

Expert's Choice



Ray Dilley

Shannon 28 cutter *Seven Bells* moves easily in light air on Chesapeake. Note hefty rubrail, sturdy bowsprit, two anchors.

The long, intricate and rewarding search for a retirement cruiser.

MY WIFE RUTH and I began our search for an "ideal" cruising boat by agreeing first on what we would do with the boat; how big she should be to enable us to do it comfortably; what rig would be most suitable for our purpose, with what auxiliary power; and, finally, how much we could spend.

Our purpose was not racing but cruising—coastwise at first, while Ruth developed boating skills to match her enthusiasm. Whatever she lacked at the start, we figured, would be balanced by my background in offshore cruising and racing, including three transatlantics.

Size was relatively easy to settle on, since we'd be alone most of the time, with only an occasional guest, or two at most. So something around 36 feet seemed desirable, possibly a ketch to break up the sail area into easier-to-handle units. Although I am of average height and weight, my wife is only five feet tall and weighs about 100 pounds. This made ease of sail handling a critical factor in meeting my objective of having a boat that either of us could single-hand in an emergency. We were willing to sacrifice a sloop's superior ability to windward, if need be, for ease of making and dousing sail.

Another positive factor for singlehanded would be a hull form

By **MONK FARNHAM**

with inherent directional stability—no fin keel-spade rudder combination for us.

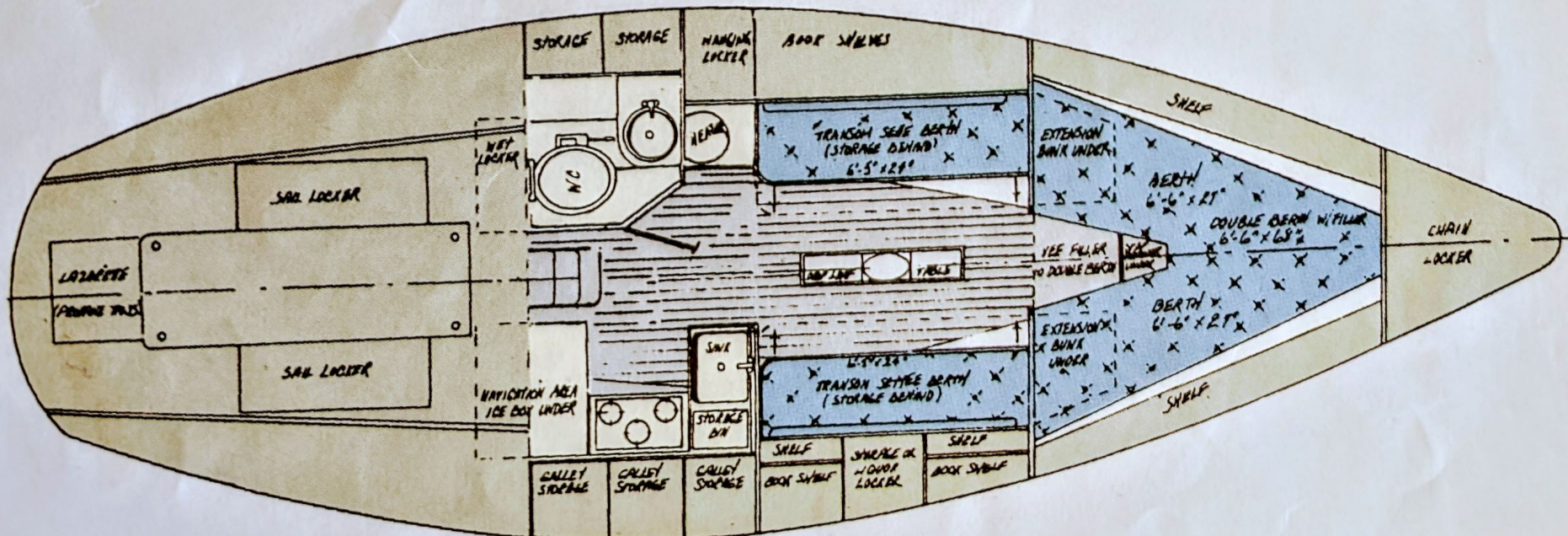
For auxiliary power, long exposure to both gasoline and diesel engines in sailboats had prejudiced me toward diesel. Its initial higher cost was, I felt, more than offset by the elimination of ignition problems and by greater safety. (I hadn't yet experienced the trickier maintenance problems of the diesel engine.)

