GOOD OLD BOAT™

THE SAILING MAGAZINE FOR THE *REST* OF US!

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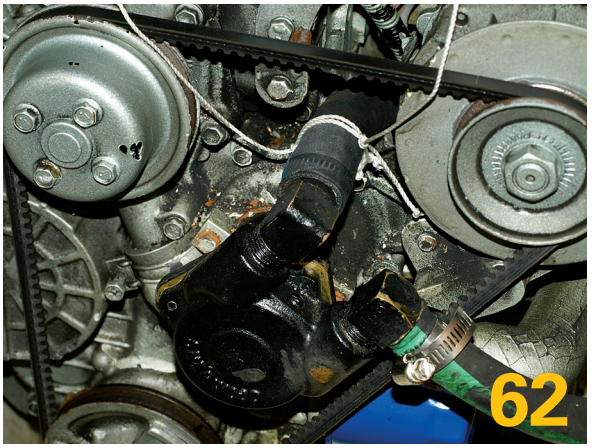


What's more

About the cover . . .

Bramare, Albert and Mickey Boersma's Hinckley Bermuda 40, was caught looking lovely one foggy morning while anchored in Langford Creek off Maryland's Chester River. Photographer Chad Doherty captured the moment while appreciating a quiet cup of coffee on his own boat nearby.

Go cheap and go in comfort

The case for good old offshore-cruising boats

by Todd Duff

The best used-boat bargains of all time are out there right now. Despite the cutbacks in new-yacht production, more boats are for sale today than ever before, and although the economic slowdown is a factor, the numbers are due mainly to the longevity of fiberglass construction. A good yacht broker or marine surveyor can advise on what to look for and what to avoid, but here are some guidelines and suggestions for anyone on the lookout for a sound cruising sailboat.

If you're going cruising, you're likely to be concerned about value. A good place to start shopping for a boat is with the well-made fiberglass production designs of the mid-1960s to mid-1980s. What I often refer to as the golden age of fiberglass boatbuilding began in the early 1970s. During this decade, along with a general awakening to the need for a clean environment and a popular movement toward simplifying life and getting back to nature, the production of small to medium-sized sailboats exploded all over America and Europe. Many builders turned out racing boats that proved to be excellent offshore cruisers. Swan 40s and 43s and their American counterparts — such as the Tartan series or some of Pearson's designs — have all proven themselves on countless passages and long-term cruises. Boats like the Westsail 32, the Crealock 37, and Cabo Ricos spawned a profusion of clones and copies, many of which are still sailing the world's oceans today.

In the 1980s, boats became lighter and larger belowdecks for their waterline length. Many experienced offshore cruisers think that by the late '80s most of the moderately priced models being mass-produced were no longer as seaworthy or seakindly as their earlier cousins. Later raceboat designs that exploited the International Offshore Rule (IOR) were not as well suited for cruising as earlier IOR-influenced designs. It appeared to many that boardrooms and committees — concerned more with how a boat would look at a boat-show dock than how it would stand a blow far offshore — began to dictate boatbuilding practices. Today, with a new 35- to 40-foot boat costing in the range of $250,000 or more, many people are looking into older well-made vessels that can be purchased at a fraction of that cost and refitted to serve their purposes.

Conflicting design goals

Although there have been many so-called advances in yacht design in recent years, you can't cheat the sea. Our forefathers knew the sea well and, through hundreds of years of refinement, developed specialized hull forms for a variety of purposes. A large number of cruising-boat hulls have been based on these hulls, but many attributes of buoy racers have unfortunately found their way into cruising designs and, more recently, interior layouts built for a life at dockside appear to have dictated the shapes of the hulls that carry them.

Most of the arguments for building lighter-displacement, lower-wetted-surface boats have been based on supposed performance advantages, and yet a Westsail 32, one of the most traditional cruising designs out there, has proven itself in many recent ocean races, challenging the myth that weight prohibits speed. In ideal conditions, a modern lightweight hull form is potentially much faster than a traditional heavy hull, but in a real seaway all bets are off. In many cases, the traditional heavy boat designed and developed to sail in real ocean conditions is superior to and safer than a modern design and more likely to deliver its crew comfortably to the next port.

