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Pearson 323

By Clifford and Bezy McKay

The thoughtful layout on the Pearson 323 makes it a great day cruiser as well as an outstanding choice for living aboard.



SPECIFICATIONS

Designer	William H. Shaw
LOA	32' 3"
DWL	27' 6"
Beam	10' 2 3/4"
Mast height above DWL	45' 4"
Draft	4' 5"
Displacement	12,800 lbs.
Ballast	4,500 lbs.
Sail Area	478 sq. ft.
Cockpit Length	8' 0"
Power	(V-drive) Atomic 4, gas. (Volvo MD11C, diesel, optional)

REVIEW YOUR BOAT

SOUTHWINDS is looking for sailors who like to write to review their sailboat — whether it is new or old, large or small. It can include the following:

- Year, model, make, designer, boat name
- Specifications: LOA, LWL, beam, draft, sail plan (square footage), displacement
- Sailing performance
- Comfort above and below deck
- Cruiser and/or Racer
- Is it a good liveaboard?
- Modifications you have made or would like
- General boat impression
- Quality of construction

Photos Essential (contact us for photo specs)

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(If you hate your boat, we aren't interested — you must at least like it)

Although we dreamed of owning a coastal cruiser, we decided, "This is not the time to buy a boat." Two weeks later, we were the owners of a Pearson 323, hull #261. So much for planning. We named her *Ceilidh* (kaylee), Gaelic for "Hospitality." We cruised in southwest Florida for eight years, then moved aboard and cruised from the Bahamas to Maine for the next 11.

Pearson built 368 boats to Bill Shaw's design between 1976 and 1982. Its thoughtful layout makes it a great day cruiser as well as an outstanding choice for living aboard. In addition to being comfortable and sturdy, she sailed fast and kept up with 34- and 35-foot boats. And on an ocean passage, on a reach, a frisky *Ceilidh* averaged a tenth of a knot below hull speed for 56 hours.

The 323 has a narrow entry with a plumb bow, giving it a generous 27.6 feet at the waterline. The cut-away forefoot keel and skeg-hung rudder provide excellent tracking. The keel, an integral part of the hull, is stout and filled with lead. The deck joins the hull with a lap joint, through-bolted every four inches, and decorated with a teak toe-rail. The fiberglass layup is substantial, and after 30 years of significant usage, shows no signs of weakness anywhere. Our original gel-coat is in amazing condition after 30 years.

The interior has a V-berth, a walk-through head and a sizable main salon. Bill Shaw decorated the off-white fiberglass interior with teak bulkheads and trim, providing a light, easy to maintain, attractive boat with a classic touch of teak. The V-berth is long enough and the headroom high enough for my 6' 3" height. It has molded cabinets, shelves on starboard, drawers on port and a plastic drop-in storage bin underneath. It has the traditional V-cutout to divide it into two berths.

A pass-through head has a handheld shower with a curtain hanging from an overhead track. A lavatory swings out



The cockpit has seats on both sides for its entire 8-foot length. Four people sit comfortably with back support at both ends.

from the wall, over the top of the head. The shower and lavatory drain into a sump and pump overboard. Across from the head is a hanging locker with a shelf above for towels. A sliding door closes the head from the V-berth, and a bifold door provides privacy from the main salon.

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MODIFICATIONS:

We made a number of changes to enhance our cruising and our liveaboard lifestyle. Some were minor "tweaks," others added significantly.

5" foam mattress covering the entire V-berth

8" track cleats amidships

Teak helm seat

RAM mike for VHF at the helm.

Rebuilt anchor platform with second roller to port and dolphin striker support.

Polyurethane paint of raw fiberglass for all lockers.

A third series 30, deep cycle battery.

Sunbrella for all interior cushions and curtains.

Special canvas seat backs for the aft end of the cockpit seats.

Propane stove.

Stainless steel opening ports to replace plastic ones.

Manual windlass and all chain rode.

Dodger and Bimini with joining canvas.

Davits on the stern.

Repowered with Yanmar 3GM30

Glasses, cups and stemware stowage cabinet, serving double duty to cover the back of new instruments mounted in the bulkhead.

Rerun icebox drain to bilge, with a cutoff valve so it doesn't foul the bilge.

Dripless seal for prop shaft.

Masthead tricolor running light.

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The L-shaped galley is located to port, aft of the settee. It has a nine-cubic-foot refrigerator, a deep sink and a three-burner stove with oven. It provides good space for galley needs.



A Nav station is located on starboard, with a molded desk, hinged teak desktop, a roomy seat and a cabinet behind the backrest. A shelf alongside holds binoculars, flashlights and books for navigation.

The main salon has a settee to port with stowage along the hull behind the back cushions. The U-shaped starboard settee has similar stowage and a shelf for books above it. A dining table rides on a 2-inch diameter aluminum post, allowing it to lower to complete a double berth. Midway up the post, it's a table. High against the cabin top, it's out of the way opening up the salon as a sitting area. Under the side

seats of the settee are two plastic bins for dry food storage. Handrails run along each side for safety in rough conditions. Three hatches cut in the cabin sole allow access to the bilge with limited room for storage in the 11-inch deep upper bilge.

The L-shaped galley is located to port, aft of the settee. It has a nine-cubic-foot refrigerator, a deep sink and a three-burner stove with oven. Enclosed cabinets against the hull, storage under the stove, and a place for dishes and cups—cut into the companionway bulkhead—provide good space for galley needs. A convenient drop-in board converts the stovetop into a workspace when you're not cooking.

A Nav station is located on starboard, with a molded desk, hinged teak desktop, a roomy seat and a cabinet behind the backrest. A shelf alongside holds binoculars, flashlights and books for navigation. Access to the cabin is via a steep stainless steel ladder with teak steps.

