

The Eco Trawler 33 cuts a low profile and her outboard engines mean a small draft.

A photograph of a red and white Eco Trawler 33 boat on a body of water. The boat has a white upper hull and a red lower hull. It features a cabin with large windows and a small outboard motor at the stern. In the background, there is a rocky shoreline with a blue metal railing. The sky is clear and blue.

COMPLETELY

The Eco Trawler 33 is trailerable, outboard-



DIFFERENT

powered, and boasts other surprising features.

BY TOM DOVE

was strolling through the 2014 Annapolis Powerboat Show, heading toward the trawlers, passing rows of look-alike center-console fishing boats and more rows of expensive go-fast overnighters with amorphous shapes. Then, I came upon something completely different.

Within that sea of fiberglass, a long, narrow vessel with sharp lines, traditional sheer, and twin outboards stood out: the Eco Trawler 33.

The big reel winch on the foredeck holding the anchor rode and the twin outboards were eyebrow raisers, and the surprises kept on coming as I stepped aboard for a closer look. This was a semi-displacement hull made of welded aluminum. It had hard chines and a workboat air about it, but was finished out as a nice, comfortable cruiser for two. To my mind—as a sailor for more than 60 years—the Eco Trawler 33 is a thoroughly sensible boat.

Metal boats are uncommon on the East Coast, though abundant in the Pacific Northwest, particularly in the fishing fleet. Aluminum is an excellent building material as long as the work is done carefully and the owner is meticulous about preventing electrolytic corrosion. You can paint it for appearance if you wish, but no visual harm comes from leaving the metal bare.

The Eco Trawler 33 is as strong as it looks. The hull is built of $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch 5086 aluminum plates in the topsides and $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch plates on the bottom. The deckhouse is also fully welded using $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch 5086 plating over aluminum frames and stringers. You may dent this boat by beating it against something large and solid, but you won't break it. You also don't have to worry about blistering or gelcoat maintenance.

TRAILERABLE

Aluminum is also lightweight. The boat weighs about 7,000 lb. dry. That, combined with its eight-foot beam, means you can tow it anywhere in America without permits or a specialized vehicle. Many standard pickup trucks and large vans have a 10,000 lb. trailer rating, which will do the job just fine. Ken and Karen Schuler of Trawlers Midwest reported no problems after trailering the boat fully loaded with cruising gear from Wisconsin to Annapolis, Maryland, behind a Ford F-150.

The builder of the Eco Trawler has taken full advantage of the material. The hull, deck, and cabin form a strong, rigid monocoque structure with no openings besides the hatch, cabin door, and ports. There are no through-hulls below the waterline. That's a neat trick, made possible by using outboards for power, which eliminates water intake and driveshaft openings. With its self-contained composting toilet, deck-mounted anchor rode, and a sink drain outlet positioned well above the waterline, the only way to get water in this bilge is by pouring it from a container.

But there's much more to a boat than the hull and deck. The foredeck hatch is sturdy, the large cabin windows well mounted, and steering and engine control systems tidy. The well-baffled, welded aluminum fuel tank is integral to the hull, and I did wonder about the difficulty of replacing it if that became necessary. The impression is of a no-nonsense workboat, simple and strong.

Snooping about, I found orderly wiring and a high-quality panel and electrical fixtures. A possible drawback is that battery capacity seems a bit low for a cruiser that will spend a lot of time at anchor. A solution would be to double the size of the house batteries in order to spend more time on the hook.

COMPOST TOILET

Plumbing—though there isn't much—is also neat and proper with a plastic, 23-gallon tank that feeds the sink. The standard

composting toilet doesn't need a drain, although the liquid container must be emptied from time to time. After a few months, simply carry the solid waste tank ashore and dump it on your garden as mulch. A low-powered fan circulates air through the peat moss mix in the toilet as it decomposes.

I appreciated the extensive soundproofing, with sprayed foam between the frames to reduce both engine and sea noises. The builder says everything is to ABYC and ABS standards, and everything I saw supported that.

