

POCKET CHANGE

Small, trailerable cruisers are expanding boating destinations with their value and versatility



BY STEVE KNAUTH

Jeff Messmer remembers well the Seattle Boat Show in January 2006. He was unveiling a 25-foot tug at one of the biggest boat shows on the West Coast, where a thousand vessels vie for the attention of buyers. What's more, his salty, little cruiser wasn't finished; it was just a hull with a partial interior and no deck. A graphic display filled in the missing details. But the in-board-powered, trailer-ready vessel with the tugboat lines caught on.

"We sold 13," says Messmer, vice president of sales and marketing for Ranger Tugs, of Kent, Wash. That number has grown to nearly 80 now, sold through some 20 dealers nationwide.

Call it the power of the pocket cruiser. And it's certainly not the domain of just Ranger Tugs. In Nova Scotia, Rosborough Boats continues to turn out a 25-foot trailer-rawler at a steady pace, as it has for more than 20 years.

"People have learned about the sensibility of these cruisers," says Bob Rosborough, president of the family-owned business in Halifax. "They like the value; they like the economy. You can trailer it. You can go single-handed. You can take it almost anywhere."

In fact, North America's cruising grounds are more accessible than ever, as builders apply the latest advances in navigation and communications, construction, safety and reliability to their trailerable boats. With these versatile 21- to 27-footers, it's truly the day of the destination boater.

"I think [the pocket cruiser owner] is a little more adventure-minded; they're not just going out to party for a day or even a weekend," says Messmer. "We have one owner who spent 78 days on his boat and covered 3,000 miles cruising southeastern Alaska. Another boat is out doing the Great Loop — up the East Coast, over to the Great Lakes and back down to the Gulf of Mexico. It's that type of boater."

Rosborough agrees. "People moving to these boats are usually seasoned boaters, really experienced," he says. "And they do tend to be adventurous. People take delivery of their boats up here and take them home themselves, through the [St. Lawrence] Seaway or the Bay of Fundy."

The practical side

Besides the promise of distant horizons, what do you get in a pocket cruiser? Behind the poetry there's a practical side, and for many owners trailerability heads the list.

"It's a major factor," says Mitch Sorbrera, founder of Retro Marine of Salem, Mass., which is planning a bigger version of its successful 21-footer. "It really expands your ability to go traveling. Get yourself a small SUV or truck, and you can tow the small cruiser anywhere and launch it, go out for a week, come back, hook up and go someplace else. I have a customer based in the Florida Keys who tows his boat all over the country."

Messmer agrees. "Fully half of our customers are interested in the trailer aspect of cruising," he says. "Not everyone wants to navigate down the ICW. They can tow a pocket cruiser behind a vehicle and gain the flexibility to do the coast of Maine, for example, and then trailer inland to [New Hampshire's] Lake Winnepesaukee."

Price is another attraction. Pocket cruisers start in the low to middle five figures and run to about \$150,000 or more, depending on engines and options. The Retro 21 can get a couple started for around \$33,000.

"Our customers believe they're getting a good value, considering what the boat is and what it can do," says Messmer.

Propulsion packages — outboard and inboard — tend to feature efficiency and economy over speed

NEL RABINOWITZ



Ranger calls its R-25 a "trailable mini-yacht," with a large saloon/pilothouse and accommodations for six.



CONTRIBUTING WRITER

and power. The Retro 21 runs on a single 70-hp 4-stroke Suzuki. Cruising speed is around 18 knots, and fuel consumption is minimal. "I like the small engines," says Sorbrera. "Going out and spending \$300 or \$400 on fuel for a weekend takes a lot of the kick out of boating, regardless of your income. I wanted my boats to literally sip fuel." One customer reported back after a weekend outing: "ran boat 10 hours; fuel usage, seven gallons."

Ranger favors diesel. In fact, it's offering a special diesel package this year, featuring the new Cummins 2-liter power plant. "It's rated at 130 to 150 hp and should give us 15 knots," says Messmer. "That's a good trawler speed."

