

Why we like the PT Skiff



The easy-to-build, fuel-efficient PT Skiff.

By Meade A. Gougeon

While *Professional Boatbuilder's* Powerboat Design Challenge was underway, we followed one entry very closely: the PT Skiff from Bieker Boats in Seattle, Washington. The contest sought innovative designs for small (16' 6" to 18' 6"), fuel-efficient powerboats making the best use of modern boat design, materials and construction technology. What intrigued us about the competition is that all entries had to be designed around a maximum 25 horsepower outboard engine and consume no more than two gallons of gas per hour at 15 knots while carrying a 650 lb (four person) load. This represents 8.6 miles per gallon. The contest also required a trailerable weight of less than 2,700 lb and the ability to safely power home into 15-knot breezes and a 2' to 3' chop. Typically, a production runabout at this length will require three to six times as much horsepower and gets fewer miles per gallon.

The PT skiff was one of 73 designs submitted from 16 countries and 19 states.

Jan and I paid special attention when we heard that the high-powered trio of Paul Bieker, Eric Jolley and Russell Brown were putting their heads together on an entry. These gentlemen have produced all kinds of boats, from International 14 dinghies to high-tech America's Cup yachts. Beiker is on the BMW Oracle structural design team. In

addition to designing boats, Russell Brown is one of the best builders we know when it comes to maximizing the potential of wood/epoxy construction.

We've always tried to build the lightest weight sailboats possible to promote maximum performance. Recently, Jan and I carried this philosophy into powerboat design when we developed and built our 32' Gougmarans which get 15 mpg at 12 knots (*Epoxyworks* 25). We were also highly impressed with a Ted Brewer designed 37' power cruiser that was built locally by owner Carl Puhl (*Epoxyworks* 26). Over a two-year period, Carl and his wife have cruised *Fifty Plus* over 2,700 miles averaging over 9 miles per gallon.

Of all the 73 entries, the PT Skiff was one of the few to be built and sea tested before judging took place. I was fortunate to see first hand the unique capabilities of this superb design. We were especially impressed with the following.

1. A rather slim hull with fine entry and appropriate flair that provides high fuel efficiency at both slow and high speeds. Most boats at this size range are designed to operate on a full plane and are very inefficient at displacement speeds.
2. A practical and simple water ballast option that is crucial to all around comfort and efficiency for this lightweight craft.
3. A unique structural design that maximizes the potential of wood/epoxy construction. The result is probably one of the lightest and strongest craft in this class.
4. The attempt from the very beginning to make this boat buildable for the talented amateur with a focus on clear instructions and efficient use of time a materials.

Professional Boatbuilder described this entry as "one of the best developed plans that took full advantage of advances in materials and construction technology." Although another boat (the RM 18 by Swedish designer Rolf Eliasson) was chosen the winner of this competition, the dynamic designers of the PT Skiff were undaunted. They proceeded to re-design the skiff with some upgrades to make her an even better boat. ■