In a recent offshore race, a Westsail 32 placed second behind an ultra-light-displacement all-out raceboat. It might have won had a gear failure not occurred. In the 1996 Annapolis-to-Bermuda Race, a friend of mine sailed to a win in his division with a Westsail 32, fully loaded down for cruising with a big dinghy on deck, a wind generator and solar panels out in the breeze, and a windvane dragging off the stern. His boat arrived only hours behind some of the all-out racers whose crews sat on the windward rail the whole way. He out-sailed stripped-out boats with cushions and doors removed to save weight! Veteran cruisers Lin and Larry Pardey have been saying for

Additional resources

Sorting through the hundreds of boats produced in the golden years has occupied many a sailor with cruising experience or aspirations. James Baldwin, another experienced circumnavigator and sailboat expert, is one. He has created his own list of 71 small voyaging sailboats (between 20 and 32 feet) that will take you to the ends of the earth even if your pocketbook is light.
http://atomvoyages.com/planning/good-old-boats-list

We also recommend:
Twenty Small Sailboats to Take You Anywhere by John Vigor

Twenty Affordable Sailboats to Take You Anywhere by Gregg Nestor

–Editors

decades that if you own a traditional heavy-displacement boat, keep the bottom clean and use big light-air sails when they're called for.

False comparisons

Entirely too much space in books and magazines is devoted to comparing keel and rudder shapes and over-simplifying the analysis of yacht designs, as if looking at the side view of a hull might tell you how a boat will handle. The hull form is much more important. For example, subtle differences in the hull forms of canoes and kayaks can yield very different handling characteristics. Lake canoes will track straight all day long and yet are difficult to turn quickly, whereas whitewater canoes can spin on a dime but are challenging to paddle in a straight line.

Statements like "Full keels track better but are poor upwind performers" or "Fin keels sail upwind better and are more maneuverable" are overly simplistic. The main factors that make a rudder more or less effective are how large and how far aft it is and what the hull form in front of it is like, not whether it is attached to a keel or a skeg or is a separate spade. In many cases, the increased lateral plane of a full- or long-keeled boat actually makes it easier to back up than a fin-keel boat with a flat bottom that prefers to walk sideways until way is on. A skeg- or keel-hung rudder is also much less likely to stall at high angles of attack. Evidence of this can be found in the photos and descriptions of spade-rudder boats that have broached in big sea conditions when a helmsman overcorrected, causing the rudder to stall, or simply lost control while surfing down a wave. Airplane wings are able to maintain lift at slow speeds because of the laminar flow created by flaps extending off the main wing surface. Imagine this when looking at a rudder attached to a skeg or a full keel. A spade rudder will stall at low speed just like an airplane wing does when its flaps are not deployed.

Seakindly and seaworthy

When was the last time you saw the term "seakindly" used in a new-boat advertisement? Many traditional types of boats have fairly complex wineglass-type hull forms, very difficult to design and very comfortable at sea as they do not present large flat surfaces to the waves in any one orientation. Some so-called traditional designs have simplistically designed round or bowl-shaped hulls that roll and pound just like their lightweight fin-keeled sisters.

> "How strong is strong enough when you're in storm conditions?"

The strength issue is rarely argued and even among modern light-displacement proponents you'll hear a consensus that heavy boats are stronger. I've heard many sailors on newer lightweight boats say their boats are "strong enough." How strong is strong enough when you're in storm conditions, or if you hit an unlit steel buoy, a partially submerged container, or a whale while traveling at 8 knots on a pitch-black night? Steel is generally more robust than even the stoutest of fiberglass boats, but an older heavily built fiberglass hull in good condition can withstand incredible punishment. I have yet to hear a long-distance cruising sailor tell me he wished his boat had a thinner hull and was less sturdy.

We've all heard the urban legend that older fiberglass boats were built heavily because the designers and builders didn't know how strong the material was and so were reluctant to "lighten up" the scantlings. This is not entirely accurate. Most designers and many builders were also engineers who certainly knew the structural

Bargain boats

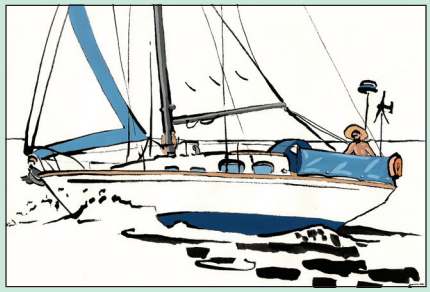
Grouped below by price are suggestions for some of the best bets where investing time and money could be rewarded with a strong handsome cruising sailboat at a very good value. The price ranges are for boats in good condition that are fully equipped with recent gear and modern electronics. Boats without these significant upgrades should sell for as much as 50 to 75 percent less.

