Cruising Savvy: Don’t Overlook the Allure of Gunkholing

We’ve got 40 rendezvous that could be the highlight of your summer

NEW BOATS
- CUTWATER 30
- SUNSEEKER PREDATOR 80
- PRESTIGE 620 S
- AMERICAN TUG 525
- CIGARETTE ELECTRIFIED BY AMG
The Cutwater 30 is the latest vessel from the Livingston family, Pacific Northwest builders who have earned a worldwide reputation as designers and builders of trailerable pleasure vessels. In fact, the Cutwater stable mate, Ranger Tug, was an early leader in that market segment.

As the Rangers — with their salty, tug-like appearance — grew in popularity, many boaters liked what their boating buddies could do with their Ranger but wanted a sedan cruiser. Enter Cutwater, thoroughly modern sedan cruisers with a very sophisticated hull design, which the builder calls a stepped keel. This design, built into the other two Cutwaters in the line — 26 and 28 feet — allows the engine to be placed lower in the hull than with most traditional hull designs. According to the builder, the lower placement improves stability and allows more headroom throughout the interior. The success of the 26- and 28-footers, of which almost 90 have been sold since their introduction a couple of years ago, led naturally to the new 30. Cutwater has orders for 35 of the 30s.

The hull-bottom configuration is unusual in a production vessel of this size and relatively low price. The keel pad runs the entire length of the hull bottom, which, combined with the rest of the bottom geometry, creates a constant layer of air along the bottom, reducing drag and improving both speed and fuel efficiency. A substantial skeg extends along almost one-third of the bottom, providing enhanced tracking and helping to improve stability, particularly at rest. The skeg also helps deflect debris out of the prop stream.

The builders have focused on a problem common to all of the small trailerable family cruisers: lack of “moving around” space in the cockpit when there are as few as four boaters outside enjoying the sun. Bench seats, port and starboard, complete with backrests, cleverly fold out, so the seat bottom overhangs the water. These “wing” seats allow plenty of room for other guests to move around or through the cockpit with ease. The transom seat can be configured to be fore or aft facing.

To make the cockpit even more social, the Cutwater 30 features an opening panel in the aft cabin bulk-
head that allows two more guests to join the group in the cockpit if the aft settee seatback is tipped forward. On the foredeck, two flush hatches hide a pair of cushioned seats, complete with a footwell that doubles as fender storage with the hatches closed. The foredeck is home to a five-step telescoping ladder over the bow for swimmers or beachcombers.

Access to the deckhouse is through a metal-framed, all-glass door. Six opening overhead hatches, a large windscreen and opening windows running from the windscreen to the aft cabin bulkhead flood the interior with natural light. Even on a lousy, dull day, the interior is bathed with natural light. The forecastle features four opening overhead hatches and four hull-side portlights, and it is bright and cheery.

The opening hatches allow for excellent passive ventilation and have a feature not usually found in boats of this size: They can be cracked open slightly and still remain dogged. That comes in handy if you want to ventilate the boat when it’s raining while you’re running or when the boat is at the dock and you’re away from it. Another important feature of these hatches is they will not allow the rain and spray (and snow during our test morning) to enter the vessel when they are cracked open only slightly.

**INSIDE SCOOP**

The interior layout is fairly traditional for a vessel this size. The galley is along the port side, and the helm station and settee are along the other. The way this layout is executed, however, is anything but traditional. To port is what looks like a countertop running from the aft cabin bulkhead to the forward cabin bulkhead. There is no stove or sink in sight. However, thanks to the clever use of a double-hinge system, the countertop lifts out of the way, revealing a propane stove, a refrigerator and a stainless sink.

The forward half of the countertop serves as the traditional countertop/food prep area. But, it can be raised, too, revealing a comfortable padded sitting area directly across from the helm seating.

As you might expect with so much window glass, visibility all around, including into the cockpit, is excellent. Seating is comfortable, and a companion seat is beside the helm seat to starboard. The hidden sitting area along the port side makes for a good watch seat and allows the skipper, the companion and the watch-keeper to communicate easily.

The dinette, convertible to a double berth, is located immediately to starboard. It seats four comfortably on each side of a high-low table. The solid-wood, well-finished table top is hinged so that the port side of the table can be laid back across the rest of the top. Not only does this feature open up the area for seating, it exposes a grabrail welded to the center table. Cutwater designers clearly have boating experience and know that, particularly on a quick boat driving...
into a running sea, there can never be too many grabrails.

Under the settee is a small but usable guest cabin containing a double berth, gear stowage space, a reading light and two hull-side portlights. While this is, technically, a cabin, it is more suited for kids or could be used as additional storage space on longer trips.

The forward stateroom features an island double berth, a large hanging locker and plenty of storage. The vessel’s single head is located forward and has a couple of well-thought-out features. The first is a frosted skylight in the dash that lets plenty of natural light into the head. The shower stall in the head is another interesting feature. At first glance, it looks like the traditional head/shower combination, except there’s no shower curtain. Closer examination reveals a pair of tracks — one on the floor and one in the overhead — and a piece of curved Plexiglas that reaches from floor to ceiling. To take a shower, the boater steps into the shower space and slides the curved panel to create a separate shower stall, without having to use up space with an opening door. It’s the same principle as a sliding pocket door. The head also contains a vanity, good storage and an electric toilet.

**GET RUNNING**

We fired up the six-cylinder, 336-cubic-inch (5.5L), double overhead cam 370 hp Volvo diesel and, using the bow and stern thrusters, pivoted away from the dock, turned 180 degrees — all in the boat’s own length — and idled toward open water. The common-rail engine started quickly, without even a hint of smoke. Idle was 600 rpm, at which we made 3.5 knots and burned 0.4 gph. Our noisemeter read 74 decibels, just slightly above a normal conversation.

When we cleared the no-wake zone, we upped the revs to 1000, which brought our speed to 6.1 knots and our fuel burn to 1.1 gph. At 1500 rpm, fuel burn went to 2.6 gph, and the boat’s speed jumped to 8 knots. At 10 knots, we burned 6.2 gph, and the engine was loafting along at 2000 rpm. We were moving at 15.5 knots at 2500 rpm, while burning 10 gph. At 3000 revs, we burned 14 gph and made 21.3 knots. Wide-open throttle was 3400 rpm, which yielded 26.3 knots while burning 20 gph.

All speeds were measured by an independent GPS, and fuel-consumption figures came from the engine’s onboard computer. During our test, the vessel handled well, even in hard-over turns and wake crossings. There was no skidding, skipping or cavitation. Everyone on board was able to converse normally, even at WOT.

The new Cutwater 30 is a boat designed by boaters for boaters. It borrows features from its Ranger stablemates, but it wraps them up in a crisp, smartly styled, modern package. Its spacious deckhouse provides more than enough space for a half-dozen people, and the clever aft-deck seating arrangement means they won’t be stumbling over each other if they all decide to congregate in the cockpit.

The standard 370 hp engine gives a good turn of speed with good fuel economy. It’s quiet enough that normal conversation is possible even at WOT. It handles well, responding quickly and precisely to all helm input at all speeds. Bow and stern thrusters make manoeuvring even in the tightest marinas safe, quick and easy.

The interior fit and finish is good, even though our test boat was hull #1 in the 30-foot series, and all the interior surfaces are easy to clean. There’s plenty of storage for cruising supplies and a good-sized cockpit for either entertaining or fishing. Exterior cleanup is easy: Hose it down and forget it.