How much could we afford to spend for a boat? In these times of galloping inflation, our 1977 budget of \$30,000 to \$40,000, plus another 10% for gear and equipment, seems almost Spartan. As we started our search that summer, however, it was more than adequate for a good "previously-owned" boat and, if nothing suitable turned up in that market, quite enough for a new boat. So, full of hope, we hit the trail.

We went armed with a List of Requirements, a dozen standards we had established to screen out run-of-the-mill boats from those worth serious consideration. Most of these criteria had been acquired during my eight years as Editor of *Boating*, where we used the yardsticks of the American Boat & Yacht Council (ABYC) in drawing

up our powerboat tests and reports on sailboats. Since the ABYC is the boating industry's own standards-making body, its recommendations have more than casual authority. From over two dozen accepted standards spelled out in its publication, *Safety Standards for Small Craft*, Ruth and I had picked a number to supplement our own requirements; the combination gave us a rapid reading on the suitability of any cruising sailboat (asterisk indicates ABYC standards):

1. *Nonslip deck surface**—wherever a foot might happen to light, not just in selected spots;
2. *Double lifelines*, plus bow and stern pulpits, with all stanchions through-bolted to backing plates;
3. *Well-placed, strong grab-rails** and handholds, through-bolted to cabin top;
4. *Strong, well-located cleats* for handling lines, including ground tackle, with all cleats and other deck fittings through-bolted to backing plates;
5. *Rugged bow chocks* and rollers for two anchors;
6. *Large cockpit scuppers**, 1¼" minimum diameter, and, if draining near or below waterline, fitted with bronze seacocks;





7. *Bronze seacocks** (not valves) on all underwater through-hull fittings;
8. *Grounded electrical system**, bonded to prevent galvanic corrosion, and for lightning protection;
9. *Easy access to engine;*
10. *Electric bilge pump**, plus 25 g.p.m. manual unit;
11. *Batteries covered and secured**, and, now;
12. *Adequate insulation* in cabin top.

This list got a thorough work-out through the summer as we combed the waterfront of the Chesapeake. But we found nothing. Then came the fall boat shows, and though we boarded many boats at Stamford and Annapolis, and gathered much literature, only two

(Left) Optional kerosene Cozy heater puts out 6,000 BTU. (Above) Main cabin shows how Shannon uses teak to produce interior of unusual charm.

of those we inspected really appealed to us.

One, the Swedish, sloop-rigged *Monsoon 31* by Hallberg Rassy, had a beautifully planned main cabin, elegantly finished in mahogany, but was short on stowage space. The other, a ketch-rigged Shannon 38, had a most attractive interior of teak, with superlative joiner-work, plus excellent deck gear and fittings. Furthermore, an old friend, Alan Eddy, first man to circumnavigate the world in a fiberglass boat, had just bought a Shannon 38, and was planning another globe-girdling with her.

But she was bigger than we wanted, and her price was more than double our budget. Alan told us, however, of Shannon's plans to introduce a Shannon 28 cutter in 1978. It seemed worth waiting for before making a decision.

Nonetheless, we started hunting again in early spring. Then we discovered and fell in love with John Kaiser's Gale Force 33 cutter through talking and visiting with a young couple who owned one in Annapolis. Like the Shannon 38, she was ruggedly built, designed and fitted to go offshore. She had a beautiful teak interior and joiner-work and lots of stowage space, so essential for long cruising.

Though her price was well above our budget, she seemed so right for us that we were willing to re-



figure. So we drove up to Wilmington, Del., to see Kaiser's plant. There, impressed by the details of the boat's construction and by Kaiser's total-quality approach to boatbuilding, we felt that, after a trial sail, we could safely sign a contract.

On a brisk spring day soon thereafter, our new friends invited us to sail with them on their Gale Force 33. She sailed like a dream, and handled easily. Only when we came to douse sail, Ruth made a sad discovery: She was intimidated by the size of the mainsail—she felt it was too big for her to handle alone.

