



GREG GILBERT

The Dream Boats of Seattle

Raised-foredeck power cruisers with enduring appeal

by Lawrence W. Cheek

One spring afternoon in 1928, *The Seattle Daily Times* dispatched one of its reporters—a “veritable landlubber,” in the writer’s self-description—to amble over to nearby Lake Union Dry Dock Co., step aboard an imposing 42’ motoryacht, and with a few minutes’ instruction, drive the vessel across Lake Union, navigate the Seattle Ship Canal and the Ballard Locks, then motor 4 miles across Puget Sound to the nearest island. Of course there was a wary minder from the boatbuilding company close by the wheel. And it’s almost equally certain that this was a promotional caper cooked up by the company with the eager collusion of the *Times*, but—it worked. The veritable landlubber didn’t run the boat into anything, and he returned to the newsroom all aglow to write a florid feature for the next Sunday paper. The big boat “responded to the slightest touch as quickly as an automobile in dense traffic,” he reported.

“When it is possible for anyone, without tedious instruction, to take the wheel of such a boat...he at once enjoys a thrill that no other mode of transportation offers, and a vista of adventure to ports of Alaska,

the entire Pacific Coast with, maybe, a long vacation through the Panama Canal up the Atlantic side, is opened before him.”

Such a “vacation” was perhaps over the top of the possibilities that the company envisioned, but the unnamed reporter (the *Times* didn’t bestow bylines in that era) conveyed the canny marketing message the young company had for its Dream Boat: a moderately large and capable production cruiser, simple enough for the owner to operate without a professional skipper, with an enticingly low entry fee. If this weren’t enough, the company was even offering to berth and maintain the Dream Boats—\$3 per month moorage and an estimated \$100 annually in maintenance and repairs (in 2020 dollars, respectively, \$45 and \$1,507).

In the 1920s, Seattle’s boatbuilding industry was enjoying a boom hardly less sizzling than its high-tech convulsions of the 2000s. The Ship Canal, a 3-mile-long channel linking Lake Union to Puget Sound, had opened in 1917, which prompted a near-overnight explosion in maritime industry around the

Above—At speed on Lake Washington, MARIAN II, a so-called Dream Boat that originated on nearby Lake Union, exudes elegance without ostentation. The type was a production boat of the 1920s, and its builder optimistically promoted it as an aspiration “well within the reach of the man of moderate means.”

WINIFRED is pictured here en route to Alaska in 1929, the year after her class win in the predicted-log race from Olympia, Washington, to Juneau, Alaska. WINIFRED's skipper predicted his finishing time for the 908-mile route with a discrepancy of just 28 minutes.

in a local office while still in school. In 1896, he went to work for a Seattle shipbuilding firm, again as a draftsman, and apparently absorbed more than a little about boat design and construction. The first mention of Cutting and boats in the local press appeared in 1906, when the *Times* reported that a propeller shaft snagged his pants leg during a "trial run" of a new boat on Lake Washington. He was in "grave danger" of amputation, the story said, but the hospital saved the fractured leg.

Around this time, while working his day job as an architect, Cutting was spending evenings at home designing the boat of his dreams, a 36' raised-deck motor cruiser. By 1909, he had enough money to commission its construction. He christened the boat KLOOTCHMAN, which meant "woman" in the regional Chinook trading jargon. But disaster struck again. One February morning in 1910, a commercial steamer crashed into Cutting's boat at a Tacoma dock, smashing it "practically to kindling wood" in one newspaper account. Undaunted, Cutting lengthened the design to 40' and commissioned a replacement, which was built by the local Taylor & Grandy yard very rapidly—*The Seattle Daily Times* reported that Cutting and his wife hosted friends aboard KLOOTCHMAN II for a weekend cruise just seven months later. Taylor & Grandy built one or two more boats to the same design, and one still resides in a Seattle marina today under the name LAWANA. These were essentially the prototypes for the Dream Boat, but production had to wait until Cutting had formed his own company.

