

Back Cove 33 Express

BY CHRIS CORNELL

I admit it: I'm an unabashed fan of this boat's predecessor, the Back Cove 29 hardtop. Although I find the brochure off base in calling it "a most recent example of everything that makes the Down East lobster boat a work of art" (the 29 looks nothing like one of Pappy Frost's creations), the styling "works" in its own right.

Moreover, the little Back Cove is a nimble, well-built, sensibly outfitted weekender that's easy to maintain, simple to operate and affordable to buy (about \$185,000 for the pilothouse model.) Small wonder that some 150 have been sold since the 29 was introduced in late 2003. Would Back Cove's new 33-footer embody the same looks and philosophy?

Having inspected and run hull #1 in Portland, Maine, I can say that the answer is a resounding yes. The trademark spoon (rounded) stem is there, as is the slightly reversed transom with its rounded corners. So are the characteristic, clean pilothouse and trunk cabin. And Back Cove stuck with the tried-and-true single-diesel/bow thruster combination that works so well in the 29.

That said, the new 33 is a lot more boat,

with more creature comforts, which is precisely what lead designer Kevin Burns, who served as my guide, intended it to be. The difference is immediately obvious when one steps up into the house. There's a very comfortable, synthetic-suede seating array to port (with a high/low table); a fully adjustable, similarly covered Stidd seat (standard) at the helm; and a galley unit along the starboard side.

This last feature includes a microwave and a Princess two-burner electric stove-top (admirably recessed to prevent pots and pans from sliding), and buyers can upgrade to a propane system. There are plenty of sturdy drawers below the counter, though I wonder about the use of varnished cherry drawer fronts and trim here.

I'm a big fan of native cherry, which is used extensively below in the 33, but it's not known for its durability when exposed to the elements. As Kevin pointed out, however, Back Cove expects a lot of 33 buyers to opt for the "hardback enclosure" (\$12,450), which would certainly make the issue a moot point.

The visibility from anywhere under the hardtop is nothing short of extraordinary. The big, forward-facing windows in the sharply angled, three-panel array provide a clear view over the bow (both at rest and underway). Long, tall, side windows do the same port and starboard, and they slide open for ventilation. So do the two Lewmar hatches in the hardtop itself. In short, the whole space is full of light and, when desired, fresh air (the center panel in the forward windows opens, too.)

Down below, headroom is exceptional. Kevin said it's 6'7" on the center-



At speed near Palm Beach, Florida, the new Back Cove 33 shows off its clean lines. Note the size of the helmsman relative to the big pilothouse windows, which provide outstanding visibility.

line, which is unusual in a 33-footer, thanks in large part to clever contouring of the overhead. In the head, which features a separate shower, there was enough clearance for my 6-foot frame. Forward, Back Cove chose to go with the traditional V-bunk arrangement, with young families very much in mind.

With the insert and third cushion in place (both of which store nicely in a recess aft of the forepeak locker), the bunk is a full 7 feet wide, and nobody's going to fall off the edge. Here, too, Lewmar hatches overhead (hinged in this case) and high-quality opening portlights in the trunk-cabin sides provide plenty of ventilation and light.

Outside, in the spacious cockpit, Kevin demonstrated one of the most impressive features of the Back Cove 33: engine-room access. Thanks to two electric, self-synchronizing linear actuators (rams), virtually the entire floor





BILLY BLACK (3)

SPECIFICATIONS

- LOA:** 33' 6"
 - Beam:** 12'
 - Draft:** 3'
 - Displacement (dry):** 13,000 lbs.
 - Fuel Capacity:** 185 gals.
 - Power (base):** Single Yanmar 380-hp
 - Price (base):** \$260,000
 - Information:** 207-594-8844
- www.backcoveyachts.com

underneath the hardtop (including the seating to port) rises up at the touch of a button. Ducking underneath (an easy fit), I found lots of space all around the electronically controlled, common-rail Cummins diesel (an option).

Routine maintenance of the engine, batteries and plumbing will be a piece of cake for owners of this boat, and that's no small matter. Back Cove has very logically organized the belowdecks systems: electrical is primarily to port, while plumbing is primarily to starboard. And although access to the stuffing box (like everything else) is terrific, there won't be much to do there because the shaft log is a dripless unit.

Kevin lowered the big hatch, started the Cummins and eased out of a very tight spot along the DiMillo dock with the 33's Max Power bow thruster, which was noisy (they all are) but very effective. Once in open water, he put the electronic throttle in the corner, and we were very quickly on plane. There was a noticeable up angle but one that didn't significantly affect the aforementioned outstanding view over the bow.

It's worth noting that the trim tabs on this model are very effective. That said, their positioning on the vertical face of the control console makes their multi-stage display difficult to read. Moreover, although I was able to trim the bow

down significantly, doing so resulted in a lot of spray off the chines. I quickly let the 33 run at its preferred attitude.

On the GPS, the diesel's 425 horses were delivering 27 knots at 3,050 rpm. Kevin and I both liked a cruise of 2,600 and 21-plus knots. At that speed, I put the boat into a series of hard turns, noticing first the low effort demanded by the Sea Star hydraulic steering and second, an unexpected level of noise and vibration aft.

Kevin explained that to reduce the 33's draft to a versatile 3 feet, the prop is recessed in a pocket molded into the hull. This results in some cavitation in tight turns. So does the Back Cove's oversized rudder, which I found to be a real boon in low-speed maneuvers. There are tradeoffs in every aspect of boat design, and Back Cove is understandably comfortable with its decisions.

So, apparently, are buyers. At the time of my sea trial, the company had sold an even dozen of the 33s and was planning to build some 30 of them in 2007. Although it's up against some stiff competition in its size and price range, the Back Cove 33 Express appears to be headed for every bit as much success as its little sister, the 29. ❁