just about everyone with an interest in cruising motorboats has heard of Robert Beebe and his classic book, *Voyaging Under Power*. Considered by many to be the best book on the subject, there have been three editions printed since it first appeared in 1975.

The culmination of Beebe's research into passagemaking was *Passagemaker*, a strong 50 foot wood ocean motorboat, on which Beebe and his wife, Linford, went three quarters of the way around the world—proving once and for all just how comfortable and capable a power cruising boat could be.

Beebe eventually sold *Passagemaker*, yet he remained involved in yacht design until his death in 1988. *Passagemaker* has changed hands a few times since Beebe was at the helm, but she is still going strong after 33 years at sea.

We caught up with *Passagemaker* in Daytona Beach, Florida, where she had just returned the day before from a 2,700 mile trip up and down the eastern half of North America. Don Sanders and his wife, Valerie, were getting comfortably settled back in at their winter homebase, but the boat looked quite ready to take off for another long voyage. That's the way it is with a proper yacht—everything aboard has its place and the boat remains in a continuous state of readiness.

Don Sanders purchased *Passagemaker* ten years ago, having made the switch from sailboats like many of us. He actually got into boating later in life, at age 40, but he's owned some serious cruising sailboats prior to becoming owner of this classic. His last sailboat was the 56-foot Bill Garden ketch, *Haiku*, on which he lived and cruised aboard after an early retirement from the corporate world.

Don recalls reading the original *Voyaging Under Power* in 1975, which subtly started a subliminal shift in his thinking towards the power cruising philosophy, even as he continued to sail around the Caribbean and down to South American waters. Don's transformation from sail was completed when he happened to be at the right place at the right time and *Passagemaker* came on the market.

When he took possession, Don decided to put her back to original condition and layout, so he spent a fair amount of time removing, refitting, and restoring the equipment and gear aboard her. He junked the junk sailing rig, built a new 28 foot mizzen mast, added back the flopperstopper rig that had worked so well for Beebe, and returned the interior to its most successful layout, yet with more modern systems.

The boat we visited was much like Beebe's original boat, only better—Don learned a thing or two from his own adventures (from Labrador to French Guiana), and there have been more than a few advances in technology during the past thirty years.

**Construction Details**

A lot has already been written about the construction of *Passagemaker*, but let's review some of the critical details. The boat is 50' long, with a LWL of 46'6", and a beam of 15 feet. Fully loaded with fuel, water, and stores, she weighs 88,000 lbs. Don reports her true draft is 6 feet when loaded.

With an A/B ratio close to 2:1, *Passagemaker* is decidedly low profile compared to many modern trawlers and ocean motorboats. This low profile results in noticeably less windage felt aboard, as the boat sits quietly while the surrounding boats were tugging at their lines and bobbing about from the strong autumn northerlies in Daytona Beach.

Her wood hull is made of triple-laminated chengal frames on 12" centers. Her 1-3/4" teak planking is fastened with 3/8" copper rivets. Chengal, which is a very hard wood, is also used for all stringers and support members. Decks are mahogany plywood, sheathed in epoxy and dynel cloth.

This boat is heavily built. At the rubrail, for example, the boat is a solid 12" thick-6" of hull and 6" of rubrail.
Passagemaker hauled in South America. Her full hull form and long, straight keel are critical passagemaking design elements.

The outside of the hull is covered by Cascover, an English product developed some years back by Lester Lovell of Southhampton. The nylon cloth sheathing adheres quite well to the wood hull, using a proprietary adhesive similar to resorcinol glue. Cascover is water-permeable and allows the hull to swell and work in a seaway. But worms and other damaging elements are held at bay. The proof is that the hull is all original and still good as new after thirty years. But enough of this background—let’s go aboard Passagemaker!

On Deck

There are two midship gates in the lifelines, port and starboard. The 39” high triple lifelines extend from the bow back to the cockpit area, and the relatively narrow side decks (18”-22”) allow you to use both hands for holding on while moving forward or aft.

The foredeck is 17 feet long, and uncluttered except for bow and deck storage of the boat’s four anchors. The anchors on most serious cruising boats are large, and Passagemaker’s anchoring gear is no exception. With a 115 VAC Lofrans windlass to handle the ground tackle, the plow and. Bruce are always ready in bow rollers.

Two large cleats are located 12 feet back from the bow—perfect for springlines and additional bow lines, along with the bow sampson post. There are two secure deck boxes just forward of the galley deckhouse; three LPG tanks are stored in one box, lines are stored in the other.

