

PassageMaker™

THE TRAWLER & OCEAN MOTORBOAT MAGAZINE

Summer Fun!

Our Outfitting Series Begins

Tough Love:
Tugs
Come
On Strong

The Baja
Bash And How
Best To Avoid It



Rule Britannia: Speedy Fleet Across The Pond

Heart Tugging

The Tug-Yacht Fever Spreads

by Robert
M. Lane
photography
by the author

Our love of
tugs often begins
in childhood.
Island Ranger
(opposite) shows
how enduring this
affection can be.

TUGBOATS ARE CONTAGIOUS.

I know. From my ground floor office in a house on Fidalgo Island, Washington, I spend too much time watching tugboats at work.

Often they escort oil tankers moving up Washington's Rosario Strait to refineries to the north. Not burdened with towing wires, they tag alongside or trail behind just to be there should something go wrong. Others, riding low and moving slowly, pull barges laden with construction equipment, wood chips, gravel, and other products on a constant parade both north and south day and night.

The weather doesn't matter; they are always there.

The tugs come into view as they pass the gap between Allan and Burrows Islands, so there's not a lot of time to watch. Usually, though, someone finds a minute to grab the binoculars or pull the lens covers from the spotting scope.

Occasionally, a smaller towboat pulls inside the islands into the bay in front of my house with a boom of logs at the end of a long line to wait for the tide to change. Sometimes they come at night and we watch their white towing lights and yellow deck lights flicker in the distance and strain to see the faint lantern marking the end of the boom.

If that's not enough, I can pause in the living room before two watercolors of tugboats by Steve Mayo, a Bellingham, Washington, artist who has lived aboard an old tug. One is of the *Challenger* made fast to a log boom and the other is of the *City of Olympia*, a steam tug built in 1898, pulling a barge through the San Juan Islands.

Yes, we're a little nutty about tugboats. And I know others are, too. Boaters for years have been buying and building tug-yachts or converting the real thing to pleasure use in an effort to capture or share in the mysticism that seems to surround those hard working vessels.

My theory is that we like them for the same reason sport utility vehicles are so much in demand: They are sturdy and reliable, powerful and able to go anywhere at anytime. Macho.

Inside, both car and tug-yacht are comfortable, luxurious, upholstered in leather and equipped with AC, stereo sound, a GPS system, and a host of other gadgets. They are powerful, yet easy to drive.

There's a gender thing here: The guy gets a vehicle with muscle and an attitude, while the gal finds luxury in the form of hot showers, a walk-around bed, a big refrigerator, and lots of stor-







AT 34 features a forward stateroom with island berth (left); saloon (below) with convertible settee and large galley (below, right). Though a tug in both name and attitude, the hull's fishing heritage is apparent (right).

American Tug



age space in a beast she can control as well as the guy.

There's a second reason some find tug-yachts attractive: the heart-tugging pull, if you will, of things nostalgic. For reasons of function, tugs for generations have had a high plumb bow, a pilothouse with a lot of large, vertical windows, a nice sheer line leading to an open working space aft and a fantail stern. It's a good look, and some are drawn to the tug-yacht style because it invokes memories of the way things used to be and perhaps ought to be now.

Truthfully, most tugboats make poor yachts. The majority of the interior space is given to a monster engine, fuel tanks and other machinery. Living quarters often are primitive. Ladders, or nearly vertical stairways, connect the pilothouse with the main deck and the engine room. And after decades of pushing, pulling, and bumping, they are battered, rusty, and tired.

Fortunately, there are enough courageous people who have bought old tugboats and converted them to pleasure use to prove that it can be done and to give the rest of us something wonderful to admire. Frank and Gayle Huff of Seattle have done it twice, and their latest effort is a handsome, comfortable, and seaworthy 70-footer. We'll visit them later.

Today's boat builders have seized the important aspect of the towboat—the glamour of the design and the appeal of nostalgia—and retained enough hints of the original lines and

shape to intrigue us, while delivering fine yachts that make passagemaking delightful.

Two builders, Nordic Tugs and American Tugs, are rolling out tuggy yachts from factories only a few miles apart in farm country north of Seattle, Washington. They offer well-built and reliable yachts for those who want a pleasure boat with a taste of tug atmosphere.

Yachts, freshly launched are budget benders, but vintage tug-yachts are available on the used-boat market, including Nordic and a pair that appeared in the 1980s and then disappeared, the Sundowner and Victory Tugs, both Taiwan-built boats.

