

Simple pleasures

Words **John Eichelsheim** Photos **Will Calver**

It was built in Maine, USA, in the 'down-east' lobster boat tradition, but the Back Cove 34 is a seaworthy, single-engined cruiser designed for economical, no-fuss boating pleasure anywhere.



The Back Cove 34 is a pilothouse model with a generous cockpit, open-backed saloon and open-plan accommodation below decks. It is well-appointed ex-factory and there is an extensive range of options, many of which were fitted to the review boat.

In commissioning the boat, Back Cove importer James Purves used New Zealand companies wherever possible. There's a lot to like about the Back Cove 34. It is typically American in terms of build quality, with the emphasis on utility and robustness rather than luxury, although the cabins are more than comfortable enough. The boat is well-engineered with easy access for servicing, decent

heavy-duty, marine-grade fittings throughout, and the hull and deck mouldings are nicely finished. The review boat features the optional grey gel-coat.

The Back Cove 34 is optimised for social day-tripping, but it's also a comfortable stay-away boat with a queen-size double berth in the bows and a pull-out settee berth further aft, both enclosed by stowaway curtains for privacy at night. It has a decent-sized heads with separate shower, a fully functional galley and a dinette that converts to yet another double berth, making a total of six.

Purves has the cruising habits of New Zealand boaters in mind so he boosted the boat's freshwater capacity to 380 litres and added the clear Strataglass rear enclosure

that turns the pilothouse into a cosy weather-tight space without detracting from its spacious feel. A hardback glass and aluminium enclosure is also an option. Reverse-cycle air-conditioning in the pilothouse ensures comfortable boating in summer and winter.

Other departures from standard spec include the Ultra 16kg anchor for peace of mind when anchoring and the latest Simrad electronics, sourced and fitted in New Zealand. An optional saltwater washdown in the anchor locker keeps things tidy forward and there's another receptacle in the cockpit.

The Simrad gear includes the latest NSS series touch-screen 12-inch display, GPS-plotter, dual-frequency





“It was a windy spring day at the beginning of the school holidays... but four kids and two adults didn't overcrowd the Back Cove 34.”

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sounder/fishfinder, 4G Radar and autopilot.

James also specified the larger Cummins QDB 5.9-litre 480hp common-rail turbo-diesel engine (the 380hp version is standard) and added a stern-thruster for enhanced control dockside. Equivalent Yanmar engines are also available ex-factory. The Cummins 480hp with 700 litres of fuel gives this boat a 250nm range at 25 knots cruise.

A bow-thruster is standard, but the boat's relatively small rudder and shaft-driven single screw don't provide the best agility at low speed, so the stern-thruster is a welcome addition.

A DAY OUT

We reviewed the Back Cove 34 a few days after the Auckland On Water Boat Show, stepping aboard in Viaduct Harbour. It was a windy spring day at the beginning of the school holidays so James' daughters Sasha and Nina, my daughter Mila and photographer Will Calver's son Patrick made up a full crew, but four kids and two adults didn't overcrowd the Back Cove 34. The rear enclosure was left open for most of

the day, so the kids spread themselves around the dinette table and into the cockpit, occupying the L-shaped seating in the cockpit's port quarter or the drop-in cockpit seat that faces it.

On the way home later in the day we closed off the pilothouse and James shared the bench seat at the front of the pilothouse with one of the kids while I helmed the boat.

The comfortable Stidd helm seat is adjustable and features folding armrests. It also swivels which is great when you're socialising inside the pilothouse. James opted for marine vinyl upholstery in the cockpit and Ultraleather in the pilothouse rather than the fabric option, but fabric is used to good effect below decks, offsetting American cherry panelling and supplying a touch of warmth and luxury to an otherwise fairly utilitarian interior.

The pilothouse interior features mostly easy-clean moulded surfaces with a Corian-style resin galley counter and cherry drawers, cabinets and trim. Wooden handholds on the ceiling complement stainless ones on the back of the hardtop and inside the pilothouse, and both the helm and front passenger seats have



substantial fold-down footrests.