Cutting seems not to have been swayed by the romance of sail; he aligned himself solidly in the 20th-century motoring camp. KLOOTCHMAN II originally carried a token sailing rig as auxiliary power, its mast planted on the foredeck in near-catboat fashion. A 1910 article in *Pacific Motor Boat* magazine said he discarded it after one season, "finding it was not worth the space it took." Small wonder, as the profile drawing depicts a stunted keel as token as the sailing rig; the canvas would indeed have been worthless except for downwind runs.

There's a curious void of stories in the historical record that would help bring Cutting into focus—no anecdotes or quotes or preserved writings—but it's possible to glimpse facets of him. He was more than 6' tall, which helps to account for the Dream Boat's generous cabin and pilothouse headroom. He was a social creature; the newspapers were peppered with one-paragraph bites about the Cuttings and their cruises with friends throughout the 1920s. He liked racing and was apparently an aggressive captain. In 1916, he won a 60-mile race from Seattle to LaConner despite running aground in heavy fog. LUDD's prodigious expansion in its first decade also suggests an ambitious character with an appetite for risk. However, he seems to have been thoughtful and exacting. A magazine



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article appraising the innovative pneumatic dry-dock he designed noted, "Mr. Cutting takes great delight in solving unusual problems in naval construction and operation." And he may have had something—or everything—to do with the long-running core philosophy of the company. Current president Hobie Stebbins, whose family has been intertwined with LUDD since 1946, says it's all about placing craftsmanship on the pedestal. "If your organization is focused on letting the craftsman do good craft," Stebbins says, "then you'll get a good product."

LUDD's decision to produce the Dream Boat seems to have been a confluence of several streams. KLOOTCHMAN II had sparked positive publicity around Seattle and Tacoma. The yard's contract with the U.S. Coast Guard had ended, and the company needed a fresh revenue stream. A new sales manager had been hired: his name was Russell Mooney, and his experience was in the auto industry, where mass production was growing. There was the whiff of money in the local market, too. Although Seattle in the 1920s wasn't blooming with freshly minted millionaires, there was steadily growing affluence and cultural sophistication. Finally, few waterways in North America offered such diverse boating opportunities: well-sheltered Puget Sound, big Lake Washington on Seattle's eastern edge, and the Ship Canal to connect Lake Union and Lake Washington with the Sound.

The Dream Boat—LUDD copyrighted the name as two words, although today it is often rendered as one—began production in 1926. The original model was 42' × 11'6" with a cockpit shaded by a tall, boxy canopy. Since Cutting had enjoyed social gatherings on his boat, this cockpit was remarkably open and party-friendly. *Pacific Motor Boat* proclaimed it "roomy enough for dancing." A LUDD brochure touted sleeping accommodations for eight adults ("and four more can be comfortably cared for in the cockpit"), though this would have required very close friendship and forbearance. LUDD pegged the original base price at an astonishing \$5,000 (\$72,824 today), "completely equipped." This



ELIZABETH BECKER

Two Dream Boats—Jack and Elizabeth Becker’s EMMELINE and Diane Lander’s MARIAN II—converged on Lander’s boathouse adjacent to Lake Union Drydock Co. for the company’s centennial celebration in 2019, giving an opportunity to contrast different cabin layouts. MARIAN II’s modified cockpit enclosure is a later variation on the one with canvas curtains, visible in the photo of WINIFRED on page 26.

was either a naïve miscalculation of production costs or a canny teaser to provoke a flurry of interest in a cruiser for “the man of moderate means.” Either way, the sticker price rose rapidly. In 1928 LUDD advertised a Dream Boat demonstrator—likely the same vessel the *Times’s* “landlubber” had enjoyed a few months earlier—for \$6,500. A new open-cockpit model was listed at \$7,150, and the more commodious bridge-deck edition was priced at \$11,000. Dreamers were encouraged to go as crazy as their bank accounts would allow. A brochure explained, “Purchaser may specify any make or size of motor with variation in cost accordingly, any color interior paint and any design drapes, upholstery, carpets or linoleum,” the latter of which was the acme of furnishing fashion at the time. Stretched editions of 45’ and 52’ became available.