The Sundowner, which came in lengths of 30, 32, and 36 feet, often is misidentified as a Nordic Tug, but the difference is obvious because the Sundowners have a reverse raked windscreen, and the Nordic does not. Not many were built. Some estimates put the total at about 50. The 37-foot Victory tug is more tug-like, with a high bow, a steep sheer line, and a tight pilothouse. About 88 of the Victory Tugs were built; a few were 41 and 49 feet in length.

Victory Tugs were noted for the extensive use of teak, on the exterior and interior.

If you want something unique, build your



American Tug 34



own. Bruce Wright, a retired physician living on Camano Island on Saratoga Passage, near Stanwood, Washington, commissioned a one-off tug-yacht in steel and aluminum by Michael Kasten, a Port Townsend, Washington, naval architect. It is nostalgic, romantic, traditional, functional and has good space for two people.

What They Say

Wright, whose 38-foot *Nidaros* now is out cruising in British Columbia after her launching a short time ago by a Bellingham builder, Iota Metalworking says, "I like the design because there's something nice about a double-ended boat. It's nice to reach out and pat it.

"I wanted something strong and dependable and that looked like a boat."

Kasten says the tug-yacht's aesthetic design delivers a message of strength and power.

"The thing that draws is not the technology of new tugs, but the nostalgia of what an old tugboat would look like. People are attracted to the old-time aesthetics of a tug pulling logs. The perception is that a tugboat is the toughest little bugger you can lay hands on."

Sam Devlin, an Olympia, Washington, boat designer-builder whose work incorporates the lines of vintage workboats, says a picture of a tug is "the first image of a boat that sticks in your mind.

"Ask kids to draw a boat and it'll be a tug."

Douglas Trumbull, whose *John D. Bosler* is a 42-foot Devlin-built tug-yacht, (*PMM, June '01*) appreciates the tugboat ethic that is obvious in the design. "It is functionality as against sleekness," he says. "I always have liked the look of old tugboats."

Frank Huff, who has owned traditional yachts as well as converted towboats, worked for years as a distributor of petroleum products. He was accustomed to handling heavy machinery, big trucks, huge pipes, and large valves. As a result, he wants "really strong stuff" in a boat. "Not yacht stuff," he says, throwing up his hands.

He now owns a 1954-vintage ex-Navy harbor tug that displaces 160 tons. "There is a nostalgic attraction," he says. "I am one of those guys. You can run these tugs thousands of hours without a problem. You can take them to Alaska and back and then to the South Pacific and back. They keep chugging 24 hours a day."

His wife, Gayle, identifies another factor that attracts Frank to tugboats. "You don't like little toys," she tells him. "You like big toys."

Chasing The Market

Nordic Tugs has been building tug-yachts since 1980. At first they were slow, small, simply finished, and sort of funky.

Today, still using the original Lynn Senour-designed hull, Nordic Tugs are fast semi-displacement yachts that handle well at slow speeds and are finely finished and stylish.

As the boats have become more sophisticated, the fake smoke stack that is the company's trademark has gone from a stiff, vertical pipe to a sloping vestige of the original. Nordics still carry a faint trace of puddening, which on working tugs is a mass of woven rope or tires slung over the bow to protect it from chafing, as a tribute to the real thing and to protect the hull from anchor scratching.

Continuing as strong elements in the boats' design are the straight stem, round portlights in the trunk cabin, and a raised pilothouse with rectangular workboat windows. Senour's open interior, which is one of his best touches, has gone through many changes for the better.

Solid, weather-tight doors from Diamond Sea Glaze have replaced sliding wooden doors that faded in the sun and leaked wind and water. Oil pot burners have given way to diesel furnaces and propane galley ranges. Big batteries, generators, and inverters have displaced smoky kerosene lamps.

The line began with 26- and 32-foot models. The 26 has been dropped, perhaps only temporarily, while Nordic has added a 42 and a 37 and will launch a 52-footer, possibly next year. The new model will offer a flying bridge (Nordic's first), a laundry room, two staterooms, two heads, and two engines; it will be the first Nordic with twins in the engine room. (Purists will be able to order it with one 450hp engine, however.)

Nordic Tug recently completed a 30,000-square-foot laminating building at its Burlington, Washington, factory to improve the production process and to enable the company to build more boats efficiently, including the 52. President Jim Cress said molds for the big boat have been completed, but the company has not determined a construction schedule or calculated the price of the new tug-yacht.

