

# ON BOARD

# LITTLE HARBOR 58

TED HOOD PROVES THAT HEAVY DISPLACEMENT MEANS SPEED, SEAWORTHINESS AND BEAUTY.

By Jack Somer

**T**he Little Harbor 58, the latest and finest in the company's line of powerful offshore cruisers, is the culmination of a design program Ted Hood has refined since his first *Robin* (which, with a few modifications, is still winning races after 17 years). The new 58 has many qualities associated with Little Harbor semi-custom boats: superb construction, fine detail, excellent systems and solid performance. But she has some differences—improvements, I should say—that distinguish her.

I have deep respect for Hood's long and proud adherence to his original design parameters: a heavy displacement hull that provides spaciousness and load-carrying ability; a high-aspect-ratio centerboard for efficient windward performance, and handsome, traditional styling. Nearly all my offshore experience (before being persuaded by my friend Tom Stark to navigate the 1986 Bermuda Race on his J/41,

*Rush*) was enjoyed on yachts of medium to heavy displacement, and I know well the comforting feeling they engender when wind and sea are rising and you want a stable platform under you.

But a heavy boat, to perform in a wide range of breezes, needs a big sailplan, limited only by a crew's practical ability to handle it (hence, the attractiveness of modern power-assisted furling). Still, the 58, with 1,508 sq. ft. of working sail, has only a moderate sail area/displacement of 16.33, so she should be fast but controllable in a blow—in other words, she will quite easily attain her theoretical speed limit ( $1.34 \times \text{square root of the waterline}$ ) but not sail much beyond that. But, her rounded hull sections imply a high sail area/wetted surface ratio, so she will accelerate easily, and like Hood's other designs, will go well in light airs.

Though the 58 has an apparently modest ballast ratio of

**Little Harbor interior details reflect the long sailing experience of the design staff: broadly rounded corners, beveled edges, well-placed hand-holds, stowage everywhere, all of which contribute to comfort and safety at sea. The client for the first 58 specified the lighter color of double-bleached teak and five coats of gloss varnish.**



**An aerial view reveals the numerous hatches, dorades and ports that ventilate the Little Harbor 58. Stainless steel is used generously for pulpits, stanchions, chocks, rails and hatch frames. The next 58 has a second cockpit abaft the helm with entry to the after stateroom, one of many custom Little Harbor options the design group offers clients.**





0.40, it is effectively higher when you consider the center-board trunk structure, heavy hull scantlings, machinery and batteries mounted low in the hull. So in a seaway she will have an easier motion (contrasted with the sharp motion of light, deep-keeled boats) and carry her sailplan well.

As to Little Harbor styling, it is conservative, even traditional, as befits Hood's New England background: There is nothing extremely modern in the look of the 58, but much modernity lurks beneath the surface, seen only by lifting a floorboard or poking into a locker. Little Harbors have evolved slowly, thoughtfully, effectively. In fact, the 58 evolved from a survey of Little Harbor owners and potential clients, which concluded with these requirements: accommodation for six; safe steering and sail control from the helm; a draft of five feet or less and, above all, speed and seaworthiness. Of course, these are not very different from most designers' goals in an offshore cruiser, but with the obvious success of the 58 design, I would expect more than a few competitors to be looking closely at her.

**Hull** My visit to Little Harbor headquarters in Portsmouth, R.I., to sail the 58 actually began with an early morning cup of coffee sipped in the design room, amidst half models fixed to the walls and tank testing models dangling from the ceiling: a three-dimensional history of modern yacht design and Ted's contribution to it. The conversation started, however, over a hand sketch Hood wanted to share (we were joined by Ted Hood Jr. and Mike Silverman, key members of the Little Harbor family).

**The Little Harbor 58 shows her handsome profile, with low freeboard and long, low house. She is easily sailed from the cockpit, with full furling gear and powered winches. Her heavy displacement hull makes her forgiving in a seaway, and she can be loaded heavily for long-range cruising with little effect on overall performance.**

**The navigation station shows the deep pride of Little Harbor's Taiwan builders: meticulous joinery, flawless varnish and a custom inlaid emblem in the chart table. The adjacent engine room, which is crammed with accessories, is easily entered for routine machinery servicing and all bilges are reached through lifting cabin-sole sections.**



The sketch is a comparison of the midship section of a typical Little Harbor keel/centerboarder and that of the 58 prototype (a pure centerboarder, with no keel). The 58's hull shape is more rounded, lacking the short keel to house the ballast and centerboard trunk. Thus, volume increases at the bottom of the canoe body, resulting in: greater interior space for accommodations, tanks and machinery; a more broadly distributed volume for ballast lead; a reduction in required draft for the same stability (the hull's center of gravity is actually lowered), and a further reduction in wetted surface.