Between the deck boxes is the main mast, with a tabernacle at deck level for lowering the mast for canals and bridges. Beebe tried to use steadying sails on this mast, but it was a hopeless experiment. Don Sanders has not used them either, especially since his flopperstopper rig works a zillion times better.

One of the truck bumper winches used to handle the paravane system, firmly mounted on aft deck.
Two opening hatches on the foredeck open into the master stateroom. Overall, an uncluttered foredeck.

**Aft Deck**

Just aft of the pilothouse is a small 4 foot wide cockpit well that allows the crew to be outside but remain well-protected. A small step on each side of the cockpit is necessary to get in or out of the cockpit, and the area is partially covered by the roof of the pilothouse.

A step up from the side deck past this cockpit well is the aft deck, where much of the ship’s stuff is stored. A hard dinghy is stored on the port side, there is a liferaft canister mounted to the deck, two more deck boxes, large fenders and a couple of outboards. The mizzen mast and boom are located here, as are the components of the flopperstopper rig. To get aboard the boat from the swim platform requires a climb up a ladder to this aft deck.

**A Flopperstopper Rig That Works**

Okay, we’ve all heard horror stories about para-vanes, and how difficult they are to use. So when Don chose to refit the F/S gear while restoring *Passagemakerto* her original condition, he spent a lot of time thinking about how to improve the operation of the gear. Beebe had written about problems in retrieving the vanes, and Carl Jergens (the previous owner) complained about getting the poles back inboard.

Wide spreader targets easily capture and contain F/S poles (top). Aft deck is home for cruising gear. Notice deep secure cockpit well, partially covered by pilothouse roof.
Don studied commercial fishing boats and shrimpers in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida for ideas to solve these problems.

What he came up with has worked well for ten years, allowing single handed operation of the F/S rig in all conditions and locations. Let's take a look...

When Don built a new mizzen mast for the boat, he increased the size of the spreader-height targets that catch the 20-foot F/S poles as they come up to vertical. As can be seen in the photographs, the poles are easily made captive as they approach the vertical stored position. This eliminated the problem Jergens experienced.

The solution to the vane retrieval problem was even more clever. Don purchased two 12 VDC automotive truck bumper winches, each rated at 8,000 lb. pulling capacity. He installed one on each side of the aft deck, aligned with one of the 20-foot poles. The winches are electrically controlled from a pair of handheld controls on a long cable, so the person can operate the control switches as he/she maneuvers around the boat deck.

Don runs wire cable from each paravane (Kolstrand #300 units, each weighing about 45 lbs.) through a pulley block at the top of each pole and down to another pulley block at the base of the pole, then across to the winch drum. Using the remote in one hand, and guiding the vane with the other hand, Don can electrically lift each vane right up to the top of its pole. Given the gearing within the winches, the process is slow, but easily controlled. He does this before setting the poles when under way.

Just about the time the two vanes start rattling around at the top of the poles, Don knows it is time to deploy the F/S equipment. He eases the poles out to their deployed position, then uses the winch controls once again to lower the vanes into the water. A one person job. Once Passagemaker leaves the dock, they find they leave the poles out, with the vanes either at the top of the poles or in the water.

Don reverses the procedure to retrieve the vanes. He brings them back aboard with complete control, since the winches and Don work together until the vanes are back on their deck chocks. The 8,000 lb. pulling power of the winch is enormous, easily bringing the vanes up from their normally deployed/maximum resistance position. Don once used the winches to bring up a vane that caught in a drift net. (Once lifted clear of the water, the net just fell off the vane...lucky.)

Another noteworthy benefit of the winch system arrangement is that Don can vary the depth of the vanes underwater. This is helpful when coining into shallow water as in an inlet. Even if the seas are rough enough to pull a vane that is only 4 feet deep clear of the water, it jumps right back in and goes back to work. And coining into port during a really nasty blow, this can be quite helpful to say the least—especially since the vanes continue to work even when...
Galley is U-shaped, with raised dinette opposite. 4-burner stove and cold plate refrigeration add modern convenience to a traditionally simple vessel.

View outside from dinette is excellent (top). Sliding 1/2-inch glass windows have foolproof locking arrangement for total security and offshore safety (right).

its way to the vane. This creates a shock absorber that is effective as the vane is pulled through the water, creating about 6" of rope stretch when the vanes are deployed at cruising speed.

Despite all this extra rigging, when one of the vane's wires was damaged while out cruising, Don replaced the entire wire cable with regular nylon rope. Using a full seven tucks in all splices, Don reports the system has performed splendidly for a couple of years with minimal stretch—and it doesn't require a shock absorber.

