



**STORY BY PETER SWANSON**

**PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILLY BLACK**

**A**ll waves are not created equal. Size matters but how it matters is not always intuitive. Sometimes taking a small boat into 4-footers is more harrowing than 10-foot seas or bigger. Like Buzzards Bay of my youth, Ft. Lauderdale Inlet is famous for steep, closely spaced little waves that make for a miserable ride; it happens when the tide is outbound and the wind and waves of the North Atlantic Ocean are in opposition.

Venturing into a nasty chop is probably the best way to test claims that a certain new 28-foot pocket cruiser offers better-than-average performance in rough water. The boat was the Cutwater 28 and I was aboard with Mark Schulstad, a Cutwater dealer from the Annapolis area and a man

A high-angle photograph of a red and white pocket cruiser boat on the water. The boat is white with a red hull and a red cabin. It has a stainless steel railing and a small flag at the stern. The water is a deep blue-green color with some ripples. The text 'NEW WAVE' is overlaid in large, bold, orange letters. Below it, the subtitle 'Cutwater Builds A Pocket Cruiser For The Times' is written in white. The background of the entire page is this photograph.

# NEW WAVE

Cutwater Builds A Pocket  
Cruiser For The Times

who truly understands cruising. Cutwater is not just a new boat, but a new brand, brought to market by the same people who build the popular Ranger Tug line.

As we approached open water, I nudged the throttle forward until Cutwater got off her haunches and ran. She was on plane and going 14 knots. We bounced around a bit but not enough to stifle conversation, nor was our chat impeded by machinery noise or the sounds of making way through the water. Were it not for the bumps, Mark and I could have been driving down the I-95 in a Honda Accord.

Easing the throttle forward, Cutwater began to pound, so I throttled back. Trim tabs, Schulstad



Above: A reversible transom bench seat, integral fenders, and a folding antenna mast are key features on deck. Right: A second helm in the cockpit makes docking easier for singlehandlers. Note the well-placed handrails.

reminded me, they're on your right. Aha...you're supposed to use trim tabs with a planing hull! I am so accustomed to displacement boats, I had forgotten the existence of those hangy-down flapdoodle things. Here in Florida the boys don't push buttons, they mash them, so I mashed down the side of the rocker switch labeled "bow down." With tabs lowered, Cutwater leveled and began to cut the water with her fine entry rather than clubbing it with her bottom. The more mash, the less smash and splash. And by the way, the windshield wipers work very well, unlike those on some other boats I've driven.

### BAHAMAS DAYDREAMING

We crisscrossed the waters in front of the inlet, shouldering handily through the chop. I remember saying to Schulstad that if this were as bad as we would get, we could easily endure the four hours it would take to reach Bimini at the edge of the Great Bahama Bank just 50 miles over the horizon.

Then, the next day, we would run over the bank to Chub Cay, following Schulstad's advice on how to cross big chunks of water before the weather window can begin to close: "Take your speed where you can get it." Then, next morning, a short hop takes us to Nassau for any last-minute provisions and lunch at the Poop Deck.

Then, we would chug down to the Exuma Cays, where easy does it, meaning we throttle back to diesel-sipping mode and love life. Down here in the sun, Schulstad said, Cutwater's solar panel would keep the fridge running indefinitely at anchor.

Alas, Bimini would have to wait, and I turned the Cutwater toward the inlet. Now we were running downwind and down-wave. I struggled with the wheel as the boat tried to turn herself left, then right, and repeat. Trim tabs, Schulstad again reminded me. They were still down and thus forcing the boat to "bow steer." I mashed the tabs up and the boat's behavior transformed; she now tracked like an arrow. Farther into the cut, the seas diminished to near calm, the place to try wide-open throttle. This time I remembered to mash tabs and within seconds the GPS readout had us at 28 knots, which, for my trawler brain, is four times the speed of thought.



