

## History 26 Ft. Bellecraft Pilothouse Cruiser

I am presenting this history to advise a future owner of the origin of this boat, which is something I would be most interested in if I were a potential buyer.

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Having owned in excess of 20 boats over +/- 59 years I found that I could not find a boat that suited my requirements. Therefore, another fiberglass boat was out of the question. I was familiar with just about all the currently manufactured fiberglass boats as well as many that are unknown to the general public, only to find them lacking in some way. Having had experience aboard one privately owned and several aluminum Coast Guard vessels, as well as accumulated knowledge, I determined that aluminum was the choice to construct the boat of my dreams. Aluminum could be built into almost any desired configuration and if a change was ever desired it could be cut with carbide tipped woodworking tools and new pieces welded into place. "Welded, not molded like a cupcake." Also, if necessary, it can be repaired in the same manner.

I accumulated a file of my sketches, magazine pictures and articles that depicted the boat that I wanted. Note, my requirements, not those of a manufacturer or of the "general boating market".

In 1999 we moved from Connecticut to South West Florida where I began searching for an aluminum boat builder (they are more numerous down there than in New England). At a boat show in Ft. Meyers I spoke with a boat dealer who thought he knew of a builder. He took my name and telephone number and said he might have the name of the builder on file at his dealership and that he would call me when he returned there after the show. I really didn't think he would remember or bother to call since there was nothing in it for him, however, that following Tuesday he called with the name and telephone number of a builder in Naples, FL. I was surprised and pleased.

I contacted the builder (resume enclosed) and we arranged a meeting. We discussed my vision and philosophy of the boat's design and construction methods at length and got to know each other. Several weeks later we met again to discuss and refine the plans and specifications he had drawn up. After several meetings we finalized the plans.

At the time he was in the process of building a house on the property where his shop was located (eastern Naples, FL). He thought it would take him about a year to finish, at which time he would be glad to build my boat. My mother was living with my wife and I and I was not about to leave my wife to take care of my mother while I would be using the boat, so, a year delay in construction suited me also.

The builder began work in early 2002. He mostly worked alone but did have a step son and others that he called upon when needed. I traveled 75 miles each way to his shop almost every Friday morning to check on the progress and visit with him. We became close friends spending many hours talking about the boat, our Lord Jesus and things in general. I took him to lunch on many of these visits and found that it is a long way from his shop near the everglades to the closest eatery. His closeness to the everglades resulted in snakes and alligators being in the shop on more than one occasion.

During the course of the build the builder lost his wife to cancer, a step daughter in Chicago also to cancer and before the build was finished he also lost the helper step son, mentioned, to an early passing. His grandson, who began working for him about halfway through the build also passed at a young age.

In addition to all this, the builder was a motorcycle enthusiast and rode a Moto Guzzi Italian bike. He was also building a bike that would have a "V" six car engines mounted in the frame and at the time, he was working on mounting an automatic transmission in the bike as well.

On a holiday near the end of 2003 he was on his bike in route to a friend's house when a dog ran in front of him which resulted in his being knocked down and breaking or fracturing nine bones. After all, he was in excess of 65 years old. He was in the hospital for several weeks and upon his release, because he had no one to drive for him, I became his driver several times a week, so he could attend to his errands.... shopping, banking, post office, pharmacy etc.

When he had healed to the point that he only had a cast on his right leg, he fabricated a brace for the leg that screwed to his boot and strapped to his leg. He removed the cast, put on the brace and went back to work on the boat. At this point I began traveling to Naples three or four times a week to work on the boat with him. I am telling all of this in order to convey the character and determination of the builder.

There are many stories to be told about things we did while finishing her and moving her out of his shop. However, suffice it say she was finished with no compromises.

For the purpose of informing insurance companies, I had her surveyed and provided them with much of this information as she is custom made and therefore, would not be found in any of their data bases. The builder had built mostly passenger vessels during his career which influenced its design, construction methods and quality standards.

