

ON THE DOUBLE

THE MILITARY-GRADE LIFE PROOF 35 FULL CABIN CAN DO MANY THINGS THAT TRAWLERS DO— AT MORE THAN TWICE THE SPEED.

Trawler enthusiasts are a unique bunch. We'll buy an 8-knot boat, and dammit, we'll be happy going 8 knots. We value dependability, seaworthiness and toughness. We appreciate the stability of a displacement hull with a keel and a low center of gravity. We're amenable to humble accommodations and utilitarian galleys. Our idea of a perfect boat is one where form follows function, much like those robust little ships that hunt for big fish in the cold, treacherous waters of the North Sea.

So what are we to think of a boat built for similar function, yet resembling virtually nothing of what we believe a proper cruising vessel should look like? After a day exploring Puget Sound aboard the Life Proof Boats 35 Full Cabin, I'm thinking it's everything I've ever wanted but was afraid to request.

I've been keeping an eye on Life Proof Boats ever since one tied up to the dock at Trawlerfest a couple years ago. At first glance, the boat seemed to be the antithesis of models we typically review in *Passagemaker*, but there she was amid dozens of trawlers and cruisers. Sure, this boat had a reverse rake windshield and a dinghy hanging off the transom, but I struggled to get my mind past the RIB aesthetics and the two speedy-looking outboards hogging the swim platform. And yet, everything about the boat implied adventure. I was intrigued enough to want to get on board.

We departed early from the fuel dock at Seattle's Elliott Bay Marina and set a course to picturesque Blake Island, made even more scenic by a sunny weather window that was expected to be closing as the day went on. At the helm, Life Proof Boats CEO Micah Bowers described the 35 Full Cabin as the nautical equivalent of an off-road 4x4, conceived for heavy-duty cruising with a luxury trim package. According to Bowers, most Full Cabin owners are destination cruisers who appreciate the freedom to get where they want to go quickly and comfortably. As he was talking, I glanced at the GPS and was surprised to see that we were quietly clipping along at 28 knots, about twice as fast as us trawler guys are used to cruising.

Built for heavy-duty cruising, the Life Proof 35 Full Cabin offers freedom to get where you want to go quickly.



The drop bow door, a signature feature of the Full Cabin line, allows for easy unloading when beaching the boat.



Above: Internal beam is maximized due to the D shape of the external tubes, allowing for surprisingly large living areas, illuminated by wraparound windows.

We arrived at Blake Island, about 6.5 nautical miles away, in a matter of minutes. Beaching the bow, we deployed our art director Jonathan Cooper and his camera gear ashore via the signature feature of the Full Cabin line: a “drop bow door” that opens manually for unloading and that has a telescoping ladder. This feature is intuitive, so much so that I was able to figure it out on my first attempt. A locking safety latch secures the door during normal operation, and the bow is double-reinforced for durability.

The 35 Full Cabin has several other notable design features—including one that involves a lesson about RIB design. Typically, on a RIB with an 11-foot beam, 3 feet of that beam is occupied by the tubes. Life Proof’s tubes employ a D shape that counters any loss of internal beam. That extra volume allows for a stand-up head with an electric macerating toilet and a shower in the lower cabin, along with twin berths, a sink, a microwave and stowage. The upper/main cabin volume is enhanced by wood accents, wraparound windows, skylights and hatches, and the living area has plenty of room for guests to move around. An L-shape settee and dinette convert to a full-size berth. The galley has large working surfaces, fit for any culinary specialist.

The helm configuration makes driving most enjoyable. Upholstered, military-grade suspension seats are available for the captain and copilot. Joystick control is an option; combined with a bow thruster, it makes close-quarters maneuvering a cinch. Foldaway throttles allow easy access to the cleat for short-handers.

A flip-down bench seat in the cockpit grants even more room to spread out; a walk-through transom door provides

easy access to the swim platform; and for distance cruisers, watertight roof boxes offer extra stowage. A stainless-steel davit system works off a manual winch for hoisting the dink.

Life Proof boats are built in three facilities in Bremerton, Washington, and are sold factory direct. A lot of the yard’s business comes from the military, so heavy-duty construction is critical. Life Proof uses commercial-grade 5086 aluminum from stem to stern, and employs an I-beam design, one of the strongest beam designs known to structural engineering. The finished product is a fully welded structure ready to “take on the rough stuff,” according to Bowers.