About 470 Nordic Tugs have been built since 1980. NT has survived management changes and bad money times (luxury taxes and high interest rates) while the competition has faded away (mainly the Sundowner and Victory tugs).

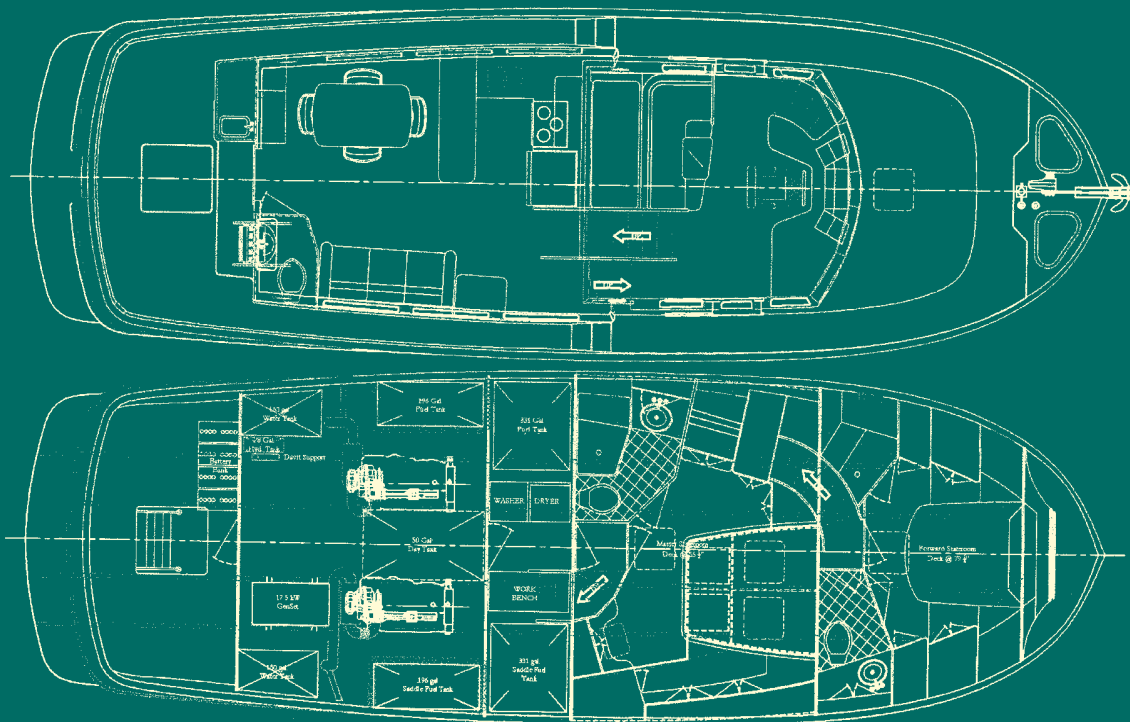
Now, Nordic again faces competition close to home in the tug-yacht business.

Three executives left Nordic Tug about two years ago, formed a company called Tomco Marine Group, and bought the mold for a Senour fishing boat hull that had been stored upside down in a field for years and began building a yacht. They gave it an overall length of 34 feet, 5 inches and called it the American

Nordic Tug



Nordic Tug under way (above). Line drawings of the new Nordic Tug 52 (right). Nordic Tugs of every size and color all in a row (below).



Tug. At that length, it fills the niche between the Nordic 32 and 37.

The Nordic line is so well known that many boaters see any kind of tug-yacht and exclaim, "A Nordic!" The boats can be found from Alaska to Mexico on the Pacific Coast, up and down the East Coast, and on the Great Lakes. They have been covered attentively by the trade press (see "Go Fast, Go Slow," *PMM, Summer 1999*). So let's take a closer look at its competition.

The New Kids

Considering the boat-building experience of Tom Nelson, Mike Schoppert, and Kurt Dilworth, one would expect them to deliver a winner. And they have.

Nelson has been building boats for more than 38 years. He began as an apprentice on wooden boats on Seattle's Lake Union and eventually owned the Nelson Yacht Corp., which built custom yachts of 70 to 90 feet until the luxury tax killed the business. He semiretired but soon was persuaded to join Nordic Tug. After four years in the Burlington plant, finally as president, Nelson was thinking about a second

retirement when the Senour fish boat mold became available.

