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Hatteras 39 Sport Express

by [David Pascoe](#)



There are big Hats and little Hats, but this is the last of the small Hats, which is a sad thing. The smallest Hatteras now made is a fifty footer. The problem, you see, is that good quality costs too much, so companies like Hatteras can no longer afford to offer boats like this. Not enough people willing to pay for this kind of quality in a small boat.

It really came as no surprise when the captain told us that this was the TENDER for their yacht. Un huh, that's what he said. Tender, as in dinghy for the big boat. That's the kind of money that buys these things when they're new, at prices that boggle the imagination. But here it is four years later selling for a fraction of original cost, and the person who's buying it is getting a great deal.



Note the optional rear-facing seat





Engine room does not make good use of available space.



This narrow view doesn't do the cabin space justice.



This gives a little better sense of the spaciousness.

It's called the thirty nine Sport Express and is reminiscent of the Bertram 38 Special. Whereas the later was a dedicated fisherman, this boat makes a lot of concessions to socializing that true blue anglers might find disdainful. Take out all that fancy seating and you'd call this a Sport Fish. But that's the way the market is with small sport boats these days. To sell enough to cover the cost of tooling and turn a slight profit, builders have to go the multipurpose boat route. And that's really what this boat is, for too many design concessions get in the way of calling her a true blue sport fisherman despite being decked out with fancy tower, riggers and chair.

Our test boat had an optional cockpit seating arrangement, which, cohabitating with a full Pompanette fighting chair, made the cockpit seem painfully small. To even get past the chair from one side to the other, you either have to step over the extremely obtrusive foot rest, or remove the seat back. The cockpit is NOT too small, it's just that you can't have your cake and eat it too. If this is a fish boat, then the optional seating doesn't belong there. If it's a party boat, then the chair needs to go. With both, you get the worst of both worlds.

Performance Before we get into other details, let's talk about performance. And it just so happened that on our sea trial day we had a huge and mean line of thunderstorms angling across South Florida in such a way as that these storms were with us for most of the day. Thus, we got no respite, and at times had to slow to idle speed because one could barely see the bow of the boat, let alone where we were going. A couple of photos here illustrate the point.

Winds gusted up to, I would guess, around 40 knots, or enough to blow the tops of waves off on Biscayne Bay. We tried to head out Government Cut, but chose not to risk it when visibility went to zero and radar showed a ship heading in. Instead, we headed south toward the wide part of the bay where seas quickly rose to four foot, and very steep in that shallow water. With 6V92's turning out 540 horses, we were told that this was a 37 knot boat. That is almost believable except that a 42 Bertram with the same power will top out at 31-32, and I seriously doubted that this 30,000 lb boat would garner an additional 5 knots. So we were not surprised that the best she would not break 30 knots on an averaged trial run upwind and down, her best being a respectable 28.2 kts.

But over a four foot sea? Hmmm, now that is impressive. And without hernia belts and teeth guards. At those kind of speeds, the only thing that won't be bumpy would be a 100' hull. There was a bit of bucking, but no bone crushing, ring-your-bell slamming. In fact, there are darn few other boats her size that could even come close to doing 28 knots in four footers. Not for a minute did I fear that the boat couldn't take it, or that we were going to break something. Nor that I or any of the other passengers could not take it.

Never mind that our broker was former NFL quarterback Craig Erickson of Allied Marine, for whom such bumps don't even register on the Richter scale. Yes, the ride was tolerable to me, even under these absurd conditions, though you can bet your butt Moma would be hollering bloody murder. And when we finally returned to the dock hours later, there was nothing on board that got broken.

Her hull shape is pretty much the standard Hatteras fare, meaning a modified vee form with quite deep entry. The bow has a moderate amount of flair, rendering a remarkably dry ride. It achieves this in large part due to

her angle of attack, wherein she rides at a 10 degree angle with tabs retracted. With 7 degrees as average or normal, you could say that she rides a little bow high.

With that in mind, now we can understand why she doesn't do better than 28 knots. Like everything else in this world, there are prices to be paid for certain benefits. You want first class sea keeping performance, then you ain't gonna go 37 knots at least as long as you don't have turbines for engines. Nor should it surprise you that she's got a 4 foot draft, a good portion of which is accounted for by a moderate sized keel that does a lot to help dampen roll.

The Cockpit Getting back to layout, the cockpit, being divided between forward and after parts, as with all such designs, creates a huge bottleneck where the L-shaped cockpit settee narrows the passageway down to about 16" wide. At this point, it's hard not to notice how often two or more people bump into each other while trying to pass this point at the same time. That's but one of the reasons why trying to mix a fishing boat with a party boat doesn't work too well. Then, the fact that there is a wet bar, frig, and storage cabinets on the starboard side in this area, means that anyone working in this area has to move out of the way to let someone pass. Indeed, all day long I was plagued by asking people to move so that I could get by. You do this just so many times before it begins to dawn on you why this is a problem.

