



RARE SIGHTING:

Florida Bay Coaster IN PUGET SOUND

AN ATTENTION-GETTER IN EVERY PORT

Story And Photography By ROBERT M. LANE

Teddi Holzemer was on the dock in Olympia, Washington, tying off a forward spring line to secure the 55-foot *Teddi Bear* when a voice called across the water. “Is that a Benford boat?”

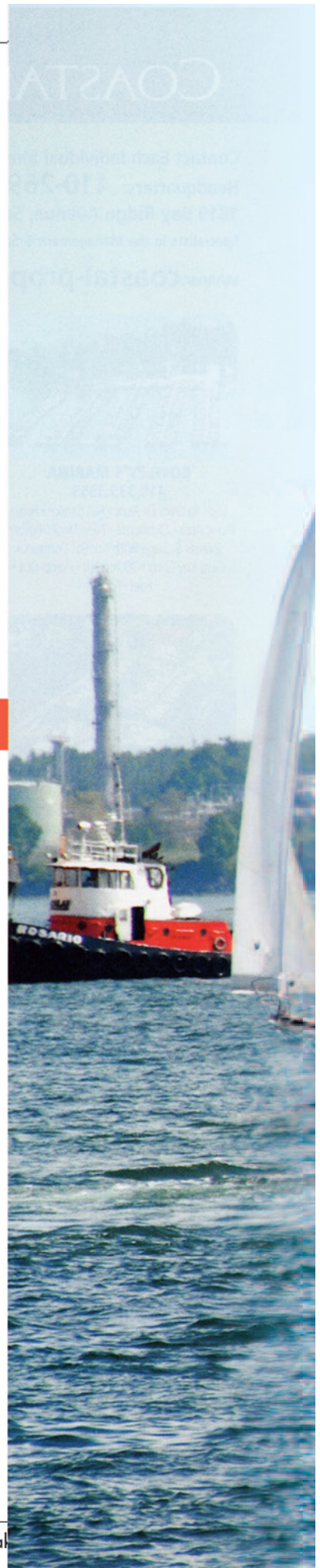
Although she had heard the question often, Teddi cheerfully called back, “Yes, it is!” as she walked forward with the bow line in hand. The voice from across the water responded: “Can we come take a look?”

Teddi and her husband, John, are friendly people who are willing to share. When you own a boat as distinctive and as eye-catching as a Florida Bay Coaster—and when she’s one of a kind in her Pacific Northwest waters—you need to like people, because they’ll keep coming down the dock, arms pointing and jaws

wagging with words like “awesome,” “beautiful,” “wow!” and “What is it?” And asking for a look inside.

As designed by Jay Benford, a Chesapeake Bay naval architect, *Teddi Bear* is all steel and three stories tall. A dramatic workboat/small freighter styling gives her a beam of 20 feet. There’s a VW Golf sedan parked on the foredeck and a Robertson R22 helicopter on the top deck. While most yachts tend to be finished in shades of white, the Coaster is painted in colors called Amazon Green and Gray Days. Those are camouflage hues in the Northwest, but they do nothing to hide *Teddi Bear*.

With a galley larger than most home kitchens, a separate dining/living room, a top deck guest stateroom/office, and a







A hydraulic windlass and all-chain rode make anchoring safe and secure. The foredeck on *Teddi Bear* is for storage and gear, not sunning, and also houses the massive crane for lifting the dinghy and car.

fireplace, she is no ordinary yacht. *Teddi Bear's* 1,270 square feet of living space give her more elbowroom than some homes. And her owners are not ordinary folk, either. Retired airline people, they refurbished and lived aboard a 36-foot Krogen Manatee for five years before deciding to build a Coaster.

While still cruising aboard the Krogen, the Holzemers talked about a larger boat. John had read articles about the Florida Bay Coaster, was intrigued and, Teddi said, often brought Benford's book on yacht design to bed. Her first reaction to Benford's personal freighter: "I don't want to live aboard a freighter, and you can't make me." Her demands were clear: a king-size bed, full-size washer/dryer, a bathtub, "a kitchen, not a galley," and a fireplace. John's requirements were simpler: "All I said I needed was a dinghy for fishing and a helicopter pad."

Their search took them to the Annapolis boat show in 2001, where they met Benford. He suggested they fly to Ft. Lauderdale to inspect a 60-foot Coaster. "The minute I walked into the 60, I could see full-sized everything," Teddi recalls. John adds: "My comment was that you get a house and I get a boat, and Jay said, 'Do you want to buy it?'"