“Safety is paramount to what we do,” Bowers said. “All of our boats include features like reserve flotation foam strategically located in hull compartments, self-bailing decks and a stabilized buoyancy collar system, which makes the boat virtually unsinkable—think of it like a life jacket for your boat, with a deck that will completely clear itself from full of water in under a minute.”

“Sounds bulletproof,” I joked.

“Actually, it is,” Bowers said with a grin. “We test for that, too.”

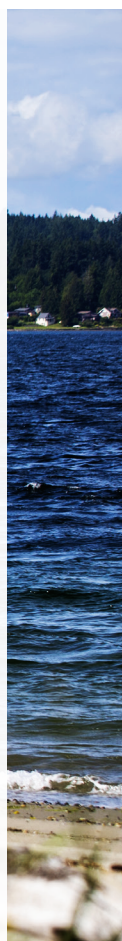
Bowers says clients often enjoy the construction process as much as the boat itself. “They have fun with it, getting to customize their boats, to an extent,” he said, referencing one surprising customization for a boat this style: a hot tub. “We converted the bow cockpit area on a 31 Full Cabin into a hot tub space, and we recently did it again on a 41.”

With our photo session complete, we decided to go grab a fishwich (yes, it’s a thing) in the seaside town of Poulsbo, about 16 nautical miles away. At 7 knots, the two-and-a-half-



LIFE PROOF 35 FULL CABIN

LOA: 35ft.
 Beam: 11ft.
 Draft:
 2ft. 8in. (engines down)
 2ft. (engines up)
 Displacement:
 12,000 lbs.
 Propulsion:
 2x 350-600 hp outboard
 Cruising Speed:
 22-25 knots (cruise)
 40 knots (fast cruise)
 (with 2x 425 hp Yamahas)
 Top Speed:
 47 knots
 (with 2x 425 hp Yamahas)
 Fuel:
 270 gal.
 Water:
 69 gal.
 Price:
 \$399,000 (base)



Above: Plenty of room for R&R in the lower cabin, which has two berths, a stand-up head with a shower, a sink, a microwave, bow access and loads of stowage.



hour stroll would have made it a late lunch. Instead, our total cruising time to Poulsbo at a “slow cruise” of 28 knots was 30 minutes, burning less than 15 gallons of fuel. At that rate, I was left thinking of all the other possibilities we might have entertained: Vancouver in just over four hours (versus a day and a half at 7 knots); Ketchikan, Alaska, in 24 hours (versus 98 hours at 7 knots), with only two fuel stops.

As the old saw goes, getting there is half the fun. But being there—way out there—is what long-range cruising is all about. This isn't a boat you're going to buy because you want to go 50 knots, nor is it a boat you're going to buy to go 8 knots. In my opinion, it's all the space in between, and the infinite ways you can use it, that put the Life Proof Full Cabin line in its own class.

Halfway through our fishwiches, a hearty gust tossed an umbrella and sent the patrons next to us scrambling, indicating that our weather window was closing. It wasn't quite the “rough stuff” we were hoping for, but we were still able to put the 35 to task as we headed back to Seattle, mowing down whitecaps in a decent breeze.

Life Proof boats have deep-V hulls with what the builder calls “ride-enhancing technologies” for rough-water performance. Our ride back from Poulsbo was stable and dry, despite the confused sea state. I was surprised with the overall sense of control and the lack of side slipping, even during high-

speed turns. Several factors contribute to that performance. Aluminum fins welded below the collars help to grip the water. The positioning of the hull and tube to the waterline optimizes stability. A canard (like a small, aeronautical forewing) is integrated in the shoulder of the boat for mixed sea-state cornering. And the collar is built out far forward for added stability in a following sea.

For power, Bowers recommends a twin 425-hp Yamaha or triple 300-hp Mercury outboard package. The boat we tested had twin 350-hp Suzuki outboards—also a nice package, according to Bowers. A version with twin V12 600-hp Mercury outboards is currently in production.

Our day on Puget Sound presented a sort of paradox for a trawler guy like me. The Life Proof 35 Full Cabin is anything but a trawler, yet it does what many trawlers can do—and then some, especially when you factor in all the shallows accessible to a boat with a 2-foot, 8-inch draft. I could easily see my wife and I loading up the kids and gear, and racing off to the Bahamas or the San Juans for Labor Day weekend. There's a lot here that I bet will appeal to the youth movement we've been seeing in the trawler market of late.

Granted, the form may take some getting used to, but see for yourself at the next Trawlerfest. You, too, might find yourself unexpectedly intrigued. ☼