

SEAKINDLY



FLAGSHIP

Grand Banks' new Aleutian 70 CP proves its mettle in a wind-tossed delivery to Key West

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S

tanding on the flying bridge of the Grand Banks Aleutian 70 CP as we made the turn to exit Port Everglades Inlet, dreaming of sandy beaches, clear waters and calm seas, I looked out beyond the end of the break-

water and saw an Atlantic Ocean that was anything but calm. Like any cruiser, I found myself willing one brief respite, just one break in the weather, so we could do a little exploring in the Keys.

Then a gust nearly lifted the cap off my head. Steady southeast winds overnight had roiled the coastal and offshore waters into a washboard of white-capped waves that stretched to the horizon. If I figured it right, we would spend the first half of our passage with wind and waves on the port quarter ahead, take it on the beam for a while, and finally have weather on our aft port quarter. Though the kayaks would have to wait for another day, this one was going to be a perfect day for an extended sea trial.

At the invitation of Grand Banks and their Seabrook, Texas, dealers, the father/son team of Jay and Rex Bettis, I boarded the Aleutian 70 CP hull number one in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, last October for a delivery to Key West. She's a handsome, well-proportioned pilothouse-forward motoryacht with a large flying bridge, a slightly springy sheer, a large fore-deck with high rails and built-in seating, and an admirable Portuguese bridge that extends protection from forward of the deckhouse to a point halfway between the stem and stern. Wide side decks continue aft, well protected by raised bulwarks, through wing doors to a covered aft deck

with built-in seating and twin walkways leading down and aft.

If you went aboard the Aleutian 70 CP during the Ft. Lauderdale International Boat Show last fall, you very likely took notice of several things. First was the new cockpit, the CP in this yacht's designation, a feature that adds versatility and beauty to an already great-looking design when it was first introduced as the Aleutian 64. Second was the stunning interior, accessed through automatic opening and closing Freeman doors, a tasteful blend of Grand Banks' signature woodwork and furniture with elegant custom décor by Ft. Lauderdale design firm A La Mer. In fact, the interior was so nice, you might have wondered, as I did, if it was really made to stand up to rough offshore passages. That it was built to sea-keeping quality I learned to appreciate during our run to Key West.

Lastly, if you have any experience maneuvering in tight quarters, you were sure to have noted where the boat was docked. Tied in the innermost slip alongside the concrete bulkhead of the Bahia Mar Yachting Center, it looked like there was no way the yacht was going to get out of there without some kind of assistance from one of the show organizer's helpful little push-boats—which of course it didn't need at all.

It was tricky to be sure, since the solid concrete bulkhead left precious little room for the stern and its ample swim platform to swing clear. While Rex and I stood by in the aft cockpit with fenders at the ready, Jay Bettis took the flying bridge controls and slid us forward into a fairway not much wider than the yacht's length, dropping into neutral just before the swim platform cleared the outer end of the slip. With the Naiad hydraulic bow thruster, Jay moved the bow through an arc of about 45 degrees and then engaged the portside engine. As we began to pull ahead in an ever-flattening arc, Jay deftly played the bow thruster and starboard engine controls until we were in the center of the fairway and headed for open water. We passed quite a few boats idling in their slips, waiting for the push-boats.

Jay communicated with Rex using handheld radios. Another valuable tool for close-quarters maneuvering, particularly backing into a slip, is the wired, handheld remote control, standard on the Aleutian 70, that plugs in either fore or aft on the main deck and gives the operator complete con-





THE ALEUTIAN 70 IS THE PINNACLE OF GRAND BANKS' SIGNATURE WOODWORK AND SEAKINDLY DESIGN, AS SHOWN AT THE PILOTHOUSE HELM (LEFT), AND THE GORGEOUS SALOON (TOP).

trol of the throttles and the powerful bow thruster.

