



## Miracle Buyers Guide



The Miracle is an amazingly versatile lightweight boat. It is its lightweight construction that allows for the loads on the boats to be low and therefore last a long time if well built. This guide is intended to show a number of routes to getting a competitive Miracle on the water. It will focus on the newer end of the market. All views in the guide are those of the author...

*By Sam Mettam*



[www.miracledinghy.org](http://www.miracledinghy.org)

## How to buy a competitive boat

### Buying New

The class is lucky to have 4 active builders in the class, all of whom are capable of building boats that are highly competitive, and I suspect that in the right hands could win the Nationals. We will look at each in turn:

#### Butler Boats

Dave Butler started building Miracles a few years ago and now builds more than any other builder. He is the most active of the builders. He builds in either Wood or Composite, or fits out the GRP boat (to which he made the latest deck mould on behalf of the association a few years ago). His wooden boats are generally light and have shown they have pace. The fact they haven't come in the top few at the Nationals is probably because none of the top sailors have campaigned one at the time of writing (although several top of the fleet sailors currently have boats on order from Dave, so expect this to change). Having said that, Ian Bradley showed their pace by borrowing one and winning a race at the 2011 Nationals and finishing 6th overall in his first ever Miracle Nationals. Dave's boats have also helped several people to improve their position in the fleet.

Dave developed the central spinnaker chute, which makes the spinnaker less likely to blow inside the jib on the hoist.

Wooden boats generally cost around £6985 on the water, composite ones £6495 and FRP ones from £5745 including everything other than trailer, trolley & covers. Dave is also able to take in boats as part exchange and convert older boats into his new design.

Dave can build quite a number of boats every year, and at the time of writing had 4 in build. You can speak to him on 01482 669848 or visit his new website [www.butlerboats.biz](http://www.butlerboats.biz)



#### Ginger Boats/Gibson Sails

This is an exciting new development. Neil Gibson of Gibson Sails has got together with Phil Hodgkins of Ginger Boats to produce a Miracle to the Ian Kelly hull shape (see further down) with a modernised deck layout. The first boat has proved fast, finishing 5th at last year's Nationals (Neil's best ever Nationals result) and winning the Southern Area Championships. Boats can be built with chutes or bags and are light. Neil can also fit out GRP boats to your specification or his own.

Wooden boats generally cost around £7250 including Sapele Decks, Harken fit out, launching trolley, top cover and a full suit of racing sails and GRP ones £6750 with the same specification.

You can speak to Neil on 07801815861 or visit his website [www.gibsonsails.com](http://www.gibsonsails.com)

#### Woodwind FRP

Woodwind mould the FRP Miracle either for sale through Butler, Gibson Sails or directly. The boat is moulded out of Vinylester foam sandwich and boats can be within a few kilos of minimum. The boat has proved to be fast, winning the 2011 Nationals.

Woodwind can be contacted on 01790 819999

#### Boatcraft

Robert Spolton at Boatcraft has been building Miracles for around 30 years. His boats have won more Nationals in recent times than any other builder. He believes in stiffness and workmanship. He's not too worried if the boats aren't fully down to weight as long as they are stiff enough (although they are all within 4kg of minimum). He spends around 300 hours on each boat (similar to the length of time spent on a wooden Merlin!). The biggest downside to a Boatcraft boat is the length of time you will spend waiting for it (at least a year - many people have bought second hand boats or plastic boats while they are waiting). You will also need to factor in a number of weekends talking with Robert in his workshop deciding exactly how you would like each element doing (no 2 boats are ever the same to look at although they are all the same basic shape).

A new epoxied hull with foils costs around £3-4000, making an on the water cost of between £7500 and £9500.

You can speak to Robert on 01623 863709

## Secondhand Boats

Competitive secondhand boats start at around sail number 3800, although there are some older ones. Most in this range are likely to be either Ian Kelly, Butler or Boatcraft. They are likely to range in price from about £2000 to over £5000, depending on how new it is, what condition it's in, what's included in the sale, the racing record and who built it.

The 3 most important things are for the boat to be well put together, stiff and within 5kg or so of minimum weight. Having said that some heavier boats have done well as long as they're stiff, but you probably won't win the Nationals in a really heavy one. In theory boats from any builder and at any age can be competitive if they were originally well put together and have been well looked after since. In practice most (with some notable exceptions) come from one of the main builders. We will look at each in turn.

### Ian Kelly

Ian was the most prolific builder from the late 1990s to around 2007 (although there are a few newer than this). His boats are optimized for offwind speed and



have probably taken more top 10 placings at the Nationals than any other builder in recent times. His focus was on getting the right shape and keeping the weight down whilst still being pretty stiff. Virtually all of his boats are around minimum weight. They are well built and you can expect them to be competitive for 20 years if well cared for.

Ian's Mk 4 boats are the same shape, but with a double floor. This makes them pretty heavy, although the boats are probably a bit stiffer and you do save the weight of the water sloshing around in the bottom of the boat.

### Butler Boats

Most of Dave's boats are at the newer end of the scale and don't come up for sale too regularly, but if you see one, they are there or thereabouts for pace...

