MAKING LANDFALL, RESTED AND WARM

by Tim Murphy

After more than 35 years and 400 boats, the 52 Raised Deck Pilot is the first go-anywhere Shannon with inside steering

It's mid-November, and Walter Schulz has just delivered a 1929 Elco motor yacht up from Florida to New England when we meet at his shop in Bristol, Rhode Island, to talk about the newly launched Shannon 52 Raised Deck Pilot.

"High anxiety, high stress, high cold," is all Schulz says for a good long while about that trip; clearly, he's still trying to shake it off.

Only later does he say more. "I'll tell you, that cold sneaks up on you and brings fatigue." For Schulz, the recollection calls up other memories from a lifetime of delivering boats: memories of navigating through heat and rain and poor visibility on boats with badly designed cockpits and berths; memories, too, of boats and lives lost following bad decisions. "When you're tired," Schulz says, "you start doing stupid things at the wrong time. That's a guarantee."

It's an appropriate prelude to our conversation.

Limiting the Exposure

Why appropriate? Because raising the comfort factor and limiting a sailor's exposure to extreme elements—hot, wet, cold—is this boat's very reason for being. "I built this entire boat around that inside steering station," Schulz said.

Walter Schulz designed the Shannon 52 RDP both from ideas he's been refining for more than three decades and from elements that simply couldn't have been realized till now. She's a more traditional passagemaker than the recent Shannon 53 HPS (see "Something Old, Something New," *Cruising World*, October 2010), a luxury yacht that followed from the shoal-draft design brief of the 35-foot Shoalsailer. Like most of the 400 or so Shannons launched to date, the 52 RDP is intended as a go-anywhere voyager. One of the increasingly fascinating things about the Schulz Boat Company is in the way its craftsmen have incorporated new design elements, inspired by recent technological breakthroughs, yet without forgetting the good things they've learned from their own hands-on experience and the seafaring history that came before it.

Take the RDP's ketch rig. "I lifted all that from L. Francis Herreshoff," Schulz says, referring to the legendary cruising-boat designer of the mid-20th century. Schulz points out the rig's big mizzen, big enough to provide footing for this 44,000-pound boat when flown in conjunction with a headsail and the mainsail entirely furled. "I take no credit for that," Schulz says. "Nobody did ketches better than L. Francis did."

Judging by today's trends, the ketch may initially look like a throwback to another age; you certainly won't find many along the boat-show docks. But Schulz sees both the promise and the limits of the technology that underpins today's prevailing trends. On the one hand, he recognizes that such innovations as the needle bearings in Harken's roller-furlers honestly do allow shorthanded, middle-aged crews nowadays to safely run

sailboats 50 feet long, day and night, over long passages; when he first went into business in 1975 Schulz reckoned 38 feet was the upper limit, based on the available technology. Still, he knows that no sailor can rely too heavily on those things: "If it's electrical, if it's mechanical, or if it just turns, the one thing I guarantee everybody is that it's going to break. Now what? What do you do when it breaks?"

In the case of the ketch rig, you have a sailplan that's divided up so that a couple can handle any one of those sails—without powered winches, if necessary. It may take a while to get them up and down, but it's possible. Twin headsails add still more sailhandling flexibility. Plus, with a mast height of 64 feet, you can take this 52-foot inside many coastal passages. The rig is just one element of a large and complex yacht-design puzzle whose solution is to carry a couple safely and comfortably across oceans and along the coast, delivering them rested and ready to do it again.

The Big Picture

The owner of the first 52 RDP has sailed a range of boats on the Great Lakes—from such production cruisers as a Cape Dory 25 and a C&C 34 to zippy performers like E-Scows and International 210s. He even owned an Ocean 48 powerboat with twin 600-horsepower Caterpillars. Now in his early 60s and with a hankering to do some long-distance ocean voyaging, he began looking for a boat he and his wife could sail to the Caribbean, maybe the Med.

Together, he and Schulz created a boat like no other Shannon, yet one that's built on many elements the yard has tested and proven over the years. The result blends the aforementioned ketch rig with a center cockpit, twin Yanmar 4JH4 engines, a bow thruster, a centerboard, and, of course, the inside steering that arguably defines the entire boat.