Dream Boats had frames of steamed white oak and planking of Douglas-fir or Alaska yellow cedar. The keel was Douglas-fir. (One owner who recently implanted a much heavier purpleheart keel reports that the boat’s stability noticeably improved.) The standard engine was a 65-hp, six-cylinder Kermath, which provided a top speed between 8 and 9 knots. One Dream Boat, which was sold to a Seattle madam, was assigned to booze-smuggling duty; not too surprisingly, it was nailed by agents aboard one of the 17-knot LUDD runchasers.

Cutting’s architectural eye is evident in the design.

While the raised-deck configuration was ubiquitous among motor cruisers of the era, the Dream Boat was beautifully proportioned, its inevitable boxiness aft offset by an unusually long, graceful curtsy in the sheerline and a distinctly modernist air—no fuss, no ornament. It’s possible Cutting was influenced by the German Bauhaus aesthetic, which was boosting architects such as Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe into international prominence in the late 1920s. In an article for LUDD’s centennial in 2019, LUDD engineer Anna Stebbins, who is Hobie Stebbins’s daughter, concluded that “LUDD-built Dreamboats are an ode to early-day minimalism that offsets the glamour of 1920s Art Deco style.”

LUDD promoted another distinctly modern aspect of Dream Boat ownership by offering to relieve owners of the drudgery of caring for a boat—for a suitable fee. “If the owner lets us know in the morning that he intends to take a trip at noon,” sales manager Mooney promised, “we will have his craft serviced with gas, oil and ice, ready for him to step in and start out.” This was possible because LUDD in those days could provide the full constellation of boat services, from design and manufacturing through servicing and even berthing. (While the yard today is entirely out of the wooden-boat business, one Dream Boat still lives in a boathouse attached to its docks, as described below.)

At some point in production between 1926 and ’28,

a famously gifted designer entered the picture. He was Ted Geary (see WB Nos. 137 and 138), and he was best known for the four monumental 96' fantail motor-yachts that LUDD also built—PRINCIPIA, BLUE PETER, ELECTRA, and CANIM. Hobie Stebbins says Geary moved into an office on LUDD's campus but was never actually employed by the company. His precise contribution to the Dream Boat's design evolution is uncertain, but he did sign the drawings of the bridge-deck version, and Stebbins thinks it's likely that he was principally responsible. He may have tweaked other details, such as widening the extremely narrow side decks. One hazard of crewing a Dream Boat is having to creep up that curl in the sheer to the foredeck. Better to open a window at the forward end of the pilothouse and wriggle out that way.

"Geary and Cutting had a close relationship, and they collaborated on a lot of boats," Stebbins says. "We have the impression they were like a couple of big kids who just really loved the art of building boats, and they would go, 'Gosh, we can do this and we can do that....' They had a shared passion."

Traditional carvel-planked boats are, of course, highly resistant to mass production; virtually all wooden pieces still have to be fabricated and fitted by hand.

There are no records that explain just what labor savings were possible in the Dream Boats, but Hobie Stebbins recalls seeing patterns still in storage for some pieces when he worked in the shop around 1980. "Unfortunately," he says, "we disposed of them when we needed to reclaim some space."

Construction quality did not appear to be compromised. Blaise Holly, lead shipwright at Port Townsend's Haven Boatworks, brims with praise for the three Dream Boats he's worked on. "There are so many clues that they were built with craftsmanship and skill," he says. For example, he points out the neatly staggered regiments of carriage bolts in the frames and floors of a Dream Boat currently in the shop: someone took care not only to make it look neat, but also to avoid lining up bolts along grain lines.

One weak point, Holly notes, was the use of steel fastenings below the waterline, which were not uncommon at the time. Today, most boat owners have replaced those with bronze. Another weakness came in the size of the floor timbers, which were comparatively thin and allow fastenings to work loose in decades of use. "But nobody back then was thinking these boats would be around for more than 90 years," he says.

EMMELINE, the boat currently undergoing a round

The modern reinterpretation of a classic

The closest thing to a modern Lake Union Dream Boat revival is percolating out of British Columbia designer Tad Roberts' studio—five motor cruisers that owe their inspiration and wedge-like, raised-foredeck profiles to the 1920s originals. Several of Roberts' reinterpretations have been built, though he's not certain how many.

