

SIMPLE ABUNDANCE

Caribiana 23: Sparingly, but daringly.

BY BILL PIKE

I WAS SITTING BY THE POOL AT MONTY'S RAW BAR chowing down on a succulent "Fried Grouper Sandwich," with french fries and cole slaw, when the boat caught my eye. It was a 23' Caribiana Sea Skiff, the "Coaster" version, with a glistening 50-hp four-stroke Honda and a bunch of swoopy, ersatz lapstrakes molded into its fiberglass hull. A couple of people were tying the little beauty dockside, not 20 yards away... my Boat Test for the afternoon.

Over the years, the make-over at Miami Beach Marina has entailed many wonders, not least of them being the addition of a top-flight restaurant like Monty's with mesmerizing cabana food. So by grabbing my attention in the midst of one of the best meals the place offers, the Coaster had proven itself a compelling vessel well before I'd even stepped aboard.

Much of this appeal comes from a long, graceful sheer. It starts low at the transom and then, with as much drama as Hemingway crams into a Gulf Stream novel, sweeps forward, high, proud and alone. As I ordered another bottle of Perrier to see me through the long, hot hours ahead, I noted that the Coaster reminded me of numerous other skiffs I'd seen around the world. There was a good reason for this twinge of recognition.

Lynn Rabren, the creator of the Sea Skiff, is a globetrotting, boat-loving documentary photographer. Over the years, he's spent a lot of downtime in places as disparate as Yugoslavia, South Africa and the East Indies studying and appreciating

wooden lapstrake fishing skiffs, a genre of watercraft that, besides being as comfortable with oceans as with inland lakes and rivers, has certain universal characteristics. They all have long, narrow-beamed hulls to maximize speed and minimize fuel consumption, for example. And they all have high, flared, sharp-stemmed bows to blast waves aside when running in big seas.

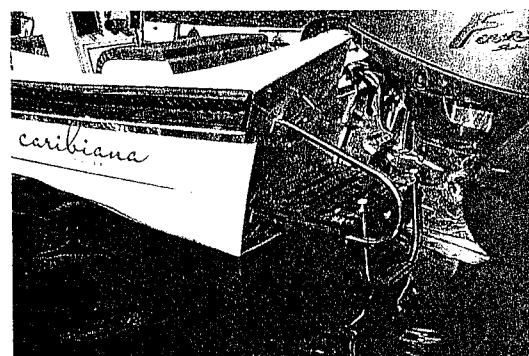
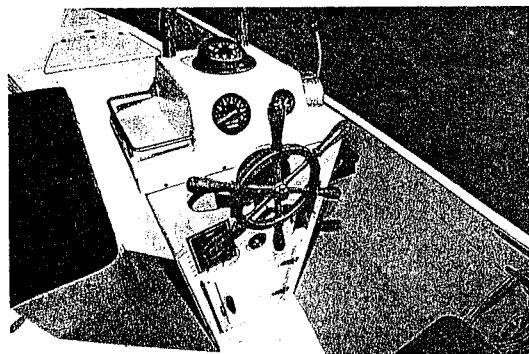
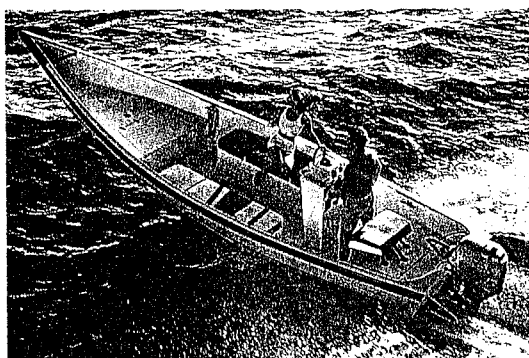
When Raybren decided to get into boatbuilding himself a couple of years ago, the vessel that epitomized the breed for him was a skiff built by Kenny Scott of Port-O-Spain, Trinidad and popularly known as the "Trinidad Pirogue."