Probably surprising everyone, Teddi replied: "We should build our own." They did. Five years passed from the time that decision was made to the day *Teddi Bear* was launched from a New Zealand shipyard.

EXCITEMENT, EXHAUSTION

I boarded *Teddi Bear* at her transient slip at Shilshole Marina in Seattle on a Saturday afternoon. The plan was to leave at 10:45 Sunday morning to catch the south-flowing flood tide for a cruise to Olympia. John and Teddi guided me to the guest stateroom/office on the top deck, where I dumped my gear. With its view over the marina and the city skyline in the distance, the stateroom reminded me of a penthouse. To sum up an afternoon, evening, and full day of talk and inspection tours: construction of *Teddi Bear* was an enormous undertaking that the Holzemers remember fondly. They shared hundreds of anecdotes, and laughed at many. Yet the project was an exhausting experience and one they are not likely to repeat.

Deciding to have a boat built entails far more than signing a contract. They worked with Benford on interior design and began searching for a yard with a good reputation for building with steel. Several yards in the United States were booked years into the future, and the Holzemers didn't want to wait that long. Finally, they signed on with Johnson Yachts in New Zealand after touring the yard and inspecting work under way.

The contract required that John and Teddi buy in the United States and ship to the builder all of the yacht's equipment, from engines and generators to miles of wiring and piping, beds, furniture, and the VW Golf.



Above: Teddi Holzemer talks mooring tactics via radio with her husband, John, as she readies a fender for landing at a dock in Olympia, Washington. Right: The lower cockpit (or back porch) opens to the saloon's spacious living room and dining area on the main deck of *Teddi Bear*. It's a great place to watch the boating world cruise by.

Selection and pricing would be better in the States. They formed a business, Bay Point Marine, joined marine trade associations, and began shopping. Fisheries Supply in Seattle publishes a catalog nearly 1,500 pages thick. John started on page one and often took the catalog to bed at night.

John thought design, selection, purchase, and shipment could be wrapped up in six months. Instead, it took a year and a half to complete the required design work and to search for and identify the best deals.

"What I had failed to realize is that buying the components was only part of the work," John wrote in an article about the building of *Teddi Bear* for *RNPA Contrails*, a retired pilots' publication. "I had flown airplanes around the world with complex systems and had built a couple of houses. Certainly designing the boat system would be fairly simple. Wrong again. I now call this the project of 10,000 decisions. I had to learn about isolated electrical systems, compute hydraulic flow requirements, design fuel, water, waste, engine exhaust, and vent loop systems, and on and on..."

When that work was done, stacks of crates and boxes filled a building in Shelton, Washington, a small port

town where he and Teddi moored the Krogen. The gear was packed into two 40-foot shipping containers.

Their plan was to move to New Zealand to work with the builder and make final decisions on interior design and systems installation during construction. One morning, with the boat about 30 percent complete, they found work had halted. The builder was having severe financial problems.

John and Teddi took over management of the construction, using the builder's facilities and hiring its employees. They became executive decision makers, working long hours every day. It took nearly three years to get the boat built.

They rented a home and were at the yard early every morning to meet with the crew and issue directions on how work should proceed.

"We were very lucky with the crew," Teddi said. "They were careful and worked hard on our boat."

The boat was built of 3/16-inch steel plate that was computer cut in Japan. Although precision cutting



contributes to a precise fit and finish, John said two workmen spent a year fairing the hull to prepare it for painting. Perfect steelwork also was needed on the exterior decks, which are surfaced with Flexiteek, a composite PVC material that looks much like natural wood.

Completed, *Teddi Bear* was put aboard a Dockwise transport in New Zealand and carried to Ensenada, Mexico. There she was picked up by a second Dockwise vessel and shipped to British Columbia, where John and Teddi climbed aboard.

They took her north and spent the winter of 2007 to 2008 in Sitka, Alaska.

When I joined the Holzemers in Seattle, they were back in home waters to participate in Trawler Fest in



Above: Lunch is easy to prepare in a galley that's spacious, well equipped, and amazingly large for a yacht. The space is just the kitchen that Teddi wanted. Opposite page: The home-size couches and dining table don't begin to crowd the saloon on the 55-foot Florida Bay Coaster. A propane-fueled fireplace is out of sight to the left.

Anacortes in late May and to have a little work done in an Olympia shipyard, including completion of the copter landing pad. Those who had a chance to board *Teddi Bear* at Trawler Fest have a true understanding of why she was voted People's Choice, the best boat in the show. The unending line of visitors' shoes on the dock was a clear indicator of her popularity.

