

A die-hard sailor ponders the Dark Side

A revealing transition revealed itself to me for the first time at October's U.S. Powerboat Show in Annapolis. Older former sailors who have embraced power and gone over to the Dark Side were meeting more and more of their old sailing buddies at the "wrong" show.

However, I have yet to even think about making that major transition in life, having decided to stick with sailing as long as I can wobble to the boat and pull all the strings, including the starter cord of my mighty 5-hp outboard. Maybe in 20 or 30 years (hah!) I might be forced to consider power, but as long as I can solo my Sailmaster 22 I will stay on the Bright Side and hope for wind.



BAY TRIPPER

JACK SHERWOOD

However, in an effort to prepare myself for what would be a depressing compromise in order to continue getting out on the water, I attended the annual powerboat show trying to behave like an older rag-hauler seriously considering going over to that other side. It made me nervous just thinking about what could happen in the case of engine failure, and with no sails to raise. What would I do, anchor and set off a flare? Call 911 or the tow service?

Putting that problem aside, I calmed down and listed a few demands for a sea-worthy powerboat with a proven history:

- A New England-type vessel with traditional, beautiful lines. No ugly boat is worth the time it takes to be disgusted by the looks of it.
- A maximum length of 25 feet would make it easy to single-hand, which is my peculiar preference on the water.
- A folding soft top because I like to be out in the sun, air and wind.
- A cuddy cabin providing full, comfortable sleeping with sitting, back-rested headroom for pondering or reading. Also, perhaps a hideaway for a Porta-Potti or cedar bucket.

I would prefer a 4-stroke outboard concealed in a well rather than hung on the transom, but an inboard engine might be the only option, even if it isn't exactly affordable. Speed is of no concern. I'd be content to cruise at 15 knots, which would more than triple my range under sail at top speed. A serious concern, however, is the soaring price of fuel, especially for a newcomer to powerboating unaccustomed to putting out hundreds of dollars for a fill-up. As a sailor cruising Chesapeake Bay, I am in no rush to get anywhere and fuel consumption — 5 gallons a day in a pinch — has never been a worry.

Trawlers aren't for me. They are pricey and confining, with an enclosed helm station that is too high off the water. I dislike the noise and smell of an engine, even though I put up with it in my older Mercury 5-hp kicker — but only when the wind betrays or deserts me. Also, sailors who have gone over to the Dark Side soon discover that 8 or 10 knots in a crawler-trawler feels like 3 knots, a forward pace oddly acceptable to a crawling sailor.

I got to thinking that I have been daysailing across the Bay, from Annapolis to Kent Island on the East-

ern Shore and back, for almost 35 years. Reaching across and back in a traditional southerly is a 10-mile round trip, perhaps with some tacks and jibes tossed in for variety and a change in direction. That consumes maybe three hours in a decent breeze. I have never been bored by this routine because I am active and doing something, harnessing the forces of nature to create my own power.

Now, if I had a small powerboat I must ask myself if I would ever motor across the Bay and back. Not likely. What would be the reward, purpose or pleasure, and just how many times can one do that? That old adage of sailors preferring getting to a destination over being there has some truth to it.

Having said all that, there is one boat that sort of caught my eye at the show: Hunt Yachts' Surfhunter 25. The C. Raymond Hunt and Associates design is 21.6 feet on the waterline, with a beam of 9 feet and draft of 3 feet. Power is a single 300-hp inboard/outboard.

This is a powerboat that could meet most of my demands. It would open up vistas for in-depth exploration of the Bay's rivers I haven't fully explored for fear of running out of wind, for coastal cruising north to Newport, R.I. in the summer, or south down the ditch to the Florida Keys for the winter.

90 pounds. Around \$2,000, but this might be too large.

- The handsome 13-foot, 2-inch Jimmy Skiff with a beam of 4.2 feet is a traditional Chesapeake Bay flat-bottomed skiff weighing 96 pounds, also with a sprit rig. At around \$1,275, this might be my choice because it is stable and tows nicely.

- The 7-foot, 9-inch lapstrake Eastport Pram with a snub bow has a beam of 48 inches, weighs 55 pounds, and has a sprit rig providing 39 square feet of sail area. Around \$1,300, but I already have an 8-foot Walker Bay dinghy.

A new Surfhunter 25 has a price tag in the mid-90s, so finding an older model (in wood or fiberglass) is the way I'd go. (The Surfhunter dates to the late 1960s, though production stopped for a time and the boat was reintroduced in 2002.)

I could take up fishing, which would give me something to do while providing some free food, though that means I would have to learn to cook. I don't have the patience, however, to sit for endless hours waiting for a fish to bite. Trolling? Perhaps ...

Or maybe I could sketch (something I used to do as a youth) or even paint, which famed Chesapeake Bay artist John Barber does from his trawler. I would continue writing, of course, knowing that

Though the Bay Tripper isn't quite ready to give up sailing, the Surfhunter 25 seems to have what he would want in a powerboat.



Still, I know I would have an uncontrollable, desperate urge at times to sail. So when the yearning strikes and calls for seeking out an anchorage to get an immediate daysailing fix, what to do? I would build (stitch-and-glue method) something I could row and sail. Under tow, a full quick-release cover would prevent swamping in a blow and protect the interior from UV rays.

Chesapeake Light Craft in Annapolis (www.clcboats.com) specializes in kit boats and offers three centerboarders of Okoume plywood to consider.

- The pretty 15-foot Skerry double-ender with a beam of 4.5 feet and a sprit rig with a 57-square-foot sail weighs

I'd come up with story ideas and boating characters while cruising under power.

Changing course from sail to power doesn't mean the end of boating, but rather a new beginning, a different way to enjoy it and make it last longer into one's diminishing years, which, unfortunately, are numbered.

For more information on the Surfhunter 25, contact Hunt Yachts in South Dartmouth, Mass., at (508) 994-2000. www.huntyachts.com ■

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