Schulz said people had been asking him for years to build a raised-deck model—the kind where you're sitting in the saloon looking up at sky—but that he had no interest. Also, it wasn't until very recently that he began to trust the glass and adhesive technology to keep those big windows intact in a seaway. "What finally intrigued me about it," he said, "was the idea of raising the thing another foot for visibility and putting a wheel in there. Get the people out of the cockpit." The resulting helm station affords more than 300 degrees of good visibility forward and athwartships.

Structure and Layout

The 52's hull structure is similar to that of other Shannons: hand-laid stitched biaxial fiberglass and linear Corecell foam. Vinylester in the outer skins protects against osmosis; polyester resin is used elsewhere. Kevlar reinforces the bow and such high-load areas as chainplates. It's a structure that's rugged without being needlessly heavy.

The hullforms of most Shannons fall into families, depending on subtle changes to the transoms and other elements. For example, Shannon 37s and 39s are modified versions of the 38 tooling. In the case of the 52 RDP, the hull shares some history with the first 50 built in 1981, which was subsequently modified into a 47 and a 51. In the case of the 52 RDP, though, the tooling changes were extensive. "From station 6 all the way to the transom, this is a new boat really," said ShulzSchulz. And the deck tooling is entirely new, with particular emphasis on improving the cockpit ergonomics.

Adding volume through those sections did two things: it opened up space for an ample aft cabin, but also increased the reserve buoyancy aft to prevent squatting under power, ultimately increasing speed. In a moderate chop on Rhode Island's Mt. Hope Bay last October, we cruised at a sprightly 8.3 knots with both engines running at 2,600 rpm; under one engine alone, we made 7.3 knots. Each engine is canted inboard five degrees to open up motorsailing possibilities, depending on the tack you're on. With twin engines and a bow thruster, maneuvering in close quarters is a snap, even when the wind and current are at odds. Under sail in eight to ten knots of breeze, we close-reached at 7.5 knots under headsail, main, and mizzen. On the wind, dropping the centerboard to its full draft of nine feet nine inches dramatically improves the 52's pointing ability. And with the board up, you can still visit such notoriously shallow cruising grounds as the Chesapeake Bay, the Bahamas, or Florida's west coast.

The increased volume in the hull sections affords still another opportunity. In keeping with its comfort-oriented design brief, the 52 RDP is a yacht that's rich in systems. This boat has a dedicated machinery space separate from engine room to house an inverter and battery charger, as well as compressors for A/C and refrigeration. Meanwhile, the engines, genset and tanks—everything with variable weight—are installed under the saloon sole, both low and centered for ideal weight distribution. Systems installation and general workmanship is impeccable.

The interior layout on the boat I sailed features a traditional V-berth forward, L-shaped dining area in the main saloon, cozy inline galley to port under the center cockpit, and over-and-under berths in a crews' cabin aft of that. All the way aft, a sumptuous owners' cabin features a head with separate stall shower. This yacht's fine rich joinery is consistent with the high standards of previous Shannons.

The Takeaway

The Shannon 52 RDP is a luxury passagemaker for a couple that reaches for the reasonable limits of size and scale, while also squarely addressing the constraints of human strength, comfort, and endurance underway. Together with her shoal-draft possibilities and her true oceangoing layout, she promises to set a new mark for voyaging comfort. And, as Walter Schulz knows, to arrive comfortable and rested at the end of a long passage is no small thing.

*Tim Murphy is a **Cruising World** Editor-at-Large and an independent writer based in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. For more than a decade he's served as Cruising World's Boat of the Year director, then judge.*

Shannon 52 RDP Specifications
LOA = 55' 0" (16.76 m.)
LOD = 51' 9" (15.77 m.)
LWL = 43' 3" (13.18 m.)
Beam = 14' 3" (4.34 m.)
Draft (fixed) = 7' 0" (2.13 m.)
Draft (up/down) = 5' 7" / 9' 9" (1.70 m. / 2.97 m.)
Displacement = 44,000 lb. (19,958 kg.)
Ballast = 13,500 lb. (6,123 kg.)

Sail Area 1,173 sq. ft. (109 sq. m.)
Air draft (sketch) = 64' 0" (19.50 m.)
D/L = 243
SA/D = 15.0
Water = 180 gal. (681 l.)
Fuel = 260 gal. (984 l.)
Waste = 50 gal. (189 l.)
Engine = Two Yanmar 75 hp diesels
(or single 125 hp.)
Price Fully Equipped for Ocean Cruising $1.4 million

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