After Trawler Fest, the Holzemers planned to head back to Sitka via the Inside Passage. They had left Sitka in March, when winter storms still blow in from the Pacific, and were pleased with *Teddi Bear's* performance in sloppy weather in Clarence Strait and other waterways. But they also spent a number of days and nights at anchor in protected harbors, waiting for storms to fade away.

Their skill in boat handling was obvious as we left Shilshole. John was at the helm on the top deck, and Teddi was out of sight on the dock below. To communicate they use duplex radios, which work like a phone.

Either party can speak any time and be heard without saying "over" or losing words as one often does with voice-activated radios. No one shouts.

Using the engines and thrusters, John eased tension on the lines, and Teddi handed them and herself aboard. She stayed on the port side deck, giving John distance off and other guidance as he backed into the fairway. I enjoyed watching and following one of my rules for hitching a ride for the sake of a story: unless asked, stand in a corner and let the experienced crew do the work.

Shilshole Marina is undergoing reconstruction, adding new floats and larger mooring spaces. *Teddi Bear*, despite her 20-foot beam, was comfortable in her assigned slip. It may be hard to find moorage that fits as well along the Inside Passage, where many marinas are older and were designed for smaller craft. The exceptions in Southeast Alaska include Sitka, where *Teddi Bear* wintered, and Petersburg. Both cater to commercial fishing craft and



have big docks and large slips. John said moorage was not a huge problem in Alaska; marinas often put *Teddi Bear* in fishing boat slips or in a double slip next to a sailboat.

The couple's predeparture routine was even greater evidence of a long history of cooperating in managing the boat. With their efforts probably influenced by John's experience as an airline pilot, they stowed everything, disconnected shorepower lines, and ran through a mental checklist before the boat moved.

Teddi Bear's bulk and towering deckhouse can cause windage problems in marinas, but "that's why we have thrusters," John said. "We've been in stiff winds, but she doesn't lean much. She likes following seas. With her shallow stern, the water rolls under."

They displayed the same berthing skills twice on reaching Swantown Marina in Olympia.

Our first stop turned out to be a reserved space, so John used the 15hp hydraulic bow and stern thrusters to move away from the dock and then eased ahead to a free spot. *Teddi* was on the dock quickly, fixing spring lines first and then making other lines fast. And then company arrived.

WELCOME ABOARD

Boarding is through bulwark gates on either side of the boat. The deck landings lead aft along side decks 21 inches wide at the cockpit and to doors opening into the galley. On the pilothouse level, the side decks are 25 inches wide.

As we reached for a door into the galley, I found an electronic keypad entry device—very modern—and an old-fashioned doorbell that sounded off like a fire alarm.

Stepping inside, it was clear that *Teddi* had gotten the galley she'd wanted. A granite-topped counter follows the forward wall, with a large stainless sink to port and a pair of portlights that look onto the car park on the foredeck. "I was walking through Costco one day and I saw it," *Teddi* recalled. "I said, 'That's my sink.'"