An Alaskan, Schoppert attended college in Washington state and began learning fiberglass construction at the Uniflite Corp. in Bellingham. He also worked for Chris Craft, Tollycraft, and Oceanus. At Nordic, he first supervised the lamination department and was general manager when he left to join the new venture.

Dilworth worked for Chambers' Craft in the late 1980s and Premier Boats in the early 1990s. After college classes, he worked as an apprentice on the conversion of Frank Huff's steel tugboat to a yacht. At Nordic, he started as a mechanic but quickly moved up to become head engineer and manager of warranty-customer service.

"These guys came to me," Nelson recalls. "Lynn (Senour) had told them the old mold was available.

"My goal was an eight- to nine-knot boat with an honest thousand-mile range, but that could get up on the step to cross the Strait of Georgia or Lake Michigan, and that's a real challenge.

"I wanted a wide chine, an ability to carry a



Workers at Tomco Marine (far left) wax a mold before laying a new American Tug hull. Tugs in various stages of construction (left) in the factory. Integrated grid (bottom, left) supports engine, tanks, and bulkheads—an innovative technique that makes a quality boat.

load. This boat is different than the 37 Nordic Tug; that's a good boat, but I wanted one that could carry a load without affecting performance.

"It's a niche boat, designed for a couple to go coastal cruising."

Quickly Successful

With 10 orders in hand, the new company decided in January 2000 to begin construction of the yacht.

That's not as simple as it sounds. Although they had a hull mold, in good shape even after years stored in a field, they had nothing else. The management staff plus a few others (including some lured from Nordic Tug) worked crazy hours for two months to build the plug and mold for the deckhouse, interior modules, and an integrated grid that is hidden in the belly of the boat.

The first was launched in nearby Swinomish Channel in August 2000, just in time for the boat show season.

It caught on immediately, with buyers pulling out checkbooks after one visit at a boat show. Soon, the new company had a backlog of 28 orders—nearly two years of production at its small LaConner, Washington, plant—and temporarily stopped taking orders and accelerated work on an addition that will double the size of its factory.

The new space also will enable the company to build a larger AT, probably a 40-something in length that will have two staterooms and two heads, and to increase production from about 18 boats a year to more than 40. AT has sold a couple of the larger yachts, even though the boat design has not been completed.

Several fishing boats were pulled from the 1980-vintage mold before it was retired to a vacant field and still are in use. Senour gave the boat a beam of 13 feet 3 inches—wide for a craft about 32 feet long—to make it stable and to enable it to carry a big load of salmon in the waters of Alaska's Bristol Bay, a performance characteristic that 20 years later would appeal to Tom Nelson.

Senour, of Seattle, an innovator in designing semi-displacement hulls that handle well at all speeds, created a fast fish boat that could hustle the catch to market.

With a 330-horsepower Cummins diesel in the engine room, the 34AT cruises nicely at 15 knots or more for a boater in a hurry to cross a darkening strait or at seven knots for gunkholing or an economical long crossing. At seven-plus knots, she can run nearly 1,800 miles on 400 gallons of fuel.

The NT and the AT look somewhat alike. Among the exterior differences: The American

Tug has a windscreen with a slight reverse rake and pilothouse doors that are hinged and swing open, rather than Nordic-type sliding doors. Nordic boats have a colored accent strip set into the bulwark, and vertical stanchions support the stainless steel hand rail; the hull on the American Tug is free of extra colors and uses sloping stanchions to hold up the hand rail. The AT obviously is beamier, and it has more freeboard.

Innovations In Design

American Tug designed a new superstructure to fit atop the Senour fishing boat hull and emphasized high-tech features in the fitting out of the newest tug-yacht on the market. Deep inside and out of sight is a fiberglass grid, built separately from the hull.

Building the mold for the integrated grid was one of the small builder's most challenging tasks. Its design and position against the bottom of the boat control the placement of almost everything else, and the dimensions had to be precise.

It is bonded into place to provide a liner for the engine room and support for the engine and fuel and water tanks (including tank baffles). The grid establishes unchanging dimensions for bulkheads, which means that interior modules built in the wood shop always fit the first time. Only a few other builders use an integrated grid.

"There was a significant investment in the grid," Dilworth explained while we toured the AT factory in LaConner, "but it makes production more efficient and a better boat."

The skeg and rudder are made of composite materials, rather than stainless steel. Dilworth said a testing machine broke while attempting to break a composite skeg. In another test, the crew put a jack under the skeg and lifted the 17,000-pound boat—without incident.