It's rare to see a serious cruising boat with a pair of two-stroke outboards for power. It is equally rare today to see a 33-foot semi-displacement cruiser totaling a mere 100 hp. The key is a long, light, narrow hull that generates little wavemaking resistance.

I asked Ken Schuler of Trawlers Midwest about the power choice. "The designer, Donald Keefe, wasn't going to put much power on this at all, but I realized that our customers will ask, 'How fast?' and they'll always want to put a bit more power on,"

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	NMPG	RANGE*	dB(A)
1000	2.8	0.4	7.0	392	56
1500	4.1	0.4	10.2	571	60
2000	5.6	0.8	7.0	392	64
2500	6.8	1.2	5.7	319	61
3000	7.7	1.9	4.1	230	64
3500	8.5	2.9	2.9	162	68
4000	9.3	3.8	2.4	134	72
4500	10.3	4.7	2.2	123	75
5000	12.3	5.7	2.2	123	78
5500	14.8	7.0	2.1	118	80
6000	15.7	9.2	1.7	95	80

LOA: 33' 0"

BEAM: 8' 0"

DRAFT: 1' 9"

DISPL.: 7,000 lb.

FUEL: 70 gal.

WATER: 23 gal.

POWER: Evinrude E-Tec 50 hp outboard (x2)

PRICE \$123,000 base, \$230,000 as tested with twin engines, cruising interior, electronics.

CONTACT: Trawlers Midwest. (920) 894-2632;

Email: trawlers@trawlersmidwest.com

TEST CONDITIONS

Temperature 61°F, light overcast, 45% relative humidity.

Wind SE at 15 to 20 knots; seas 3 to 4 feet in Annapolis.

Wind SE at 10 knots; seas less than 1 foot on Magothy River for two-way runs.

Load:

Fuel: 25 gal.

Water: 18 gal.

4 adults

Full cruising load of gear (owners are cruising)

*Range chart calculated on 80 percent (56 gal.) of full (70 gal.) fuel capacity. Speed measured with GPS, averaged on two-way run. Fuel flow measured by ICON Pro Series gauges Range in nm.



The helm is nicely finished and offers good sightlines in all directions; Spartan yet comfortable v-berth.

Schuler said. "So we put a 115 hp Mercury on it, and that went the same speed as these twin 50 hp Evinrudes.

"We didn't want to go more than 115 hp, not that the structure won't take it, but with a full-displacement boat, you don't need to go faster than about 15 knots. We could easily go down to twin 40s or 35s and still get 11 or 12 knots.

"The important thing is to have enough speed to cut through the waves. We have one owner who has twin 20s on his and he's very happy with it, though I think that's a little underpowered," Schuler said.

I asked if he preferred twins over a single engine on the boat.

"I think so, and most people like that idea," Schuler said. "Outboards today are so reliable in themselves that it's not necessary, but most people are accustomed to having the redundancy. It doesn't matter whether you use a single or twins, since there is not much maintenance, so you might as well put the twins on."

Some of us like outboards and some do not, but this setup has some big advantages. Outboards are quiet, easy to service, and they do not take up interior space. The Eco Trawler 33's 50 hp Evinrude E-Tec engines meet environmental requirements without the complications of a four-stroke design. That, in itself, is a big accomplishment.

DETAILS

The deep cockpit feels secure and comfortable, and there's a nice movable aluminum ladder for easy access to the water. Since the engines are on an external bracket, the cockpit is open and uncluttered. I liked the sturdy grab rails on the cabin house, because they add security for moving forward on the narrow side decks.

The Eco Trawler 33's cockpit is large, so carrying a couple of bikes is easy, and the outboard motors leave a lot of space inside the hull under the deck.

The foredeck has a nicely crafted reel winch that holds all the anchor rode. While the anchor on the boat I tested isn't self-launching, Karen Schuler said that she got it started over the roller with a gentle push through the hatch as she stood in the forward cabin. With a remote anchor switch, this means that you

can raise and lower the hook without going outside.