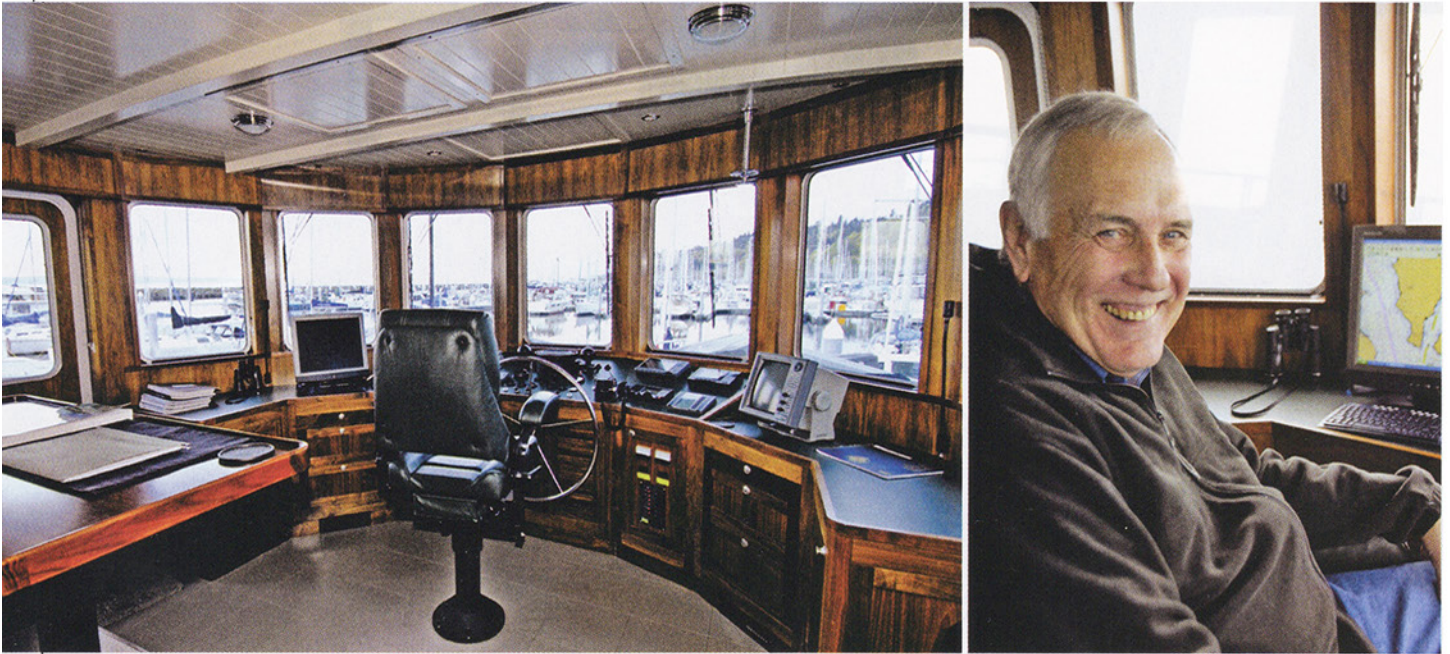
A window gives the dishwasher a great view. (There's a standard dishwasher, the automatic kind, under the counter for major cleanup work.) The propane range is full size, with four burners and an oven. An island counter provides even more work space, and *Teddi* used it to deftly produce breakfast and lunch.

On the aft wall are two ConServ (also known as Eco-

Fridge) refrigerator-freezer combos from Vestfrost of Scandinavia. Although they are separate units, they are placed tightly side by side and look like a single. The freezers have a feature that works well when the Holzemers anchor: A switch kicks the freezer compressors into nonstop work while the boat is cruising, pulling the interior temperature far below

opens onto the deck-level cockpit, which is more like a big, semicircular back porch.

The Holzemers chose Australian walnut with a clear finish for woodwork throughout the boat. It contrasts nicely with the lighter colored upholstery and carpeting. Big, comfortable home-size couches are to port in the saloon, along with a similarly sized dining table. Almost



Left: The solitary helm chair offers excellent visibility forward and to the side. The curved shape of the pilothouse reflects the workboat character that influenced the design. Right: John Holzemer, a retired airline pilot, flies helicopters for a hobby and, with his wife, Teddi, managed construction of *Teddi Bear*. They are now full-time liveaboard cruisers.

zero. Because they are well insulated, the freezers hold the low temperature, and the compressor seldom switches on while they are at anchor, reducing the load on the house batteries and the need to run one of the boat's two 7.6kW generators.

Although offered as marine equipment, the ConServ units have no cruising locks. Instead, John uses Velcro straps looped through the handles to keep the doors closed in rolling seas.

Not only does the galley look and function like one at home, it also is the center of activity when a crowd is aboard, just like at home. "Everyone ends up in the galley," Teddi said.

Cork flooring finished to resemble tile is used in the galley, pilothouse, and other high-traffic areas. There's carpet in the saloon (really, it's a living room and dining area with full-size, home-style furnishings and a propane fireplace) and in the master stateroom. The living area is down two wide steps from the galley; walls of glass offer a panoramic view of the sea. It

invisible are drop-down panels in the overhead that open for access to electrical wiring.

A stairway leads from the galley up to the pilothouse, a head with a jetted tub, and the guest stateroom/office, where I spent a night. Not only is it a comfortable room with a full view of the outside world, it also opens onto an upper-level semicircular deck (another back porch). What a tempting place, I thought, for a deck chair, a good book, and a favorite beverage. But this was a working cruise. No time to relax. The stairways were planned well, with consistent rise and run like those in homes. They are wider than stairs found on most boats and, best of all, none curves. They have handrails, too. (Some of the living spaces lack overhead grabrails. They would be welcome on a rough passage.)

The pilothouse is rounded across the front and reminded me of the curving, multiwindowed deck-houses often found on tugs, fishing boats, and old ferries. Appropriately, for a boat cruising in the Pacific Northwest, it is Bunyanesque.



The guest stateroom aft of the pilothouse doubles as an office space when not used by visitors. It also boasts one of the best views on the boat, with windows on all sides and a walk-out deck that overlooks the cockpit.