### ENTRY LEVEL OR END GAME

Cutwater Boats of Monroe, Washington, is a division of Fluid Motion. The company's Ranger Tug line came to the fore about five years ago and continued to thrive when the down economy drove a host of boatbuilders out of business. Refer to previous issues of *PMM* for details about the boats, but it would be worthwhile to quote some Ranger sales figures. Since 2006, Ranger has sold 250 25-footers. The 29 was introduced in January 2009, and as of this writing 90 had been sold. Introduced in May 2010, more than 50 new 27s are plying the waterways. All in all, a remarkable record considering the period rates as the lowest point in history of the American recreational marine industry.

Cutwater is no tug. She's a fast little boat that appeals to no fewer than four markets: 1. Powerboaters looking to downsize; 2. Entry-level boaters looking for an affordable family cruiser;



3. The growing fast-trawler crowd; and 4. Boaters that drive a medium-duty pick-up truck and want a trailerable vessel.

“What I saw with my past business was the guy who owned the 45-foot Meridian, Carver, Silverton, Sea Ray—whatever—had curtailed his boating activities due to energy and operating costs. Insurance went up and dockage went up. Fuel prices went up. So people, although they love boating, were struggling to keep up with their lifestyle,” Schulstad said.

“This product appeals to new boaters getting in, serious people who want to do a little bit of cruising with their family. That’s part of what started boating as we know it. It was a family activity. I saw mature boaters that I thought were ready to look at a different approach to boating and how to stay on the water, the downsizing trend. Baby Boomers are retiring now, and they can throw this boat on a trailer and take it up to the San Juans or up to Long Island Sound, wherever.”

### WHIFF OF MAINE

Let’s take a closer look at Cutwater’s design and features. Cutwater people like to describe her as having Maine roots, and surely there is a whiff of Downeast in her, but nowhere nearly as much as, say, a small Mainship. The sheer of Cutwater’s hull doesn’t have the upward sweep of a true Jonesporter, but that’s good if you are trying to maximize interior volume amidships to accommodate humans. That beautiful lobsterboat sheer puts the volume forward at the chain locker instead. All in all, the Cutwater maintains a traditional look by abstaining from Euro styling, even though reverse sheer would add even more space to the accommodations. To my eye, Cutwater’s designers had struck a nice balance between the aesthetic and the pragmatic.

If the cabin top looked a little busy, that’s because it was. But that could not be helped; all that stuff had a job to do, and the boat would be less able without it. Horn and spotlight, three ventilation hatches, radar dome, and radio antenna were grouped with room to spare for a stainless steel roof rack and attached solar panel. The panel took up half of the rack, with room for a kayak alongside. (In fact, the Cutwater 26, near identical to the 28 except with a cockpit shorter by 2 feet, was sporting the kayak on her roof rack when I visited the boats.)

From the dock, you board Cutwater by stepping onto the swim platform, which together with the bow pulpit makes the LOA of the boat 32 feet, 4 inches. The swim platform has integral stainless steel rails, molded recesses for small fenders, and a hide-away swim ladder. The transom has a reversible two-person seat for facing forward and aft. That’s four space-saving ideas and you

haven’t even stepped into the cockpit. Fluid Motion’s genius as revealed in the Ranger Tugs—and now the Cutwater line—is the company’s ability to use a variety of space-saving tricks and incorporate features that make a vessel feel much bigger to us than the small, trailerable boat that she really is.

### VERSATILE AND FISHABLE

For those so inclined, the cockpit is eminently fishable and comes equipped with padded coamings against which to brace a knee while reeling in your catch. To starboard is a second steering station—call it a poor-man’s flybridge—mainly for single-handed docking, but useful too in slow-speed maneuvering to land that fish. Oh, there’s also a small sink built into the helm console, the first of four. I guess when you call yourself Fluid Motion, you cannot have too many sinks.

To port, a molded cabinet does triple duty. It serves as a housing for a drop-in, off-the-shelf plastic cooler. It stows a stainless gas grill that sits atop the cabinet top when in use, and beneath all that, provides access to the optional 2.7kW generator.

Anyone who reads about boats has probably noticed that most boat tests reveal minor flaws in a vessel. A cynical view is that the author duly reports these minor flaws mainly to give his otherwise positive conclusions more credibility. There’s always a little foreign matter in the punchbowl, you might say. I will get to my observations later, but I won’t be following in the footsteps of the many writers in the past that bemoaned the scarcity of handholds and drink holders. No one will ever be able to say that about the Cutwater. There are at least six drink holders, maybe more, and there’s a rail anywhere you could think to lay a grasping hand.