$10,000 to $25,000

Finding a well-equipped cruiser in this price range is tough because investments — such as a watermaker, solar panels, and electronics — can sometimes add up to more money than the boat's purchase price.

As long as you don't get too carried away, however, you should be able to sail away on one of these:

post-1976 Bristol 24
1970s Pacific Seacraft Flicka
Eastward Ho 24
Pearson Triton or Vanguard
Allied Seawind 30 • Contessa 26
Folkboat • Alberg 30 • Tartan 27
and dozens of others



$25,000 to $45,000

As long as you don't mind going with a somewhat older model, you should be able to find one of these in ready-to-go condition:

Pearson Alberg 35
Bristol 32
Nor'Sea 27
Westsail 28
Alberg 37
Allied Seawind II or Seabreeze
Shannon 28
Pacific Seacraft Orion or Mariah
and similar

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PIERRE HERVÉ

characteristics of the materials they were using. However, most of the early designs were simply fiberglass reproductions of popular wooden types and had to weigh as much as their wooden cousins or they would not have floated on their lines. Also, when fiberglass was first introduced to boatbuilding, many sailors mistrusted it but were reassured by the heavy construction. To many experienced sailors it appears that — because of budget constraints and marketing decisions made in boardrooms — modern boats have become lighter and flimsier and advertising departments have sought to convince us that this is to enhance performance and livability. As anyone who owns a classic boat knows, aesthetics are a big part of a sailor's enjoyment. When other sailors photograph your boat, it boosts the pride of ownership that makes some of the aspects of keeping an older boat in great shape a little easier.

Good qualities endure

Aesthetics, seakindliness, performance, value, and strength are all great reasons to own an older quality boat. Longevity is in your favor and there is little doubt that some of the purpose-built hefty cruising boats from the 1960s through the '80s will be around well into the end of the 21st century. Our grandchildren's children may well own a 100-year-old 1965 full-keel cruiser on its fourth engine and sixth suit of sails.

Every type of boat, of course, has its shortcomings. Heavy-displacement boats need much bigger hardware, sails, ground tackle, and rigging, all of which cost more for overall length than they would for a lighter boat. The Westsail 32, for example, has a rig as big as many 38-footers and the ground tackle you might expect to find on a modern 42-foot boat.

When you go looking for an older boat to buy, keep in mind that upgrading or replacing engines, rigs, sails, and electronics, in addition to rebuilding interiors or rewiring, can drive the investment up well beyond the original purchase price. Even then, with careful shopping you might end up with a much better, stronger, and more comfortable boat than you could have purchased new for perhaps multiples of the amount of your investment. Shop carefully and have fun!

Todd Duff, a writer/photographer and marine surveyor, has owned 50 sailboats. He and his partner, photographer and professional captain Gayle Suhich, have logged close to 150,000 miles under all types of rigs, including a brigantine. They are full-time cruisers and have recently refitted Westsail 42 hull #1 for more sailing adventures.

$45,000 to $75,000

In this price range there are a lot of good boats to choose from:

Westsail 32
Alajuela 38
Ingrid 38
Bristol Channel Cutter
Vancouver 36
Allied Princess or Mistress
Cape Dory 36
and many others

$75,000 to $120,000

Find a totally equipped and world-cruise-ready boat from this list:

Westsail 42 or 43
Peterson 44
Whitby 42
Crealock 34 or 37
Cabo Rico 38
and others including:
Rivals
Camper & Nicholsons
and many others

Cruise the Internet, talk to a good broker, and find a surveyor with extensive offshore experience who can give you sound advice. Experts like Robert Perry, John Neal, and others are available on a consultation basis as well, and they will often supply you with a list of their own favorites as you go searching for your own good old boat.

There are many great older boats out there. Begin with how you want your boat to be equipped, then work backward from the price of your complete cruiser and you should be able to make a logical purchase. Get out there cruising sooner! You might be happier, will certainly be wealthier, and could wind up owning a better boat than if you had purchased new.