

Allweather Boats



Main Street in Ferndale, Washington, tracks through the center of a business district that cannot look entirely different now than it did in the 1950s. There are a lot of “mom and pop” retailers, restaurants, and offices here. Once away from the I-5 off-ramp, there are no impossibly bright pre-fab plastic buildings with cartoon signage for pointless pop-culture Chinese trinkets or tasteless pop-tart food. After passing a civic building, a couple of churches, a mortuary, an insurance office, and a store dedicated to selling model railroad gear, Main Street extends into a long stretch where homes and various small business enterprises are built along the edges of old pasture land and hayfields. The typically idle farmsteads are still existent between the thin shell of residential and commercial use along the road and dark evergreen forests a quarter mile away. It would seem like an odd place to meet a visionary, a man with a sense of purpose and a mission from which he has not wavered for over three decades. Homer Hughes of Allweather Boats may have previously been something of an insightful voice crying out in the wilderness, but current events may very likely validate his theory of boatbuilding.

Not that Homer's theory of boatbuilding requires validation, of course; it relies on fundamental principles that have remained unchanged for perhaps thousands of years. What Homer dares to challenge is the theory of “more”—that modern marketing principle maintaining that more horsepower, more speed, more interior room, more deck space, and more LOA (sold for a lot more money) always results in a better boat.

Homer's firm builds a single vessel: an eight-meter, full displacement, double-ended fiberglass powerboat that sports an



Commercial fisherman and shop teacher Homer Hughes knows what it takes to build a good sea boat, and he commands the skills to do so.

appearance similar to a motor lifeboat. Hughes has worked as a commercial fisherman as well as a shop teacher, so he understands the dynamics of an excellent sea boat and commands the craftsmanship required to build one. Boat shoppers prioritizing interiors that look like hotel lobbies, galleys that could serve as a set for the Galloping Gourmet, and master staterooms that would make a Vegas madam blush will probably look right past the flared bow, abundant freeboard, and canoe stern of the full-keeled, heavily ballasted, round-bilged displacement hull and decry the absence of a big-screen plasma TV. The Allweather eight-meter isn't a typical or average boat and may not appeal to the typical or average boater.

Some boaters are more familiar with the trade names of the latest high-end decorator surface materials than with the advantages of a low center of gravity and raised hatches in the self-bailing cockpit. Perhaps they will consider the Allweather

eight-meter and wonder why anybody could possibly have an interest in such an unusual looking vessel, so far removed from the Madison Avenue mainstream of mass production.

Over the last few decades, 31 people have shared Hughes's vision of a proper sea boat and commissioned him to build them a boat. “This hasn't been much of a Seattle boat,” said Homer. “Most of these have gone up to Alaska, and some of them have become small-scale commercial fish boats. It would be unusual to build an Allweather for a first-time buyer; most of our customers have owned a couple of boats or more and learn something from each experience, before they finally come to realize that the essential elements of a sea boat remain pretty consistent. They find those elements built into an Allweather. The boaters that get enough experience to know what they really need to be safe and comfortable offshore are the types of people who eventually become my clients. I



had one couple that sold a boat well over 40 feet in length and ordered our 26-foot oil screw. Right after they took delivery, they motored out to the Strait of Juan de Fuca and went fishing out in the Pacific off the Oregon Coast. They told me that the Allweather eight-meter was a much better bluewater boat than their old boat of over 40 feet."

Homer's boats cannot be considered fast. They make about the same speed as a sailboat running under power, with 15-hp diesel engines propelling an Allweather eight-meter at displacement speeds of up to seven knots. It would be common for some of the more popular selling million-dollar powerboats, with perhaps a pair of 400-hp diesel engines, to duplicate the six or seven-knot cruise speed of an Allweather with both engines throttled back to idle. Categories where an Allweather excels, however, are affordability, fuel efficiency, and range.

It has been accurately observed that yachtsmen comfortable with a purchase price in the high six-figure or even seven-figure category could "care less" about the cost of fuel. If the 2,000 gallons a pleasure boater might burn in a season climbs in price from \$2.50 to \$4.50 per gallon, most

Clockwise from above:

Heavily ballasted keel, full displacement hull, large rudder with skeg.

An Allweather boat is styled much like a motor lifeboat.

Homer Hughes says, "A lot of people tell us we have the same sort of interior room found on a lot of 30-footers."

An Allweather boat is easily trailered.

boaters comfortably affording \$5,000 monthly boat payments will not be inconvenienced by an increase of a few thousand dollars in a fuel bill spread out over several months. Boating, however, should not be restricted to that fraction of the populace with unlimited resources. The Allweather eight-meter is a boat that can bring safe, reliable, economical boating to an average family with only a moderate

amount of disposable income.