Entering the cabin means hardly leaving the outdoors in the sense that you are bathed in the light of day with windows all around, including sliders to port and starboard and four opening hatches above. Immediately to port is a decent galley, that comes standard with an electric cooktop and convection oven, plus a 12/120-volt small fridge, under-counter stowage, and the largest of the four sinks. Albeit reluctantly, Fluid Motion will customize the Cutwater to accommodate East Coast preferences for a propane stove. For denizens of the Pacific Northwest and other northern climates there is an optional diesel cooktop and cabin heater combination unit.

### UNDER THE TABLE: A BED!

To starboard is a two-person dinette, with a space-saving feature. The forward bench reverses. Facing forward it is a helm seat, facing aft it is a seat at the table. The nifty thing is that it has been engineered to sit



Top: The light and airy styling, and plenty of windows, help make the saloon feel bigger. Above: With a table that lowers, the stateroom does double duty as a sleeping or sitting area. Note the coffeemaker and microwave nook.

several inches higher when facing the helm. The rear seat is hinged and supported in its upward position by an air shock to provide easy access to a double berth beneath dinette and cabin sole. As you can imagine, this is not a big space but serves its purpose. Most cruisers would probably use it as plastic tub storage and for life jackets. For that matter, the dinette lowers with a filler cushion to sleep one more person comfortably.

The dashboard is home to a suite of Garmin electronics. Garmin, perhaps more than any other maker of multi-function displays, has been dedicated to simplicity, a natural outcome of the company's automotive GPS-mapping business. It's a good fit for a boat that is designed for simplicity of operation, whether the owners are old Baby Boomers or a young couple with little or no previous experience.

Two steps down lead to the master and head. When not being used as a bed, the berth converts to a sitting area with a small table. To port is a cabinet that houses sink number three, a microwave, and a 12-volt coffeemaker. A flatscreen TV attaches to the bulkhead above. Opposite is an adequate head and shower, which incorporates the fourth, and most unusual sink; it's a bowl sink and made of blue glass.

The head has a ventilating hatch and opening portlight; the stateroom has three opening ports and a matching hatch. The Cutwater is a nicely ventilated boat. Southern cruisers would probably opt for the air conditioning and generator package for those stifling days at a Florida dock, but one of the measures of a good cruise should be the infrequency of air conditioner use. The idea is to interact with nature, not shut ourselves off from it.

## BOAT TEST II: THE BEACH

Mark Schulstad had worked a photo shoot for the Cutwaters the day before I joined up with him, and he had scouted out a location I didn't know existed, John Lloyd Park at Dania Beach. I maneuvered Cutwater up the narrow creek and under the low bridge that led into a lagoon behind the barrier beach. By now that outgoing tide that had roiled the inlet was dead low, and we were gunkholing.

The idea was to show how the boat's 28-inch draft, protected running gear, and standard bow and stern thrusters could be used to advantage. As we came to a nice section of beach, I toggled the thrusters to twist the boat perpendicular to the white sand. I nosed her forward until she nudged bottom. We shut her down and went forward. One disadvantage of a trailerable boat with full-beam accommodations is there are no side decks, just gunwales for footholds, so we advanced carefully holding onto the cabin-top grabrails.

Here again was demonstrated another one of those built-in features that characterizes this company's vessels. Beneath a molded fiberglass lid was a telescoping "beach ladder" ready to be flipped over and used to climb down to the sand, which we did. What an excellent feature for a Bahamas cruiser! Another telescoping ladder is integrated into the swim platform as well.

True, it's not easy to access the bow, but Schulstad said that this was a drawback that was overcome by providing a helm-operated electric anchor windlass and wireless remote control for the thrusters. The remote is worn on a lanyard around the skipper's neck. When docking singlehanded, he or she would most likely use the cockpit helm station to maneuver into position, then apply thrusters to push the boat against the dock. At that



Left: The uncluttered helm has room for more than one Garmin display, with room left over for VHF and autopilot. Right: Battery switches and equipment monitors are found just inside the entrance to the mid-cabin berth, well away from the engine room.

point, Schulstad said, the skipper can hold the boat against the dock and actually climb onto the dock to make lines fast, securing stern loosely, then using a little thrust to bring the bow within reach to secure it.