So our search continued, now into New England—to Stamford, Essex, and other boating centers as far north as Cape Cod. Before the

(Right) Well-ventilated galley has good counter space, stowage, gimballed kero stove. (Below) Fore-and-aft head boasts ample stowage, handy oilskin locker.



summer was over we had inspected more than three dozen boats, both used and new, including such popular favorites as the Alberg 37, Bristol 32, Cheoy Lee Clipper 33, Gulfstar 37, Intrepid 35, Pearson 365, and Princess 36. And we had visited six other boatbuilding plants, in addition to Kaiser: Cape Cod Shipbuilding, Cape Dory, Dickerson, New England Boat Builders, Shannon, and Southern Cross.

At Shannon we found that for maximum strength all their fiberglass was laid up by hand—no chopper gun anywhere. But to me, having been through many boat plants, our most important observation was the *enthusiasm* pervading Shannon, the obvious pride of the work crew in what they were build-

ing. It reflected directly the uncommon, oldtime-craftsman attitude of Shannon's two principals: Walter Schulz and his partner, Dave Walters.

By fall boat show time we felt prepared to make a decision. A valuable aid, incidentally, had been the *CSY Guide to Buying a Yacht*, written by Jack Van Ost, head of Caribbean Sailing Yachts. Ruth, in particular, found it most helpful for the insight it gave her to the hidden aspects of yacht construction. And it made us want to check out the new CSY 37 cutter at the Annapolis show.

There, we examined another dozen boats the first day, including the CSY 37 cutter. We found she had much to admire, but her base price was two-thirds more than our top budget.

One boat we could afford, however, and were instantly drawn to was Staysail Yachts' version of L. Francis Herreshoff's classic ketch, the H-28. She rode the water like a swan among geese, elegantly fulfilling the designer's comment about her: ". . . a mythical dream come true, the answer to a sailor's prayer."

And Herreshoff would have approved her all-bronze cleats, chocks, winches, and six opening ports, as well as her teak-and-butternut interior, and the honest construction throughout. The H-28 became a sudden finalist in our marathon.

Her only competition was the Shannon 28 cutter. But what competition! From the pier, the 28 gave an impression of strength—her husky hull, powerful outboard rudder, heavy teak bowsprit, and full-length teak rubrail topped with half-round stainless steel promised safe passage over deep water to far horizons.

On board, we found the same meticulous craftsmanship and attention to detail that had so attracted us to the Shannon 38 the year before. From her molded-in, nonslip deck surface to her bronze seacocks, the Shannon 28 met or exceeded each item on our basic list of requirements.

Ruth and I worked our way through the crowd back to the H-28 for another look, and were struck again by her beauty. Then back to

the Shannon 28, with the same result. It was a dead heat. Since the two boats' sailaway prices were virtually identical, we decided to postpone a decision until after a trial sail on each boat, even though this meant another 400-mile drive back to Shannon's home waters in Portsmouth, R.I.

But, we figured, en route we could stop at Staysail Yachts' headquarters in Huntington, N.Y., and sail the H-28. We made a date accordingly. Only, unfortunately, when we arrived to keep it, the boat was not available—she had been scheduled for a promotional photographic session!

We couldn't spare the time to wait for its conclusion; instead, we called local friends and had an impromptu inspection of their wooden H-28, which was moored nearby. Their account of cruising in the H-28 helped crystallize our thinking: She would be fine for coastal waters while Ruth was learning the ropes, but if later we wanted to make long passages, the Shannon 28 would suit us better. With that fact established, we drove on to Rhode Island.

Our first day there, however, was like summer on Long Island Sound—flat. Even so, the Shannon, which displaces 9,300 pounds, kept steerageway in the scant zephyr. We stayed overnight, gambling on better wind next day, and were rewarded with 20-25 knots out of the north.

Cold it was, on the choppy waters of Mount Hope Bay, but convincing for a demonstration of the boat's performance. With Dave Walters in command, we first tried the boat to windward under main and staysail. She moved well, but not fast enough to satisfy Dave. So we hanked on the Yankee jib. Then she heeled to her sailing lines and really moved out, making a good six knots.

It had been years since I'd sailed a cutter and I had forgotten how well the sail area can be divided for easy handling. The Shannon 28's working sails, for example, total 460 square feet, of which the main accounts for 175, the staysail 120, and the Yankee 165. None of the sails is burdensome, and the boat can be quickly dressed for

heavy weather, with two jiffy reefs in the mainsail and one in the staysail.