The galley is very serviceable, with two electric hobs (gas is an option), a microwave oven and two AC/DC fridges, one under the passenger seat on the port side. James has also included an additional Waeco freezer which lives under one of the dinette seats. There's generous under-bench and under-seat storage and even a built-in rubbish bin. The Kohler 6kW genset supplies 240V power for domestic appliances such as an electric jug and is also required to run

the air-conditioning, but all the boat's LED lighting is 12 volt and there are 12-volt power outlets here and there. A TV wasn't fitted, but is an option.

WIND AND SUN

We made our way down the harbour in a strong nor'wester and headed up the coast along Auckland's East Coast Bays to find a little flat water for the running shots, then ran downwind through almost a metre of slop before ducking into Rakino Channel and anchoring in



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Back Cove 30

Back Cove 34

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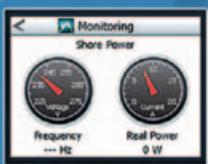
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Maori Garden Bay in the lee of Rakino Island. The kids went down below, pulled the tinted acrylic companionway door across for privacy and changed into their swimsuits, determined to make the most of the day. The worst of the wind was whistling over our heads, so under sunny skies it was actually quite pleasant out on deck, although swimming in 14°C water is best left to children.

Although they were a little reticent at first, the cold water didn't deter the kids for long and they were soon leaping off the boat into the tide. The Back Cove's wide swim platform proved its worth and the pull-out boarding ladder worked well.

The transom door is on the starboard side and the moulded non-slip walk

surfaces of the cockpit sole and the swim platform have a topcoat of 'Graystone' for improved grip, which also extends to the side decks and foredeck. The foredeck has enough space for lounging in the sun, but the wind was too fierce to make that an attractive proposition, so we stayed in the shelter of the cockpit.

The bow rail wraps right around the foredeck, and a short fibreglass bowsprit secures the Ultra anchor and keeps it clear of the hull as it comes up.

As reviewed, the Back Cove isn't especially fisher-oriented, although it would be an easy matter to fit a stainless staple or two to the swim platform to take a bait board, a few rod holders and/

PERFORMANCE

Smartcraft gauges and Simrad NSS12

RPM	Speed (knots)	Fuel (lph)
600	4.1	1.9
1000	5.6	4.5
1500	7.8	11.8
2000	11.1	28.0
2500	16.0	41.6
3000	22.8	63.2
3450	28.5	96.2

or a barbecue. With no cockpit coamings there's nowhere to put rod holders either, but if fishing is an important recreational activity for you, drop-in factory coamings are available that accept rod holders. A rocket launcher option can also be fitted here in New Zealand if required. To open up the cockpit for fishing and diving, the rear cockpit-seating module can be dispensed with entirely, though you'll lose



The double berth in the bows can be enclosed with a curtain; The heads have full headroom and include a separate shower with a seat; The all-electric galley is well appointed for a boat of this size. Cabinetry and trim is American cherry, floors are moulded GRP



The helm position is comfortable with everything within easy reach

some useful storage as a result.

A couple of under-floor cockpit lockers provide reasonable stowage and access to the polyethylene fuel tank, but other than inside the cockpit seat module (where included) there isn't a lot of dedicated storage for bulky objects. However, the foredeck locker aft of the chain well is more than big enough for fenders, and maybe even a folded-up inflatable dinghy.

BRILLIANT ENGINEERING

Unlike many imported boats, which tend to be heavy, solid GRP, the light but strong Back Cove 34 boasts a relatively high-tech VIP resin-infused PVC foam-cored hull with balsa sandwich decks. Vinylester resins are used throughout and the resin-infused foam core stringer system is timber-free. Paint systems are Awlgrip.

The hull has a 'prop pocket' or tunnel for the shaft and propeller to run in, allowing an excellent shaft angle and reducing total draft to less than a metre.

The Cummins resides under the pilothouse floor, the whole of which hinges from the front, lifted on a hydraulically-powered ram. Once fully open it reveals a well laid-out engine room with acres of space. Servicing this boat, either as an owner undertaking routine maintenance or as a technician undertaking more serious work, should be a real pleasure.

