

Dinghy test

Topaz Vibe Xtreme

Five years after testing the original Topaz Vibe, **Jeremy Evans** goes sailing with a Vibe on steroids...

Topper International launched the original Vibe to wide acclaim. It's a versatile boat that's lively and loads of fun to sail, but very stable and easy to manage. The Vibe is one of the best boats in the Topaz range, partly because the rotomoulded plastic hull is small enough to be reasonably light and stiff, with particularly good design work by Ian Howlett and Rob White.

If there's one possible drawback, it's that the rig lacks power for lighter winds or heavier sailors, including existing young Vibe sailors who are now outgrowing their boats.

Wanting to extend the appeal of the Vibe for older teenagers, Topper's Spanish importer hit on the solution of fitting the 14ft Topaz Magno rig. This worked so well that Topper International introduced it to the range as the special order Vibe Xtreme at £270 extra. There's a 20 per cent increase in sail area, with the taller mast fitted with lowers shrouds and spreaders for greater control of mast bend and compression. This makes it easier to depower the mainsail upwind, with enough support for a lighter crew to trapeze without distorting the rig, plus a longer pole to fly a

considerably larger asymmetric spinnaker.

A more powerful rig seems like a good idea, so long as it makes the Vibe quicker and everything continues to work properly. To find out, we had a session on Datchet Water with Jon Manners and his son Dan.

On the water

★★★★☆

The Vibe X is not dwarfed by its bigger rig, which has a similar sporty appearance to the 15ft Xenon, with black spinnaker, white Dacron jib and Mylar mainsail with black scrim reinforcement. We sailed on flat water, where the main challenge was to stay fully powered with the crew on the wire as the wind oscillated between Force 2-4.

Unsurprisingly there's lots more power, particularly downwind. The solution is for the helm to bear away on gusts to hold the boat flat, ensuring sail power is transformed into acceleration. Better control of mainsail shape allows the helm to depower as necessary when beating by flattening the sail and twisting open the upper leech.

There's plenty of room at the back of the cockpit for a medium weight adult helm and enough gunwale space for a fairly lightweight crew to enjoy life on the wire. While the Vibe is a lot more stable than a small skiff like the 29er, you still need to be nimble to trapeze any 12ft dinghy.

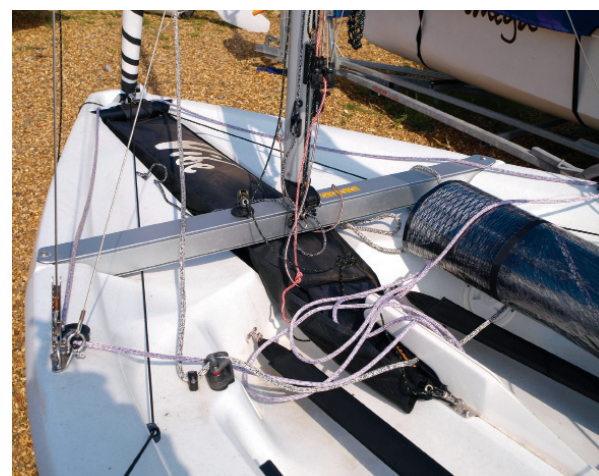
The main advantage over the standard rig is lots more power for lighter winds, allowing the boat to plane earlier and sail faster. As the breeze increases, better technique and more grunt will be needed to control the boat, which like any well powered dinghy could become a challenge in strong winds and waves.

A 10-year old seems likely to be the minimum recommended age for a crew – ideal weight is around 60kg, with enough strength and confidence to handle the spinnaker. Ideal helm weight is probably under 75kg, with ability to hold the boat flat, keep the crew out on the wire and enjoy the turbo-charged performance.

Verdict

★★★★☆

The standard Vibe is still a great choice for sailors who just want to have fun, with the Xtreme option providing more power and an increased challenge. □



1 Rigging the larger sail was straightforward. 2 There's a lot more power - especially downwind. 3 The Vibe benefits from good design work by Ian Howlett and Rob White. 4 The Vibe X isn't dwarfed by its larger rig.

SPECIFICATIONS

Design	Ian Howlett & Rob White
LOA	3.76m
Beam	1.6m
Hull weight	70kg
Mainsail	8.12sq m
Jib	2.30sq m
Gennaker	10.58sq m
Ready to sail	£4,995 (Standard Vibe is £4,725)
Options	Top cover £225; rudder blade bag £80; launching trolley £325; trailer road base £450.





“I wondered whether any part of Burghfield would be deep enough for a full transom-over-bow wipe out”

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COMPARISONS



RS200

Britain's most popular 12ft one-design dinghy. GRP hull, top class competition.

LOA 4m
Beam 1.83m
Sail Area (main & jib) 11.52sq m
 (spinnaker) 8.29sq m



Laser Vago XD

Spinnaker and trapeze skiff-style dinghy with rotomoulded plastic hull.

LOA 4.2m
Beam ??m
Sail Area (main & jib) 11.98sq m
 (spinnaker) 13sq m

ANSWER BACK

From ??? at Topper International

Supplier: Topper International, Kingsnorth Technology Park, Wotton Road, Ashford, Kent TN23 6LN.
 Tel: 01233 629 186
 E-mail: info@toppersailboats.com
 Web: www.toppersailboats.com