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The Hatteras 31′ Sport Cruiser

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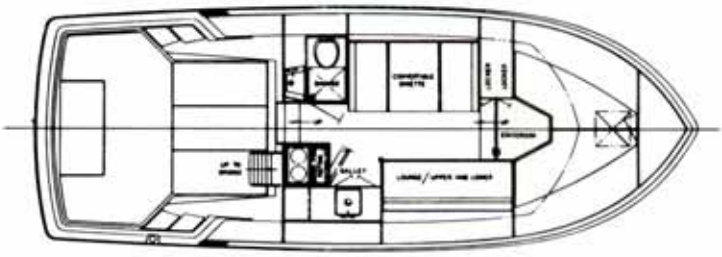


Quality construction in a high-performance, medium-size cruiser designed to take diesel power

This month's profile and photographs by Associate Editor Jack Smith

Left: Ocean racer/designer Jim Wynne, at helm of Sport Cruiser, was responsible for hull and industrial designer Fred Hudson, at his right, designed the interior and superstructure

Above: Express Cruiser follows Sport Cruiser during run on Biscayne Bay. Sport Cruiser option is a second set of controls in place of convertible lounge below. Note flat running attitude

AT 31 FEET, the latest Hatteras would be the smallest ever introduced by the company, but other than that, and the fact that quality could be expected, I didn't know what I'd find when I went for a preview shortly before the opening of the 1974 Miami International Boat Show in late February. YACHTING was going to eye a secret that had been two years in the design and development.

The scene at Ryder Yachts in Miami, where preparation for launching was in progress, turned out to be a bundle of surprises. After meeting with Wes Dickman and Ken Kranz, respectively national sales manager and manager of marketing services for Hatteras, I discovered, though my expectation was to see one boat, that there were two models built on the same hull, both of them racy-looking types designated the Sport Cruiser and the Express Cruiser. Then I was greeted by Jim Wynne, well known for his earlier ocean powerboat racing and now for his designing, and learned that he was responsible for the hull. Also on hand was industrial designer Fred Hudson, who had done considerable work in the marine industry, and I was informed that he had designed the interiors and the superstructures of both models

The hull was another surprise. It's deeply V'd, with considerable flare in the bow. Forward lifting strakes, molded in longitudinally on each side of the bottom, are relatively wide and terminate about amidships. The chines widen rapidly on the underside from a fair surface near the stem and are exceptionally wide and flat in the afterbody, providing the basic lift aft and a high degree of transverse stability. But most striking is the bottom configuration in the areas of the propellers and rudders. On each side, from a point just aft of the propeller shaft exit to the transom, the hull is scalloped out so that the struts, propellers and rudders are partially recessed. Jim referred to the scallops as "pockets" that provide for lower shaft angles. Introducing this feature, he noted, not only allowed for more efficient use of propeller thrust but permitted larger engines to be set low in the hull with a flush cockpit sole and a relatively low cockpit profile, thus

making it possible to satisfy the original design concept of a modern, high-performance, diesel-powered cruiser in only 31 feet. I noticed, too, that the pockets arced downward somewhat from a maximum depth above the propellers to the terminating points at the transom, and it seemed that this would have the effect of providing some lift at the stern and getting the bow down in the manner of the wedges used on some shallow-V planing hulls.

Since the Express Cruiser was still a prototype, it was decided that I would focus on the Sport Cruiser. The hull length is actually 31'9", the beam is 11'10" and she draws 3'1" to displace 15,000 lb. The freeboard is 3'10" forward and 2'9" aft. I climbed a ladder for a look and found that she has a roomy T-shaped cockpit with large, molded-in steps that give excellent access from the side decks. Around the sides and aft are vinyl-covered foam cushions with a corded welt at the top inside edge that allows easy slide-out removal from aluminum track. The sole is nonskid and around the perimeter are water run-off channels that lead to large scuppers at the stern corners. Centered forward of a hatch that gives access to the stern gear is a direct-reading mechanical fuel gauge for a 150-gallon, UL-approved fiberglass fuel tank beneath the sole. Across the full width forward are triple hatches that give access to the tops of the engines and their inboard sides, while in the cockpit sides are large removable panels for access below the decks to the outboard sides.