### Boatcraft

Robert Spolton does not make a lot of boats, but those he does build are of a very high quality. He focuses on stiffness and longevity (he uses mahogany more than obeche making the boat heavier initially, but less likely to take on water in the longer term). This means you can expect the boat to remain competitive for as long as you can keep it in good condition.

### GRP boats

The Mk3 FRP boat finished in the top few of the Nationals when new, so in theory should be still fairly competitive if you can find one in good condition. The older original GRP boats are a bit heavy to be truly competitive, but they are fairly strong. Some of the composite older boats have proved to be fast, with Richard Byne finishing 4<sup>th</sup> in his (admittedly 'special' and still down to weight version) and Tracy Amos regularly at the sharp end of the fleet.

GRP/FRP boats always seem to hold their value pretty well and don't come on the market that often. An equivalently priced wooden boat is likely to be a lot faster, but then if you need a plastic boat for maintenance purposes and can't quite stretch to a new one they can still give you good racing.

### Older Bell Woodworking boats

Bell Woodworking boats were well put together, and the measurements are all somewhere down the middle of the tolerances (like Boatcraft boats). If they have been really well looked after, and are still relatively light with good sails and foils you may be able to get a boat that can be almost as fast as the best at a good price

### Other boats

There are inevitably boats that don't fit into any of these categories. Plenty of boats have been home built, and some of these have been well built and are fast, whilst others aren't... Look for race results, etc, and get a feel for how well the boat is put together. If you can take someone who knows what they're looking for then so much the better. If a boat has reasonable race results, ask yourself is it because it is a good boat being sailed by a decent team, or a not so good boat being sailed by a better team! To get to the very front of the fleet, both boats and sailors need to be good.

### Builders of the Top 10 Boats at recent Miracle National Championships

Posn	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
1 <sup>st</sup>	Boatcraft	Raines	Kelly	Boatcraft	Boatcraft	Boatcraft	Raines
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Raines	Boatcraft	Raines	Raines	Kelly	Raines	3383
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Boatcraft	Boatcraft	Boatcraft	Boatcraft	Raines	Boatcraft	3454
4 <sup>th</sup>	Kelly	Kelly	Lunn		2713	Bell	Morton
5 <sup>th</sup>	Chamberlain	Boatcraft	Bell		Kelly	Jones	Jones
6 <sup>th</sup>	2713	Speed	Bell		Boatcraft	3454	Lunn
7 <sup>th</sup>	Lunn	Ward	Bell		Lunn	Lunn	Bell
8 <sup>th</sup>		Bell	381		Henry	26	Boatcraft
9 <sup>th</sup>	Ward	Chamberlain	3752		3454	Kelly	Kelly
10 <sup>th</sup>		Lunn	Burton		206	Boatcraft	Boatcraft

Posn	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
1 <sup>st</sup>	3283	3283	Boatcraft	Boatcraft	Woodwind	Kelly
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Raines	Kelly	Kelly	Kelly	Kelly	Kelly
3 <sup>rd</sup>	3383	Raines	3283	3283	Boatcraft	Kelly
4 <sup>th</sup>	Boatcraft	1161	1352	Boatcraft	Bell	Boatcraft
5 <sup>th</sup>	Boatcraft	Bell	3796	Raines	Kelly	Ginger
6 <sup>th</sup>	Morton	3383	Boatcraft	Kelly	Butler	Kelly
7 <sup>th</sup>	Boatcraft	Lunn	Bell	3383	3796	Boatcraft
8 <sup>th</sup>	662	Boatcraft	Kelly	3796	Bell	3383
9 <sup>th</sup>	Lunn	3796	Raines	Bell	Boatcraft	Morton
10 <sup>th</sup>	Burton	Chamberlain	Boatcraft	1606	Morton	Bell

Blank spaces are where results are not available. Sail numbers are inserted where the builder is not known. In many cases, these are older kit boats built either by Bell Woodworking or by homebuilders.

### Looking for a used boat

The Association website is a good place to start. Boats also come up on appoloduck and (less often for competitive boats) ebay. When going to look at boats, check for the overall stiffness of the boat and whether there are any dark or soft areas of wood. In plastic boats, look for cracks and to see if any minor dings, etc, have been repaired rapidly. The most important area for stiffness is the centerboard case. On a fast boat it should hardly move when you try to flex it. You can get an idea of how well the boat is put together by looking to see if there are gaps between the panels on the floor under the glass tape.

It is also worth checking the weight of the bare hull. This can be done with the boat upside down on a pair of bathroom scales (add together the 2 numbers), or more accurately if you can borrow some crane scales. To be able to finish in the top few of the Nationals (and therefore for you to know it isn't the boat holding you back) the weight needs to be less than around

65kg without a centerboard or 68kg with (as long as it is stiff). Having said this, heavy boats have finished high up in Nationals as long as they were well built. Older boats tend to be heavier as they gain weight with age due to water and paint etc. As an example, Peter Burfield's old boat (2132) weighed 63kg when he bought it new from Bells in 1977 and 82kg when he sold it a couple of years ago. However the boat still finished 4<sup>th</sup> at the 2005 Nationals.



Built by Bell Woodworking