The interior of the Eco Trawler 33 is defined by the boat's narrow beam. The two standard layouts show a modified V-berth forward in its own cabin, along with comfortable seats for two in the main cabin and a large, bright, and most importantly odorless, enclosed head are aft to starboard. The main cabin on our test boat had a two-seat dinette to port and a galley with sink, two-burner stove, and fridge to starboard. It's efficient and compact.

The effect you get in the interior is that of a comfortable cocoon. Big windows everywhere dispel any claustrophobia and the narrow cabin is reassuring when the waves kick up. You won't tumble across the saloon on this boat. Whether this environment suits you or not will be a personal choice, but there's no way around it in a boat that's going to cruise down the Interstate behind your vehicle.

The sleeping cabin forward has a pair of berths that are more rectangular than the usual V-berths. With the thick cushions and easy access, the owners will rest well. I suspect that the narrow hull will not pound at anchor, either.

Our test boat had an optional roof-mounted air conditioner that could also heat on reverse cycle. This is strictly a dockside solution, of course, and it's not possible to pipe the engine water to cabin heat vents as you can with an inboard diesel. Owners who plan to anchor out in cool climates will want a heater of some sort or should carry a portable generator that can power the air-conditioning unit.

I do have a minor gripe about the skipper and crew seats forward: The permanent footrests are too low for people of my height (5 feet 8 inches). That should be an easy fix and tall folks will appreciate the high overhead and long berths.

Any power cruiser this size has limited storage, so a couple will need to monitor the inevitable accumulation of stuff.

SEA TRIAL

While the eight-foot beam constrains the living space, it expands the performance envelope and the boat's portability.

We had ideal conditions in Annapolis for a good test of the Eco Trawler 33's ability. The wind had been blowing from the southeast at 15 to 20 knots for enough hours to build short, steep 4-foot seas. It was a typical Chesapeake autumn day, better suited to sailing than motoring.

We slid out of the calmer Severn and into boisterous Chesapeake Bay at an easy cruise speed, setting the power at 2,750 rpm to yield 7.3 knots at a 1.34 speed/length ratio and no more than a quiet hum from the engines. As the water got rougher offshore, it was clear that turning across the waves produced a lot of roll. Once we hit the rougher stuff, Schuler ran the boat up to semi-displacement speed and we sliced eastward into the waves at about 10 knots.

That stabilized the pitching but water was breaking over the bow continuously. The wipers took care of that, and I never sensed that we were in danger of losing control. Adding flare in the hull forward would have deflected some of the water, but that would have been more difficult to build, could reduce the efficiency, and probably would make the motion sharper. As we all know, every boat is a compromise and I found this compromise more than satisfactory.

We continued well offshore and then "tacked" to port to put the waves on the starboard quarter as we turned north. The ride was still steady and the long hull with its deep skeg gave good directional stability. We never had much roll or felt in danger of broaching while running downwind this way.

North of the Bay Bridge, the seas dropped and we continued effortlessly northwest into the Magothy River. Until then, our


speed was comparable to a similar-size sailboat going downwind alongside us but, of course, his speed decreased as the wind did while ours remained constant. Sailors looking to make the change to a trailerable trawler will find the Eco Trawler 33 a good match.

In calm water and at low speed, the Eco Trawler 33 turned easily in just over one boat length, heeled slightly outboard in the turns, and stopped and backed down with perfect control—as close to being free of vices as you'll get. The range numbers are interesting. Most of the time, the skipper will probably choose a speed at the upper end of the displacement range, a bit over 7 knots, for a rate that would carry the boat far enough to match the longest distances between fuel stops on the Great Loop. If fuel resupply is not available, dropping the speed to a 1.0 speed-to-length ratio (approximately 5.6 knot speeds) adds another 100 miles to the range.

CONCLUSION

The Eco Trawler 33 is a synergy of unusual features with a unique and likable result. It is a strong coastal cruiser that is nicely suited to the Great Loop or the Bahamas.

While its length is greater, this neat little cruiser has about the same interior space as a conventional, beamy, planing 28-footer. However, when the weather kicks up or when you pull up to the fuel dock, you'll see a big difference in its favor.

If you tire of the place you are cruising this month, load your Eco Trawler 33 onto the trailer and go somewhere else, even places only accessible by land. 



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