The single pilot's seat sits on the boat's centerline, with the helm dead ahead and navigation instruments and gauges curving left and right. All that space is good, but it invited some inefficiency in placing an array of equipment. For example, the person at the helm needs to turn his or her head sharply right to check the radar. Looking at the chart plotter requires a hard turn to the left.

There's generous space for visitors, with an appealing settee and table. Side doors open to wing decks that look down on the foredeck, where the 3,800-lb. VW Golf is parked on a lifting platform that's hoisted by a 2-ton hydraulic crane. A 14-foot New Zealand-built Stabi-Craft tender is stored on a rack above the car. (The supporting beams swing aside to provide a clear lift for the hydraulic hoist.) For simple water fun, Teddi and John can splash an 8-foot, folding Porta-Bote stored on the upper deck.

One of the newer voluntary yacht construction standards of the American Boat & Yacht Council requires a system that enables a crew member who has fallen into the water to climb back aboard without assistance. John and Teddi, aware that the high freeboard of the Coaster and the lack of a boarding or swim platform aft would make solo reboarding difficult, have installed gear that will go a long way toward meeting the ABYC standard. Hardware at each entry

gate permits the quick installation of a ladder that is stored on the starboard wall of the aft deck, and there's a handrail on the outside of the hull at each entry. *Teddi Bear* also carries a Lifesling on the aft deck.

Boarding the yacht from a marina float requires a long step up. If that is not possible, the easiest way to board is to step first to the rubrail and then over the bulwark. John said he's thinking about ways of installing a ladder that would fit into a niche below the deck, pull out, and fold down to make boarding easier and safer. If the docking situation allows, the transom gate off the swim platform is also an option.

DOWN, DOWN, DOWN

Next stop: the lowest level of *Teddi Bear*.

A doorway in the saloon opens to a stairway leading down to the bottom deck, where one finds a bedroom suite with a king-size bed, rows of drawers for storage, and a home-size closet. Here, we're below the water level, so there is no natural light. Some would regret the loss of view and sunlight, but John said he and Teddi like it because it is quiet and dark, especially when cruising in Alaska, where summer sun persists long beyond bedtime.

John said other Florida Bay Coasters have the master stateroom on the top deck, where the light and view are superb, but he declares they are happy to be different.



Because it's on the lowest deck, the master stateroom has no portlights. But plenty of lighting makes up the loss. The master head is to the right, and the entry to the boat shop and engine room is just visible on the left.

A doorway on a side wall opens into what John calls "the shop." It is that, but it also is control central for the boat, with a huge electrical switch panel and battery disconnect switches on one wall. The shop has space for parts and tools and neat stacks of rags Teddi uses to clean the engine room.

She told me she developed her engine room cleaning skills on their Krogen, where she scrubbed with rags and a bottle of 409 cleaner. We stepped through a watertight doorway into *Teddi Bear's* glistening engine compartment, and there was not a spot or drip in sight, nor was there any hint of the usual engine room aroma.

I use a 12mm wide-angle lens in boat photography. This is the only engine room I've encountered that was so large the camera could not see both engines simultaneously. I could stand straight and walk easily through the compartment; there was no clutter on the deck to trip over.

The Westerbeke 120hp diesels, painted the builder's traditional red, flank a pair of 7.6kW Westerbeke generators installed in white enclosures along the centerline of the boat. The Coaster has twin keels, one under each engine, and a heavy skeg protects each propeller. "This boat will sit on the bottom [on the keels], and we proved it one time," John said. After going aground, they deployed an anchor and waited for the tide to rise.

Back in the engine room, two things were noticeable in the array of equipment. One was the exclusive use of stainless steel pipe for all fuel and hydraulic lines. I asked John why he chose such an expensive alternative to the flexible hose found on most boats. He said he wanted to protect against leaks and the smell of fuel and that it was available at a good price in New Zealand.

The second eye-catcher was a large, insulated tank bristling with valves, gauges, and plumbing. It is the heart of the boat's heating system. The 100 gallons of antifreeze and water in the stainless steel tank can be heated electrically, or by the boat's 67,500-Btu Kabola furnace, or with heat from the engines and generators. Hot water circulates throughout the boat to blowers that provide thermostatically controlled heat to each living space.

When I checked, the temperature gauge read about 145°F. Domestic water also is heated in the tank via a separate heat exchanger. It is unlikely the circulating coolant could ever leak into the domestic water system, but John said he uses a nontoxic form of antifreeze, just in case. A temperature of 145° is too hot for use in a bath or galley, but I noticed a temperature-reducing valve in the system.