Why didn't Hood do this before? Well, it turns out, he did do it recently in Cabot Lyman's 49' *Chewink*, now completing a circumnavigation (see the first installment of the Lyman family saga in YACHTING, last February). But, he had hesitated to eliminate the keel in production boats because, as he explains, many cruising sailors think of a keel as security against grounding damage. Still, the gains in performance surely justify its elimination, and Hood has taken the giant step (though the 58 is offered with keel for the unconvinced).

A study of the drawings of the 58 on these pages also reveals how the Little Harbor design group reaches another goal: a graceful shape. Given the added volume below the waterline, they did not have to force the freeboard higher to increase accommodations space and headroom, so the 58 has a low profile and her sheerline is classic, rising at the bow just enough to ward off a sloppy sea. And by rounding out the underbody sections, they produced a hull whose displacement is concentrated amidships, allowing traditional, balanced overhangs. (This contrasts with another recent design trend, exemplified by, say, French singlehanded racing hulls or the Deerfoot line, whose displacement is distributed over much longer waterlines by the virtual elimination of overhangs.)

The other characteristics emerging from the demand for 4'10" draft, are the skeglet abaft the centerboard to protect the prop, and the rudder extension, deployed when under sail but retracted in shoal water. (*Chewink* has the same rudder configuration.)

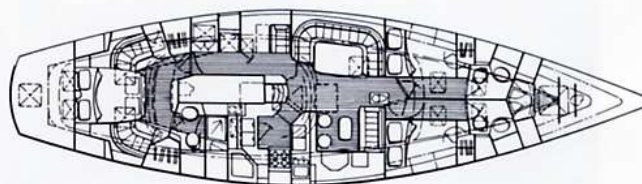
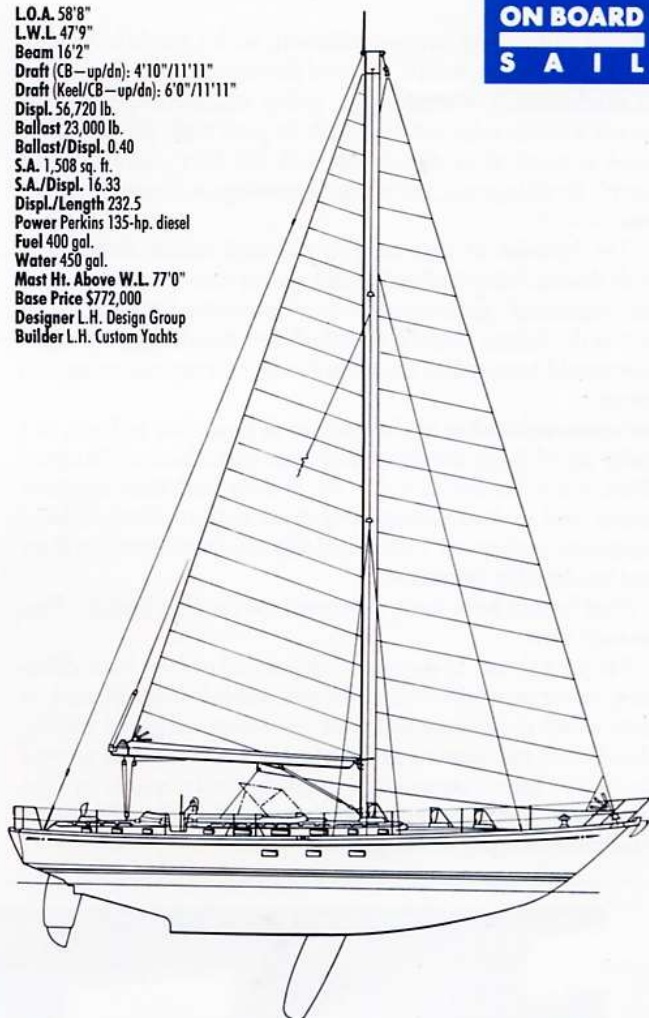
**Construction** Little Harbor builds in hand-laid fiberglass, with Airex core in the hull and Divinycell in the deck. The exterior finish is superb, but even where internal skins are visible, such as the bilges, signs of care are in evidence. Both rudder and centerboard are molded in two parts, the rudder with stainless stock, the board with a bronze shoe on the leading edge. The lead ballast, spread through the bilge, is molded in place and glassed in. Fuel and water tanks are glass, integral to the hull and all bulkheads—structural or not—are marine ply and bonded to the hull and deck.

