

Trawler Talk

BOAT SHOW FROM A DEALER 'S PERSPECTIVE

Most of you reading this article have probably attended a boat show at some time in your lives and if you're really into boating probably go to one every year. For as long as we can remember there have been annual boat shows in Green Bay, Milwaukee, Chicago, and many other places in the Midwest. A more recent venue has occurred in Bay Harbor, Michigan for the past five years. Bay Harbor is located in Little Traverse Bay in Northern Michigan. Other well-known places in the Bay are Harbor Springs and Petosky. This show is held the 2nd weekend in June and we have been cruising one of our boats to the show each year. We thought it might be interesting if we described our experience as a dealer participating in the show.

Months ahead of time we need to make the decision to attend the show, send in a reservation form along with a payment to secure our space. These payments help the sponsor of the show to pay their expenses of advertising the show to the public, extra employee time and extra security personnel they need on hand for the show. We also need to decide if we will pay for an ad in the boat show program and materials for the ad need to be sent several months before the show to allow time for printing. About a month before the show, we send the list of workers we will have at the show so name badges can be prepared for them and we inform them of our estimated time of arrival. Some of the slips for the show are being used by residents who have leased their slip for the season. They are asked to move to a different location in the marina during the show so that all the "show" boats can be located on one dock or sometimes several docks.

Regarding our decision as to which boat to take, initially we need to pick one that has the electronics installed. We don't feel it is safe to venture across Lake Michigan without a good radar system, compass, and VHF radio. A GPS chartplotter and the auto-pilot are extra conveniences that make the trip more enjoyable and less stressful. We also want to vary the boats we take so as to give exposure to the many different models we sell. This year we chose the PDQ 41 Power Catamaran. This is the first vessel of its kind to be in the Great Lakes.



PDQ 41 Power Catamaran

Packing for a boat show is quite an undertaking. If you read our July article about all the items we needed to cruise the PDQ from the factory in Whitby, Ontario back to Wisconsin you have some idea about all the navigational equipment, supplies, and personal items that are required. Now add everything needed to be in a show which includes all of the above plus signs,

brochures, listings, registration papers, clipboards, and lots of cleaning equipment. We have a single spaced, two-column check list of items we refer to so as not to forget an important component.

The show takes place on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Our plan is to cruise across Lake Michigan on Thursday and return on Monday. As the days approach, we start watching the weather very closely and are prepared to leave a day earlier if we have to. This year, the forecast is favorable for Thursday but we like to get an early start before winds get a chance to build. Since we live a half hour away from the boats, we generally get everything loaded on the boat and spend the night there so it's easy to take off at the first sign of daylight.



American Tugs, Camanos, and PDQ's
at Manistowoc Marina

Except for a few fisherman heading out the marina is quiet and everything is very still. We silently motor past our fleet of boats knowing they will be well cared for by our daughter, Maria, who spends every day from Monday through Saturday at the marina during June, July, and August. She keeps them all looking like new and shows them to people who just stop by and to those who have phoned ahead they are coming.

The Manistowoc lighthouse is the gateway to the lake and a familiar sight to us as we head out on the Lake.



Manistowoc Lighthouse

There is no wave action to speak of and the forecast is for it to remain at 2 feet all day. We can really appreciate this because of the many times we have crossed Lake Michigan on our way to boat shows when we have encountered 8-10 foot seas and more. But all of the boats we sell are designed to be very seaworthy and we know they can handle really rough water and keep us safe. Our course is set at 54 degrees north. This will take us to the buoy at Manitou Islands.

The auto-pilot will hold this course easily in these calm waters. We relax for the time being, sipping our morning coffee and watching a simple sunrise. With no clouds in the sky and a light haze, it comes up as a red ball with little color display around it. Quite a spectacular feat that occurs every day and most times we're all too busy to even notice. Being on a boat with no distractions around you gives you a great opportunity to appreciate nature's beauty.

Eventually we consume some juice and cereal and milk. Food always tastes better on a boat. Again I think it's because we actually are able to focus on it more rather than gulping it down to get on with our day.

Besides having our paper chart spread out, we monitor our course and position on the single 12" chartplotter/radar installed on this boat. We set the optional screen layout with the chartplotter on the right and the radar and navigational info on the left.



Chartplotter showing our course, radar, and navigational info

When I took this picture, we were on a heading of 54 degrees, at 16 knots, with 2 hours, 51 minutes and 45.67 miles to the cursor which is currently on the buoy at Manitou Island Passage. I took the picture at this time to show the deepest depth recording we are seeing at 739.8 feet. You can see where we are on Lake Michigan by the black icon of a ship on the chartplotter side.

When we're on our way to a boat show, there are always things to be working on especially if the waters are calm like it is this day. I take advantage of this by laying out our sign and mounting all the updated laminated pictures of our in-stock boats on it.



