

May 1, 2001

Pacific Seacraft 34 and 37

These Bill Crealock-designed 'Voyagemakers' have a reasonable turn of speed thanks to moderate displacement and a split underbody. Relatively narrow beam makes for a seakindly motion, but reduces interior accommodations.

Originally known as the Crealock 34 and 37, this duo can be thought of as performance cruisers plotted somewhere on the continuum between heavy displacement cruisers and light displacement racers. Both have a seakindly motion and a good turn of speed. Now known as Pacific Seacraft Voyagemakers, they are part of a five-boat line ranging in size from 34 to 44 feet. The 37, introduced in 1980, was followed in 1984 by the 34. In this review we wanted to see how the 34 stacks up against its larger stable mate; for more specific information on the 37 see our earlier review of it.

The Company

Pacific Seacraft was founded in 1976 by Henry Morschladt and Mike Howarth, who first produced 25-foot daysailers. Like many boatbuilders, the company suffered during the industry downturn of the 1980s, and the business was sold to Singmarine Industries, Ltd., of Hong Kong. It has been owned by an individual investor since 1998.



The Pacific Seacraft 34 performs similarly to the 37; indeed, their D/L and SA/D ratios are quite close.

The company now is managed by Don Kohlmann, a veteran America's Cup racer and former owner of Ericson Yachts. He said that 1,850 boats have been built and that the current annual production level is "40 to 50 boats." In addition to Pacific Seacraft models, the company also builds the Flicka and Dana, seaworthy 20- and 24-foot sailboats, and the 38T Fast Trawler.

Design

Designer Bill Crealock's knowledge of sailing goes well beyond the theoretical. Following graduation with a degree in naval architecture from Glasgow University in Scotland, he spent eight years cruising the Atlantic and Pacific oceans aboard sailing yachts. He also served as sailing master on a 105-foot schooner undertaking a scientific expedition for the US Navy.

Eventually settling down on the California coast in 1958, he has since designed boats ranging in size from dinghies to a 100-foot catamaran. His clients have included Excalibur, Islander, Columbia, Westsail and Cabo Rico.

"I estimate that about 8,000 boats have been built to these designs," he said.

The Pacific Seacraft 34 and 37 are notable for their clean lines, traditional, ocean cruiser appearance, and canoe sterns. In profile, both have gentle sheer lines and fairly low freeboard. The coachroofs are flat and the bronze opening portlights dominate the cabin sides. Both designs are very soft on the eyes.

"In the 37, I had the luxury of drawing a boat not for a client but to represent what I would like for myself," Crealock said. "It had to be nimble for local sailing but able to make reasonably fast ocean passages in safety and comfort. That meant that, above all, it had to be well balanced, and we devoted more time to that than any other aspect of the plan.

“I have been studying balance, which I consider to be the most important element of design, since I began my career. The [early 1970s] Excalibur 26 was the first production boat in which I was able to attempt to produce an easily sailed boat.

“I believe that there is a great difference between speed ‘round the buoys and speed on an ocean passage with a crew consisting, perhaps, of an undersized, emaciated skipper and a mildly mutinous spouse. That’s when the boat must take care of the crew.”

The keels are long cruising fins integrated with a skeg on which the rudder is hung. This makes for a more maneuverable boat than a full keel or a full keel boat with cutaway forefoot and “Brewer bite,” that is, a chunk removed from the keel forward of the rudder.

The canoe stern figures prominently in the design scheme, and is more pointed than the wider, more rounded sterns found on many Taiwan-built double-enders.

“A canoe stern, if carefully designed and given sufficient overhang,” said Crealock, “can be efficient and attractive. When the going gets really tough your stern will probably have to serve as your bow. The combination of a canoe stern, which presents less area to the sea, and high-lift skeg reduces the chance of a broach when sailing downwind in heavy seas.”

“The 34 aimed at the same overall qualities as the 37, but proportionally was given a little more volume to take care of the extra gear which has become standard. Both were aimed at the sailor who knew that if one day he dreamed of cruising afar he had a boat to take him anywhere.”

The boats’ displacement/length (D/L) and sail area/displacement (SA/D) ratios are nearly identical. The 37’s D/L is 334.13; the 34’s 333.19. The 37’s SA/D is 15.66; the 34’s 15.12.