The hull/deck seal is by an overlapping joint that is bolted and epoxied, and chainplates are bolted to separate fiberglass knees. Little more need be said about Little Harbor's expert workmanship, except to repeat what I have written elsewhere: the best yards in Taiwan, under the best American supervision (in this case, Little Harbor's Bruce Livingston) build yachts of the highest quality.

**Rig and Equipment** While the standard yacht has a double spreader sloop rig, Navtec rod rigging and manual Barient winches, the prototype I sailed is rigged for serious pushbutton sailing: with Hood electric Stoway mainsail, Sea Furl 4880 furling for the genoa and 3250 for the inner

L.O.A. 58'8"  
L.W.L. 47'9"  
Beam 16'2"  
Draft (CB—up/dn): 4'10"/11'11"  
Draft (Keel/CB—up/dn): 6'0"/11'11"  
Displ. 56,720 lb.  
Ballast 23,000 lb.  
Ballast/Displ. 0.40  
S.A. 1,508 sq. ft.  
S.A./Displ. 16.33  
Displ./Length 232.5  
Power Perkins 135-hp. diesel  
Fuel 400 gal.  
Water 450 gal.  
Mast Ht. Above W.L. 77'0"  
Base Price \$772,000  
Designer L.H. Design Group  
Builder L.H. Custom Yachts

ON BOARD  
SAIL



forestay, and a fully powered electric self-tailing Barient winch package. In keeping with the goal of full control of the yacht from the helm, essential lines lead to the cockpit, and winch-control buttons are within reasonable reach of the helm. While Little Harbor has not taken the leap toward fully automated, joystick control, this is about as close as you can get to comfortable, shorthanded sailing without a computer.

Power is a Perkins 135-hp. diesel on soft mounts, driving a feathering three-blade Maxprop, through a Scatra flexible coupling. The result of noise/vibration reduction is a truly quiet machinery experience, and engine room access is excellent. Batteries, the new gel-type, are located in the bilge where they contribute to the unmeasured ballast.

**Accommodations** The present layout is democratic forward, with mirror-image guest cabins and heads, while the owner gets a centerline double aft. This scheme is one of many offered in Little Harbor's genuinely customized program. The

*/continued on page 137*

## LITTLE HARBOR 58

(Continued from page 113)

second hull, in fact, is quite different, with a single large cabin forward to starboard, an oval dining settee in the saloon to starboard, a walkthrough galley to starboard and an owner's cabin with double berth to port with private entry from a small after cockpit (which the first client did not want). In all layouts, the cruising stowage is almost bottomless.

The interior of this boat is finished rather differently, with double-bleached teak and a glossy varnish (rather than the "standard" satin varnish over unbleached teak.) The effect of the lighter wood is wonderful to me, though I personally would have taken the satin finish, to keep the reflection down.

**Performance and Handling** My test sail took place late in June, in a puffy 10-15 knot northwesterly with just a hint of October. Were it not for the fact that the Hoods had later appointments, and we had no food and drink aboard, I would have suggested setting an MPS, ducking out past Brenton Reef and heading for Bermuda.

That would have been a proper test for this beauty. But, no such luck.

The yacht's big 150-percent genoa had not yet been delivered, so we made do with a 110-percent full-hoist jib and, at first, a full main: just right for the lower range of breeze. Hood took the helm to get the feel of her—she was so new the Little Harbor people had sailed her only briefly in light air, so this was their test as well. From the wheel he supervised the tweaking of things.

(Watching the subtle tightening of Hood's brow until hal-yards were right, the outhaul firm and sheet leads set was enlightening; the yard boys would have some tuning work that afternoon. For a moment I allowed myself the fantasy of sailing a new boat with Hood and Rod Stephens—what an education!)

I took the helm when we sailed into open water, and a reef was needed—a roll of the first few feet of main into the Stoway—and she heeled nicely to her lines, with an easy helm, though in the puffs she fought a bit: like a real sailboat.

On every point I found the Little Harbor 58 fast and responsive. The crew trimmed with the power winches, and she became a prime sample of feet-up sailing. Ted Hood's goal of safely controlled cruising has certainly been achieved with this yacht.

As a long-time keelboat sailor, I have occasionally found centerboarders slightly intimidating; not the Little Harbor 58.

Her board is easily controlled by a manual winch on the house, and the gentle improvements in her performance when the board is set right make the effort worthwhile. The only minor negative I found was the slight vibration set up in the rudder extension at speed; I would have no trouble living with that.

Under power she is as fast and maneuverable as a 56,720-lb. lady could be.

What more could a cruising sailor want? □