The basic pocket cruiser layout goes for practicality, too. The floor plan is usually centered on a wheelhouse or extended pilothouse with a galley and dinette. The galley might have a one- or two-burner stove, pressure water and a standard or optional refrigerator. The dinette normally converts to a berth. The helm station has a dash or console for instruments and, in some models, a small nav station. There's a forward cabin and enclosed head and shower, and a few boats may offer a midcabin berth, as well.

Amenities run the gamut, from air conditioning,

heating systems and hot water heaters to custom electronics and bow thrusters. "Many of our buyers are getting away from the fuss of owning a big boat," says Messmer. "But they like the fact that the pocket cruiser can have all the systems they're used to. For example, we offer a bow and a stern thruster on our boat, and every one we've delivered has had both."

"You can trailer it, you can go single-handed, you can take it almost anywhere."

— Bob Rosborough, Rosborough Boats

In other words, small doesn't mean less. "You're actually opening yourself up to more cruising," says Retro's Sorbrera. "You can go exploring Kent Island in the Chesapeake and then do Martha's Vineyard in New England without having to take the time and effort to make the passage from one to the other. The pocket cruiser gives you more legs."

Here's a look at eight trailerables that are drawing destination boaters to the cruising life.

Acadia 25

It's unusual for a Florida builder to produce a Down East boat, but that's just what Atlas Boat Works in Cape Coral has done with the Acadia 25. The builder calls the all-fiberglass boat a "lobster boat design refined into a pleasure yacht ... meeting the demands of the weekender, cruiser and fisherman."

The look is certainly traditional. A trunk cabin with eyebrow trim and a large pilothouse top a long, even sheer line. The 25-footer's bow is gently curved, the freeboard is ample, and the stern is wide and low, much like the Maine fishing boats it's related to. Those boats have single-engine power, and so does the Acadia. A 110-hp Yanmar diesel will deliver a 12-knot cruise speed, and 150-hp and 180-hp power plants are offered for the more performance-minded.

The starboard-side helm station has a raised bucket-style seat, destroyer wheel and compact fiberglass console. The middle pane of the three-pane windshield opens, as does the side window. There's a companion seat to port, and the offset companionway leads to the cabin below.

The layout is simple but complete, with cruising comforts for two. There's a V-berth forward with stor-



The C-Dory 25 Cruiser has 6 feet, 10 inches of headroom in the pilothouse, which allows for a standup head compartment that includes a shower.

age beneath and an overhead hatch. The L-shaped galley comes with a sink and one-burner stove, and there's ample room for an under-counter refrigerator. The enclosed head compartment contains a marine head, vanity sink and shower. The white fiberglass interior is trimmed in finished wood, giving the cabin a traditional look.

Cruising amenities include a hot water heater, optional air conditioning and shore power, and an extended hardtop. Several traditional hull colors are available, including dark blue and dark green.

C-Dory 25 Cruiser

Three decades ago, a Washington State boat-builder brought to the Seattle Boat Show what was essentially a miniature version of the big displacement boats he was known for. The 22-foot "Flat Bottom" caught on as a hardy fishing boat, and C-Dory Marine was born. Today, the Auburn, Wash., builder offers a fleet of fishing and cruising boats from 17 to 27 feet, under the C-Dory, TomCat and Skagit Orca nameplates.

The C-Dory 25 Cruiser builds on the success of its smaller sister ship, the 22 Cruiser, with several additional features. The bigger boat has 6 feet, 10 inches of headroom in the pilothouse, which allows space for a standup head compartment that includes a shower. The galley is larger, too, and has room for a two-burner stove (with a diesel stove/heater option), a full-size sink, and a teak dish rack.