The engine sits along the keel line, driving the prop-shaft and four-bladed propeller in the tunnel, but the vast engineering space also contains the genset, battery banks (two house and two engine start batteries), the shore-power system, battery charger, holding tank and associated pumps, hot and cold water

system, fuel system and an oil change pump. Everything is properly secured, logically positioned and electrically/galvanically bonded.

EXPRESS CRUISER

With the kids finally well chilled it was time for a late lunch, then a run back to the city into the prevailing conditions which remained fresh.

After the morning's activities, the children relaxed in the pilothouse, the sound of the boat's engine and its motion through the water sending a couple of them to sleep.

While still in the shelter of Rakino we ran the Back Cove 34 up to its maximum revolutions, reaching 28.5 knots at 3450rpm and 95% engine load. At 12 knots, the boat is just on the plane, while a comfortable cruise speed is anywhere from 15 to 25 knots. At 21 knots it burns a little over 55 litres of diesel an hour at 2800rpm, so in two-and-a-bit hours and for less than \$150 worth of fuel you could travel from downtown Auckland to Great Barrier Island.

On the way home, punching into the wind and the sea, we maintained around 18 knots most of the way, only slowing in the high current areas where the seas were especially steep. The 7-tonne (light) Back Cove 34 feels a very competent sea boat, if a little wet on some angles, so its triple windscreen wipers, one for each pane, were useful in the conditions. The pilothouse's middle screen opens outwards and can be locked in position, more for ventilation than access to the foredeck, and is complemented by sliding side windows.

A problem with a leaking hydraulic

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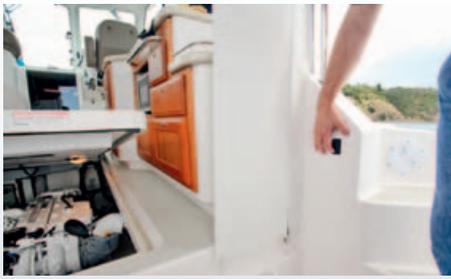
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The pilothouse floor, furniture and all, lifts hydraulically to reveal the well laid out machinery space below

valve in the steering system (since remedied) made the last part of our pleasant day out slightly nerve-racking, the helm becoming progressively less responsive the closer we got to the city. Fortunately, a combination of throttle ahead and astern, judicious use of the bow and stern-thrusters, and a team effort at the dock allowed us to tie up without incident in the windy conditions.

BOATING'S VERDICT

A little steering glitch aside, the Back Cove 34 demonstrated impeccable manners and made swift, comfortable progress on a blustery spring day when most boaties stayed at home. It looks and feels well put together and the simplicity of a single engine, with the associated savings on fuel bills, should have wide appeal.

The layout is simple but practical, with a good mix of comfort and easy-to-live-with practicality. The interior and exterior styling is timeless and the materials and fittings used are good quality so the boat should still look good 10 years down the track.

With a number of factory and dealer options, the Back Cove 34 represents good value and relatively trouble-free boating. Trailer-boaters moving up to their first launch, or perhaps launch and yacht owners wanting something smaller and/or less demanding to run and maintain should definitely add the Back Cove 34 to their list of prospects.



PROS

- Well-built, capable performer
- Relatively simple engineering and ship's systems
- Stern-thruster aids agility when docking
- Can sleep six; social layout

CONS

- Pilothouse interior is cosy rather than spacious
- Open-plan sleeping accommodation may lack privacy for some
- Electric galley means running genset to cook (but LPG is an option)

Back Cove 34

► loa 11.45 metres ► beam 3.67 metres ► draft approx 0.97 metres ► weight approx 8000kg full load ► engine 1 x Cummins QSB 480hp turbodiesel ► fuel 700 litres
 ► water 380 litres ► cruising speed 20 knots ► max speed approx 28.5 knots ► price as tested \$599,000, incl GST and commissioning ► packages from \$478,949
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