The keel tapers at its after end to provide a clean flow of water to the rudder, which is tapered in front and squared off at the end to provide true tracking at sea, Dilworth says.

Other than the propeller and its shaft there is no underwater metal on the American Tug and thus no need for bonding. The shaft carries one sacrificial zinc.

Engine exhaust exits the boat underwater directly from the engine room. All noisy equipment, including the generator, furnace, and pumps, is enclosed in the heavily insulated engine room. The saloon deck has one inch of insulation to block the passage of sound; the pilothouse deck above the engine room has an inch and a half of acoustical insulation.

Floors are built of a plastic honeycomb known as Nida Core. American Tug vacuum



Hull shape (left) incorporates chines to soften roll and a skin cooling system (note the assembly around the shaft). Thanks to a dry exhaust system, below-water through-hulls are avoided. Pilothouse and saloon (right) looking aft and pilothouse from the foredeck (bottom).



Nidaros



bags a fiberglass surface to one side and plywood on the other. The 9-by-12-foot saloon deck needed no supports other than along the perimeter, but American Tug adds some for owners' peace of mind.

American Tug offers West Coast buyers a boat that comes equipped with an Espar furnace, propane stove, and generator. For the East Coast, it packages a boat with a 26,000 BTU air-conditioning/heating system, a generator, and an electric range. All boats have bow thrusters, Heatercraft heat systems, windshield washers, and space to run wiring for after-market electronics.

The fiberglass shower stall is roomy. AT found it cheaper to buy a home-style shower from a building-supply firm than to mold its own.

Only a few added-cost options are available. Among them: the buyer's choice of washer/dryer, a dishwasher, or an icemaker. I've never seen a washer/dryer combo in a 34' boat, but I saw one on an American Tug. As the result of clever design, it hides in a saloon cabinet and pulls out for use.

The swim step is made of composite materials and is glued and screwed to the hull.

Twenty-one small LED courtesy lights are scattered through the boat. All lights are controlled by a central digital switching system than can be programmed. They can be left on indefinitely because the total power draw is less than one amp.

Storage is abundant, including beneath the saloon settee that opens to a berth larger than a double bed, and in the master stateroom forward. Beneath the saloon deck and above the shaft alley is a storage space large enough for eight milk crates. Every drawer in the boat slides on ball bearings and can be pulled all the way without fear the drawer will hit the deck.

The 34AT is a one-stateroom, one-head boat that is just right for a couple, but with space for special friends.

As in the Nordic Tug, the American Tug pilothouse is open to the saloon. This is a winning design feature because it offers the skipper the advantages of a pilothouse—better visibility and freedom from the clutter of cooking, dining, and cleaning—without separating the crew from the social scene in the saloon. The view aft is good, too, for backing into a slip.

Building A Tug-Yacht

Iota Metalworking is in the historic Fairhaven neighborhood of Bellingham, Washington, just across the street from the Alaska ferry terminal. There is no sign on the building, but the rusty steel hull out front is a good clue.

I found Pete Silva, company owner, and Bruce Wright. That was not his boat out front; *Nidaros*

was undercover in a temporary pipe-and-plastic building at the back of Silva's boat shed.

Shipwrights were aboard, working on cabinetry and interior finish with the hope of having the 38-foot boat in the water by early summer.

Wright and his wife, Nancy, were owners of a 40-foot Pacific Trawler when he began looking for his dream, a metal boat.

He joined the Metal Boat Society and found that Silva also was a member. Wright drove to Silva's shop in Bellingham and found him at work on a small tug-yacht that had been designed by Kasten. The architect remembers: "Bruce called me immediately and said, 'I want one just like that, only bigger.'"

Kasten did the design work, but it was strongly influenced by Wright, who knew in detail what he wanted from his experiences as a long-time boater in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest. The Wrights had owned several other boats, including one they had built in Alaska along the lines of a vintage fishing boat.

Nidaros is a displacement boat, but with some chine to moderate the normal rolling tendency. She has a four-cylinder, 110-horsepower Alaska Diesel Lugger engine that is based on a John Deere block.

Her cooling system is unusual. Instead of the heat exchanger or keel cooler found on many yachts, Wright chose skin cooling. Cheek plates are welded to the keel, and engine coolant flows between the cheek and keel.

"This is perfect in Northwest waters," Wright says. "There is nothing hanging out in the water."