The helm station is to starboard, behind the triple-pane windshield and opening side windows. There's a single bench seat, and the fiberglass console houses controls and electronics. Up forward, there's a V-berth that can be closed off with a privacy curtain. Several layout options are available, including a reversible forward dinette seat.

The 25 Cruiser is 4-stroke powered and can handle twins or a main engine and smaller auxiliary. Maximum horsepower rating is 200. Twin 90s or a single 150-hp outboard are more typical.

C-Dory uses hand-laid fiberglass and balsa composite construction in the bottom, decks and bulkheads for strength and stiffness and to maximize interior space.

Eastern 27

The Eastern 27 is the largest of the New Hampshire builder's trailerable boats and one of its most popular designs. In production for more than 20 years, the single-engine Down Easter could be called a camper for a couple. Simple accommodations inside the locking forward cabin include a V-berth with cushions (and optional filler) and an en-

NEIL RABINOWITZ (TOP LEFT)

RETRO 21
CAPE ISLAND TRAWLER



LOA: 21 feet **BEAM:** 8 feet, 6 inches **DRAFT:** 9 inches **WEIGHT:** 2,350 pounds **HULL TYPE:** semidisplacement **TANKAGE:** portable fuel and water tanks **POWER:** single outboard to 70 hp **SPEED:** 20 mph cruise **PRICE:** \$32,900 **CONTACT:** Retro Marine, Salem, Mass. Phone: (978) 578-1606. www.retromarine.com

ROSBOROUGH RF-246
SEDAN CRUISER



LOA: 25 feet **BEAM:** 8 feet, 6 inches **DRAFT:** 1 foot, 6 inches **WEIGHT:** 5,400 pounds **HULL TYPE:** semidisplacement **TANKAGE:** 120 gallons fuel, 42 gallons water **POWER:** single or twin outboards to 300 hp, single gas or diesel sterndrive **SPEED:** 15-20 mph **PRICE:** \$87,400 (without power) **CONTACT:** Rosborough Boats, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Phone: (902) 450-3262. www.rosboroughboats.com

ACADIA 25



LOA: 24 feet, 10 inches **BEAM:** 8 feet, 6 inches **DRAFT:** 2 feet, 6 inches **WEIGHT:** 5,100 pounds **HULL TYPE:** semidisplacement **TANKAGE:** 60 gallons fuel, 20 gallons water **POWER:** single diesel to 180 hp **SPEED:** 20-22 mph **PRICE:** \$96,337 **CONTACT:** Atlas Boat Works, Cape Coral, Fla. Phone: (239) 574-2628. www.acadia25.com

C-DORY 25 CRUISER



LOA: 25 feet, 5 inches **BEAM:** 8 feet, 6 inches **DRAFT:** 10 inches **WEIGHT:** 3,600 pounds **HULL TYPE:** semidisplacement **TANKAGE:** 100 gallons fuel, 23 gallons water **POWER:** single 150- or twin 90-hp outboards **SPEED:** 30 mph (top) **PRICE:** \$59,085 (without power) **CONTACT:** C-Dory Marine Group, Auburn, Wash. Phone: (253) 839-0222. www.c-dory.com

closed head compartment with a marine head and holding tank. Four screened cabin ports let in light and fresh air. Custom interiors that include a galley can be arranged.

On deck, the helm station with destroyer wheel is placed to starboard behind the triple-pane windshield (the center pane opens). There's a pedestal seat and a fiberglass dash console with room for full instrumentation, a companion pedestal seat to port, and optional aft jump seats. Optional hard cabin sides on cruising versions have sliding windows, and a canvas package that includes side and aft screens encloses the entire area.

Fishing often is a cruising pastime, and the boat's angling options include a live well, rod holders and a saltwater washdown. Eastern Boats says the stern-drive-powered 27 has benefited from the new generation of compact diesels, which lend themselves well to the pocket cruiser. The new standard power plant is a 163-hp Volvo diesel, which delivers a 20- to 25-mph cruising speed with a top end of around 32 mph. Cruising range with the 110-gallon fuel supply is more than 700 miles. Other engine options are a 190-hp Volvo diesel, a 280-hp gas Volvo, and a 300-hp gas MerCruiser.

