

Surfhunter carries on Hunt's deep-vee tradition

By Peter Van Lancker

Serious anglers in Southern Massachusetts will recognize the Surfhunter name, and many will recall these capable, seaworthy fishing boats from nearly 40 years ago. Hunt Yachts reintroduced the Surfhunter 25 in 2002 on a semicustom basis. While a lot has changed about these boats, there is quite a story — some would say legend — about the designs and history behind Hunt Surfhunters.



Surfhunter 25

The original 25-foot Surfhunters were designed by Ray Hunt himself, the man responsible for the deep-vee hull shape. Hunt, who lived and worked in Padanaram, Mass. (it's South Dartmouth on maps), had plenty of experience with the steep chop and suddenly nasty conditions found on Buzzards Bay and around Martha's Vineyard; these were his home waters.

As his original partner and current president of design firm C. Raymond Hunt Associates, John Deknatel, relates: "By 1961, Ray's breakthrough 'Moppie' raceboats had shown the world that the deep-vee hull form could handle rough seas with a softer, drier ride. But the waters around Cape Cod were already buzzing with Ray's deep-vees."

The early Hunt boats were built of wood by professional boatbuilders. There also were do-it-yourselfers trying to produce copies, though most of these boats were lightly built and have disappeared. But a few of the professional builds remain and are highly prized when they infrequently show up on the brokerage market.

The Surfhunter 25 of today is a modified version of a 1966 design for boatyard owner Nat Mendell of Mat-

tapoisett, Mass. Nat wanted a yard project, something good he could build in wood and produce a couple of boats a year. Mendell's boats were cold-molded in diagonal mahogany. This approach might have been fine if demand hadn't grown with every one he finished.

Higher production suggested a switch to fiberglass, so in the early 1970s a Mendell boat was sent to Jarvis Newman, who after some design modifications (mostly to accommodate molding requirements but also to improve the shape),

produced a hull mold and, entirely new, a deck mold.

Key in this change were the chines. In a wooden boat the chine is the angled joint between bottom and topsides. Typically, that joint was covered with a 2-by-2 inch wood strip to hide and strengthen the butt. In fiberglass you don't need this covering. And, no longer constrained by what you could bend into a wood strip, Newman also could vary the shape of the chine and move the flat run from the bottom of the old wood strips into the deadrise part of the hull.

Newman specialized in producing parts, more than finished boats. His 25s went to a number of builders for completion; among the more prominent was Bill Potter of Fairhaven (Mass.) Marine. Potter and his partner, Tommy Johnson, loved to fish, loved

Hunt deep-vees, and knew about Surfhunters. The Surfhunter 25 suited them personally and suited their fishing friends. But they did little to expand a small, local clientele.

In the 1980s, however, they built new hull and deck molds. In the hull the chine was lowered slightly and widened. This made the new hull, which is the version that Hunt Yachts is using today, a bit more stable and slightly more efficient.

What is interesting about this development process is that today's Surfhunter 25 remains a very close relative to some of the earliest Hunt deep-vee classics, like the Bertram 31. It features as much deadrise as possible to

deliver the ultimate rough-water ride. And it provides proof that detractors' comments about deep-vees' "roly-poly behavior" are simply untrue.

In the intervening years, a number of boatbuilders have produced what they describe as modified-vee hulls. Typically, these feature less deadrise, especially aft where their flatter bottoms combine with dropping the chines deeper into the water. This does provide additional stability, though at the cost of a harder ride.

"This is the factor in deep-vee design where experience counts," says Winn Willard, president of Hunt Yachts and vice president of C. Raymond Hunt Associates. "It's subtle stuff but really affects ride and performance. If you know how to vary chine shape, placement and width, you get stability and efficiency. You can have both if you know what to do."

Hunt Yachts had access to the 50 years of knowledge in deep-vee development through C. Raymond Hunt Associates. We went after the Surfhunter 25 tools as a logical expansion of our boat line, knowing that her hull offered the ultimate ride and classic deep-vee performance.

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Today's Surfhunter 25 is a much more versatile boat than the many fishing-focused earlier models. The inboard engine (300-hp MerCruiser 350 MPI Horizon standard, Yanmar and Volvo diesels optional) has been moved forward and connects to the outdrive with a jackshaft. This opens up the transom area of the cockpit for serious fishing or a removable cross-stern seat, turning the Surfhunter into a delightful dayboat for touring and family fun.

The cabin allows overnighting (V-berth under large fore-deck hatch), as well as privacy for head and galley. Visibility from the helm is outstanding. And with cushions and cupholders, combined with unmatched roughwater comfort and 35-knot speed, this is a lot more than a "picnic boat."

Building on a semicustom basis permits each owner to enjoy a unique solution. So far the range has extended from no-nonsense fishing machines to elaborately trimmed and varnished mini-yachts. Overall, each should enjoy lasting value and years of admiration. This is a head-turner in just 25 feet.

The proof is now hitting the water at a rate of more than two per month, each built to personal order. The Surfhunter legend will obviously continue.

Peter Van Lancker is Hunt Yachts vice president of operations. Previously he has been vice president of engineering at Boston Whaler, president of Black Watch Yachts, and vice president of design for the OMC Boat Group.

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 25 feet
BEAM: 9 feet
DRAFT: 2 feet, 6 inches
HULL TYPE: Hunt deep-vee
DISPLACEMENT: 5,500 pounds
SPEED: 35 knots

Hunt Yachts, 252 Elm St., South
Dartmouth, MA 02748. Phone:
(508) 994-2000. www.crbunt.com