The engine water pump circulates the 50-plus gallons of coolant contained in the system. The 55 square feet of cheek-cooling area theoretically will cool a 110hp engine operating in 75-degree seawater, Wright says. *Nidaros* will operate in waters of about 50 degrees, and only about 60hp will be needed to drive the boat at hull speed. "It's extremely conservative," he adds. "We are very much over cooled."

The Lugger has a dry stack exhaust. As a result, the boat has no through-hull fittings below the waterline.

The deckhouse is aluminum. It must be separated from the steel deck to prevent corrosion. While many builders use an "explosion-fused" bimetal strip made by DuPont to provide the necessary separation, Silva and Wright chose neoprene rubber and bolts.

They were concerned about the expansion of dissimilar metals and feared that over time the bimetal strip would loosen. The neoprene gasket separates the two metals; 218 stainless steel bolts encased in plastic tubes hold it all together.

"It is weather tight," Wright says. "It is a superb system. And it does allow flexibility."

Many metal builders have steel and aluminum cut with computer-driven tools. Silva, however, chose to loft the boat in his shop and to cut the metal by hand.

The master stateroom is forward, with V-berths, storage lockers, and a dressing area. Steps lead up and aft to the pilothouse, which has seats for the pilot and navigator and folding tables for computer use or dining.

The Luger diesel is beneath the pilothouse; while it does not have standing headroom, there is adequate space for engine maintenance, parts, and for a generator. (Wright did not install one.)

Nidaros carries 450 gallons of fuel in two tanks. Diesel flows through Racor filters to a day tank, which directly supplies the engine through another Racor. The engine-mounted secondary filter does final cleaning; Wright should never have a problem with dirty fuel.

Down steps from the pilothouse is the saloon, with galley, head, and space for two comfortable reading chairs with side tables and quarter berths for guests or daytime napping.

The Wrights are in their sixties and, as Bruce said, are finished with brave cruising. However, Kasten designed the boat to be self-righting. "I haven't asked him to be aboard when we do our first tip-over," Bruce jokes. "The boat should be able to tolerate an awful lot of abuse."

All doors are sliders. "That's another prejudice of mine," Wright said. "After six boats I think there should never be a swinging door on a boat. They are dangerous and can damage fingers."

Nancy Wright chose the color scheme: The hull will be painted black, the bulwarks red, and the house will be navy gray.

The Wrights chose a 38-footer because they believed that anything larger would limit their opportunities to explore the many small harbors and winding island waterways in Northwest waters.

Nidaros looks much more like a towboat than any of the mass-produced tug-yachts on the market. It's easy to imagine her with a towing bitt and a line stretching aft to a tow. On a working tug, however, the space aft of the pilothouse would be given to an engine, other machinery, and fuel tanks and would not have the space for comfortable living that *Nidaros* offers.

Island Ranger

Frank and Gayle Huff's 70-foot tugboat is moored in the right place: at Seattle's Jacobson Terminal, where vessels hundreds of feet long line the docks and machinery the size of houses is under repair.

As big as she is, *Island Ranger* lies in the

shadows of that industrial-strength maritime scene.

Several people insisted I talk to the Huffs and check out their boat. Not knowing much about her, except that she was a former Army harbor tug built in 1954 for service during the Korean War, I was stunned by her beauty. The tug still looks like a tug in every way, perfect in detail, yet the interior provides comfortable, finely decorated, and spacious living areas.

It was an enormous job. When Frank Huff bought the tug on the Sacramento Delta in 1988 she showed the wear of a life of hard work. Her 30,000-pound Atlas diesel smoked heavily and the vessel was a dirty, battered mess.

But Huff, who already had built a 50-foot traditional yacht, converted a 110-foot tug for pleasure use, and restored a 65-foot Canadian forestry boat, could see the potential.

He hired a crew to deliver it to Seattle in the spring of 1988. The Huffs took their first cruise aboard her in 1993.

Huff was the general contractor on the job. He knew how because of his business career in petroleum distribution and through his experiences building and refitting boats.

Years ago, he bought a 50-foot Delta hull and hired Lynn Senour to design the interior and deckhouse. He found a boat shed and hired shipwrights and pitched in himself, while operating his business.

That was warming-up time. Later, the Huffs bought *Lorna Foss*, a retired 110-foot tug that has a footnote in history: A Navy YTM, she was at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Using his metalworking and machinery skills and hiring shipwrights to help, Huff built a new pilothouse and created living spaces. Frank and Gayle fished commercially for salmon with the old tug, and cruised it for pleasure.