"I'd need to put a pencil to it," said Homer, "but I think I could build a brand-new Allweather for somebody at a price around \$90,000. We've been saying for over 30 years that the price of fuel was going to do what it seems to be doing now, and because of that we think more people are going to agree that the time is right for a boat like this. To give you an idea of just

how economical an Allweather eight-meter will operate, a few years ago we delivered a boat to Ketchikan. Now, to be honest we were running pretty light as we didn't want to have to pack anything back off that boat but a couple of sleeping bags after we made the delivery, but we ran from Ferndale to Ketchikan on 47 gallons of diesel."

The fuel consumption curve for an Allweather eight-meter graphically illustrates the relationship between speed and fuel economy. At seven knots, an Allweather will burn about one gph. Figures quoted in gallons per hour often fail to impress boaters more attuned to high-speed operation (who might in turn remark, "Okay, you only burn a gallon of fuel per hour but if it takes all day to get out of sight you have still burned a lot of fuel in the process!"). Putting the fuel consumption into terms of nautical miles per gallon can serve a useful purpose. With some of the large, high-speed power cruisers realizing under a nautical mile per gallon, seven nautical miles per gallon (the seven-knot fuel consumption of an Allweather) would be considered very admirable fuel economy in most circles. According to figures furnished by Allweather boats, slowing to six knots reduces fuel consumption to two quarts of diesel per hour, achieving a fuel economy of 12 nautical miles per gallon. Boaters willing to slow to five knots will burn only about a quart of diesel per hour and can travel an incredible 20 nautical miles per gallon of diesel consumed.

At the five-knot speed and the standard 115-gallon fuel tank, range on an Allweather boat is about 2,000 nautical miles with prudent reserve, approximately enough to motor from Olympia, Washington, to Anchorage, Alaska (and halfway back!) without stopping along the route for fuel. "Boats very similar to an Allweather are common in much of northern Europe," observed Homer. When considering that fuel has long sold for well over \$5 a gallon in that region and the conditions that often prevail in the North Sea, it isn't difficult to understand why a

boat with the characteristics of an Allweather would be a popular choice.

Cabin layout of an Allweather eight-meter is comfortable but spartan, and roomier than one might assume when viewing the boat from alongside. "A lot of people say they think we compete pretty well with 30-footers when it comes to interior room," remarked Homer, and as we inspected the interior of the boat it was easy to see why. A double bunk is set in the forepeak, with a hanging locker to starboard. Immediately aft is a pair of opposing settees, with a clever pull-out dining or chart table the slides under the forward bunk when not in use. The settees can be made up into another double bunk, expanding practical sleeping capacity to four persons. Aft of the settee and to starboard is the inside helm, followed by a stainless galley sink and a run of count-

It shouldn't be difficult for more people to appreciate that this is a boat whose time has come.

er space. Opposite the helm and galley sink is a galley worktop, a propane stove, and an enclosed stand-up head in the aft port quarter of the main cabin.

The large cockpit features a folding tiller, intended to be the primary steering station during fair weather. "The wheel and the tiller seem to balance each other very nicely," said Homer. "I can usually set a course and then leave the wheel long enough to fry up some breakfast and then when I'm done I will usually discover that we are still within a few degrees of the original heading."

Homer pointed out that the deck rails are set inboard from the edge of the non-skid decks. "I've actually had people tell me that I've put the deck rail on all wrong. They expect to see it on the outside edge of the deck. We put the rail inboard from the walking area of the deck to make it easy to get on or off the boat at any location. A lot of the Coast Guard boats are set up the same way."

Is there a viable market for a super seaworthy, heck for stout, slow but ultra-economical, affordable pleasure boat? The latest round of fuel price increases and prospects of more to come have inspired Homer to once again begin marketing the Allweather more energetically and consistently. For the huge portion of the populace for whom basic affordability and cost of operation would be major considerations rather than incidental details, the Allweather eight-meter may represent an important means to get additional families out on the water.

"It shouldn't be difficult for more people to appreciate that this is a boat whose time has come," opined Homer. "We're all having to make, or should be making, some adjustments in life in response to the fuel situation. Even my wife, who drives a 50-mpg VW diesel, is more hesitant than before to just hit the road and drive all over. There's never going to be as much oil available as we used to have. And besides, it would be a shame to waste this oil we're burning lately, some of it has got blood in it."

Homer Hughes may think his Allweather hasn't been much of a "Seattle boat," but the design appears to have some redeeming qualities for our inland boating environment. Even at seven knots, a boater departing Shilshole at 0800 can easily plan to lunch in Port Townsend, Tacoma, Gig Harbor, Langley, or Port Orchard. The hull design will make an Allweather an exceptionally safe vessel, reducing any anxiety associated with the concern of being "caught" by weather while crossing Juan de Fuca or Georgia straits. A boating family on a budget can trailer an Allweather home at the end of a cruise to save mooring fees. An Allweather could knock around Puget Sound and the San Juan Islands for an entire summer's worth of weekend and vacation cruises on a single load of fuel.

For additional information on Allweather boats, check the company website at allweatherboats.com or phone Homer at 360-384-4686. ■