



Boat review

Note the difference in the arrangement of the tiller on *Icelander*, Bill Watson's Yankee Dolphin, at left, compared with *Trina*, bottom photo on Page 11. Bill Shaw aboard *Trina*, at right.



Value and hazards

What should you do if a certain 24-foot hull in the boatyard turns your head? First, realize that this may be an emotional reaction and that owning a Dolphin is not *like* a relationship, it *is* a relationship. You may not be thinking clearly. If corporate hiring people make up their minds in the first 30 seconds and spend the rest of the interview rationalizing that decision, watch yourself. In your saner moments, however, you do have pedigree working for you. It should give you some measure of confidence that Sparkman & Stephens and Bill Shaw have each designed volumes of well-known and well-regarded boats. That fact will for sure matter to many potential buyers when you come to sell.

Moreover, licenses from Sparkman & Stephens to build Dolphins required each builder to adhere to very strict layup and construction standards. For example, hand-laid combinations of fiberglass cloth, mat, and roving are multiplied to create thicknesses of $\frac{7}{8}$ inch in the keel wall, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch at the keel/hull curve, $\frac{7}{16}$ inch at the waterline, and $\frac{3}{8}$ inch at the sheer. And the hull/deck bond requires 153 alternating stainless-steel screws and bolts every 4 inches all the way around with epoxy resin between. Furthermore, the keel cavity is filled with a mixture of lead shot and epoxy resin whereby the keel and 3 inches of the hull become one solid mass. These are covered with heavy mat, roving layers, and resin to 18 inches up the side of the hull. In the words of Romaine Corbin of Pacific Dolphin, Inc., "No one is ever going to worry about dropping a keel or holing below the waterline."

Resources

Dolphin discussion list

<dolphin@list.sailnet.net>

Register with SailNet to join this group.

Outboards vs. inboards

Dolphins may come with outboards or inboards or both. The outboard wells work nicely, except that the new four-strokes take more room than two-strokes and may not fit or rotate as well. Owner Ron Breault reports that his 4-hp two-stroke moves his boat at 4.5 knots in a calm. It stores under the cockpit in a heavy-wall plastic tube. He loses 0.3 knots to drag while sailing with the prop in the water. But outboards leave more storage space below and are easy to afford, reach, service, and remove. It's also easy to install a loaner while yours is being fixed. Inboards are more expensive, have more moving parts, and are harder to reach, service, and remove. A new inboard could well be of greater dollar value than the rest of the boat. On the other hand, inboards put the prop directly in front of the rudder for improved slow-speed maneuvering, and they start and shift with readily accessible buttons and levers. The older I get, the more I value that.

What to look out for

Many Dolphin owners contributed to the following list of what to look at, watch out for, and have a surveyor render an opinion on (note that this list applies almost verbatim to virtually any similar-sized boat):

- Moisture-meter the hull and especially the cored decks. O'Days have wood in the hull-to-deck joint that is often "gone." Check near stanchions, fittings, and genoa tracks.
- Check shroud chainplates, their through-deck passages, the bulkheads to which they are bolted, and the bulkhead-to-hull bond. Water damage here may be the most common Dolphin problem.
- Check for compression or corrosion on the prop under the on-deck mast step.
- Check the topsides and bottom for gelcoat cracks or crazing from the

extra-heavy gelcoating of the era. It is easy to live with these; one can redo the surfaces as time and funds allow.

- Check whether the trailer size and condition are up to the distances you plan. Do you have access to a big enough vehicle?
- Check the hull-to-deck juncture, ports, hatches, and so on for signs of leaks from caulking failure or tired fasteners.
- Check the rudder movement for bearing wear and the fittings for electrolysis.
- Wooden spars with original resorcinol glue may begin to separate. These can be cleaned up and epoxied back together.

Renew or restore

You *can* buy a used boat and just sail away. As for me, I *hate* surprises. I want a boat that's trustworthy. If I had a new old Dolphin, I would at least renew it by checking and replacing every last thing that was remotely suspicious or could stop the boat from getting me home. If possible, I'd budget an extra \$2,000 to \$3,000 (more if a yard does the work) to get a substantially new boat (and my own peace of mind).

Will it be worth it? Some think you need a masochistic streak to renew or restore a boat. My rule is: "Always try to buy from a distressed owner; do not buy a distressed boat." But there is considerable satisfaction in preserving something worth saving and making it work well and safely again. Dolphins are selling for anywhere from \$3,000 to \$10,000 today, more for Mr. Fuss-budget's boat. You probably won't get your refit investment back in cash, but you're a sailor so you know what you get back in purely subjective ways.

As Romaine Corbin said of Dolphins, "Boats that will get them there and bring them back — swiftly, safely, comfortably." In my book, that's the highest praise any boat could receive. 