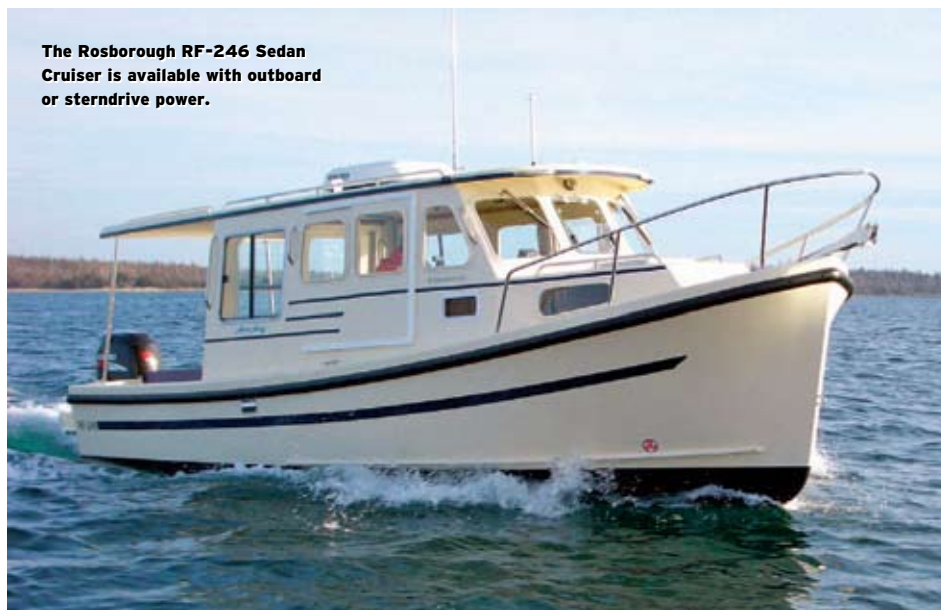
Osprey 26 Long Cabin

The Pacific Northwest has its own boating traditions, rooted in the commercial fishing in the challenging water of the Pacific Northwest. Osprey Boats, of Bellingham, Wash., has been building rugged, mid-size recreational fishing vessels for that environment for nearly 20 years.

The builder touts the trailerable 26 Long Cabin for its "open-ocean excursion capabilities and the little luxuries that make the difference." A cruising cousin to the builder's well-known fishing boats, the weekender is designed with more living room, a larger deck and family-boat luxuries.

The 26-footer has a distinctive profile, with a sharply rising bow, pilothouse placed well forward (with triple-pane windshield and opening side windows), and long sheer line to the cockpit. Power options include single or twin outboards as well as a single I/O, gas or diesel.

There are two cabin layouts available. One places the head compartment in the main cabin, the other moves it forward. In each, the pilothouse contains the standup galley to starboard, with a stove, sink and under-counter space for a refrigerator. The dinette, with bench seats, is to port, and this space converts to a bunk. The helm station is forward of the galley, equipped with a bucket-style seat, destroyer wheel and dashboard panel. There's a companion seat



The Rosborough RF-246 Sedan Cruiser is available with outboard or sterndrive power.

across the way. The forward cabin has a standard V-berth with insert.

The 56-square-foot cockpit can do double duty as a fishing platform (transom door and washdown) or an entertainment center, with music from the standard CD player/stereo system.

Ranger R-25

Ranger Tugs celebrates its 50th year of building rugged boats for coastal waters. The company was founded in 1958 by David Livingston, and it's still run by the same family in Kent, Wash.

