

Creeping happily along the waterways

■ Although boat sales in general are slumping, those people seeking life in the slow lane are eagerly buying large, trawler-style yachts.

BY LORI BECKER
Palm Beach Post

STUART — Tom Jackson never fully appreciated boating until he slowed down.

The 58-year-old has owned a series of go-fast power boats. But 2½ years ago, he and his wife, Jackie, 56, bought a Krogen trawler, a 48-foot yacht that creeps along at a carefree pace.

"This is the most exciting boat I've ever owned," said Jackson, who retired in December from his family-owned land development business. "I'm seeing things I never saw before. When you go up and down the Intra-coastal at eight knots, you see everything for as long as you want to see it."

The Delray Beach couple, just back from four months in the Bahamas on their yacht, have discovered the "trawler lifestyle," a stop-and-smell-the-salty-air approach to being on the water.

A HOME AFLOAT

Stuart-based Kadey-Krogen Yachts says it sells more than a boat; it sells a way of life.

Functioning like a floating home, a Krogen trawler is stocked with the same creature comforts of life ashore. These slow-moving, long-range cruisers are meant for the summer voyage, not the weekend jaunt.

"Our owners ... are more interested in the journey than the destination," said John Gear, 59, president and co-owner of the company.

At a time when boat sales are falling and manufacturers are cutting production, Kadey-



PAUL J. MILETTE/PALM BEACH POST

NEW MODEL: Kadey-Krogen Yachts in Stuart introduced this 48-foot luxury trawler.

Krogen has plans to increase sales. The company is introducing a fifth model next year and wants to boost production by 25 percent over the next couple years, said Tom Button, 51, another co-owner and vice president of operations.



BUTTON

Kadey-Krogen makes about 20 boats a year. The company chooses to limit production, preferring to be a niche builder.

At 30 years old, Kadey-Krogen has built about 600 vessels since its beginnings. It is one of the oldest and most respected builders in the trawler world, drawing a loyal following of cruisers, said Bill Parlatore, editor of Passage-Maker, an Annapolis, Md.-based magazine that follows the trawler industry.

"It's one of the mainstays," he said. "Krogen is a family. The owners all know each other."

While most yacht owners are on their vessels a few weeks a year, Krogen owners often use their trawlers as a vacation home, spending half

the year on the boat. For some, it's a full-time home.

"They're condos on the water," Gear said.

Krogens are built to order at a shipyard in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Four models — 39, 44, 48 and 58 foot — range in price from about \$700,000 to \$2 million. A 55-foot vessel will debut next fall.

Trawlers, by definition, are fishing boats that use trawl nets to catch fish. But the word has come to personify power boats that cruise six to eight knots.

GOOD IN A STORM

Trawlers are equipped far beyond traditional recreational boats, with an abundance of storage, appliances and fuel capacity. They're also seaworthy vessels capable of managing stormy waters, Parlatore said.

"Most motor yachts are pretty incapable of spending three weeks anchored out in the water," he said. "Trawlers are self-sufficient. They have all the systems you need for safety and comfort."

The 51-year-old Grand Banks Yachts in Seattle is the "granddaddy" of the trawler makers, building about 90 boats a year, Parlatore said.

But the fuel-efficient trawler niche took off during the oil crisis of the 1970s, he said, spawning other big players including Nordhavn Yachts in Dana Point, Calif., and Nordic Tugs in Burlington, Wash.

The trawler market has not been hit by the recent downturn in the recreational boat industry, Parlatore said. That's because trawlers are not just weekend toys. They're a growing retirement choice for baby boomers.

"Most other boats involve discretionary income, and it's something to do on an afternoon. This is more of a lifestyle choice," Parlatore said. "If you love to travel, a trawler is a pretty outstanding way to see the world."

Naval architect James Kro-

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— JOHN GEAR,
Kadey-Krogen Yachts co-owner

gen and yacht broker Art Kadey founded the company in Miami in 1977. Just four years later, Kadey was shot and killed when he tried to help a couple being robbed in Coconut Grove.

TAKING CHARGE

Krogen's two sons became more involved in the company, and when their father died in 1994, Kurt Krogen became president while Jimmy Krogen took over his dad's separate design firm.

The younger Krogens moved the company to Stuart in the late 1990s and began refining the lineup to raise the bar on quality and comfort.

Kurt Krogen sold his share of the business in October to Gear and Button, who both live in Port St. Lucie, and Larry Polster, 44, of Annapolis. Gear has been with the company for six years, and Button came on board nine years ago. Jimmy Krogen serves as its naval architect.

Improvements still are made every year, mostly drawn from customer feedback, but the hull design is the same first conceived 30 years ago.

"Jim Krogen got it right the first time," Gear said.

KADEY-KROGEN YACHTS

- Owners: John Gear, Tom Button, Larry Polster
- Headquarters: Stuart
- Vessels: Trawlers, from 39 feet to 58 feet long
- 2007 projected sales: \$15 million
- Employees: 10
- History: Founded in 1977 by James Krogen and Art Kadey
- Online: www.kadeykrogen.com

SOURCE: Kadey-Krogen Yachts