

PRACTICALLY PERFECT

A QUICK CRUISE ALONG THE
MAINE COAST ON THE *BACK COVE*
DOWNEAST 37 OFFERS
A BIT OF BOATING HEAVEN.

BY MARY SOUTH



The Back Cove Downeast 37 looks right at home as she runs in her native waters off the coast of Maine.



That is one good-looking boat was my first thought when I spotted the Back Cove Downeast 37 at the dock in Portland, Maine. *I want one* was my second thought as I stepped aboard and eyed the spacious helm deck layout. *Why-oh-why didn't I go into a more lucrative field?* was my third as she cruised across Casco Bay at 21 knots.

Back Cove is the sister brand of Sabre Yachts, and there are plenty of ways to define the differences between these siblings. The two most obvious ones revolve around size and price point. Sabres are larger, with twin engines and “stick-built,” which allows more customization because furniture is tabbed into the fiberglass hull. Back Coves are generally smaller,

single-engine boats that come virtually fully equipped, with a few select options.

But why would you want to customize what is already very nearly perfect? Back Cove has been building the popular 37 hull that the DE 37 rides on for years, but it's the new layout that swept me off my feet. This boat has been designed for the way many of us actually use a boat.

Clockwise from below: The Back Cove Downeast 37's cockpit presents owners with space for dining, lounging, fishing — or whatever they desire. Forward, a queen island berth offers rest after a long day on the water, with plenty of stowage beneath for coastal cruisers. The open salon deck was made for boaters who want to feel connected to the beauty of their surroundings.



Stepping from the full-width (13 feet 3 inches) swim platform through the center-line transom door, the first thing I noticed was the expansive deck space. On this first DE 37, a teak table and chairs are positioned aft. They look uncrowded, inviting and elegant. Not your style? You can opt for installing aft corner seating or enjoy the expansive, open aft deck however you'd prefer. The single-level sole comes gel-coated with nonskid on the walking areas, but teak is an option.

One of the most remarked-upon features of the DE 37 is her awning system. With the push of a button, a SureShade canopy extends over the aft deck, providing shade and shelter from showers — and visually, it simply extends the line of the hardtop, so you don't have to sacrifice style for protection from the elements.

The open salon and helm are protected by that hardtop and four large, sliding, screened portlights with blinds. An Isotherm ice maker and Indel fridge will come in handy while underway. Settees, which are slightly elevated to provide a better view to port and starboard, face each other across a high-gloss cherry dining table. The L-shaped bench seat forward and to port has a convertible back that lets guests face forward or aft. A Stidd helm seat is within arm's reach of the Stazo wood-grain wheel and a console with a well-designed electronics display. A bow thruster is standard on the DE 37, but the one I drove also had an optional stern thruster and a Lenco Auto Glide trim tab leveling system that measures engine and GPS data 25 times per second and uses that info to seek out the optimal running angle. (You can also quickly disable it to set your trim tabs manually.)

Three steps down and to port is a galley with a Vitrefrigo stainless-steel drawer-style fridge and freezer, a Bontoure under-counter convection microwave, a Kenyon two-burner ceramic cooktop and enough counter space to prep meals for two. To starboard is a head with a separate shower stall and bifold door. A centerline queen berth has stowage beneath. Herreshoff-style joinery, a teak-and-holly sole and good lighting add understated touches of elegance.

The Downeast 37's layout welcomes plenty of guests for fun days on the water, but she also works as a perfect weekend cruiser for a couple. I was struck by how designing



TEST CONDITIONS:

Performance numbers are supplied by Back Cove Yachts, with speed measured by GPS on Casco Bay, Maine, in flat seas and a 5-knot wind, with full fuel, full water and two persons aboard. Fuel consumption was measured with the Cummins MerCruiser electronic engine-monitoring system. Sound levels were measured at the helm.

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	dB(A)
600	4.9	0.6	67
1000	7.3	1.7	68
1400	9.4	4.4	73
1800	13.1	9.4	75
2200	18.2	14.7	79
2600	24.0	20.4	83
2700	25.5	22.6	83
2800	26.9	24.8	83
3080	29.7	31.8	84

SPECIFICATIONS:

LOA: 42'6" (including swim platform)
 BEAM: 13'3" (overall) DRAFT: 2'8"
 DISPL.: 22,100 lb. FUEL: 300 gal. WATER:
 120 gal. ENGINE (std.): 480 hp Cummins
 QSB 6.7 diesel ENGINE (opt.): 530 hp
 Yanmar CX or 600 hp Cummins QSC 8.3
 (tested) diesel BASE PRICE: \$433,500
 PRICE AS TESTED: \$490,000

her with just one stateroom (instead of the two featured on the original Back Cove 37) opened up the feeling of the boat. It's the spaciousness of the interior layout as much as anything else that makes this Back Cove feel more luxurious than previous models.

She is solidly built with a resin-infused hull with PVC foam core sandwich and resin-infused foam core stringer system. The resin-infusion system ensures the optimal ratio of fiberglass to resin, resulting in a lighter, stronger structure than would a hand-laid process. Access to our test boat's optional 600 hp Cummins QSC engine (a 530 hp Yanmar 6CX is another option and a 480 hp Cummins QSB is standard) is through a centerline cockpit deck hatch that rises on gas shocks and offers a wide and easy entrance to the space. The engine area is clean and roomy enough to access important service areas with relative ease.

But how did she drive, you ask? Bentley Collins, Sabre and Back Cove's vice president of marketing and sales, had me follow him in the Downeast 37 as he moved his boat (a Sabre, of course!) from Freeport back to Portland, Maine. I'm accustomed to maneuvering a 40-foot, 30-ton, single-screw steel trawler without a bow thruster, and I silently acknowledged the full depth of my masochism when just a couple of pushes on the bow and stern thruster levers effortlessly glided me out of a less-than-ideal docking spot.

Passing out of the Harraseeket River and into Casco Bay, I throttled the diesel up and the boat responded beautifully, leveling out smoothly and turning with ease. I didn't have time on our short delivery mission to put the Downeast 37 through YACHTING's standard performance tests, but my time at the wheel was, well ... life-altering might not be too strong a way to put it. Pretty much any time I pilot another boat, it's going to be faster than mine, but as the DE 37 zoomed along, with wind in my hair and fantastic sight lines that showed off Chebeague, Cliff, Long, Diamond and Peaks islands on a gorgeous Maine summer day, I was reminded *exactly* why I decided to do this instead of becoming a stockbroker or a lawyer. And so, for now, I comfort myself with Robert Browning's line: *Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven for?*

On the other hand, if you don't have to, why wait for heaven? **■**

Back Cove Yachts, 207-594-8844; backcoveyachts.com