Once clear of the Port Everglades entrance, Jay steered courses north and south while I recorded performance data in both directions. Then he handed me the wheel and I put the yacht through a series of turns and maneuvers before setting a course for the ocean buoy off Miami's Government Cut, the first waypoint on our westward curving path to Key West. Rough as it was in the waters off Ft. Lauderdale, the Tom Fexas-designed Aleutian 70 hull proved to be a solid performer on all points, tracking well because of the full-length keel that drops down below the running gear for protection in the event of grounding. The well-flared bow proved to be an asset running into the waves, adding lift and buoyancy even as the stern knifed deeply into the oncoming rollers. Hull number one was equipped with Naiad's 254 electronically controlled stabilizers, an optional factory-installed system that kept us on a very even keel no matter what the direction of the seas.

Instead of the standard 800-horsepower Caterpillar C-18 engines, the Grand Banks Aleutian 70 hull number one was equipped with a pair of 1,550-horsepower Caterpillars that reached top speeds of 27 knots—remarkable when you remember that we were carrying 80 percent of our standard fuel load and running in 15- to 20-mph winds and waves ranging from four to six feet. Cruising at 19 knots, the Caterpillar engine-control readouts showed a combined fuel burn of 84 gph. Allowing a 10 percent reserve, the Aleutian 70 had a 532-nautical-mile cruising range at that speed in those conditions.

My sound readings indicated that standing watch on the Aleutian 70





HELMSMAN AND NAVIGATOR WILL APPRECIATE THE FLYING BRIDGE'S STIDD CHAIRS, LARGE WHEEL (AND OUTDOOR GALLEY). THE LAYOUT IN THE SALOON DECK (ABOVE) IS A RECREATIONAL TOUR DE FORCE.



would be easy on the ears during a long cruise, and indeed it proved to be a comfortable experience. I also gained a new appreciation for the work of Grand Banks' craftsmen—slogging southward the interior was notably free of rattling doors, creaking panels or noisy hatches in the sole. As beautiful and exquisite as the built-in furniture and cabinetry looked, it sounded even better. The custom woodworking was the best quality; no two interiors are ever completely alike. A customer can work with a dealer to specify interior details, and the factory will send back CAD files for inspection and approval before the first teak plank is shaped. They have their own kiln for drying teak. All the furniture, bulkheads and cabin soles are fabricated with a honeycomb core to eliminate excess weight.

The layout on the Aleutian 70 CP is virtually identical to that of its sibling 64, excepting the fact that the crew quarters are moved from aft of the engine-room to a position ahead of the machinery space. Crew access is through watertight doors from the engine room as well as from the portside deck—perfect for continuity of service while maintaining the privacy of owners and guests. On the accommodation level, the full-beam master was particularly luxurious in its uses of space. In addition to the VIP stateroom forward, the Aleutian 70 I boarded had the optional portside office that converted into a private double on the spur of the moment.

Notable main-deck features included a massive Maxwell 3500 Vertical





Generous accommodations below embody easy cruising comfort (above) with full-beam master and forward VIP suites

LOA: 75'0"
LWL: 64'4"
Beam: 19'10"
Draft: 5'6"
Displ.: 117,000 lb.
Deadrise: 13 degrees
Fuel: 2,625 gal.
Water: 350 gal.
Naval Architect: Tom Fexas
Interior Designer: A La Mer
Engines as Tested: 2x 1,550 hp Cat C-30 diesels
Optional Power: 2x Caterpillar or MAN diesels
Transmissions: Twin Disc
Gear Reduction: 2.48:1
Props: 42" x 43.6" Nibral
Generator: 1x 21.5 kW Northern Lights
Steering: Hydraulic power assist
Engine Controls: Twin Disc EC300
Base Price (w/test engines): \$2,734,700
Price as Tested: \$2,995,000

hydraulic windlass for chain and rope both sides, plus a wide pulpit setup for side-by-side anchors and massive custom cleats, big deck drains and freeing ports along the side decks. In the aft cockpit, two large hatches in the teak-planked sole gave excellent access to rudder heads and loads of storage. Two built-in lockers across the forward end of the cockpit housed a deep stainless steel sink with cutting board, which the fishermen in the family will appreciate, and a massive Magma gas grill large enough to charbroil a good-sized mahimahi to starboard.