For upwards of an hour we put the boat through her paces, beating, reaching, and running. She was a delight on all points—light on her helm and responsive. And despite the chop, thanks to her ample freeboard, she was *dry*.

At the helm, Ruth was happy to find that the low trunk cabin gave her a clear view forward. And when we finally took in sail, she felt no qualms at the prospect of handling the mainsail by herself.

We congratulated Dave Walters on the boat's fine performance and went back to his office to sign a contract on Shannon 28 Hull No. 10, for Spring, 1979, delivery. That was October 17, 1978.

What with one delay and another, we finally took delivery of *Seven Bells* after her compasses were swung on July 26, 1979, 282 days later. In the interval, however, far from flagging, our enthusiasm had grown in the three visits we made to the plant during the boat's construction.

We had engaged a top surveyor, Paul Coble, of Newport, R.I., a Sparkman & Stephens alumnus, to check her out at four stages: first, when the hull was completed; then, with ballast in place and bulkheading finished, before installation of the deck; next, before launching; and, finally, on her sea trials.

Quite apart from double-checking on the builder's quality control, a good surveyor can make positive contributions to a boat's safety. To protect against lightning on *Seven Bells*, for example, Paul recommended that instead of the customary #8 A.W.G. copper cable, Shannon install straight lengths of 5/8" copper tubing from the upper shrouds, backstays, and bobstay direct to one through-hull fitting. Tubing is preferred because high voltage deserts the center of a conductor and goes to the periphery—a tube provides more surface area than a cable.

So Shannon flattened the ends of five lengths of 5/8" copper tube, split them, and after bolting one each to the lower bolts of the upper shrouds, to the split backstays, and to the bobstay, led them all to the

galley sink's bronze seacock. Lightning will leave *Seven Bells* by the shortest possible route.

At the end of *Seven Bells'* sea trials, Paul Coble made a significant comment to Shannon's Bill Ramos: "This is most unusual—I have only a page and a half of notes; I usually have six or seven. So now you know how you rate!"

In our case, Shannon had already found most of Paul's items and was about to fix them before delivery. But they added from his list such things as securing the ballast pigs under the galley sole, freeing up the engine's saltwater intake, adding wedges on the fuel tank and battery case to prevent shifting, and moving the stove's gimbals for a greater heeling arc.

For a weekend shakedown cruise to Block Island and back, I was lucky to have Norry Hoyt join me. Not only is he a first-rate shipmate, but one of the most knowledgeable sailors around; I was eager for his opinion. He was, to put it mildly, enthusiastic. At the finish, he—the owner of the Carib 41 *Telltale 2* that he has cruised in the Med and transatlantic—said he envied me!

Ruth came up to Rhode Island and we started the 400-mile "sail" back to the Chesapeake. The quotes indicate no wind or headwinds that required a bronze breeze from *Seven Bells'* 15-hp. Yanmar diesel virtually every mile of the way. Faithful engine—she ran without faltering until I cleaned the fuel filter at 50 hours and caused an air lock. For \$20, a mechanic at Burr's Dock in New London removed it, and checked me out in the procedure.

When we had wind, even strong headwinds, we were delighted with how *Seven Bells* reveled in heavy going. With single, jiffy-reefed main and staysail she pushed the seas aside with assurance. Heavy rain discovered for us that the dorades dripped, but it was good at long last to be homeward bound in our own beautiful boat. (Later, Shannon had the dorades made leak-proof—they have an almost missionary zeal to keep their owners happy).

At New York's South Street Seaport, Ruth went ashore to pick up her car and drive home to

Maryland. To take her place, Lamar LeMoute, a new friend from the advertising agency business, had joined us in City Island. He and I shoved off for the final 250 miles.

Four days later, we anchored in Annapolis, having endured 60 hours of powering through fog, rain, and calm, with only three hours of sailing. Practically our only amusement had been sampling new dishes I evolved to cope with cooking on the single-burner stand-in for the departed Kenyon. Some of the results reminded me of an old Anguilan saying: "*What don't kill will fatten.*"

Sometimes patience is rewarded. Next day we caught a brisk southwest breeze that let us march across the Bay to Oxford under all plain sail in six hours. It was a glorious end to the long voyage home.

And it was the beginning of a new life with *Seven Bells*, cruising the Chesapeake at first, but, with a good mate and a good ship, who knows where one's anchor will eventually find ground? □

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