On the positive side, the cockpit bench seating is the nicest I've ever seen. You've heard me say that if you create a bench seat that holds three, the maximum that will sit there is two, because no one ever wants to sit in the middle. Well, they solved that problem by taking that long seat and breaking it up with arm rests between each of the three seating positions. Smart thinking there. And, the upholstery is remarkably firm and has held up well.

The helm sort of reminded me of a Tiara panel. There is a large back panel for mounting flush electronics. The compass goes front and center. The wheel is a destroyer type, vertically mounted, albeit on the smallish side with the engine controls above on the horizontal plane so that you don't get tangled up in the wheel. The DDEC displays are mounted on angled pods with a good line of sight. The electrically controlled helm seat allows you see over the back panel but unfortunately is poorly positioned relative to the wheel; you are not going to sit there and steer without getting a helluva backache. So, instead, you stand and hopefully soon you'll be able to turn on the autopilot. I'd hate to have to bring this one all the way down the Intracoastal. The two spoke wheel is not made for steering with your feet, as I usually do.

Incredibly, during hours of torrential rains, neither the windshield nor the enclosures did not leak much. It's a rakish, study affair, to which the paint seems to be adhering well. Railings are the husky 1" stainless pipe and solid as can be.

The Hull Unlike Hatteras of the past, these boats are foam cored on the decks. The bottom is solid glass and the sides are too as near as I could determine. Stringers are the usual top hat type with no wood structures other than bulkheads. Decks are glassed on. Fore and cockpit decks are solid when jumped on. Hatches are all properly designed with very deep gutters and good drainage. As usual, hatches are a bit hard to get up, but that is a price you pay for solving the leakage problem.

This boat, with the optional cockpit seat, poses a ridiculous problem of engine room entry. The cockpit seat lifts up on pneumatic cylinders to reveal a Z-shaped engine room hatch that is not on hinges but has to be lifted out. And you have to do this whilst on hands and knees while you are UNDER the lifted up seat. If this doesn't cause you to throw your back out, probably nothing will. In any case, this is a badly thought out arrangement that is truly intolerable, but you only have this with the optional seating. . . . for which there is a special place just waiting on the bottom of the ocean

The Engine Room Originally designed for 6-71 inline diesels, this is one of the rare ones fitted with V92's. Unfortunately, they are a bit close together, which makes it hard to navigate between them. With the engines hot, you are bound to get burned, as I did. Otherwise, it is adequately sized with generator within.

If you know Hatteras, then you know they are famous for sprinkling electric panels around in their boats, and they place them in the oddest, often most inconvenient of places. Here is a perfect example of that: In the cabin is a main panel that contains only the main DC and AC circuit breakers. Virtually all the other breakers are in the engine room which, as you may recall, I described as being hell itself to get into. Why did they do it this way? Is it an April Fools joke? It would seem so considering the ordeal that one has to go through just

to get there. Surely they could not have failed to notice the problem. They might as well have put those breakers at the end of a 500' long dock.

Engine noise? Contrast this with any Sea Ray and you'll be amazed at the difference in noise levels. On a Sea Ray with Caterpillars you scream to be heard. Here, you can almost talk normally.

Cabin Area -- spacious but struck me as odd in a way hard to define. Perhaps because the depth of the hull renders a very high overhead, which visually throws things out of proportion. You get the impression of smallness without actually being small. Aft and to starboard is a spacious head with a good sized shower stall. No complaints here at all.

Just ahead of this is a four seat dinette -- as all Hatterases have dinettes because they are so darn convenient. Oddly enough, the only crappy thing on this boat was the dinette upholstery, which did not measure up to the rest of the boat. Neither did putting a self-contained AC unit under the dinette seat where, predictably, water sloshes out of the poorly drained condensation pan to begin ruining the wood work. There is a reason why they used to put the compressors in the engine room, and this exemplifies it.

The forward cabin, such as it is, does not have a vee berth but, rather a one-legged vee that makes for a largish berth that, although high up as you'd expect, has a lot of overhead so that you don't feel like a tinned sardine. However, there is a dearth of floor space so that doors and drawers get tangled up and are hard to get to or use.

