

# St. Petersburg Times

## One man's boat odyssey

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Sid Klein, landing at Honeymoon Island with Kelly DeLeSec, first saw the 23-foot Caribiana fishing skiff in a magazine. Smitten by its appearance, he did some research, saw that it fit his needs, talked to other Caribiana owners and finally took the leap.



[Times photo: Douglas R. Clifford]

Sid Klein knows boats. Clearwater's 65-year-old police chief built his first one out of an old wooden box at age 7 in Miami.

"I carried it down to a local pond in a shopping cart," he recalled. "I launched it by myself, climbed in and it promptly sunk."

As this son of a carpenter got older, he grew to value fine workmanship.

"My father found this old skiff with a lapstrake hull," Klein said. "He stripped every bit of wood off that boat, refinished each piece, and then put it back together."

The boat ran for decades, many more years than it should have, thanks to quality workmanship. Klein, meanwhile, moved away from home, far from the beloved 16-footer he had enjoyed so much as a youth.

"I had lot of different boats over the years," he said. "Some were good, some were not. But I was always looking for something special."

## **Dream boat**

The boats Klein has owned have ranged from a 16-foot bowrider he describes as a "piece of junk," to a 21-foot center console that he and his late wife took fishing "every weekend" for 10 years straight.

"Like most boaters, I wanted something bigger and better," he said.

Over time, Klein looked at a variety of boats. Then one day as he was thumbing through an issue of *Coastal Living magazine*, he came across an article about a classic boat built in the Panhandle.

The 23-foot Caribiana Skiff is modeled after the deep-vee hull fishing boats that have been used by island fishermen for centuries.

A die-hard fisherman, Klein wanted a boat that was versatile enough to run offshore on a good day, yet still navigate the shallows of local coastal waters.

But Klein confessed there was one thing he just could not get out of his mind, "I love the way it looked."

## **Form vs. function**

An experienced boater, Klein knew he should not buy a boat simply because of the way it looked.

The first question any prospective boat buyer should ask is: How will the boat be used?

"My wife and I were looking for something to take out to the islands and have a picnic lunch," he said. "I wasn't worried about carrying a lot of people, because I knew it would probably be just she and I."

With that settled, Klein thought the boat might be worth pursuing. So he called the manufacturer, who told him about a local man who had the model he was considering.

"I went over to his house and he had it hanging on the davit in the backyard," he said. "It was too rough to take out, but I could tell just looking at it, I wanted to get one."

## **Too big, too small**

A common mistake many boat buyers make is settling on a model that is either too large or too small for their needs.

Klein wanted a boat that could be trailered and launched from any boat ramp or even the beach.

The Caribiana Skiff was built with versatility in mind. The boat's length-to-beam ratio and lightweight design mean you do not need a lot of horsepower to get it up on plane.

There is an old adage among boat builders: the poorer the country, the narrower the beam. Most fishermen in the Caribbean don't have the money to spend on gas and expensive motors, and as a result, their boats are built with narrow beams.

### **The need for speed?**

Another common pitfall many boaters make is underpowering their boat. A boat may be rated for a 150-horsepower engine, but fill it full of people, and then you realize that 200 horsepower would have been a better choice.

But Klein didn't want to set any speed records.

A 50-horsepower motor will keep the Caribiana Skiff gliding at 30 mph without using much gas. With a 10-inch draft, the boat can run the flats. The high bow handles rough water well, making it suitable for offshore use.

"That is plenty fast for me," Klein said. "Another plus is that I can run all day on one tank of gas."

For Klein, a small, fuel-efficient engine made sense. A 50-horsepower engine wouldn't work for many people, including tournament fishermen and performance boaters, but it is perfect for hopping among the barrier islands.

### **Second thoughts**

Klein was surf fishing in the Panhandle when he heard about a boat show in Pensacola.

"I knew they would be showing the boat there, so I decided to take a look," he said.

He and his wife drove straight over and liked what they saw. But the pragmatic Klein didn't want to make a rash decision. Like any astute boat buyer, a dozen questions ran through his head.

What kind of range would the Caribiana have? Would it get him out and back on one tank of gas? The boat was built for utility, not for comfort. Would a long day on the water send him to the medicine cabinet in search of ibuprofen? How would it handle rough seas? On the gulf the weather can change with little notice.

"I walked out of the boat show," he said. "I didn't want to make the wrong decision."

## **Trust your instincts**

Klein was walking to the car when his wife, Lois, stopped him in his tracks.

"You know you want it," she said.

He thought about it for a moment and walked back inside.

"I bought the demo model they had on the floor," he said. "I have never regretted that decision."

Klein named the boat Lady Lo after his wife.

He could have listened to his head and bought a more practical boat. In the end, he also listened to his heart.

"I guess you could say it came down to a matter of style," he said. "Style ... that's important in life."

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## **Caribiana Skiff**

Length: 23 feet

Beam: 6 feet 5 inches

Draft: 8 to 10 inches

Weight: 1,200 pounds

Max load: 1,600 pounds

Power: 25 to 90 horsepower

Fuel efficiency: The boat cruises at 30 mph with a 50 horsepower motor while consuming less than 3 gallons per hour.

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