Pearson provided quality electrical wiring for both 12-volt and 110-volt circuits. An adequate electrical panel for the time has been outmoded by the expansion of electrical needs on a 21st-century boat. Check to assure after-delivery wiring was done properly. The Datamarine speed and depth instruments have been surpassed by current standards and will likely need replacing.

A teak and holly sole, and a plastic-covered thin-plywood overhead with teak trim, complete the well-organized, attractive and very serviceable living area. Removable teak plywood panels all along both sides give convenient access to the underside of the deck and toe-rail for inspection, repair and running wires fore and aft. Friends from 36- to 40-foot boats have remarked, "You have more room in your main salon than we do."

The cockpit has seats on both sides for its entire 8-foot length. Four people sit comfortably with back support at both ends. There are two large combing boxes for light sailing gear, trimmed in teak. The mainsheet traveler is mounted at the front edge of the cockpit, just aft of the bridge deck, counter-sunk so as not to interfere with one's comfort. Two very large lazarettes provide stowage for sails, lines, fenders and life preservers. In some models, lockers for a 10-pound propane tank were included in the cockpit seats, aft. Pedestal steering is located 2/3 aft in the cockpit with

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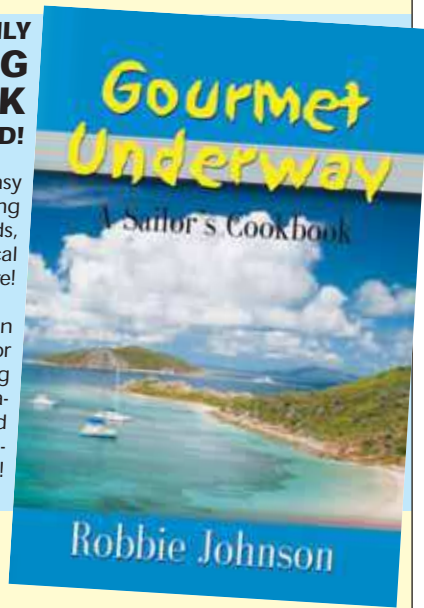
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enough room behind it for a helm seat.

At the bow, an anchor platform, extending 18 inches forward of the stem, was included on later boats. Built of 1 1/2-inch stainless steel tubing, the platform has a roller mounted to starboard for stowing an anchor and paying out rode. A sizable anchor locker is molded into the forward deck for rodes, chain and spare anchors.

The 323 has ample ventilation with a 20-inch hatch over the V-berth, a 16-inch hatch over the main salon, and four opening ports, two each in the V-berth and the head. Two dorades provide additional air. Four large, fixed ports light the main salon.

A distinctive feature of the 323 was the pirate stripe around the cabin top. I have seen them maroon, gray and blue. We decided to paint ours to match the hull in order to enhance the lines of the boat.

The V-drive engine is located under the bridge deck, with access from the main salon and the lazarette. An Atomic 4 was standard with a diesel option (Volvo MD11C). A V-drive, despite the difficult access, provides optimum usage of space in the main cabin. 323s have a 6-gallon hot water heater and hot/cold pressure water system supplied by two 20-gallon water tanks with an additional 40-gallon tank option in the bow. A fuel tank holding 21 gallons was located aft of the engine amidships, and a 15-gallon holding tank was placed under the V-berth's starboard side.

The keel-stepped mast, rising 45.5 feet above the water-



A dining table rides on a 2-inch diameter aluminum post, allowing it to lower to complete a double berth. Midway up the post, it's a table. High against the cabin top, as it is here, it's out of the way—opening up the salon as a sitting area.

line, is a straight extrusion with single tapered spreaders. The standing rigging is stout, and the chain plates run through the deck and bolt to knees glassed directly to the hull. The 4.5-foot draft allows you to sail comfortably in shallower waters. The freeboard is high, providing a dry sail in windy conditions. *Ceilidh* sails comfortably with the main alone, or jib alone. With a 135 percent jib, she moves well in light air. She carries a large cruising chute with ease. The 323 is a comparatively stiff boat with a ballast ratio of 35 percent and a generous 10' 3" beam. When overpowered, she slides off downwind before burying her rail. She is well-mannered in steep seas, with an easy motion. She raises her stern gracefully to avoid being pooped in following seas, even with steep 12-foot pressure waves. We have surfed at eight knots, the boat completely under control.

With the Volvo MD11C, 23 HP, *Ceilidh* cruises at 5.5 knots but is sensitive to slight bottom fouling. When we repowered with a Yanmar 3GM30(f), (v), 27 HP, we cruised at 6.5 knots, maintaining speed even with a "fuzzy bottom." We've powered into 65 knots of wind in calm seas, and we've stopped, hobbyhorsing in our tracks, with 25 knots and 4-foot seas. Backing a 323 is an "art," not a science. With a 15-degree shaft offset to starboard and the balance point of the boat 2/3 aft, it requires careful planning to dock. With time, however, the captain and the boat can accommodate to each other's idiosyncrasies.

Pearson 323s are readily available today with prices listed in the 20s and 30s. A large percentage of boats are found in the northeast, though; there were five in our Saint Petersburg, FL, marina. You will find them in a wide range of condition, but the boat itself is well-built and sound. A Pearson 323 responds nicely to "fixing up."

After 22 years and 70,000 miles under the keel, our relationship with *Ceilidh* remains a love affair. We've waxed, washed, polished, sanded or painted every inch of her surfaces time and again. We've depended on her strength and design to care for us when the seas were tempestuous and the winds howled. We've basked in the adventures she's taken us on and been rocked by her gentle motions into dreamless sleep. We could not have found a better boat to call our "home."

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