The teak door to the cabin is centered in the bulkhead, and to starboard is a ladder with stainless steel rails and teak treads that leads to the bridge. Behind the ladder is a fixed, tinted cabin window, and just below it is a stainless steel shore power panel with connectors for 120-v.a.c. air conditioning and ship's service and fuses below that isolate it from the a.c. selector panel within the cabin. Forward on the starboard side of the cockpit is a panel for a Fiquench Halon automatic engineroom fire control system.

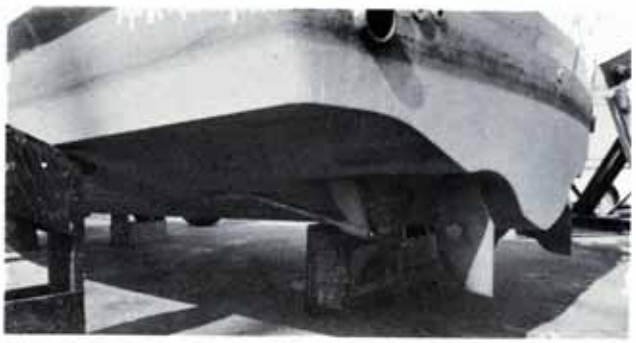
In a neat arrangement, the stainless steel ladder rails from the cockpit lead up and around all sides of the bridge (inside the smoked plexiglass, venturi-type, wrap-around windshield) and they terminate on the forward side, halfway in toward the centerline. They provide good security coming and going or when seated and traveling at speed and they also double as a support for the upholstered back of a two-place bench-type seat aft and to port.

There are three other seats on the bridge, each a foam-cushioned, vinyl-upholstered pedestal type—one with arms, centered before the console for the helmsman, and the others without arms on each side. Though the armless seats are swivel types, they really can't make it because they're too close to the sides, but the bases do occupy minimum space and the seats lift off if necessary.

The molded fiberglass control consol, which has a V form and is screw-fastened on the centerline, has a stainless steel wheel at the center, instruments on the face below, throttle levers to port, shifts to starboard, and switches on a lower ledge. In the bulkhead on each side of it is a compartment with a smoked plexiglass door in a stainless steel frame.

Below in the main cabin, the joiner work is excellent, with natural teak dominating and maple-grained "butcher's block" plastic laminate on the dinette table and the galley countertops virtually defying detection as synthetic. The overhead is perforated white vinyl, the sole is covered with a light blue shag carpeting and a blue fabric upholstery covers six-inch foam cushions on the convertible dinette to port and the lounge that converts to upper and lower berths to starboard.

In the L-shaped galley aft and to starboard, there is a 110-v., 6.5-cu.-ft. refrigerator, a two-burner alcohol and electric stove, a stainless steel sink, dish and stowage lockers and a utensil drawer. Fifty gallons of water are carried for a pressurized system. Between the galley and the head, the step below the cabin door has a hinged tread and it serves as a stowage box. A fire extinguisher is mounted on the riser. The head to port has a teak door and a teak-trimmed one-piece molded fiberglass shower pan, locker and sink unit with a mirror across the after bulkhead. The d.c. distribution panel is in the locker beneath the sink and this boat also had an optional 40-amp., 12-v. battery charger in the locker. A shower sump pump switch and indicator light are on the face of the locker section below the counter. The head is a manual pump type and a 25-gallon holding tank is standard, though plumbing to the tank is an option.



The 31' hull has broad, flat chine surfaces aft and pockets that allow for recessed stern gear and lower shaft angles

The dinette conversion is what I consider to be the best type. First the table is unhooked from bulkhead-mounted plates and the leg is folded back against the underside. (This leg, incidentally, has a press-type catch that locks it in the open or folded position—one of the nice little hardware touches found in a well-built boat.) The table is then laid on the raised sole between the seats, and the seats, which are on tracks, are pulled to the center while the seat backs, which are hinged to the seat, are laid flush. No snaps to undo; no loose cushions to arrange—primarily a fast mechanical operation.