The builder calls the R-25 tug-style cruiser a "trailerable mini-yacht." With its large saloon/pilothouse, ample accommodations (sleeps up to six) and diesel power, it fits the bill. The hull shape is bred for the Straits of Juan de Fuca, with a tall bow topped with bulwarks and a heavy rail. The freeboard runs well aft to an open cockpit, finishing in a high, rounded stern and stern rail. The pilothouse windows are rounded like a tug's, too. The saloon and pilothouse essentially comprise one big cabin with a teak-and-holly sole, giving the boat an airy feel inside.

The saloon is set up with a dinette with bench seats (convertible to a berth) and a U-shaped galley equipped with two-burner stove, sink and refrigerator. A 6-gallon hot water heater is standard. The helm station is a step up and to starboard and has a wood-

trimmed wheel and a wood console with enough space for large-display electronics. An optional electronics package features Raymarine equipment.

The short trunk cabin houses the V-berth, and there's a private midcabin berth to port. The full-size, enclosed head compartment is aft and has all the necessities, including a shower.

Standard propulsion is a 75-hp Yanmar diesel, and a 110-hp engine is optional. Other options include a cockpit canopy (with or without side enclosures), raw-water washdown, bow and stern thrusters, and a 50-inch mast.

Retro 21 Cape Island Trawler

The Cape Island Trawler is a two-person, outboard-powered coastal cruiser built on a time-tested hull design. The brainchild of longtime boater Mitch Sorbrera, it's built in Canada by Southwest Fiberglass Products, which has been producing similar vessels for more than 15 years.

The functional layout starts in the cabin, set up with a standard V-berth, two storage compartments and room for a portable head. A large overhead hatch and side ports provide light and ventilation, and there's a cabin light for convenience.

The extended cabin houses the helm station, to starboard, with pedestal seat (and companion), destroyer-style wheel and compact console. Side win-

RANGER R-25



LOA: 24 feet, 7 inches **BEAM:** 8 feet, 6 inches **DRAFT:** 2 feet, 2 inches **WEIGHT:** 5,700 pounds **HULL TYPE:** semidisplacement **TANKAGE:** 75 gallons fuel, 30 gallons water **POWER:** diesel to 150 hp **SPEED:** 16-17 mph **PRICE:** \$119,940 **CONTACT:** Ranger Tugs, Kent, Wash. Phone: (253) 839-5213. www.rangertugs.com

SEAWAY 25 COASTAL CRUISER



LOA: 25 feet **BEAM:** 8 feet, 6 inches **DRAFT:** 1 foot, 4 inches **WEIGHT:** 4,700 pounds **HULL TYPE:** semidisplacement **TANKAGE:** 80 gallons fuel, 37 gallons water **POWER:** single outboard to 175 hp, single diesel to 190 hp **SPEED:** 18-20 mph **PRICE:** \$99,000 (with 150-hp outboard) **CONTACT:** Seaway Boats, Oxford, Maine. Phone: (207) 539-8116. www.seawayboats.com

OSPREY 26 LONG CABIN



LOA: 26 feet **BEAM:** 8 feet, 6 inches **DRAFT:** 1 foot, 6 inches **WEIGHT:** 6,500 pounds **HULL TYPE:** semidisplacement **TANKAGE:** 150 gallons fuel, 30 gallons water **POWER:** single gas or diesel inboard, single or twin outboards **SPEED:** 30 mph (top) **PRICE:** \$150,656 (with 250-hp diesel) **CONTACT:** Osprey Boats, Bellingham, Wash. Phone: (360) 738-4671. www.ospreyboats.com

EASTERN 27



LOA: 26 feet, 4 inches **BEAM:** 8 feet, 4 inches **DRAFT:** 2 feet **WEIGHT:** 4,800 pounds **HULL TYPE:** semidisplacement **TANKAGE:** 110 gallons fuel, 20 gallons water **POWER:** single sterndrive **SPEED:** 20-25 mph cruise, 32 mph top **PRICE:** \$80,000 (with 163-hp Volvo) **CONTACT:** Eastern Boats, Milton, N.H. Phone: (603) 652-9213. www.easternboats.com

dows slide open, and opening panels on the triple-pane windshield are an option. There's room for a small galley with a propane stove, small sink and cooler. A three-piece enclosure with window panels is an option, enclosing the 100-square-foot cockpit.

