



UNDER THE SKIN

# PACIFIC SEACRAFT

The Crealock 44 (foreground) and the 37 beat towards the Golden Gate Bridge. Inset, a 37 just out of the mould

*This Californian boatbuilder's range of canoe-sterned cruising boats is designed by Essex-born Bill Crealock. David Glenn and Malcolm White visited Los Angeles and San Francisco to see them being built and to sail them in Frisco Bay*

In a land of high-speed, ultra light displacement boats, multi-million dollar America's Cup yachts and a computer culture that seems to drive Californian society, the success of the traditional, canoe-sterned Crealock 37 and her numerous sisters might seem surprising.

It is, perhaps, an underlying desire among Californians to escape the strain and stress of life ashore, preferably aboard something dependable, that makes the purposeful Pacific Seacraft range so appealing.

There has always been a demand in the USA for medium to heavy displacement cruising yachts, but Pacific Seacraft, based in an old soft drinks factory in Fullerton, a rather nondescript suburb of Los Angeles, has been one of the most successful builders. The company are now convinced that European buyers looking for a true bluewater cruising boat might find what they want in this high-quality American product. Competition in Europe could be considered to be the likes of Hallberg Rassy, Najad, Oyster and Rival Bowman.

The company was founded in 1975 by Mike Howarth and Henry Mohrschladt, but has moved from private ownership to become part of Singmarine Industries owned by the Keppel Group, a successful Singapore-based ship building and property conglomerate; it has not, however, lost sight of its main aim of producing no-nonsense cruising boats.

Despite buying a motorboat company and the moulds to the Ericson cruiser-racer range four years ago, the cruising yachts, and the Crealock range particularly, remain the company's flagships.

One of Pacific Seacraft's greatest strengths has been its association with naval architect Bill Crealock, who has been responsible for nine of the 11 yachts in the range. 'Gentleman' Bill, as he is known, was born in Essex in the UK more than 70 years ago. Via India, Baghdad and Scotland, he eventually settled with his Welsh wife just north of San Diego. Still going strong, Gentleman Bill has just designed the Crealock 40 (see page 92).

"I decided to retire before I went to work," confessed Bill, who went on to describe how, as a youngster, he had gone on a shell-collecting expedition in a 105ft Herreshoff schooner and cruised all over the Pacific before putting down his roots. In that time he learnt a great deal about how yachts behave, particularly in heavy downwind conditions.

The canoe stern is his trade mark. The yachts possess no bulbousness or heavily rounded sections so often seen in more recently designed double-enders. Instead Bill draws a very carefully crafted shape which, as he puts it: "will work well as your bow when sailing in a storm." He produces a yacht with most pleasing looks.

Another significant feature of Bill Crealock's designs is the relative lack of beam. For instance, the 37 only measures 10ft 10in, narrow by modern day standards. He has no time



Above, the Californian climate allows moulding to take place in open-sided sheds. Right, with liners in place, the 37 is almost ready to receive furniture, which has been built in the wood-working shop. Note the topsides-mounted chainplates



Right, engine installation, plumbing and wiring are all thoroughly checked while they are still accessible. Far right, preparing to bond the teak toerail to the bulwarks. Teak decks are an option



for designers who give in to demands for vast volume at the expense of seamanlike design.

If people want to go to sea in small boats, they must be comfortable and safe, believes Bill, who nonetheless recognises the need for a good turn of speed. A split configuration fin and skeg arrangement below the waterline and a markedly undistorted canoe body form part of the equation which results in a truly efficient performance in the larger boats in the range.

Two other men have become instrumental in getting the Crealock message across: Don

Kohlmann, vice president of sales and marketing, and Jeff Merrill, director of sales and marketing. Not only are they salesmen, but also yachtsmen of the highest calibre, both having campaigned 12-metres in America's Cup competition, Don as 'sewer' man aboard Dennis Conner's *Freedom* in Newport in 1980, and Jeff as a tactician aboard Buddy Melges' *Heart of America* in Fremantle in 1987.