“Our boats look heavy on the D/Ls for two reasons,” Kohlmann said. “The overhangs are fairly long so the waterline appears to be short, but each pick up waterline quickly as they begin to move through the water. If we add the staysail areas the SA/D on the 34 becomes 18.38; the 37, 19.18.

“A second point is that our displacement is calculated to be ‘half load’—half fuel and water, sails and store for a crew of four.”

Crealock and Kohlmann take pride in an award made some years ago by Fortune magazine that, along with the F-15 fighter plane, listed the Crealock 37 as considered one of the 100 best products made in the US. It was the only sailboat on the list.

The most recent models to come off the production line are referred to as Voyagemakers. Standard equipment now includes Harken roller furling, a singlehander’s package, B&G instruments, refrigeration, Ullman sails, Corian countertops and a Force 10 stove with oven and broiler.

Construction

The 34 and 37 have similar laminate schedules. Hulls are solid fiberglass. Following application of an ISO-NPG gelcoat, a 3-ounce layer of chopped strand mat is wetted out with vinylester resin to prevent blistering. Kohlmann said that chopped strand eliminates "the binder in rolled mat that has been identified as a contributor of water-solubles to the gelcoat/skin interface," a potential cause of blisters.

This layer is followed by 2415 bi-axial roving (24-ounce roving attached to 1.5-ounce mat) laminated with isophthalic polyester resin. Extra layers are added to the chainplate and keel attachment areas, at the rudderstock, and on the centerline. Hull thickness at the bottom is 7/8".

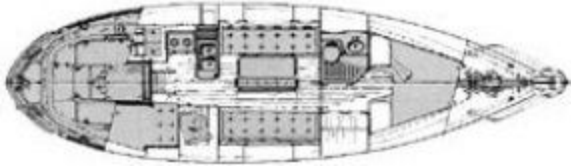
A full-length interior pan is bonded to the hull with bi-axial roving. This structure provides stiffness to the hull and incorporates foundations for berths and other interior "furniture." There are recesses molded in to accept bulkheads. Bulkheads, cabinetry and shelving are all bonded to the hull so, "there are no floating interior components," Kohlmann said.

We've never been keen on molded pan interiors because they tend to condense moisture, make access to parts of the hull difficult, make for a noisier boat, and severely limit customization, but Pacific Seacraft does a better job with pans than most production builders. Indeed, Pacific Sea-craft boats are probably the most expensive boats one can buy with a molded pan interior.

The tops of the bulkheads are bonded to the underside of the deck with bi-axial roving. To further strengthen the bulkheads, a teak beam is installed along the top of the bulkhead; it is secured with carriage bolts through the beams, tabbing, and the deck. The construction method results in a unitized structure that is unlikely to flex under heavy load.

The hull-deck joint is at the 4" tall bulwark. The 3/8" deck flange overlays the inward oriented 5/16" hull flange and the two are bedded in 3M 5200® and secured with 1/4" stainless steel bolts and backing plates located on 4" centers. Additional structural support is provided by a 13/16" teak caprail bedded in polyurethane and fastened with #10 stainless steel screws on 8" centers. We doubt this joint will leak or deteriorate except in the event of a heavy collision.

The deck is laminated with mat and bi-axial roving and cored with Baltex AL600 balsa core. Areas in which hardware will be mounted are cored with marine grade plywood in place of balsa. Winches, the 31" tall stanchions and other deck hardware are installed over predrilled holes that are sealed with epoxy before the bolts are pushed through; this helps prevent water from penetrating the lamination. All hardware is installed with stainless steel backing plates.



The chainplates are mounted outside the hull for easy inspection. The exterior plates are made of 1/4" x 2" type 304 stainless steel fastened with carriage bolts to 1/8" thick stainless steel plates bedded on the hull interior. Their placement outboard makes for a wider staying base, which is stronger but makes for wider sheeting angles that affect pointing ability. But because most other modern boats of this size generally have a foot or so more beam, the Crealocks end up with about the same sheeting angles as a beamier boat with inboard chainplates.

The lead keel is fastened to a solid fiberglass stub and bedded in epoxy. Stainless steel backing plates bedded in epoxy are placed over each keel bolt, which is secured with nuts locked in epoxy.