Power comes from a single outboard from 50 hp to 70 hp, and cruising speed is around 20 mph. Built on a semicustom basis, the 21-footer can be outfitted with such additions as rod holders and rocket launchers, additional cockpit seating and a side-mounted, water-level swim door. The all-fiberglass hull is based



The Retro 21 Cape Island Trawler combines workboat roots and cruising amenities.

on the Cape Island hull designed some 40 years ago by the Canadian government for offshore commercial fishing boats.

Hundreds of Cape Island hulls are now in use throughout the Maritime Provinces. The semidisplacement shape — with its high, sharp bow and broken sheer leading to a beamy, tumblehome transom — reflects the long history of rough-water the region is known for.

Rosborough RF-246 Sedan Cruiser

Family-owned Rosborough Boats has built more than 400 vessels over the years and counts Canada's Department of Fisheries among its customers. In fact, it has 45 Rosboroughs in its fleet.

The Halifax, Nova Scotia, builder calls the RF-246 Sedan Cruiser the "ultimate in usability and versatility ... for cruising and/or living aboard." It's built on an all-fiberglass, semidisplacement hull with positive flotation.

Rosborough devotes much of the space aboard the 25-foot boat to capacity, comfort and convenience. The saloon is enclosed by a sliding door and laid out with a dinette to starboard, which converts to a single berth. The galley is across the way, to port, and comes with a standard two-burner stove, sink, under-counter refrigerator and counter and storage space. A 6-gallon hot water heater is optional.

Tall windows give the cabin an open feel, and there's good visibility from the starboard-side helm seat. There's plenty of room for gauges and electronics in the fiberglass console. Other helm features include a dual bench seat, side doors and optional opening windshield panels. The V-berth is lit by a skylight and can double as a dining area or office, thanks to a high-low table.

The RF-246 can be powered by single or twin outboards, or a single gas or diesel sterndrive. The recommended maximum engine ratings are 300 hp combined for twin outboards, and 190 hp for a diesel I/O. Cruising speed is 15 to 20 mph. Options include dinghy davits, a transom seat and transom door, and a hardtop extension that covers the cockpit.

Seaway 25 Coastal Cruiser

Seaway has been building boats in Maine for more than three decades. Founded by Harry Farmer, the company started out building commercial lobster boats in the 1970s, and the same family runs it today.

One of the newest entries in the growing pocket cruiser fleet, Seaway's 25 Coastal Cruiser, makes its debut this year. Based in Oxford, the builder calls the trailerable cruiser a "camping boat for that weekend trip when you want to be on the water." But the pilothouse, convertible seating, standup shower and such amenities as air-conditioning make it a well-equipped overnighter that can sleep four.

The extended pilothouse is laid out with all the necessities for weekend cruising. There's an enclosed head compartment with room for a portable or permanent head, a sink and standup shower. The galley-up is equipped with a two-burner stove and sink, along with shelves and under-counter storage. The dinette, with bench seats and table, is to port, and the unit converts to a double berth. Amidships and to starboard is the helm station with bench seat; a companion seat is to port.

Outside, the 25-footer shows a high profile, with bulwarks forming a gentle sheer to the flat transom. The trunk cabin design allows for a forward hatch and ports, and the cabin-top trim accents the boat's traditional look. The boat rides Seaway's standard semidisplacement fiberglass hull, rich with lobster-boat tradition. Power comes from a single outboard to 175 hp or a diesel I/O from 160 hp to 190 hp. ■

Everything he can do in a bigger boat and more

Bill Dobson has gotten around on sailboats. Growing up in the Midwest, he's raced all kinds of performance boats, from Ynglings to E-scows, and covered the Great Lakes on big-boat classics, including a Pearson 35 and a 75-foot Alden ketch. But the 25-foot sailboat he bought used two seasons ago has made him a pocket cruiser convert.

