

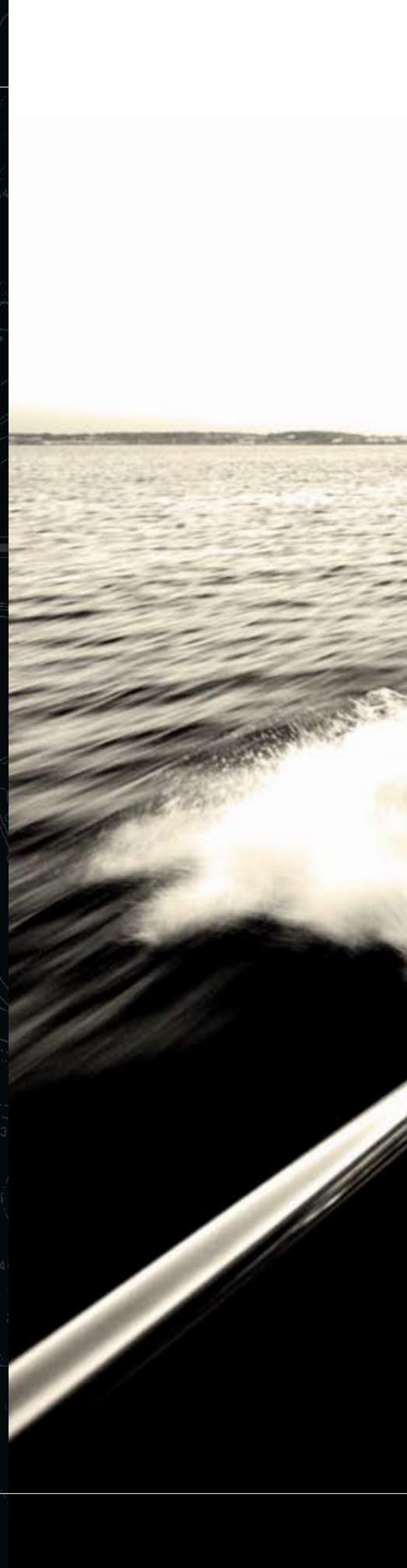
There's a distinctive kind of motor yacht that's making a way of life out of cruising. Whether you're taking America's delightful Great Loop or crossing any of the seas beyond, you'll likely find yourself trading wakes with the increasing number of people living the trawler lifestyle.



# Life in the SLOW lane

by W.W. Williams

One out of every 20 or so folks in the U.S. owns a watercraft of some type. Of the more than 12.5 million recreational boats in the 2006 total—93 percent of which were motor-powered—only a scant 4 percent (about 500,000) were larger than 26 feet. ¶ That luxury market, what most of us would call yachts, includes cabin cruisers, sport fishermen, multihull cruisers, express cruisers, Down Easters, converted work boats, trawlers, and those sizable luxury yachts one sees moored in Monaco. With the slowing economy, sales of these inboard motor cruisers may dip a bit from the nearly 8,000 sold in the U.S. in 2005, but there's a ripple of the unusual in the latest sales stats. There's a surge of ▶▶▶





growth evident in the popularity of trawlers. Industry experts put the number of recreational trawlers currently sold at only about 10 percent of the market, but most agree that this uniquely utilitarian-style yacht makes up the fastest-growing segment of the market. With retail value averaging about \$750,000, the question for boat buyers and fanciers alike is, why trawlers, and why now?

I'm a lifelong sailor, but it wasn't until I met with Larry Polster, the vice president of Kadey-Krogen Yachts, that I found an explanation for the trawler phenomenon that I could hang my sailor's cap on. On a windy day last February, I found Polster on Lake Union at the Seattle Boat Show. We were sitting in the snug pilothouse of a spanking-new Krogen 58 discussing the appeal of recreational trawlers, when he opined, "It isn't so much the boat that defines a trawler; it's the lifestyle."