"Mom and I ran it," Frank says.

Next was the 65-foot forestry boat, *Hecate Ranger*, which had been designed as a crew boat and had sleeping space for 12.

When the *Island Ranger* reached Seattle, Huff and his crew cut it apart. The pilothouse disappeared, to be replaced with a larger command center with space for visitors, nav equipment and charts. They added wing decks off the new bridge.

The Atlas diesel stuck up into the space that was to be the saloon. It also was direct reversing, which means that it had no gearbox and that moving the tug in reverse required stopping the engine and then restarting so it would turn the opposite direction. And it was old and tired.

So it had to go. The deck was cut away and the aging engine lifted out. Huff's search for a replacement engine led to a salvage yard where

he found four Detroit Diesel 12V-149 engines waiting to be scrapped.

They had finished at least one career driving generators that provided power for giant earth-moving trucks. They looked dismal sitting in the yard, but Huff bought two.

In the one error on the job, Huff took the word of an expert that the selected engine did not need to be overhauled. So it was dropped into place and the boat rebuilt around it.

After the first long cruise, in which the engine consumed enormous quantities of lubricating oil, Huff rebuilt it in place. The job would have been markedly easier in the shop.

Today, the engine gleams under a coat of green paint and delivers 10 knots of speed while burning about 15 gallons of fuel an hour. It is so large that the starting motor is powered by air, not electricity. Even changing the oil is a job: The engine holds 35 gallons of lube oil.

With original turbochargers and large injectors, the 12V-149 was rated at about 1,000 horsepower. Eliminating the turbos and installing smaller injectors reduced the engine output to 600 horsepower, Huff says.

The valve covers are chrome plated and every other piece of equipment in the engine room sparkles with fresh paint. I searched thoroughly for a flaw and finally found a smudge of oil beneath the engine about the size of a nickel. Huff apologized, grabbed a mop to clean it up, and explained that it came from around a seal between two sections of the block that he could not replace in the engine room overhaul.

If any engine room deserved to be rated a holy place, this is it. The temptation is to spend hours there, where spit-and-polish, fresh paint and perfection rules, but the rest of this tug-yacht deserves attention.

Step aboard at the fantail stern. When I was aboard, it was wide open with space for a basketball game. While cruising in Alaska, Huff does some long-line fishing for halibut, and he has gear in place on the stern and an icemaker on the boat deck above for icing the catch.

Lynn Senour designed the interior spaces. The saloon stretches on and on forward to the galley. It's traditional in style with a dining area and settee to port and other chairs and bookshelves to starboard. The galley is home-sized with a commercial-style stainless steel Lang stove, a full-sized refrigerator and ceramic tile on the deck. A team of cooks can work here. (Had the Huffs followed the ship's lines, the galley deck would have been slanted. They built forms and poured concrete to create a level deck.)

Cabinets are made of ebony. You'll see other rare woods, including rosewood and koa, throughout the tug. Those woods are hard to

SPECIFICATIONS

34 American Tug

LOA	34' 5"
Beam	13' 3"
Draft	3' 5"
Displacement	18,000 lbs. (light load)
Power	Single 330hp Cummins
Fuel Capacity	400 U.S. gallons
Water Capacity	150 U.S. gallons

38 Nidaros

LOA	38'
Beam	12' 9"
Draft	5' 4"
Displacement	29,000 lbs. (light load)
Power	Single 110hp Luger
Fuel Capacity	490 U.S. gallons
Water Capacity	240 U.S. gallons

52 Nordic Tug

LOA	54' 2"
Beam	16' 10"
Draft	4' 10"
Displacement	68,730 lbs.
Power	Twin Cummins 450 hp
Fuel Capacity	1,100 U.S. gallons
Water Capacity	300 U.S. gallons

70 Island Ranger

LOA	70'
Beam	20'
Draft	9'
Displacement	160 tons
Power	Single Detroit Diesel 12V-149
Fuel Capacity	6,000 U.S. gallons
Water Capacity	1,100 U.S. gallons