The skeg extends below the rudder to protect against damage incurred during grounding or collision with a submerged object. Protection for the propeller and rudder is provided by a steel plate molded into the leading edge of the solid fiberglass skeg. The bottom of the stainless steel rudderstock is secured by a manganese bronze gudgeon through-bolted to the skeg.

Though expensive, we think the company's production process yields some of the strongest boats in the industry.

On Deck

The deck layout and hardware also reflect the boat's bluewater heritage.

The deck's 18"-wide walkways are easily navigable because the shrouds are attached to outboard chainplates. Combined with long handrails and high lifelines, it is easy to have one hand on the boat in heavy seas.

The cockpit on the 37-footer is significantly larger and more comfortable than its little sister. The cockpit on the 34 is a near oval, and seats are 6' 5" long; seats on the 37 are 8' 10". Seats are 16" wide and have ergonomic, outward-angled, 12" backrests; however, space for legs and feet is at a premium because the footwell is only 28" wide. We found the arched helm seat on the 34 more comfortable than the flat seat on the 37.

Both boats have storage in the stern for two propane tanks and a small compartment for a stern anchor and rode. Lazarettes add storage for fenders, dock gear and small sails.

Single-spreader LeFiell aluminum masts are finished with linear polyurethane paint rather than anodizing, which has become less popular due to EPA restrictions. The rig on the 37 is supported by 9/32" 1 x 19 stainless steel wire, the 34 by 1/4" 1 x 19 wire. Running backstays are standard, necessitated by the inner forestay.

The headstay and inner forestay are fitted with Harken furlers. Six Harken two-speed self-tailing winches manage halyards and sheets led aft to Spinlock rope clutches. Early models had winches mounted on the mast; we prefer the single-handers package, with all running rigging led to the cockpit. This arrangement will be much appreciated when forced to reef in a heavy sea.

The mainsheet traveler is equipped with a Harken ball bearing traveler.

Accommodations

The interior layouts are set up for offshore and are attractive. The common denominators are light flowing in through tempered glass to finely crafted and varnished teak woodwork accented by smooth white Formica® and Corian® surfaces. The feeling of openness is enhanced by 6' 4" inches of headroom in the saloon.

The 37 has significantly larger living spaces because interior volume increases exponentially with length.

The saloon on the 37 measures 14' 9" and is 8' 8" wide, compared to the narrower 10' 10" long saloon on the 34.

The comparatively narrow beams of these boats, plus their canoe sterns, make for interiors smaller than those on the floating condominiums marketed by the industry giants. Competitors offer boats 18"-24" wider and with significantly more volume aft. This additional space allows them to build a second enclosed stateroom, and, in some cases, a second head. The tradeoff—and there are always tradeoffs—is a less seakindly motion.

The 37 sleeps six in comfort, the 34 four to six depending upon their size. Only the forward stateroom on either boat, however, is enclosed by a door.

Rather than a conventional V-berth, the 37 has a 6' 6" long by 5' 11" wide double berth offset to starboard, and a built-in chair with thick foam cushions to port. If one wishes, the chair can be eliminated and the size of the berth increased, an option we'd consider since the 22" wide seat is too narrow for the average adult. The 34 has a regular V-berth with an insert that creates a 78" long by 84" wide queen-size berth.

Quarterberths located in the stern of both boats are located aft of the chart tables. Though the space on the 34 is more than 7' long, it is only 34" wide and 20" high. Though billed as a double berth, it's really too tight for two adults. And, because the pillow area doubles as a seat for the navigator, this area may best be used for storage when not being used as a sea berth.

The quarterberth on the 37 is more spacious. In addition to being 8" wider, it is taller and is located aft of the navigator's fixed seat. It's still a tight fit for two adults. A privacy curtain would be an excellent addition on both boats.



The galleys are designed and equipped to cook a Christmas goose. Features include hot and cold pressure water and gimbaled Force 10 stainless steel two-burner propane stove with oven and broiler. Newer boats are equipped with an 8 cubic foot SeaFrost BD3 12-volt refrigerator.

The optional \$840 teak storage unit located over the sink interferes with sight lines but, especially on the 34, it adds significant storage space.

In the 37, the 6' 4" L-shaped dinette converts to a 50"-wide double berth. To port is a similarly sized 24"-wide settee that, if outfitted with lee cloths, could double as a sea berth.