While these two likable men may have chased the racing bug right out of their hearts, they bring crucial knowledge of how to make



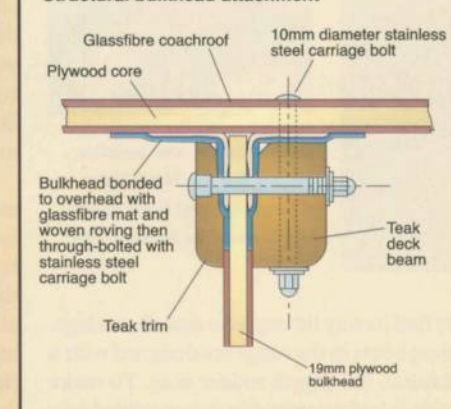
A copper grounding strip for SSB radio is incorporated into the hull moulding



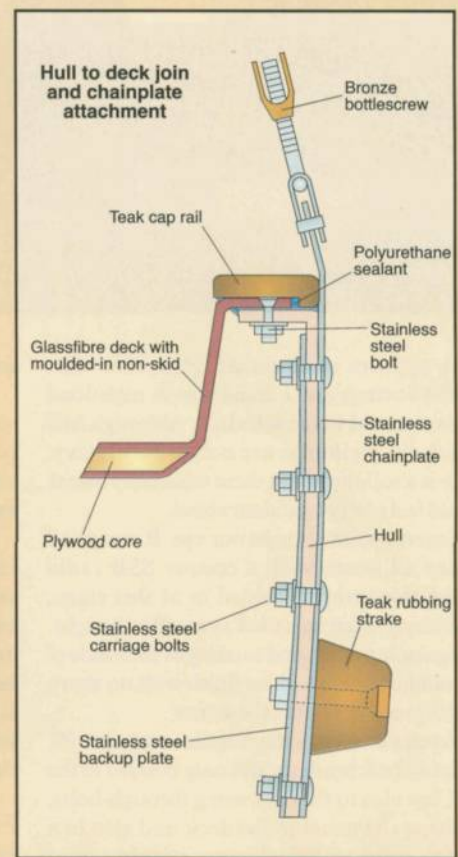
Above and below, constructing furniture outside the yacht and then installing it



#### Structural bulkhead attachment



A very well protected propeller and rudder set on a full-length skeg



Above, steering quadrant, seacocks and engine exhaust hosing in place. Left, butterfly scarf helps to secure the teak toerail



Left, the accommodation close to completion. Above, the new pilothouse version of the 32 deck moulding in the fitting-out bay

any boat sail efficiently, something which is sadly missing among some boatbuilders once they get their product afloat.

We followed a 37 through the build process, but no story about Pacific Seacraft would be complete without mention of the smallest yacht in the range, the extraordinary Flicka 20, a legendary Bruce Bingham design which the company started building in 1978. Almost 500 have been launched and Flicka has carried Pacific Seacraft's name round the world.

Although her long, deep keel draws only 3ft

3in, she has 6ft standing headroom throughout her three-berth accommodation. People have sailed them everywhere in the nastiest weather and on the longest passages, and they have acquired cult status. They are wildly expensive at almost £40,000, but second-hand boats are as rare as hen's teeth.

#### HULL AND DECK

Two of the great things about California are the weather and highly competitive labour rates, the latter brought about by a large influx

of Latin workers from Mexico and South American countries. Air temperature and humidity levels are ideal for glassfibre moulding so everything is done in open-sided sheds, allowing vast savings on atmospheric control, including ventilation.

Pacific Seacraft have found the Mexicans hard workers who quickly acquire the key skills, particularly in hull moulding. Lamination is conventional with a glass/resin chopper gun used to spray on the initial laminate. Thereafter everything is done by hand. ▽



**Customised accommodation** aboard the 37. The tubular stowage (above) is for charts, which would be better off flat

A mixture of Coremat, glassfibre mat, woven rovings and biaxial mat in high-load areas are used in the schedule. Although hull and deck mouldings are not unduly heavy, there is a solidity about them which any owner would feel pretty confident about.

Several points caught our eye. It was good to see all boats with a copper SSB radio grounding strap moulded in at this stage, something often regarded as an afterthought. The grinding down and sanding of the inside of all mouldings left a clean finish with no sharp glass fibres left 'behind the scenes'.