The remote can also be used for the stern thruster to adjust the positioning of the Cutwater when you are getting lined up to go onto the trailer.

### LESSON IN FLUID MOTION

By now you probably have an impression of a boat full of clever touches, but the most outstanding feature is the hull itself. At the top, Fluid Motion is a father-and-son team with John Livingston as president and his father David doing much of the design work. Dave Livingston is one of the most prolific naval architects working today, and he has applied that experience to create an amazing—and confusing—belly for the Cutwaters. There's a lot happening down there.

Cutwater is believed to be the first diesel cruising boat to feature a step in the hull. You can see this as a small opening just above the waterline approximately amidships. Think of this as an air intake scoop. There is a full keel for stability tracking and to protect the running gear. There is a bulge where the engine mounts so it can sit lower in the boat and thus reduce shaft angle and lower center of gravity for greater stability. Aesthetically, it helps by lowering the cabin sole and thus lowering the boat's profile overall. Reverse strakes add yet another measure of outboard buoyancy to reduce roll.

Earlier I described the hull as confusing. One news report called the Cutwater a semi-displacement boat, and the company's own website said semi-planing. Yet I found

nothing displacement and nothing semi about traveling at 28 knots, so I asked the elder Livingston what gives. "It's a stepped-bottom planing hull," Livingston said. "I agree with your comments completely about semi-displacement or semi-planing. In my experience it usually means they don't do either very well."

Livingston then gave me a little tutorial on the Cutwater's stepped hull and advised how I could demonstrate the physics for myself using a spoon and a kitchen sink. The step, which I described earlier as a scoop, funnels air under the outboard sections of the hull as you throttle forward. The air reduces the suction of the water and gets the boat onto plane earlier and reduces drag while on plane.

"By using the step in the hull, it's possible to also run more "V" and a more convex entry or fuller bow forward, which is smoother like a dolphin or orca. You also gain a much larger volume area forward inside the hull," Livingston wrote. "The step helps almost in every aspect of performance with the possible exception of a few trailers that need to be modified. If the step is not the right shape some increase in water noise can occur, so the design is critical."

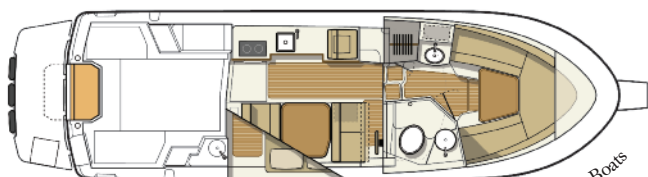
To get a basic grasp on the physics, Livingston had me take a spoon, hold it lightly by the handle, and let the spoon's bottom rub up against a stream of tap water. Try it yourself. As the water rushes along the belly of the spoon, the spoon is sucked deeper into the stream. That side of the spoon is full-displacement. Reverse the spoon so the rim touches the stream and no such thing happens. It bounces over the surface of the stream as if on plane.

## CUTWATER 28

LOA	28' (molded)
LOA	32' 4" (with swim platform and pulpit)
LWL	28'
BRIDGE CLEARANCE	9' 1" (with folded mast)
BEAM	8' 6"
DRAFT	28"
FUEL	100 U.S. gal.
WATER	40 U.S. gal.
HOLDING TANK	30 U.S. gal.
GENERATOR	2.7kW Mase (optional)
WEIGHT	6,400 lb. (dry)
ENGINE	Yanmar 260hp 6BY2 diesel
MAXIMUM SPEED*	29.6 knots
CRUISE SPEED	6 knots (slow)
RANGE AT SLOW CRUISE	460 miles
CRUISE SPEED	22 knots (fast)
RANGE AT FAST CRUISE	200nm
DESIGNER	David Livingston
BUILDER	Fluid Motion/ Cutwater Boats
BASE PRICE	\$170,000

\*Calculations were performed with fuel and water tanks half full and two persons aboard.