That really registered with me. The surge in trawler sales is as much about the lifestyle of new boat buyers as it is about the style of these yachts. For the kind of boater who isn't racing off to, or zipping back from, weekend recreation, the trawler is the perfect home on the water. I'd been living that life, fueling the trend, and hadn't even realized it.

After years of owning sailboats, including 27- and 36-footers, a 24-foot oysterman replica, and a 52-foot ocean-going sloop, I made the trawler move last spring when I bought a North Pacific 43. The larger living area, a raised pilothouse where I could keep out of the weather, and newfound power to battle changes in tides made the transition from sail to trawler simply delightful. Nothing against sailing—I was a passionate sailor for years—but trawlers seem uniquely attractive to boaters ready to take a different approach.

As you read this, I'm heading back up the scenic Inside Passage to Alaska from my home in Seattle. It's a pilgrimage that's perfect for a trawler—the kind of slow, extended trip where the main purpose is watching the seals and whales in the water; the bears, wolves, and mountain sheep along the shoreline; and the eagles soaring overhead. Eating freshly caught crabs, prawns, and fish is icing on the cake.

The type of craft that makes this kind of long-range cruising a delight evolved from the demands of the rough waters of the North Atlantic. As the story goes, the trawler was invented in the 19th century along the English Channel, between Torquay and Plymouth, at the legendary port of Brixham. The sturdy vessels were designed to trawl, that is, to tow a conical net through the water or along the bottom to catch fish. Today, several restored early sailing trawlers can still be seen in Brixham harbor, along with a full-size reproduction of Sir Francis Drake's *Golden Hind*.

During both world wars, diesel-powered trawlers were pressed into service as minesweepers, their crews and equipment easily suited to the task. During the Cold War, the sturdy, seaworthy, and commodious trawlers were converted into spy ships. The same characteristics led some individuals to convert them into oceangoing yachts. Soon

boatyards around the world were turning out recreational trawlers that resembled their fishing cousins.

Today, there's no one definition that serves for all recreational trawlers. Broadly speaking, they are built with a raised pilothouse and a large salon. Some have sedan-style cabins that combine the helm station and salon into one open room. For many, the trawler is a rugged, work boat-like craft that looks safe and sound in any weather.

As my friend J. Scott Rohrer, a maritime historian, explains it, the marine insurance industry defines trawler-style motor yachts in three ways, besides just checking the box labeled "trawler" on the policy. Most agree that the key characteristics of trawlers are that they're diesel-powered, have a top speed less than 12 knots (a knot being 1.151 miles per hour), and have a single screw (propeller).

Yep, that means these boats are stable and relatively slow. But slow boats have fewer accidents, single-propeller trawlers have a structure called a skeg that guards the prop, and diesel fuel is less volatile than gasoline.

If you think that seems like a comfy and safe way to ply the seas and passages, you're right. Most of the boats have roomy salons with spacious galleys, all fitted in rich, natural woods. They also include wide walk-around decks for easy docking and moorage, covered cockpits on the aft section for outdoor relaxation, and large areas on the upper deck for stowing tenders, kayaks, and crab and prawn traps. There's the working part of the boat called the pilothouse. Some trawlers also include open-air steering stations (flying bridges) for excellent views.

Many people find themselves attracted to trawlers, but when I think about those who epitomize the lifestyle, the McCreerys come to mind. Bob and Ellie are full-time live-aboards on *Northern Lights*, a North Pacific 52. (That's how boaters think of each other: name of boat, make of boat, first names of owners.) Their boat may be slow, but like a lot of folks, they're not easy to catch up with. Last winter, they were off traveling. When I talked to Ellie, they were running to catch a flight to Australia. They had been visiting back East and were now on their way Down Under for a month before flying back to the West Coast and heading up the Inside Passage to Alaska for the summer.