The Yellow Cedar 34 and 38 designs stemmed from an article Roberts wrote for *WoodenBoat* in 1997 (see WB No. 137) on powerboat design principles. These were to be cold-molded, pure displacement-hull boats, designed to provide roomy and airy space inside and cruise at 7 or 8 knots on minimum power and fuel consumption. The 38 actually made it into limited production in a fiberglass version as the Memory 38; however, its builder, Memory Yachts, is no longer in business.



JERRY JONES

Tad Roberts' Wedge Point 31 design is a plywood-hulled update of the Dream Boat aesthetic of simplicity and generous accommodations. The deckhouse has 6'4" of headroom; the deckhouse and cockpit combined are 13'6" long.

Some 18 years later, Roberts designed the Wedge Point 27 and 31, both intended for easier construction in plywood and powered by outboard motors. The 27, Roberts says, should achieve a cruising speed of 10 knots using only a 25-hp outboard, if its weight can be held to 4,000 lbs. At least one of the 31s has been built, and its fetching looks invariably bring smiles to onlookers' faces.

The newest design, the cold-molded Enavigo 39, was a commission from Enavigo Yachts of Croatia. Enavigo says it has the first example under construction, with launching planned for summer 2021. However, Enavigo has substantially altered the design—it's now more swoopy than wedgy or boxy—and Roberts has disowned it. "I have no part of that," he says.

Roberts says the raised-foredeck types of the Dream Boats and their successors keep inspiring him for several reasons. "It's an eminently comfortable boat, perfect for the Pacific Northwest. The cockpit, deckhouse, and lower cabin space all flow together; you can heat the whole space with one heater in the forecabin. And they're graceful, good-looking boats."

—LWC

Plans from Tad Roberts, who in 2020 became a regular contributor to WoodenBoat's Design Review section, are available from Roberts' website, www.tadroberts.ca.

of frame and floor replacement at Haven, was immediately checked for hogging when it was hauled out. The crew had to jack up the transom a mere $\frac{5}{8}$ "—proof of a stout structure.

The Dream Boats enjoyed a steady stream of publicity around the Puget Sound area in the late 1920s, and in 1928 *The Seattle Daily Times* reported that inquiries were coming in not only from the East Coast and Great Lakes states but also from France, Sweden, Australia, and the Philippines. The other boatyards clustered around Lake Union—Blanchard Boat Company, Grandy Boat Company, and others—raced to build similar cruisers, and generically they all came to be called “Lake Union Dreamboats,” rendered as one word. But production of the LUDD Dream Boats was surprisingly modest. Beginning in 1929, the Depression strangled the market, and only two more were produced after that year. The entire run totaled about 24. The Classic Yacht Association lists 11 still known to exist, plus the prototype LAWANA. Most of the survivors are in active use, and they have been restored and well maintained.

Fate probably locked onto an immutable course in 1983 when Jack and Elizabeth Becker took the Amtrak Coast Starlight up from California to visit the Port Townsend Wooden Boat Festival for their honeymoon. Jack already had a wooden sailboat he’d restored in the Bay Area, but because Elizabeth was a fair-weather sailor they agreed that their next boat, if and when, would be a motor cruiser.

Fourteen years passed. By then, they were living in Portland, Oregon, and Jack was in midlife crisis from a highly stressful job. Elizabeth talked him into taking a six-month sabbatical to attend the Northwest School of Wooden Boatbuilding. One day at the school he was thumbing through a Northwest boating magazine’s classifieds and snagged on a perfunctory one-line listing for a 1928 wooden motor cruiser, asking \$24,500. That weekend, he and Elizabeth went to look.

“It was a mess,” he says. “Junk everywhere, everything peeling, funky acoustic tiles on the overhead. But we looked at it a couple more times and ended up making an offer.” And moving permanently to Port Townsend.

EMMELINE was a LUDD Dream Boat with the later bridge-deck configuration. If Geary’s aft cabin

addition rendered the boat less airy in profile, it compensated by making the boat much more welcoming for cruising. The dance-floor cockpit was sacrificed in favor of two complete staterooms, each with its own head.