Teddi Bear also has zoned air conditioning. One of

the generators will carry the operating load of the two units, but it won't carry the load if both switch on simultaneously. A timing sensor prevents such an overload condition.

An engine room sensor flashes a warning to the helm if the ambient temperature reaches 135°. If the temperature hits 180, an automatic suppression system shuts down the engines, ventilation fans, and air intakes and then discharges extinguishing chemicals. The bank of 16 4D AGM batteries in the lazarette will deliver 800Ah of energy at 24 volts in being discharged to 50 percent of total capacity, enough to carry the electrical load on *Teddi Bear* three days. The batteries are recharged by engine-mounted 150-amp alternators while under way or by the generator when the boat lies at anchor for extended periods.

Significant insulation and location of the engine room deep in the belly of the boat, far from the saloon and pilothouse, make a quiet cruiser. Running through Colvos Passage at 6.6 knots and with the engines turning at 1300 rpm, my sound level meter measured 54 decibels on the A scale. At 1800 rpm and 8.1 knots, the meter displayed the same number.

I carried the meter to the middle deck and the saloon and found 62dBA. In the master stateroom, on the lower deck and separated from the engine room only by the shop area, the meter reading varied between 62 and 64dBA.

Excessive engine noise is the most exhausting part of long-distance cruising. It won't be a problem for John and Teddi.

The boat carries 3,000 gallons of fuel in epoxy-coated, integral steel tanks. At 7 knots the Westerbeke diesels burn a total of 5gph, giving her a range of about 3,500 miles.

Normally, *Teddi Bear* cruises at 7-1/2 knots. She has a top speed of 9-1/2 knots, John said.

To sustain long-distance cruising, the yacht carries 1,500 gallons of water and has an ECHOTec watermaker that produces 55gph. She does not have stabilizers, which might be desirable on ocean trips, but the Holzemers are not planning those long crossings. John also chose not to install the automatic corrosion control system often found on steel craft. Instead, he depends on a liberal use of sacrificial zincs along the hull and shafts. He also selected Marelon polymer composite through-hull fittings over the traditional bronze fixtures.

ABOUT THOSE COLORS

Choosing the hues for the exterior was a challenge. Teddi used watercolors to paint color schemes on full-page profile drawings of the boat. She showed me many

sheets, with a variety of hull and house colors and a huge assortment for accent paint.

They were pointed toward nontraditional colors by a friend who said, "All boats are blue or white. Do something else." After that hint, the paints Teddi applied to the line drawings began to show the greens and grays that finally were chosen. The samples were offered to many for review.

The color scheme that was ultimately selected "got the highest marks from everyone," Teddi said.