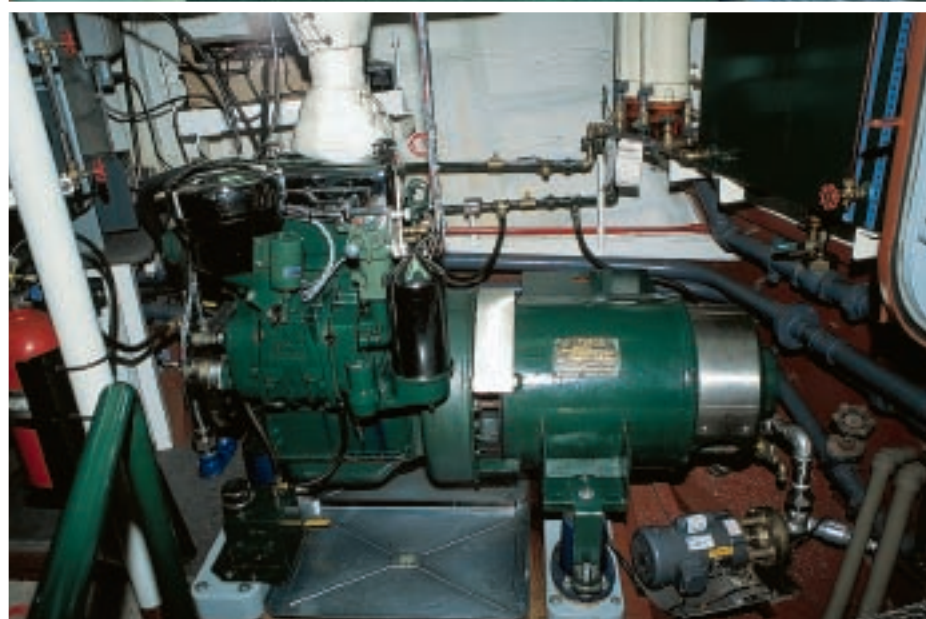
Ship-sized galley with ebony cabinets (left). Valves (right) that would make any man's heart sing. Saloon that stretches on and on (below). 20 kW generator in a ship shape engine room (bottom).



Island Ranger



Frank Huff in the bow of *Island Ranger* (right). *Island Ranger* at her moorage (above).



find today, but Huff bought them for earlier boat restoration projects and saved leftover material for future use.

Access to the engine room is through a doorway and stairs to the left. Staterooms are down steps and forward. An area that once housed a galley and berthing spaces for a crew of 10, the forward area now has two staterooms, heads, and a utility room.

The pilothouse is forward and up a flight of steps. The helm station fills the forward area, and large windows all around offer excellent visibility. Doors lead to the wing deck and the boat deck aft. A comfortable settee fills the aft wall.

It is loaded with equipment, including the original magnetic compass, the original autopilot (plus a new one), two radars, a Sperry gyrocompass and two depth sounders.

Huff developed software that records GPS waypoints and times on his computer while the *Island Ranger* is under way. This produces records he considers invaluable and that, when combined with Nobletec navigation software, can generate all the courses he needs to find his favorite places in Southeast Alaska.

Not So Easy

The Huffs almost make the work sound simple. Snapshots in a photo album prove that it is not. Few of us possess Huff's qualifications, and there probably are not a lot of shipyards around that could do the work he performed.

A 70-footer is a nice size for conversion, Huff says, because it offers good living and piloting spaces. "It's just fine for two people," Gayle adds.

But the work is king-sized when it comes to removing and rebuilding a pilothouse, cutting open the deck to replace an engine, calculating the need for ballast and pouring it in place, and adding bow and stern thrusters and a new keel-cooling system for the engine. Beyond that is the need to know what needs to be done, to be able

to plan the work, to schedule it, and get it done.

The enormity of the job is evident in the time it took: five years.

Gayle Huff said visitors come aboard and are awe-stricken. "We can do this," they say. We have to say nicely that you probably can't," she adds.

There are others with courage to match the Huffs. Probably every major seaport has a few examples of stunning conversions. So, don't rule it out. Just be careful.

About now, the *Island Ranger* is in Southeast Alaska for another long summer of cruising and fishing. The Huffs must endure millions of admiring glances and thousands of questions, but they'll do it with grace.

A Last Look

Now that we've finished our pop psychology review of this love affair with tugs and tug-yachts, let's get down to basics.

While they may serve some inner need, Nordic Tugs, American Tugs, Sundowners, Victories, and converted towboats satisfy a common goal: to find a sweet, seaworthy boat that has good lines and handles well and will provide years of super coastal cruising.

With competition heating in the new-boat market, buyers should have a great time checking out the Nordic and American Tugs. While they are similar, there are differences that may count. Larger tug-yachts are coming for those who need more space.

Look closely and be sure the one you choose is the little tug that could.

Toot! Toot! ●

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