The boat deck will store a 13-foot Novurania RIB tender, which is launched or retrieved by the hydraulic crane set to starboard. (By now you should be getting the picture that hydraulic systems, because of their reliability and long duty cycles, play a significant part in the Aleutian 70's standard equipment list. This seems entirely appropriate for the mission and quality Grand Banks has worked to establish.) There's an

outdoor galley to port under the radar arch, and settees on both sides equipped with teak-grate tables for dining or entertaining. A brace of Stidd chairs faced the forward console, with the helmsman's on the centerline for the best possible view in all directions. I liked the chart table to the right of the helmsman's position, but thought that, if this were my yacht, I'd like to have something similar to the port side of the first mate's chair to have one more pair of eyes helping out with navigation.

Just to starboard of the helm, a translucent weatherproof hatch opened to reveal a staircase leading down to the pilothouse deck. As with the earlier 64, the galley and a small portside dinette were on the same level as the lower helm, but our yacht had

something special to improve visibility aft. Hull number one was equipped with an optional electric lift mechanism that lowered the over-range galley cabinet for use and partially raised it into the cabin top, creating a better view through the galley and out the aft saloon windows. Additionally, the television in the aft port corner of the saloon was also mounted on a lift for improved visibility when lowered.

The galley itself was equipped with all the tools an entertaining owner might wish for. Corian counters are standard, as are Miele dishwasher, Broan compactor, Miele cook top, GE Profile splash and exhaust, and six SubZero drawer-style units—three refrigerators, three freezers. Another freezer was located in the crew's quarters, adding capacity for long-distance cruises.

Jay Bettis and Co. installed the electronics in Seabrook, Texas, before the boat was delivered to Ft. Lauderdale. Two 17-inch Big Bay monitors, one directly ahead of the wheel, ran Nobeltec Admiral navigational software and two IR2 radars—a 48-mile unit to port and a 72-mile to starboard. Two built-in 3-gig Shuttle X small form-factor personal computers processed all the navigation data, controlled by two wireless mice on a shelf to starboard of the Stidd pilothouse helm seat. Jay mentioned that Stidd offers a trackball-equipped chair that might be more desirable to some, but that this setup worked well for them. There was plenty of room remaining on the helm console for two more large monitors, desirable if you wanted the most impressive glass helm of all time. A pair of Furuno GP37 GPS receivers, Simrad IS-15 depth/speed/trip, Twin Disc EC300 Power Commander electronic throttles added functionality to the well-laid-out helm. Overhead, the autopilot was within easy reach of the wheel, flanked by a stabilizer control panel, a fuel transfer system and tank monitor readout that made it easy to move fuel from multiple tanks to a single day tank. There's plenty of room for an SSB radio and a backup VHF, as well.

After a full day's run, we tied up at The Galleon, rinsed the boat well, cleaned up and headed for Duval Street. In another boat, it might have been an exhausting delivery. In our case, the night was young and, even though the weather was punishing, we arrived with personal energy in reserve. □ **Contact:** Grand Banks, (206) 352-0116; www.grandbanks.com. **Reader Service # 190.**

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	dB(A)
900	9.1	15.0	65
1200	11.8	32.0	66
1500	14.3	54.0	67
1800	18.8	85.0	72
2100	24.1	123.0	75
2300	27.1	166.0	75

Speeds, in knots, were measured with GPS off Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, in 4- to 6-foot seas with 1/2 fuel, full water, 7/8 black water and 3 people on board. Air temperature was 80 degrees, with 15- to 20-knot winds. Average water depth was more than 40 feet. Fuel burn for both engines was recorded with engine gauges.