Karen working on a boat show sign

Generally speaking, even if the Lake is very calm in the morning, by noon the waves will pick up as the winds usually do. That doesn't happen as you can see on this picture. You can hardly tell where the lake ends and the sky begins. We have crossed this lake over 70 times and have NEVER had it stay flat the whole way as it is on this magical day!



Stern wake at 17 knots

If you've ever wondered why catamarans get such great fuel economy, this picture of the bow wake at 17 knots tells the story. The catamaran hulls simply knife through the water with very little resistance.



Bow wake at 17 knots

We usually carry at least one bicycle to a show both as a mode of transportation if we need to pick up some thing at a store and for a chance to get in a little exercise in the mornings before the show starts. This time we have Ken's 3-wheel recumbent along and it fits easily on the front deck simply bungeed to the railing. There is just so much space on these catamarans. Thought we'd take a picture of it with Ken sitting on it but when we looked at the picture, we both kind of laughed because it looks like he's in a wheelchair...is this a premonition of our future boating as we age??!!



Ken's recumbent tri-wheeler

We also spend some time on the bridge until we feel we've had enough sun. Visibility at the inside station is good as well with the 360 degree window coverage.

As we enter Little Traverse Bay, the cliffs of Bay Harbor are prominent as are the beautiful expansive homes that dwell on them. This harbor was created from an abandoned cement plant. I have included the aerial pictures and the write-up from the Bay Harbor website at www.bayharbor.com where you can find even more information.



Former cement plant at Bay Harbor

“For over 100 years mining operations and a massive cement plant had scarred over 1,200 acres and five miles of Lake Michigan shoreline on Little Traverse Bay. After ceasing operations in the 1980's, the cement plant had been abandoned leaving a moonscape of chromium brick, asbestos, coal and 2.5-million cubic yards of kiln dust. In 1993, Bay Harbor Company Chairman, David V. Johnson, teamed up with CMS Energy and led a coalition of strategic allies in what was (and remains) the largest reclamation in North America. Most impressively, what was formerly a moonscape is now the site of a four-season luxury resort community, a world-class deep water harbor, the Olympic caliber Bay Harbor Equestrian Club, and the 27-hole Bay Harbor Golf Club crafted by Arthur Hills and hailed by Golf Digest as "The Pebble Beach of the Midwest.”



The transformation was rapid. In 1994, simultaneous explosions demolished the cement plant smokestacks. Eight months later, the barrier between Bay Harbor and Little Traverse Bay was removed, and water rushed in at the rate of one-million gallons per minute. Within 24 hours, over 2.5-billion gallons of water formed the new Nautical Center of the Great Lakes and became Bay Harbor Lake.”



Bay Harbor Marina bottom left

The entrance to the harbor is well-marked with red & green buoys to show the channel. One can't help but be enamored by the homes, more like mansions, as you enter the harbor.





We notify the Harbormaster via the VHF radio that we are entering the port and he directs us to our assigned slip number. Dockhands are readily available to assist in securing our lines. Ken always makes docking look like a “piece of cake” as he maneuvers this 18’ wide catamaran into the slip. It takes a little extra effort to place all our fenders and lines in positions that will best accommodate people getting on & off the boat during the show, yet having it all look neat and inconspicuous.

This is Thursday evening and the show doesn’t start until 3 pm on Friday so we can relax and enjoy the evening and leave the cleaning and set-up for tomorrow morning. But our “office” is still open and we spend a couple hours retrieving our phone messages from the day and returning calls as needed. We will continue to do this diligently several times during each day of the show. E-mail is also a challenge and we’ve recently added the wireless component but I can’t pick up a strong enough signal here on our laptop. I’m told there is a café in town that has free wireless so I’ll have to make that a planned mission in a day or so.

The next morning the dock is bustling with cleaning crews but since we have one boat, Ken and I will be taking care of that ourselves. First, there is the complete washdown from the top to waterline. Then it’s cleaning the inside edges around and inside all the hatches since we know folks will be looking in these areas. The use of an Absorber (a special shamee type cloth) works really well to go over all the stainless steel to remove water spots and make them shine. Cleaning all the windows with Dirtex, my favorite window cleaner, also gets rid of the streaks. All of this has to be repeated every day of the show to make sure the boat looks as spotless and shiny as possible.



Karen doing the daily cleaning

Fortunately for us, we have owners of a 2002 American Tug 34 with a home port of Charlevoix, which is the next port south of Bay Harbor. Dave & Barbara Coey have been gracious enough to cruise their boat to the Bay Harbor Show for the past three years. It gives us a chance to show another one of our models. Since they are so close, they come in to the show Friday morning. It's great to see them again and we are very grateful to them for spending these days with us. The American Tug 34 is a very popular model and is always a hit at the show.



2002 American Tug 34 "Tulibra II"

Setting up for the show includes arranging all our signs in strategic places. Even though we bring two boats to the show we also want to expose the other brands we sell and specifically what we have in-stock.



Our banner reads, "We Sell the Dreams, You Build the Memories!" It fits nicely across the stern where the dinghy would be located. Then out goes the welcome mat with our logo that should make the entrance to the boat obvious.