As can be seen in the diagram on page 109, the main bulkheads are not only bonded to the hull, but also to the deck using through-bolts, securing the panel to the deck and also to a heavy, solid teak deckbeam running right across the boat. This looks immensely strong, the only niggling worry being whether water

might find its way through the deck fastenings.

Most boats in the range are designed with a substantial, full-length rudder skeg. To make sure this is laid up properly, it is moulded as a separate piece, then assembled and bonded into an aperture in the main hull moulding.

The hull-to-deck join is formed of an upstand which doubles as a reasonably deep bulkhead. All the chainplates are topside-mounted which makes them easy to inspect and avoids through-deck fittings and the problem of intrusion in the cabin. Because the boat is relatively narrow, what would normally be a wide shroud base isn't too extreme and means the genoa can still be sheeted efficiently.

## FIT-OUT

Pacific Seacraft have introduced the Voyager Edition to all boats in the range in response to the large majority of owners who set off on

long-distance cruising. As a result, VHF radio, depth sounder, sailing instruments, battery charger, voltage inverters and a number of other items are fitted as standard, but more importantly are installed with great care and attention at the build stage. This does not, however, mean that equipment cannot be removed for repair or replacement – far from it.

Harken furling gear, Schaefer deck equipment, Edson and Whitlock steering systems are among the quality names which appear on board. On the domestic front, we were shown the water tanks which, on the 34, 37 and 44, are all glassfibre mouldings forming part of the inner liner. Knowing the possible problems that arise from taste in glass tanks, Pacific Seacraft plumb in high quality charcoal filters which ensure that all drinking water is taste-free – something that American customers are very sensitive about.

There is a fairly high degree of customisation among the larger boats in the range and one has the impression that a lot of time is spent on fit-out. Wiring and plumbing runs looked excellently done, and engine and equipment installation couldn't be faulted.

Once the bulkheads, glassfibre liners, wiring and plumbing are in place, the teak accommodation finish can be started. This was one of the few areas in which we found Pacific Seacraft wanting. Fitting sprung ballbearing catches to stowage lockers seemed unforgivable on boats that are designed for passage-

making. It takes minimal weight to burst these open once the boat is heeled.

We were told that Pacific Seacraft use top quality teak below, but the coarse grain and varied colours didn't give that impression when compared with a Bowman Rival or an Oyster. Although the cosmetic finish is a matter of personal taste, European customers might not find it to their liking.

## SAILING THE CREALOCK 44

At the end of our tour of the Fullerton factory, we flew north to San Francisco where we were relishing the thought of sailing the 44 in the sunny, brisk afternoon conditions of the city's spectacular Bay.

We weren't disappointed – just after lunch the mist cleared and a sparkling westerly gave us superb sailing beneath the awe-inspiring span of the Golden Gate Bridge. Unfortunately, the brand new sails aboard clearly hadn't been used in earnest: the luff of the genoa was too long and we couldn't get adequate halyard tension for the conditions.

Nevertheless, the 44, with hull lines almost identical to those of the 37, proved to be a fine, responsive boat to sail with a motion in the choppy wind-against-stream conditions which indicated that she would provide a velvet ride in a seaway. Bronze deck fittings seemed tough, well positioned and properly fixed, and the locally built LeFiell spar appeared uncomplicated and well finished.



**Above, ready to go – the Crealock 37's underwater shape on display. Right, well-protected cockpit with deep coamings and a good sprayhood**

## CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that Bill Crealock's designs are likely to provide comfortable and reasonably fast performance, plus hull lines which are pleasing to those who appreciate the more traditional look. Moreover, it is extremely refreshing to come across a designer like Bill who has succeeded in persuading his builder that seamanlike features and good looks should not be sacrificed for more marketable items.

Build quality is high; although the finish below is adequate, it might benefit from more design input to meet the demands of those cruising long distances.

Anyone in the market for a comfortable yacht for serious long-distance cruising would



do well to add Pacific Seacraft to their list of possibles. With two agents in the UK, it should not be necessary (unfortunately) to visit California for a trial sail. □

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