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Courtesy of Cutwater Boats

### STREAMLINED CONSTRUCTION

Hull shape is part of the formula, but construction plays a part in the boat's performance and price. Just four large molded pieces comprise the hull. Before the hull is popped out of its mold, a full-length stringer system is bonded into it and filled with foam for noise dampening. None of the furniture is stick built. A liner for the forward stateroom and a liner from the stateroom



Excellent access to the engine, fuel filters, and raw water strainers is through an electrically raised cockpit hatch.

stepdown to the transom complete the boat below decks. "You've got these four long parts that all get urethaned and puttied together and with that you get this very strong result. For a 26- or 28-footer, it's amazing how solid it is. It's light because there's no wood core," said Mark Mansfield, national sales manager for Cutwater Boats.

The marine industry has what you might call "liner skeptics," usually technicians who have found that liners prevent access to wire and hose runs when they need to repair or retrofit systems. Cutwater has addressed the naysayers by installing access ports at every junction and turn in a wiring or hose run.

Mansfield said that consolidating what boatbuilders call "small parts" into just five major molds—the deck and house being the fifth—allows Cutwater to significantly reduce labor costs. That (and the fact that Fluid Motion is debt free) enables Cutwater to sell its 28, with a long list of standard features, for just \$170,000. Long-term cruisers will probably add enough options to bring the price tag up to just under \$200,000. Subtract \$30,000 from both those figures for the 26.

Speaking of which, the 26 differs from the 28 in only two major respects. The cockpit is 2 feet smaller so the cooler/grill locker is eliminated, and it has a smaller engine. The 26 has a Yanmar 4BY2 180hp instead of the 6BY2 260hp engine in the 28. Once inside the cabin the boats are identical.



The Cutwater 28, and the 26, feature a low-drag hull designed by David Livingston that offers economy or speed when needed.

And for those who want to know before going to the company's website, the Cutwater hulls are solid fiberglass with vinyl ester resin used below the waterline for resistance to blistering. Divinycell is the core material of choice where strength, stiffness, and light weight are paramount, such as in the decks and cabin sides. Tanks are plastic, located on the centerline, and easily accessed for service. Both Cutwater models are built to ABYC guidelines, and carry limited warranties: five years on the hull, one year on components, plus a separate diesel engine warranty from Yanmar.

### NITPICKS AND NOTIONS

Earlier I promised to air my criticisms, which really are minor. Plus my test boat was the first 28 and it's a rare boat line that doesn't need tweaking at the start. All the wood aboard is decorative, not structural, as Mansfield noted, and there appeared to be at least four, maybe five different kinds of light woods, including the teak-and-holly flooring and aftermarket teak cabinet fronts. Since the flooring and East Asia-made cabinet parts pretty much have to be teak, why not just finish the rest of the boat in teak? Too little wood is involved to affect the price of the boat.

Also, when the stateroom berth is made with its cushion insert, the door to the head cannot be opened fully, making it particularly awkward for guests needing to use the bathroom during the night. I'm sure the factory will come up with something, maybe a bi-folding

door, to remedy this.

Also in the stateroom, and maybe this is a guy thing, but I would get rid of the sink and second microwave and expand the hanging locker in their place. I'd keep the coffeemaker, but stow it away when not in use. (And, yes, I would keep the drink holder.) While we're at it, why not substitute a curving semi-arch for the angled piece that you see in the picture?

### BOAT TEST III: THE NEW RIVER

If you ever get a chance to cruise up the New River in Ft. Lauderdale, you should. This winding little waterway through America's yachting capital has a veritable museum of watercraft lining its banks. Schulstad was driving now, heading for one of the city's upriver boatyards to put Cutwater on the trailer en route to the next boat show and ultimately to the Chesapeake.

We relaxed and chatted, enjoying the view. Being there on a small maneuverable powerboat felt liberating. I remembered other times on the New River, especially when that bridge tender surprised a dozen big boats by closing prematurely, forcing us all to back and fill wildly in the current. I remembered the other tales of wounded pride.

As we passed moored vessels of every description, we sometimes saw vessel owners or workers busy in some task; what the Dutch call "massaging the boat." More than a few of them paused as we went by. They had stopped to look at us. 