Having spent two years as an engineering major, attended the wooden boat school, and received ABYC marine electrical certification, Jack was well qualified to be EMMELINE’s rescuer. The job still took nine years of work. The canvas-covered foredeck and cabintops all leaked, so they were replaced. The pilothouse sides were teak boards 1" thick and in good enough condition to be cleaned and refinished. The aft-cabin sides were badly rotted inside from overhead leakage, but these were Douglas-fir planks on the inside face with $\frac{1}{2}$ " teak sheathing outside. Becker replaced the fir and refinished the teak. Likewise, nearly all the exterior trim pieces were teak; he just took them home, cleaned them up, and reinstalled them. “Teak is amazing wood,” he marvels.

Structurally, the hull was in fair shape; at least the original plank fastenings, which were galvanized nails, had already been replaced with bronze screws. The frames had deteriorated over time, however, and in July 2020 EMMELINE was hauled out for Haven to replace 15 of them.

Becker did a lot of interior cleanup, repair, and repainting during his first nine-year push, but no makeover. He had been planning to remodel the galley, but as he worked down through layers of paint to the original primer, he realized that EMMELINE had made it through three-quarters of a century without any substantial change. Proper respect, he decided, meant preserving everything original wherever possible. He’s seen some rehabs where owners have renovated the galley or added a dinette in the aft cabin and used oak trim, while retaining the original teak in the forward cabin. “It’s just wrong!” he says. “If you change the design in one place you need to change the whole thing.”

The Beckers use the boat, still based in Port Townsend, regularly but gently. Some years they’ve cruised to the annual Wooden Boat Festival on Lake Union, an easy 40-mile day. More often they just take a couple of friends aboard, motor to a secluded bay a few miles east of Port Townsend, and drop the hook for the night. They nurse the 73-year-old Chrysler straight-8 by observing a 1,700-rpm “redline,” which translates to a stately $7\frac{1}{2}$ knots. They haven’t even ventured north to the San Juan Islands; the Strait of Juan de Fuca crossing always has the potential of nasty weather.



ELIZABETH BECKER

EMMELINE’s original appearance has never been altered, although a new Chrysler straight-8 engine was installed in 1947.

“We don’t need to travel far away to enjoy the boat,” he says. “Once you’re away from the dock, it doesn’t matter where you are.”

Diane Lander downsized to the 42’ Dream Boat MARIAN II in 2013. She and her late husband had owned the 93’, 1929 motoryacht OLYMPUS, and she wanted a classic boat she could run herself without a crew. MARIAN II, happily, had been owned by boatyard owner Tim Ryan of CSR Marine in Seattle for years and was generally in fine shape. Still, in one torrent of winter work in 2016 Lander had the keel, seven frames, the horn timber, and rudderpost replaced. She also has made a few interior renovations such as new shower tile (originally the space was a hanging locker) and a starboard helm station. The staggering acreage of brightwork demands consistent attention. It helps that Lander keeps the boat in a large boathouse next

door to LUDD, but she still has a professional finisher booked full-time for the entire month of April—every April.

The original Dream Boat had open cockpits with a hard canopy extending all the way to the stern, and they were supported on slender posts. During one former owner’s tenure, MARIAN II’s cockpit was winterized and brightened with an all-glass enclosure replacing the original canvas curtains; the doors glide forward for entry and ventilation. Lander has discovered that crosswind dockings fare better when both doors are opened.

Lander says the 92-year-old boat functions very well as a modern cruiser; her philosophy has been to keep its outward appearance as original as possible while welcoming in modern conveniences such as a refrigerator and an autopilot.

Top right—MARIAN II’s owner, Diane Lander, reports that the cockpit comfortably accommodates eight, just as LUDD advertised in the 1920s. The Isuzu diesel resides under the sole inside a soundproofed steel box that makes for quiet cruising and difficult engine work. **Middle right**—The galley has been updated only with a propane stove. **Bottom right**—Berths remain as in the original plan. **Below**—Sliding windows at the stern and both sides extend the useful living space while preserving the original layout’s openness in fine weather.



GREG GILBERT (ALL FOUR)