Those unpleasanties aside, the galley is, shall we say, interesting? There's nothing really wrong with it, it's just different. Like the reefer and freezer hanging from the overhead above the counter. Here you hope that the contents haven't shifted and don't fall out as soon as you open the door. Counter tops are the now usual Corian lookalike plastic with premolded sink. Between the Kitchen Aid 2 burner cooktop and the sink, there isn't much working space. Nor is there much storage available. Oh, there are lots of cabinet doors, but when you open them you'll be amazed to find the spaces only 4-6" deep!!! And there is not a single drawer. Ah, well, you want space, buy a megayacht

Meanwhile, this is an altogether pretty nifty little boat that carries with it most of the usually good Hatteras engineering and quality but for a couple of serious gripes. Good quality and great performance don't often come together in a single package, but in this one you've got both. They were only built and sold for four years so there are not hundreds of them around. They started in '95 and ended in '98. Why? Too much quality and too high a price to sell a lot of this size boat. Now the smallest Hatteras built is a 50 footer.

It's the last of the little Hats.

Posted January 7, 2002



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David Pascoe - Biography

David Pascoe is a second generation marine surveyor in his family who began his surveying career at age 16 as an apprentice in 1965 as the era of wooden boats was drawing to a close.

Certified by the National Association of Marine Surveyors in 1972, he has conducted over 5,000 pre purchase surveys in addition to having conducted hundreds of boating accident investigations, including fires, sinkings, hull failures and machinery failure analysis.

Over forty years of knowledge and experience are brought to bear in following books. David Pascoe is the author of:

- "[Mid Size Power Boats](#)" (2003)
- "[Buyers' Guide to Outboard Boats](#)" (2002)
- "[Surveying Fiberglass Power Boats](#)" (2001, 2nd Edition - 2005)
- "[Marine Investigations](#)" (2004).

In addition to readers in the United States, boaters and boat industry professionals worldwide from [nearly 80 countries](#) have purchased David Pascoe's books, since introduction of his first book in 2001.

In 2012, David Pascoe has retired from marine surveying business at age 65.

On November 23rd, 2018, David Pascoe has passed away at age 71.

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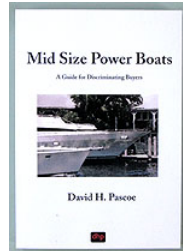
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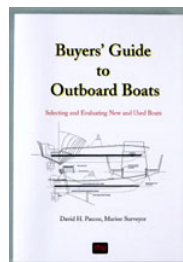


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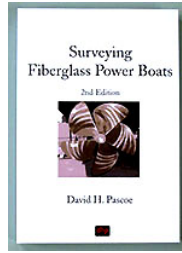
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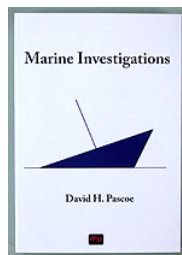


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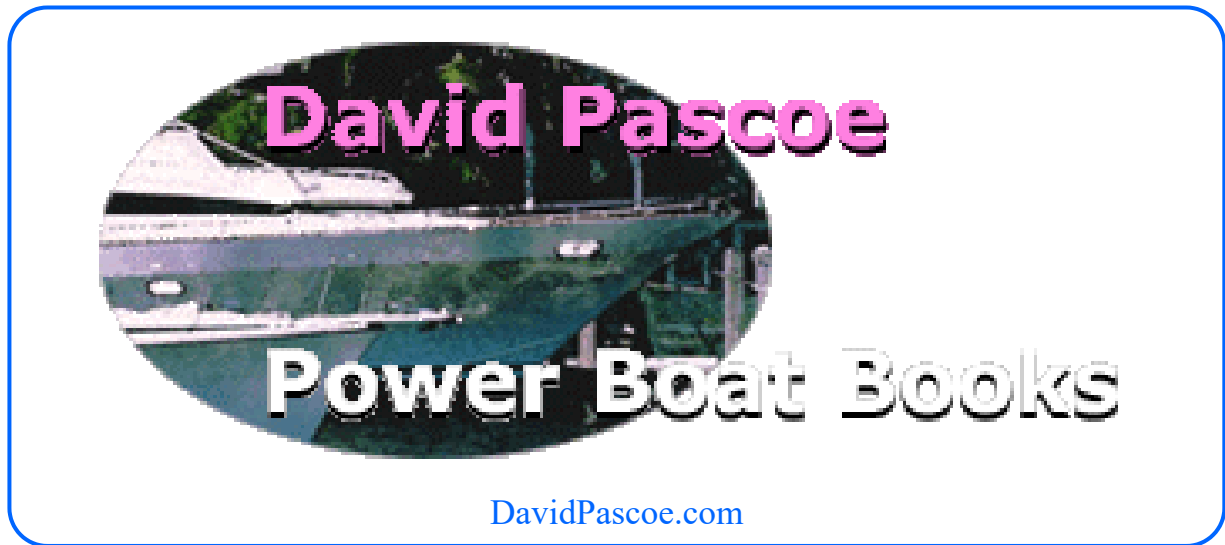
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