Inside we also need to vacuum everything and have all of our personal supplies tucked neatly out of view. People always seem to get a kick out of opening the refrigerator and announcing, "Hey, it even comes stocked with beer!!"

All of our brochures need to be organized and our business labels applied. Ken gets the honors of doing stacks of those.



Ken applying labels to brochures

A boat show is a great time to visit with boat owners and prospective buyers. Power catamarans are fairly new to the boating market, especially here in the Midwest. Some come with preconceived ideas about performance differences but many others are open and willing to learn. The biggest difference we try to explain is that of fuel economy. We mentioned that earlier in this article when we showed the picture of one of the bows slicing so smoothly through the water so as not to create a bow wave. It is what allows this 41 foot vessel with twin 260 hp Yanmars to burn only 2 gallons per hour at 9 knots; 7 gph at 13 knots, 9 gph at 17 knots, and 14 gph at 20 knots. Those are really incredible figures when you compare them to other semi-displacement trawlers and even more so to planning hulls.



Ken explaining electronics



Karen handing out a brochure



Checking out engine room

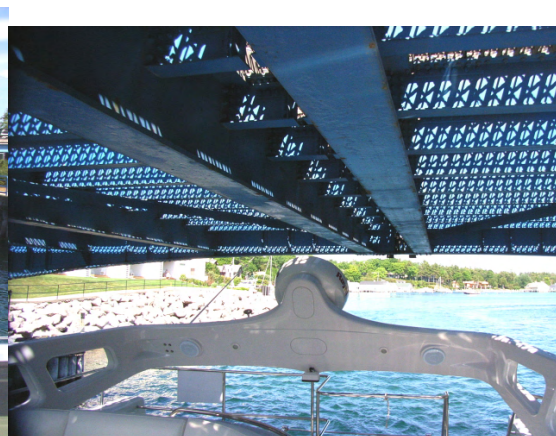


Looking at other in-stock models

The show ends at 3 pm on Sunday. We listen to the weather forecast to determine when it is best for crossing Lake Michigan. The forecast for Monday is for winds to increase to 15-20 knots with a 60% chance of thunderstorms. Looks like it would be best for us to head out as soon as we can. Even though we probably have plenty of fuel to cross, we plan to run in to Charlevoix to fill-up. A good rule of thumb is to have as much fuel as your tanks hold to head across a lake the size of Michigan that can turn nasty in short order. It doesn't take long at all to get to Charlevoix because it is only 20 some miles south of Bay Harbor.



Low bridge entering Charlevoix



Going under bridge with arch lowered

A really convenient feature on the PDQ 41 is the electrically-powered radar arch. At a push of the button, the arch slowly lowers allowing us to pass under the bridge without waiting for the

scheduled bridge opening times. Soon we're fueled up and head out on the lake which is still treating us to calm seas at 1-2 feet.



Leaving Charlevoix harbor

We decide to cruise at 21 knots to get across most of the lake before dark. Generally, we don't like to cruise after dark because it's a little un-nerving to think of the possibility of hitting a stray floating log which would be impossible to see unless someone sat watch on the bow. But we don't mind coming in after dark to Manitowoc, because we know the harbor so well. We are treated to a full moon so even though we arrived in Manitowoc at 10 pm, it was still easy enough to find our way. Of course, the chartplotter and radar are also helpful in picking out the harbor entrance from quite a ways out.

In the next few days, there'll be some follow-up to do as some folks signed up for brochures and other information which we will send out as soon as possible. Others are put on a call-back schedule depending on their time-frame for buying a boat.

This is the only boat show as such that we will be doing this season. In the past we were attending at least four boat shows every summer and fall but as our inventory of boats has increased we have had to make some changes. Being the only Midwest dealer for both sizes of American Tugs, Camanos, Ranger Tugs, and PDQ Power Catamarans, we now have our own "boat show" every day. People will drive for 8-10 hrs or come on the carferry or fly into the Manitowoc airport to see our boats first hand. We appreciate this as well because we can spend much more quality time with perspective buyers than we can at a show when their and our time needs to be divided. Also, our list of brokerage boats continues to grow and this season we have had 6 of the 17 of our brokerage boats move their boats to the Manitowoc Marina to get the added exposure we can give them here.

Everyone seems to think our season will be winding down soon as we tuck our boats away for the winter. Not so....our boats are all lined up in the marina parking lot and are not shrink-wrapped. We continue to show them all season having sturdy ladders with hand rails to easily access the interiors. This is also a good time for us to be able to point out the features that make these boats so seaworthy. It's very impressive to see up close the full keel, hard chines, large rudder, and protected prop that play such an important part of boating safety and comfort. It's one thing to look at the above-water amenities on a boat such as large cockpit seating areas, interior lounging spaces, spacious staterooms, and fully out-fitted galleys. But a big part of the decision as to what one should consider in buying a boat is often hidden from view when boats are in the water.

Please direct any questions or comments you may have to:

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