By comparison, the 34 has 6' 6" settees to port and starboard; the port settee converts to a 48"-wide double berth. The dining table folds out of the way on the forward bulkhead.

Crealock located the water, fuel and waste tanks in the bow and stern, and amidships under the teak and holly cabin sole. While one normally doesn't want excess weight in the ends, it hardly can be avoided in a smaller cruising boat.

The heads in each boat are nearly identical, though the larger boat has a compartment that measures 60" on the diagonal. Neither boat has a shower stall, but the inconvenience will be of little consequence to cruisers in warm climates.

The engine compartment has 360-degree access to the Yanmar diesel—that's rarely seen. The companionway cover lifts to access the front of the engine; a removable panel in the cockpit sole provides access to the aft end of the engine and steering gear in a space large enough for a 6-footer.

Performance

Our test boat was a 10-year-old 34 that we sailed on the north end of Puget Sound in relatively flat water and winds that varied from 8-12 knots. It was outfitted with its original Dacron sails; the quarter berth and lazarettes were filled with spare sails and gear.

While we expect most any boat to sail close to its designed speed in 10-15 knots of breeze, it's always interesting to see how a boat performs in just 5-10 knots. If it has any performance in its blood, the boat will still move. In less than 5 knots of wind, odds are most of us will be motoring or listening to slatting sails.

The 34's dimensions and performance ratios are so close to the 37 that she appears to be proportionately faster than her big sister. Polar diagrams provided by US Sailing indicate that VMG (velocity made good) is 3.23 knots on a beat in 8 knots of wind, and 3.75 when wind speed increases to 10 knots. These predictions also indicate that the boat sails best on a broad reach at 116° of true wind in 8 knots of wind, and 140° in 10 knots.

We equaled or exceeded those predictions without a great deal of effort. The 34 easily sailed to weather within 50°- 60° of the apparent wind, moving smoothly at 4.5-5 knots with a Yankee, staysail and full main. At approximately 70° to the apparent wind she buried her shoulder and surged forward at 5.2-5.5 knots. Footing off, she maintained the same speed until we sailed lower than 120°, when she decelerated to 3.5 knots. A cruising spinnaker will improve performance.

The 34 powers smoothly and quietly. With the Yanmar 35-hp. diesel running between 1800-2400 RPM, she moves at 6-6.5. knots with an 11" x 17" three-blade propeller, consuming only 6/10 of a gallon of fuel per hour. She's nimble under power, and turns more quickly in tight quarters than a traditional full-keel cruiser.

Pricing/Warranty

The 37-foot Voyagemaker has a sticker price of \$228,000; the 34 is priced at \$199,000. Well-maintained used boats tend to maintain high resale values. At this writing, a 10-year-old 37 is on the market at \$174,900; a 1992 34-footer for \$142,500.

Pacific Seacraft warrants that it will repair or replace any part it manufactures, as well as associated labor costs, for a period of two years from date of sale. It extends coverage for the repair of gelcoat damage caused by osmotic blisters for 10 years, based on a depreciation schedule.

Conclusion

These boats record 150-mile days in comfort in typical ocean conditions.

The reality of long-distance cruising is that one spends most of the time in the cockpit under sail, a large percentage of time belowdecks eating and sleeping, and a small percentage of time in the head. Considering those uses, either of these boats will meet the needs of the informed buyer.

The 34 is an excellent daysailer or distance cruiser suitable for four adults or a couple and two children. The cockpit is too small to seat more than four adults comfortably. However, as Crealock says, a small cockpit is a good thing if pooped.

The aft berth is most suitable as a single sea berth and storage area. The head is smallish.

By comparison, the 37's cockpit accommodates six, as will its sleeping quarters. The cook will appreciate the larger galley, and the navigator can perform his chores without fear of sitting on a sleeping crew's head.

Any buyer considering purchase of a new Pacific Seacraft yacht will face a difficult decision because only \$30,000 separates the price of the two. Considering an 8% interest rate on a 15-year loan, that translates to a monthly payment of \$286.

A more difficult decision could be choosing between buying a four- to six-year-old 37 for \$190,000-\$200,000, or a new 34 for \$200,000.

It's a tough choice, but we'd take the used 37.