Looking forward in main cabin. Gussets fill in between the windshield and top section of the forward cabin door frame

Three hatches provide engine access. Removable side panels allow man to enter and work—in this case on junction box

Stainless steel shore connector panel is below tinted window in cabin bulkhead. Ladder rails continue around bridge

Opposite, the back of the lounge swings up and is suspended by straps hooked to the overhead to form an upper berth. An interesting touch is that the back has a very slight butterfly form in section and tends to cradle a person lying in the berth.

Stowage below the lounge consists of one locker forward with a door hinged at the bottom and two drawers aft. Beneath the raised sole in the dinette, there are two drawers, and under the seats are large lockers, the forward one with a door on the inboard side. The after seat locker in this boat housed an optional air conditioning unit with reverse-cycle heating, with the controls and an outlet grill mounted on the inboard panel. In the same locker, accessible through a door on the forward face, the a.c. selector panel is mounted. This is a fine panel, built to UL standards and sealed in an aluminum box, and it includes expensive, slide-type, vapor-proof safety switches that cut out the generator when the ship's service or air conditioning shore power is switched on and vice versa. In the forward seat locker, a similarly constructed a.c. distribution panel has breakers for 110-v. receptacles, refrigerator, stove, water heater and battery charger plus one spare. A junction box where all the hook-ups are made is located out in the engine compartment. The electrical system is obviously top quality.

Looking forward in the main cabin, the impression is that the folding door to the forward cabin is in a free-standing teak frame silhouetted against the windshield. However, the frame adjoins a port hanging locker and a starboard bulkhead, and teak gussets between the raised top section and the windshield close off the forward cabin. Within, there's a rope locker in the bow; a well-made aluminum hatch overhead with heavy handles to dog it down and a teak-framed, drop-down nylon screen below; V-berths with fabric-covered six-inch foam cushions and matching pillows; four-drawer stowage below the berths; and a hanging locker aft and to port. White vinyl over foam insulation is also used on the hull sides here, lights are installed on the after bulkheads and there is standing headroom in the sole area.

Out in the cockpit, I lifted the sturdy hatches from their scuppered recesses and found that the 3160 Caterpillar diesels come up snug to the sole but are thoroughly accessible. With the panels in the cockpit sides removed, a man can actually climb in to service the outboard sides. However, the fuel filters are hung on the inboard sides of both engines for greater convenience. Battery boxes are centered aft between the engines with vapor-proof switches above them. The Fiquench fire control unit is centrally located on the forward bulkhead and engine hour meters are mounted port and starboard of it. Below the engines are oil pans, and the through-hull fittings are equipped with sea cocks.

Below the after hatch in the cockpit, four hat-section longitudinal fiberglass stringers that reinforce the hull bottom can be seen. Mounted on a platform above them, against the transom, is the hydraulic steering unit, and in this boat there were two blower motors instead of the one listed as standard. Besides the standard 12-v. bilge pump, there is also an emergency hand pump mounted on one of the central stringers. The strut bolts are also visible here, and, in accordance with good practice, the electrical system and machinery are grounded through them. Throughout, quality is evident in the construction and equipment installations.

When the Ryder yard launched the boat, I boarded her with the designers, and in company with the Express Cruiser and another Hatteras we headed down the Miami River and out into Biscayne Bay for a trial run and a picture-taking session. Out in the open, when the throttles were advanced, she rose quickly and smoothly on plane with little change in attitude. Her relatively level attitude was great on the smooth water, and though we didn't do any clocking, it was evident that she was a 30-knot-plus boat with the 3160 diesels. She had no trouble banking into tight turns, either. Unfortunately, it was impossible to try her in a seaway because it was one of those glassy-calm days, but there's no doubt that she's exactly what they set out to make her—a high-performance moderate-size diesel cruiser.

The Hatteras 31 Sport and Express Cruisers are also available with twin 235- or 330-hp. gasoline engines at considerably less cost.

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