When the building contract was signed, the builder ordered the engines, a 225HP Honda main and a 9.9Hp Honda long shaft kicker. They were delivered soon afterward and were not unpacked until needed at the end of the build, some two-and-one-half years later. When we unpacked the 9.9HP Honda kicker we found that it was not electric start nor equipped with the remote-control linkage ordered. Recourse from the engine dealer was not a success as he had sold the business and the new owner did not feel he was liable for the error. However, my being a member of the local Coast Guard Auxiliary, in which news travels fast, I did manage to get him to provide the propeller for the main engine. (A three blade S.S. which I subsequently replaced with a four blade S.S., this made the three blade a spare)

With a different dealer, I pursued swapping the 9.9 HP for an electric start remotely controlled model. This dealer talked me out of a deal, which would have benefited him, he said that based on the extreme reliability of the main engine negated the need for a kicker get home engine or trolling engine. So far, his assessment has been correct. The main will idle for hours and not load up (4 stroke) and he claimed, that the computers in the engine will not allow it to be harmed, not only by low speed operation but other operational perimeters as well. I subsequently sold the kicker; however, the starting, throttle and gear shift controls are still in place. Linkage for connecting a kicker to the main engine for steering (when the main engine is either tilted up or down) is onboard.

In 2007 my wife and I decided that we were missing out on seeing our grand children growing up. So we decided to sell our home in Punta Gorda, FL and move back to CT. This meant that we would be able to use the boat for the reason she was built; to travel to CT and back to FL, however, this trip would only be one way.

On Memorial Day weekend of 2007 we departed for CT via the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, the Caloosahatchee River, Lake Okeechobee, St Lucie River and the east coast Intracoastal Waterway to Norfolk, VA, where we stayed in Little Creek VA (where SEAL team two and six train and are billeted). In Norfolk my wife flew back to FL and my son flew in from CT to complete the trip with me. From that point we went outside into the Atlantic to Great Egg Harbor Inlet (just a little south of Atlantic City). The next day we proceeded to New York Harbor and the East River into Long Island Sound and on to Clinton, CT. With two and three day layovers at places like St. Augustine, FL, Savannah, GA and several quaint southern water front towns along the way, it took us about 20 leisurely days for the trip.

We lived very comfortably aboard, spending about half of our nights in some beautiful anchorages. Our method of operation was to overnight at anchor about an hour or two in travel time south of the marina we planned to stay at the next night. We would get underway early the next morning so as to arrive at the marina around 0800-0900 hrs. We would then fuel up, wash the boat down, take showers, do laundry and go shopping for provisions and be through by noon. This would allow us the afternoon for site seeing and exploring, a good dinner and restful night's sleep.

Arriving in Clinton, CT I purchased a trailer in order to haul and store her. I prepared her for long term storage and put her into a rental storage facility. When I purchased a house in CT in 2008 she was moved to that location, covered, the trailer blocked up and the wheels removed. The covers were replaced every two years to keep her clean and protected from the elements. She has been in that condition until October 2017 when my sons washed her, installed the wheels on the trailer and took her to an aluminum boat builder in the area to get her bottom sand blasted and painted.

While she was in FL she was in a brackish water canal behind my house. Her bottom was originally primed and painted with two coats of a different color anti fouling paint with two final coats of black. The different colors of ablative paint were to provide a visible means of determining wear. Black was said to be more effective in tropical waters than other colors. Also, to both coats of black we added the hottest Habanero pepper powder we could find. It was just one of those tricks I acquired over the years and it couldn't hurt. Well, probably because of the water conditions and being in the water for +/- 15 months she acquired some patches of barnacles which when power washed off left bare aluminum. These bare spots had what some call poultice corrosion. This is the white powder found on aluminum; it could be likened to aluminum rust. There wasn't any significant penetration of the aluminum, so her bottom was sandblasted, primed, coated with three coats of barrier coat and two coats of black antifouling paint (without the pepper powder). All the coatings are Pettit brand for aluminum boats. Not cheap, but nothing but the best.

Finally, for the sad part: I am forced to sell my pride and joy due to age, health and finances. It is not something that I want to do but reality must be faced. I spent more time designing and working on her than I did enjoying what she was built for, but that was the case with almost all my boats. I always keep them operating and looking brand new. My hope is that the next owner will do the same.

Fair winds and following seas.