He also told us the vanes swim around a lot at anchor, but still perform well enough at reducing roll that he has never felt the need for special anchoring stabilizers.

Beebe's book, you recall the importance Mr. Beebe placed on the pilothouse. Not much has changed here, and the boat is mostly original. Sure, the electronics have been updated, but the overall details of the pilothouse are remarkably original. A hatch and curtain were added to reduce stray light from the galley and dinette area, helping onwatch night vision.

Visibility is excellent in all directions. Headroom averages 6'6", and there is a nice big settee for comfortable seating while under way. Most of the windows and ports open for ventilation in warm weather.

(Many of the windows on Passagemaker slide open, using an idiotproof latch/lock that is simplicity itself. All glass on the boat is 1/2" armor-plate. All opening ports are also 1/2" armorplate glass, and use an ingenious method for keeping them open or watertight. See the photos for details.)

A hatch in the sole of the pilothouse lifts for easy access and/or inspection of the Holy Place. A ladder takes you right down to the side of the Ford diesel, but the visibility through the hatch is generally good enough for the requisite hourly inspections. (As Valerie explained the ritual, the hourly check is to "look, listen, and smell.")

The steering system used in Passagemaker is original, and quite unique from hydraulic or cable steering options found in more modern
boats. A chain runs over a sprocket on the helm wheel, and also connects down at the foot of the port side of the pilothouse, where it turns a sprocket mounted on a solid steel shaft that is well supported in pillow blocks. The shaft disappears aft, actually traveling through the aft head compartment (but up out of the way), before it reappears in the aft cabin. The shaft continues to run aft along the aft cabin’s overhead on the port side. The shaft (supported by pillow blocks and with several universal joints to allow the shaft to follow the curve of the hull) ends at the stern, where it is connected directly to an automotive steering gear box.

As the shaft turns in the steering box, it moves a 6-inch arm on the other end of the steering box that is linked via solid connecting rod to an arm on the rudder shaft quadrant. Since the top of the rudder shaft enters the boat in the aft cabin about 6 feet above the cabin sole, this mechanical linkage is up out of the way, but still visible for easy inspection. Don reports it is totally original, only needing grease twice in ten years.

Don is very pleased with this mechanical steering gear. There is little to wear, and the linkage transmits "feel" from the massive rudder to the wheel. And the chain in the pilothouse is perfect for installing an autopilot. In fact, Passagemaker’s autopilot is original. (Apparently this steering arrangement worked even better than expected, as Beebe later needed full dimensions to recreate the system for another client years later.)

The front surface of the pilothouse is covered in green chalkboard material. Don and Valerie find this gets used all the time, to record depths, tide information, VHF channels, and I suppose even as a reminder to get milk. It is used daily.

As you can see from the photos, the interior of the pilothouse, and the boat in general, isn’t the varnished teak yacht finish some of us are used to, but totally in keeping with a true bluewater motorboat. Passagemaker has two GPS units, LORAN, and radar. She also is equipped with two VHF radios, SEA 222 SSB, and EPIRB.

**Galley/Dinette**

A couple of steps down from the pilothouse is the cooking and eating area of the boat. A U-shaped galley is located on the starboard side of the boat, with an 18” raised dinette opposite. Visibility out the windows is great when you are seated at the dinette.

There is abundant storage for long and short term provisions, and the galley is sized right for cooking offshore or full time living aboard. There
are two refrigeration units (Don loves ice cream), and the propane stove/oven is connected to three 20 lb. LPG tanks. So self sufficient are her essential systems that Don once cruised for nine months before visiting a marina dock for supplies—he didn’t even need fuel!

Up Forward

Going forward from the galley and dinette, one passes a full head on the port side of the boat, with an enclosed shower compartment opposite. The head is big for an older boat, and everything is in its place. The substantial hull construction is clearly visible in the large head. Separate shower stall is located across from head compartment.
View of cockpit from aft deck. Notice coaming in doorway into pilothouse, and the sliding hatch access to aft cabin. Cockpit box used to hold ice, before modern refrigeration was installed.

can be readily seen in the head compartment, with massive butt blocks and frames visible. You’ll also notice the wiring—all wiring on Passagemaker is exposed and painted, just like you’ll find aboard a naval vessel. Beebe spent considerable time in the U.S. Navy—Don told us that naval officers he meets while in port always feel right at home when they come aboard for a tour. The light switches are original too, and decidedly British—up is off, down is on.