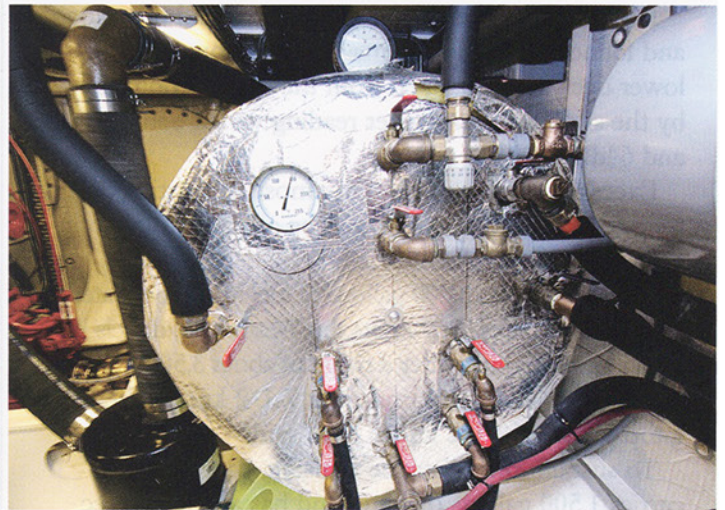
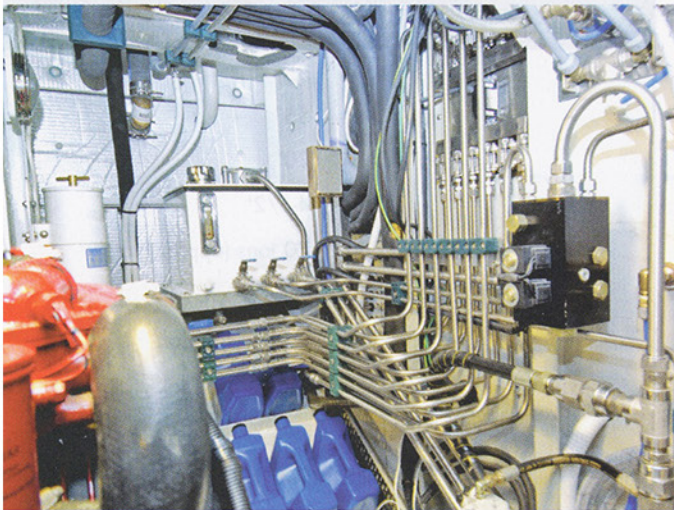
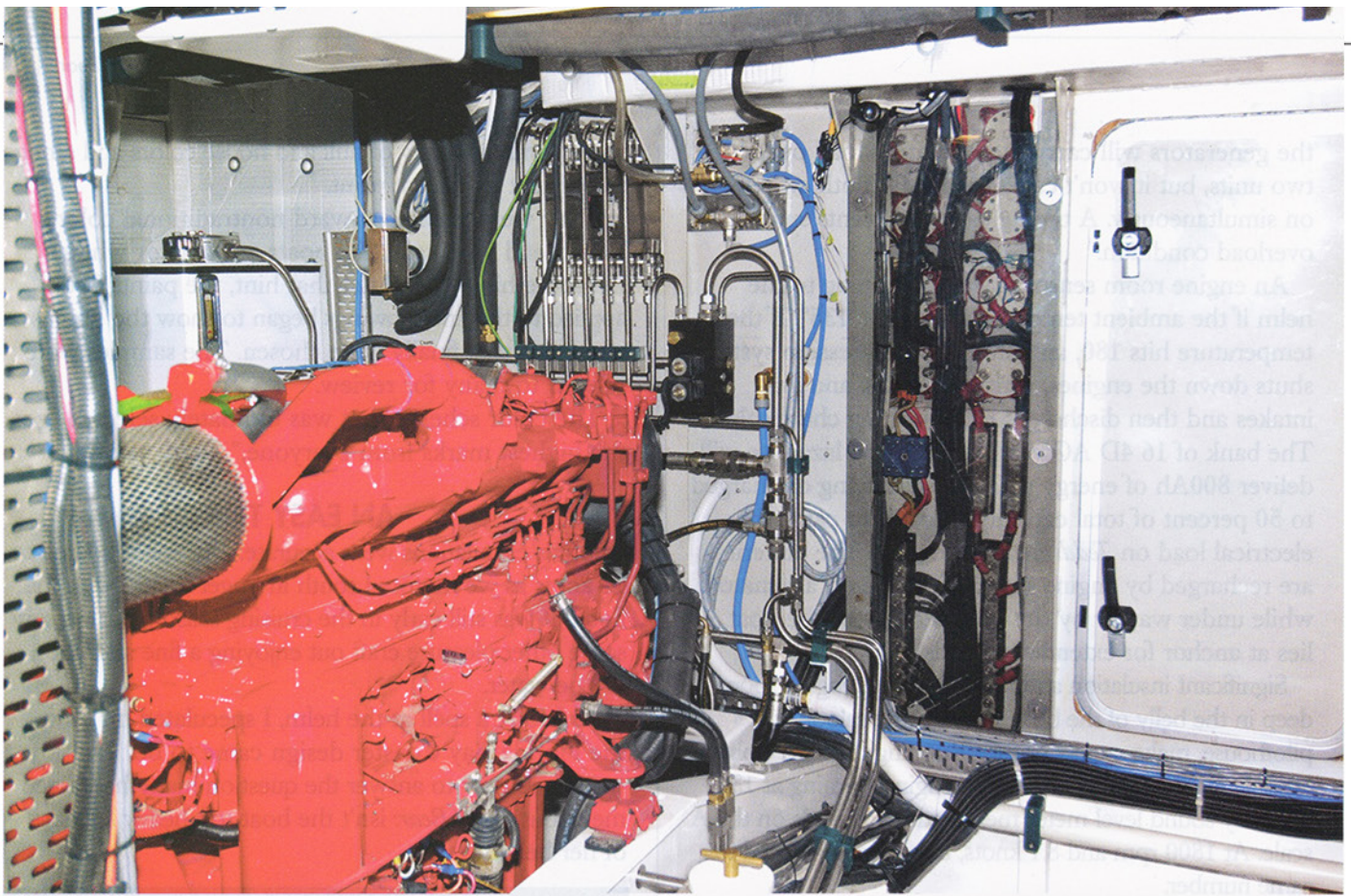
AN EASY TRIP

John's calculations were accurate. Our speed soared to 11 knots as we motored south in Puget Sound with the flood. It was still early in the cruising season, but we saw some other pleasure craft out enjoying a fine afternoon on the water.