It was the Trinidad Pirogue, in fact, that guided Raybren and a bunch of his friends as they made a plug of Bondo, plywood and Fornica in a little shop in Alabama, bypassing wooden boatbuilding methods in favor of fiberglass. While traditionalism worked fine for design, they all agreed that modern fiberglass technique was the obvious choice for a boat that would be reasonably easy to build and maintain.

AFTER HOURS BOAT TEST.

That afternoon was indeed hotter than a two-dollar pistol. But with the 50-hp Honda purring wide open, emitting about as much noise and smoke as a sewing machine, the Coaster pegged a top speed of 29.3 mph, fast enough to keep things tolerably cool.

Because of the standup, fiberglass steering pedestal and the smooth Kobelt engine control, driving had a salty, big-boat feel, although the high bow obviates operating



At home in rough water or flat calms, the Coaster looks romantically traditional. Top speed: 29.3 mph.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FOREST JOHNSON

the Coaster while sitting down, at least at go-go speeds. The only other handling foibles I noted were the boat's tendency to be a little tippy in the displacement mode and an inclination to ventilate the Honda's prop in sharp turns. The first problem is innate, stemming from a narrow hullform. The second can be addressed by trimming the motor in all the way or by lowering it on the transom.

Fuel consumption data was a mindblower, although I'm well aware of the comparative efficiency of four-stroke outboards. Check out our performance chart. The Coaster can cruise for *days* on a tank of fuel.

Unfortunately, I seldom do much boating at night anymore. So it was with considerable enthusiasm that I accepted an offer to venture up the Miami River later that evening, well after dark, onboard the Coaster. What a trip. Our route was totally urban, leading through darkened canyons of multi-hued, neon-bathed skyscraping towers. But being in a small, open boat, we were also synched into the natural world...we could touch the river, smell it and even taste it sometimes, as bits of spray found their way aboard. Lovely.

LEISURE WITH DIGNITY. The joy that is the essence of the Caribiana Sea Skiff comes not only from how it performs but from the solid way it is built.

The skincoat is hand-laid with 1½-oz. mat and Cook Composite Polymer vinyl ester resin, high-grade stuff that resists water permeation like gangbusters. The rest of the laminate is composed of more 1½-oz. mat and layers of bi-axial cloth, all hand-laid with general-purpose or polyester resin. A Last-a-foam core makes up the bulk of the transom. This is a high-density material with enough compressive and torsional strength to resist the effects of way more than the 90 hp the boat is rated for. It's sandwiched between bi-axial glass.

Once the hull has cured in the mold, a stringer grid of ¾" XL10 treated plywood, with the appearance of a fish skeleton and a lifetime guarantee against rot, is resin-coated and glassed in. Electrical and fuel runs are then installed in the grid in PVC conduit. At about the same time, 2" by 6" urethane foam strips are bonded and

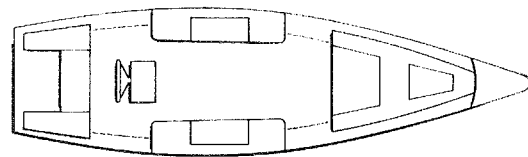
THE HIGHS: *MPG of this lithe little yacht is a tribute to the environment. Modest but high-profile use of teak makes for a traditional look, without the traditional maintenance.*

THE LOWS: *No sit-down driving at go-go speeds. Prop ventilates slightly in turns. While the long, narrow shape of the boat means efficiency, it also lessens side-to-side stability.*

