



Surfhunter 29

LOA	29' 6"
Beam	10' 6"
Draft	3' 0"
Power	320 HP I/O
Displ.	8,000 lbs.
Fuel	150 gals.
Range	250 nm

Builder: Hunt Yachts, 252 Elm Street, South Dartmouth, MA 02478, 508-994-2000; www.crhunt.com.

Courtesy Hunt Yachts

Nessie

by John K. Hanson, Jr.

The Surfhunter 29 *Nessie* gets up on plane smoothly and runs relatively quietly for such a powerful boat.

Back in 1984, at the Wooden Boat Show in Newport, Rhode Island, I caught up with the dean of wooden boat yacht brokers, Dick Sciuto. He showed me the boat of the show—at least it was to my eye. It was a 22' lapstrake bass boat, designed by Ray Hunt. I test drove the boat to the back beat of the Newport Jazz Festival, fell in love with it, bought it, and named it *Buffalo Soldier*. I still own the boat and am as happy with it as I was when I first took it for a spin.

Over the years, many people have complimented me on *Buffalo Soldier*. They almost always ask, "Is that a Ray Hunt design?" They say that name, Ray Hunt, with a kind of awe. They are familiar with Hunt's "greatest hits"—the Bertram 31s, the Whalers, the Concordia yawls, the race winners both sail and power—but they have never seen a little Ray Hunt inboard powerboat, a boat that shares all the good design aspects of offshore boats from the 1960s.

Buffalo Soldier is my Penobscot Bay pickup truck. I use it for exploring the islands and going on picnics, as a photo boat and a taxi. On our last trip out to North Haven this summer, it carried my wife and me, our two boys, my mother-in-law, my brother-in-law and his wife, luggage, a large rolled-up Oriental rug, two dogs, and a case of fine wine. We averaged a nice and easy 20 knots across the bay.

Yes, *Buffalo Soldier* suits me to a T, but I've always wondered what a little bit bigger version of it would be like. Maybe, say, just under 30 feet; not what I consider a big boat, such as the twin-engined Bertram 31, just something slightly larger than what I have. This fall, I had a chance to find out.

Nessie, the very first of the new Surfhunter 29s from Hunt Yachts, hails from Moosehead Lake, the inland sea of Maine. This lake, 35 miles long, is of a scale with Penobscot Bay and at times can offer even more severe wave patterns. *Nessie*, under the able care of Mark Gilbert, owner of Moosehead Marina, is the perfect boat for handling Moosehead and for taking advantage of what the lake offers, such as beautiful beaches.

On my test drive, Mark took the helm at first to navigate the rock-strewn passage that leads to the main part of the lake. When the dock lines were dropped I noted the first difference between *Nessie* and my boat—*Nessie* has a bow

thruster. Both boats are propelled by a stern drive; *Nessie*'s is a 320-hp gasoline-powered Volvo with a ceramic lower unit driving duo-prop propellers. But stern drives, for all of their advantages, such as allowing a big boat to do small boat things—beaching, for example—are not at their best in low-rpm boat handling. *Nessie*'s bow thruster took that issue right off the table.

Although *Nessie* is more than double the displacement of *Buffalo Soldier*, it didn't feel like a big boat to me, so much was similar. The helm station is on the starboard side, just like home. The instrumentation is clean and legible, far better than home. The flush-mounted Garmin chart plotter is bigger than the little Garmin 188 on my boat, but it serves the same function.

The most distinctive difference between the two boats is how quietly *Nessie* runs, how smoothly *Nessie* runs, how powerfully the boat gets out of the hole and on to a plane. Lightly loaded, *Buffalo Soldier* does okay, but its 170 horses work quite hard with any weight aboard. I got the distinct feeling that *Nessie* could handle quite a bit more weight before it would even be noticed.

My boat is more than 40 years old, and it shows. *Nessie* is brand, spanking new, and that shows, too. And beyond the gloss, the improvements in machinery and electronics are impressive. Through good design and a bigger platform, the Surfhunter 29 has an honest-to-goodness cabin with standing headroom and a shower. Through good engineering, the engine and its box have been moved forward in the cockpit to do double duty as a comfortable and useful settee. The passengers are close to the driver yet out of the way. Aft of the settee area is plenty of room for dancing or fishing.

Under way on our test drive, *Nessie* felt as nimble as the smaller boat. While we didn't have the weather or waves to prove it, I expect its greater heft and waterline length will be a vast improvement in a seaway. All of the attributes that I thought a larger version of *Buffalo Soldier* would have, *Nessie* has, making for a fine boat, a very comfortable boat.

A few days later we went down to the town docks in Camden's inner harbor, where my boat is moored, and took *Buffalo Soldier* for a quick lunchtime spin. Nothing too dramatic, just a little tour to see the beautiful fall foliage along the shore and to check out the gorgeous yachts lined up for winter work at Wayfarer Marine. It was when we came back that I realized why, as seductive *Nessie* is, *Buffalo Soldier* must still be the boat for me: The town docks are limited to boats 22' and less.