The Offshore 25 from Eastsail Yachts of Bow, N.H., was designed by Eliot Spalding in the early 1980s as a "rugged, trailerable pocket cruiser ... for the long voyage." With its full keel and transom-hung rudder, choice of sloop or cutter rig, and complete accommodations, including an enclosed head, it fits the bill. Yet the 8-foot, 6-inch beam makes it legal to trailer without permits, and auxiliary power is a 20-hp diesel.

Small, seaworthy, easy to handle and with a simple but complete layout, the Offshore 25 was just what Dobson had been looking for. "It was right up my alley," he says. "It had classic lines, and I liked the cutter rig. That divides up the sails; they're smaller and easier to deal with by yourself. The accommodations were small, but they work for two people. And there was enough headroom for me."

After a 30-year hiatus from boating — "raising a family, mortgages" — Dobson's enjoying every minute back on the water. Each year, he's extending his cruising grounds. "The first year, I did a lot of coastal cruising in Casco Bay, anchoring every night," says the 54-year-old consulting engineer from Spencer, Mass. "It is also great for gunkholing. I can go into those nice, small coves that are out of bounds for bigger boats."

This past year, Dobson started doing what he calls "sails to nowhere." He drops

the dock lines at his Great Island marina, points the pocket cruiser in the general direction of the Gulf of Maine, and "sets out into the ocean," as he puts it. "I'd just sail for 24 or 48 hours, turn around and come back. It's a different kind of sailing. You don't have to be navigating all the time; you just relax and enjoy it — tend the sails, read a little bit, sleep, eat a little bit.

"The best thing is how easy it is to go sailing," he continues. "I don't have to dig up a crew, and everything on board can be handled by one person or two."

The boat is relatively small, and Dobson has kept the

mechanical and electronic devices to a minimum. "My nav station's a chart kit on my lap," he says. That makes the 25-footer easy and inexpensive to maintain. The "to-do" list includes a bottom job, topside paint and refinishing the woodwork, all easily budgeted over time.

"I'd rather have a small boat that can be well-maintained than a bigger one that I can't afford to keep up as it should be," Dobson says. "And if the cost is less, I can afford to do more. That's an important part of it. And that includes things like storage, hauling and overnight slips."

There's no sacrificing seaworthiness for size, either. On the Gulf of Maine, 6- or 7-foot waves and 25-knot winds are nothing unusual, and the boat's not only proved itself a good performer when reefed down, it's surprisingly dry, too. "I think it's that clipper bow," says Dobson.

The pocket cruiser's stiffest test to date? An offshore summer thunderstorm with torrential rains and 60-mph winds. "It was really no big deal," he says. "The tiller was lashed down; the sails were all tied up. I went below and rode it out."

Calmer waters beckon this season. Dobson and the dark green boat with the distinctive tanbark sails will lead the annual cruise of the Bluewater Sailing Club in Maine. "I've got the smallest boat in the fleet," says Dobson. "I'm calling it, 'Leading from behind.'"

And there's more to come, as distant horizons beckon the little boat. Next year — or maybe the year after — Dobson would like to take the Offshore 25 to the tropics. "It would be a great boat in the Bahamas," he says. "We'll see. I feel like there's really nothing I can't do in this boat that I could do in a bigger boat." ■



OFFSHORE 25

LOA: 25 feet **BEAM:** 8 feet, 6 inches **DRAFT:** 3 feet, 8 inches **DISPLACEMENT:** 7,000 pounds **SAIL AREA:** 400 square feet **POWER:** 20-hp diesel **PRICE:** \$90,000 **CONTACT:** Eastsail Yachts, Bow, N.H. Phone: (603) 224-6579. www.eastsail.com