BOATING CERTIFIED TEST RESULTS Caribiana Sea Skiff

rpm	SPEED			EFFICIENCY				OPERATION	
	knots	mph	gph	naut. mpg	stat. mpg	n. mi. range	s. mi. range	run angle	sound level
1000	5.8	6.7	0.3	19.4	22.3	314	362	0	70
1500	6.6	7.6	0.4	16.5	19.0	267	308	1	70
2000	7.1	8.2	0.7	10.2	11.7	165	190	2	72
2500	8.4	9.7	1.0	8.4	9.7	137	157	3	75
3000	10.4	12.0	1.2	8.7	10.0	141	162	3	80
3500	12.9	14.9	1.7	7.6	8.8	123	142	3	82
4000	15.4	17.7	2.2	7.0	8.0	113	130	5	85
4500	18.6	21.4	2.6	7.2	8.2	116	133	5	89
5000	22.2	25.6	3.0	7.4	8.5	120	138	6	92
5500	23.2	26.7	3.5	6.6	7.6	107	124	6	93
5700	25.5	29.3	3.7	6.9	7.9	111	128	6	94

Advertised fuel capacity 18 gallons. Range based on 90 percent of that figure. Performance measured with two persons aboard, full fuel. Sound levels taken at helm, in dBA.



LOA	23'0"
Beam	6'6"
Draft	10"
Displacement (lbs., approx.)	1,200
Minimum cockpit depth	1'5"
Transom deadrise	10°
Bridge clearance (to top of pedestal)	4'0"
Fuel capacity (gal.)	18
Price (w/standard power)	\$23,625

STANDARD POWER: Single 50-hp Honda four-stroke gasoline outboard.

OPTIONAL POWER: Single outboard to 90 hp.

TEST BOAT POWER: Single 50-hp Honda four-stroke gasoline outboard with 49.3 cid, 2.8" bore x 2.8" stroke, turning a 11¼" x 13" three-bladed prop through a 2.09:1 reduction.

STANDARD EQUIPMENT (major items): Pedestal w/ss handhold, steering wheel and Kobelt engine control; choice of deckplan (open fisherman, bench seats or side seats); ss hardware; vinyl rubrail; 2 Rute 500-gph auto. bilge pumps; Sea Dog flush-mount bowlights.

thing to be said for comparing it to a simple, solidly-built fish-fighter like the Parker 23' center-console. With an identical LOA, an extra 2' of beam, a two-fisted dry weight of 2,975 lbs. and a more workmanlike finish, the Parker sells for \$17,914, without motor. Not much more than the Coaster.

But of course, we're talking two vastly different boats here. One is built for the hard-core fisherman, while the other is built for romantics. Especially the ones who empathize with graceful sheers more than sandwiches. ⚓

For more information, contact: Caribiana Sea Skiffs, Dept. B, 25288 Canal Rd., Orange Beach, AL 36561, 334/981-4442.

glassed to the gunwales. This not only strengthens the structure of the boat, it improves reserve stability by positioning flotation material up high.

Finally, after a cockpit sole of ¾" XL10 is secured atop the grid with 3M 5200 adhesive and stainless-steel screws, and after the sole is bonded to the hullsides with glass, the entirety of the boat's interior is shot with 3 to 4 ounces of chop. Installation of seats and other equipment follows, along with lots of laborious hand-fairing that produces an appearance of utter simplicity, almost as if the boat had an innerliner.

GOLD-PLATED GREAT. There are three slightly different versions of the Caribiana Sea Skiff. In terms of complexity and cost, the Coaster I tested in Miami is the intermediate one and by Raybren's reckoning the most popular. Options on our test boat included a teak rubrail with rope inlay (\$1,520); a "Bronze Hardware Package" that entails bronze Kobelt controls, cleats and helm seat supports (\$700); and a Honda 50-hp outboard, mounted and rigged (\$6,125). Other available options include: compass (\$150); aluminum trailer (\$1,550); Bimini (\$800) and, for sultry, lemonade-sippin' afternoons, a Sunbrella parasol (\$500).

Base price of the Coaster is \$17,500, without motor. I know of no models from mainstream manufacturers that directly compete. However, since simplicity is one of the boat's hallmarks, there's some-