Master Stateroom
The master cabin aboard Passagemaker is forward, with two opening hatches overhead. The master berth is pullman-style on the port side, with another hinged berth that folds against the hull opposite. The master berth is relatively narrow (43" wide), and both Don and Valerie wish it were wider, although they find it is incredibly peaceful and quiet there when under way. The hull is very well insulated. (Love that thick wood hull!).

There are small drawers and lockers located throughout the master cabin, although this kind of cruising boat will demand more creative management of stuff than today’s triple-decked trawlers. There is actually plenty of room, but you’ll still need to watch those two dozen sweaters and twenty pairs of deck shoes!

Passagemaker has a small office located in the forward area of this cabin. Don’s Macintosh computer system is located here (no laptop, but full size computer equip-
Aft Cabin
Back out into the cockpit, there is an aft-facing sliding hatch that opens into the huge aft cabin. This part of the boat has undergone many variations during the last thirty years, and Beebe was never really satisfied with it, but the present arrangement is most livable—at least to Don and Valerie.

At the base of the ladder under the hatch, there is 7’ headroom in the standing area of this cabin. A drawing table is on one side, with the boat’s second head compartment opposite, port side. The rear section of the cabin is raised, and there are two long settees and two pilot berths located here, with a fixed table in the center. Shelves and lockers are everywhere, and those wonderfully large (28” long by 13” high) opening ports allow considerable ventilation for comfort and mildew-free living. (These windows can be left in the open position in almost all conditions, even torrential rainstorms. I just love the simplicity of the windows, which are all 1/2” bulletproof glass.)

Holy Place
A small door on the aft cabin bulkhead is a second entry option into Passage-maker’s engine room. The entire philosophy of long distance voyaging under power is embodied in this compartment. Passage-maker is powered by a single Ford 6 cylinder diesel engine. This is her second engine, converted for marine use by Nor’East Ford in Massachusetts. It has 2,700 hours on it, and still looks in new condition. Don replaced the original engine, a Ford 330 Thornycroft 6 cylinder, because it was getting difficult to locate parts. He told us...
Looking aft in engine room. Door to the right of the Northern Lights genset opens into aft cabin. There is an impressive 5’4” headroom in the engine room.

Robert Beebe
John I. Thornycroft & Sons

1963
50’
46’6”
15’
6’
39.3 long tons (Fully loaded)
5,000 lbs. lead
1-3/4” Teak planking on laminated Chengal frames

Large rudder delivers excellent control in slow speed maneuvering.

Note massive rudder shoe.
checked from the pilothouse. As for performance, *Passagemaker* averages 3.3 nautical miles per gallon, and gets 2.25 GPH at 7.8 knots @ 1,750 rpm.

Don installed an 8kW Northern Lights generator in the engine room, to assist the main engine in charging duties. The Ford diesel turns an AutoGen 115 VAC cruising generator, a 24 VDC generator, and a 12 VDC alternator—so there are a variety of electrical options operating off the main engine. Don’s records show the genset is run one hour a day to keep things charged when the boat is anchored.

*Passagemaker* carries 300 gallons of water in three tanks. Don and Valerie keep 200 gallons in reserve most of the time, and use an HRO 200 GPD watermaker to keep the third 100 gallon tank full for regular use. This arrangement has worked out quite well, and still provides a healthy reserve of water. (By the way, the top surfaces of the galley house and pilothouse have raised edges to help trap rainwater during rainy weather. This water collection system is another way to successfully live off the land, while still relying on a modern technology watermaker when appropriate.)

**Summary**

There are many interesting, unusual, and validating things about *Passagemaker*, and we had a marvelous time visiting Don and Valerie. Her systems and equipment are balanced between Beebe’s 1963 vision and the modern realities of the 1990s. Today’s *Passagemaker* is no museum, nor is she a relic from pioneering days. Her hull is strong, her systems still functional, and her place in history is assured. She is still a proper passagemaker, capable of going around the world in comfort and economy.

And she still turns heads wherever she goes—some people recognize her immediately, others just notice her strong unusual lines. You see, her basic design is as valid today as it was thirty years ago, and she is still a viable approach to the cruising motorboat theme as we move towards the next century.

Don’s health has changed in the last year, so it is time for him to focus his energies on other things. It’s time to pass the baton to a new watch, a new crew destined to keep *Passagemaker* out where she belongs, for the next thirty years—voyaging under power.

For the special couple who appreciate the actuality of this boat. and not just what it represents, this is an opportunity of a lifetime. To cruise on the original. *Passagemaker...* one of a small handful of boats that started it all. •

(As we went to press, we learned that *Passagemaker* has, reluctantly, been put on the market. Details for serious inquiries can be found elsewhere in this issue—BP)

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