As I took a spell at the helm, I speculated on how the Florida Bay Coaster design came to be. And I wondered how to answer the question many had asked me about *Teddi Bear*: isn't the boat top heavy because of her height?

TEDDI BEAR	
LOA	55'
LWL	55'
BEAM	20'
DRAFT	4-1/2'
DISPLACEMENT	70 tons (approximate)
BRIDGE CLEARANCE	19'
FUEL	3,000 U.S. gal.
WATER	1,500 U.S. gal.
GENERATORS	Two 7.6kW Westerbekes
ENGINES	Two 120hp Westerbekes
AIR CONDITIONING	Two 16,500-Btu units
HEAT	67,500-Btu Kabola
CRUISE SPEED	7-7.5 knots
RANGE AT CRUISE SPEED	3,500nm (at 7 knots)
DESIGNER	Benford Design Group benford.us; 410.745.3235
BUILDER	John and Teddi Holzemer; Johnson Yachts
YEAR BUILT	2007
INTERIOR DESIGNER	Teddi Holzemer

For more on Florida Bay Coasters, visit floridabaycoasters.com.



Top: The port engine and an array of stainless steel hydraulic piping sit just inside the engine room's watertight door. Above left: The Holzemers selected stainless steel for handling diesel fuel and hydraulic fluids. The artful array of piping shows the skill of the building team. Above right: Wrapped with insulation and bristling with pipes and valves, this tank holds 100 gallons of a water-antifreeze mix that heats the boat and the domestic water supply. Heat sources include the engines and generators, a Kabola furnace, and electric immersion heaters.

Back home, I used the questions as an excuse to call Jay Benford. Although he's lived and worked on the Chesapeake in St. Michaels, Maryland, for 24 years, he has strong Northwest roots. He worked in Seattle for eight years as a designer and project manager for Foss, the tugboat company, and then spent another 10 years working in Friday Harbor, on San Juan Island.

I've always liked Benford boats. They are not cast from the usual mold. One of the few highlights of one unhappy year I spent as a failed boat salesman long ago was the opportunity to represent, drive, and sell a Benford boat, a 32-footer called *Lady Bug*. She was a charmer, and I sold her to a guy who owned a tavern. It's difficult to describe Benford's eclectic style. He



has designed all kinds of floating craft, from small rowing boats to tugs, barges, ferries, and yachts. Looking around on the Internet, I found an apt description that appears in Danny Greene's *Cruising Sailboat Kinetics*: "The designs of Jay R. Benford are usually easy to recognize but difficult to describe precisely. They definitely have a traditional look about them yet don't resemble any particular type of traditional craft. Often they look like caricatures of boats—the kind of boats you see in children's books.

"No insult is intended. On the contrary, Benford's boats all seem to have some sort of magical quality, a unique character all their own that defies definition."

The Florida Bay Coaster came to life about 20 years ago when Reuben Trane asked Benford to design a boat that could carry a vehicle. The first Coaster, a 50-footer with an 18-foot beam, was launched in 1987. Soon, there was a 65 (which musician Billy Joel owned for a while).

Trane, who now builds and markets the fast Island Pilot 435 and who is working to produce a diesel-electric yacht fitted with solar panels and batteries,



Teddi switches on an AC pump at the huge electrical control panel in the boat shop, outside the engine room. Battery disconnect switches also are located here.

constructed three 45-foot Florida Bay Coasters and three 50s, Benford said.

Fourteen Coasters have been built. A 38-1/2-foot aluminum version is under construction in Australia. Only the first three and *Teddi Bear* were designed to carry a vehicle. Considering Trane's assignment to build a yacht capable of carrying a car, the design is not radical, despite its bulk. It is a mini freighter and so it looks like one. "I referred to it as a personal freighter," Benford said.



Top and above: Watching *Teddi Bear* under way, it's clear why she was a showstopper at Trawler Fest in Anacortes. No doubt she will continue to turn heads.

And, no, Coasters are not top heavy, and they're not going to roll over in a blow. "She's not tall compared to her beam," Benford said. "The fact that she's beamy means she can carry that height with comfort. These boats are stable.

"For a 55, she has a huge amount of room for living aboard," he added. "She is perfectly suited to cruising the Inside Passage or living aboard."

Right now, the waters of the Inside Passage in British Columbia and Southeast Alaska are enough to keep the Holzemers content. They haven't stopped dreaming, though.

"We're thinking of the East Coast and the ICW, maybe in this boat, maybe in another," John said. "There are lots of choices and lots of opportunities." 