Not everyone has the means to live this kind of full-time trawler lifestyle, but where there's a will, there's often a way. Author Bob Hale makes it pay, as well. Aboard *Surprise*, his 37-foot Tollycraft, he cruises the waters of the Pacific Northwest between Olympia, Washington, and Prince Rupert, British Columbia. Along the way he publishes the *Waggoner Cruising Guide*, a best-selling guidebook to the Northwest. "The coast is changing, and it's a full-time job to keep up," he says. "I could spend the rest of my life reporting the latest changes to my readers." So Hale spends months at a time on the boat, cruising some of the most beautiful waters in the world. "I'm a contented man," he says with a smile.

Phillip and Catherine Mousley typify another aspect of

the trawler trend—folks who have traded in their sailboats. Dedicated sailors don't make the shift from sailboats lightly. The Mousleys crossed the Atlantic for the first time aboard a new Warrior 40 sailboat; then they recrossed the Atlantic and sailed through the Mediterranean. Crossing the Atlantic for a third time aboard a new Bowman 48, they won the Atlantic Cruiser Rally. After selling their transport business in Great Britain, they made the move to trawlers by ordering a new Kadey-Krogen 48, *Jabberwok*. They recently cruised the coast of Eluthera in the Bahamas. "We just find a cozy anchorage and stay for as long as we like," says Phillip.

The harder work of sailing urges many retirees to the stately trawler. Most sailboats offer a water-level open cockpit, which can be bothersome in iffy weather. Engine power is needed through narrow passage-ways, and smaller engines and props are slower against strong currents.

You don't necessarily need great wealth and an absolutely empty calendar to fashion a trawler lifestyle. Gerry and Glenna Travers help defray the cost of *Amazing*, their North Pacific 42, by chartering it out through their company, North Pacific Charters. When I met them last spring, they were leaving for a nine-week cruise north to Ketchikan, Alaska. A charter would take over from there and bring *Amazing* back south to Anacortes, Washington.

Tony and Mary Ward-Smith of Seattle live modestly aboard their 30-year-old Grand Banks Classic 32 woody, *Angellena*. They cruise the Puget Sound and the San Juan Islands of Washington, the Gulf Islands, Princess Louisa Inlet, and the Desolation Sound of British Columbia when time permits. Both still are working, but Tony, as a consultant, has more time to spend aboard *Angellena*. During the summer, when Mary can get away from work, she hops a float plane from Seattle's Lake Union to wherever Tony has the boat anchored. "I set the crab pots in the morning and pull them up in the afternoon when Mary lands. Fresh crabs and the time to enjoy them is just one of the perks of this part-time working lifestyle," Tony adds.

"It's a transfer of energy and focus," says newly retired Johnson & Johnson executive Betty Robinson. She's the owner and full-time live-aboard of *LiLi* (pronounced Lily) a Krogen 48. I called Robinson in the Florida Keys while she



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was readying for a spring cruise up the Intra-Coastal Waterway to the Chesapeake Bay. Her first full year aboard was crammed with studying *LiLi's* systems and handling. She also took a lengthy cruise learning to navigate and pilot from a professional captain she hired aboard. Then she did it all herself on the return to Florida in the fall. "I did need a little help from my friends," she admits. "But it's a labor of love that I think many single women could handle."

Bill and Staci McLauchlan traded in their sailboat for a Nordic Tug 37. They found it a bit small and bought a Krogen 48. But after the sale of their market research firm, they decided to move aboard full-time and traded up again to a Krogen 58, *Tapestry*. One of their favorite cruises last year took them up the Hudson River to Lake Champlain and on to the Saint Lawrence where they visited Québec City, Prince Edward Island, and Canada's Maritime Provinces, before returning down the East Coast from Maine to Florida. Follow the travels of the McLauchlans at [tapestrylink.com](http://tapestrylink.com).

The stories are different, but the folks choosing trawlers agree it's life in the slow lane—perfect as an alternative to a base on land when pre- or postretirement options unfold. Other yachters may stick to familiar bays, weekend cruising, and the yacht club, but trawler folks are setting off in their seaworthy homes to head for new horizons.

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**W.W. Williams**, a longtime contributor to HEMISPHERES, now works from aboard *IBIS*, his North Pacific 43. You can catch him along the Inside Passage between April and October.