking boat appeals to you, why not take the first step and give us a call?

**Keith Jamieson, BIFFA General Secretary**

The Comparative Boat Review between these big dinghies (all be it with keels added) does perhaps highlight the difference between the boats; although both demonstrate that Uffa's original concept that if a keel boat were made light enough and the right shape it could be made to plane like a dinghy and both these boats will do this and in spades!

The Flying 15, although a 60 year old design, will still deliver an exciting enough ride for all those who sail it, there may be a bit more rope in the 15, making the rig easily adjustable but this encourages variety of crew weights; also making this a 'thinking sailor's boat' and you will very definitely get out what you put in.

In launching, the boats provide dinghy-like sailing in two completely different ways; the 15 utilising a cleverly shaped fixed keel design, whilst you can get a bit wetter than a dinghy the boat does draw less than 3ft; over 60 were successfully sailed off the beach at Abersoch for a Nationals.

The 15 will appeal to a wide variety of sailors with entry level into the class being at a very reasonable cost, those coming into the class will find a friendly supportive bunch that enjoy close competitive racing to a high standard with a good social scene. The boat will continue to evolve; ensuring the 15 like many other 'traditional' designs remains relevant to today's sailing public. **DSM**

