



Oyster 655



Offshore

On a 300-mile offshore delivery, *BWS* discovers (again) why *Oysters* set the standard for world-class passagemakers

by George Day and Scott Akerman

The delivery run from Newport, Rhode Island to Annapolis, Maryland as boats are moved from one boat show to the other has become a classic fall cruise for *BWS* as we test one or more of the boats being delivered.

The passage is a bit over 300 miles and includes the shallow and often choppy waters of Rhode Island Sound and Delaware Bay, plus the deep water run from Block Island across the Bite of New York to Cape May, New Jersey. The final leg takes you through the C&D Canal and down the Chesapeake past Baltimore to Annapolis. When it comes to putting a boat through its paces in all of the conditions you are likely to meet while world cruising, this passage is a perfect test track.

SEA TRIAL

We left Newport aboard the new Oyster 655 *Matchmaker* with owner Peter Lloyd plus a crew of three. With four experienced hands, the watch keeping would be simple and we could expect to make good time.

The forecast was for the wind to shift from light southwest to south-east and build, so when we rounded Block Island that first morning under power, we met a rising breeze that offered us a close reach all the way to Cape May. With the wind forward of the beam and blowing 15 to 20 knots and seas building to four feet, the 655 was a dream to handle: both fast and comfortable.

The Rob Humphries-designed hull has a fairly narrow bow and her lines run aft very straight and true to

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her broad transom. There's nothing extreme in the boat's dimensions. The standard hull, like *Matchmaker*, has a 60-foot waterline; a modern, bulbied-fin keel with a nine-foot, eight-inch draft; and a large rudder mounted on a small skeg. The standard rig stands 90 feet above the water and spreads 2,830 square feet of cruising canvas (the full 150-percent genoa included).

The non-dimensional ratios show that the 655 is a thoroughly modern cruising boat with the power to sail well in light conditions as well as in the bumpy 20 knots we had off New York. The displacement-to-length ratio is 182, which puts it in the "performance-cruiser" category. But the 655 is no lightweight skimmer; the boat feels and sails like a solid passagemaker, yet is always easy to





steer and is pleasantly responsive to the helm and sail trim.

The boat's sail area-displacement ratio of 22.58 is quite high among the offshore cruising fleet. But, with the optional in-mast or in-boom furling mainsail and hydraulic furling headsails, you can dial in the exact amount of sail area you need to balance the boat and maintain optimum boat speed.

Matchmaker has an optional 98-foot carbon rig with in-mast mainsail furling, so we were able to adjust the mainsail's sail area and flatness throughout the first night without having to leave the cockpit or wake the off-watch crew. The advantage of the carbon spar lies in the weight reduction aloft, which in turn reduces the boat's pitching motion in head seas and rolling motion when running in big rolling swells; plus, the carbon rig makes the boat stiffer and able to sail slightly closer to the wind than her sisterships with aluminum spars.

The 655 cruised at a steady 9

knots all night, so daybreak found us closing in on the New Jersey shore. The cold front associated with the wind shift to the southeast blew through that morning and brought with it blustery and shifting winds. With shortened sails, we made landfall and were lucky enough (or smart enough) to catch the favorable flooding tide all the way from Cape May to the C&D canal.

In fact, the tides favored us all the way to Annapolis. We caught the favorable ebb through the canal and that carried us to the Bay Bridge. But, it was coming onto low water when we got to Back Creek and we had a gingerly moment as we coasted *Matchmaker's* nine-foot draft over the shallow spot at the creek's entrance. We made it without a bump. We had completed the passage from Newport to Annapolis in nearly record time, with *Matchmaker* averaging just over 9 knots for the trip. Plus, we arrived better rested than when we left, despite a bouncy night at sea.

LIVING ABOARD

The 655, like her sisterships, is a semi-custom boat that is built in a female mold. The interior spaces are defined by the structural bulkheads, deck, floors, tank and engineering installations. Oyster offers standard layouts, and most owners will select one of these with their own minor modifications. That said, Oyster can go farther than most builders to modify an interior to fit an owner's specific requirements.

On a recent visit to two facilities in England where Oysters are built, *BWS* had a chance to see the modern state of craftsmanship that goes into every Oyster. The managers and craftsmen who build the boats have, in many instances, been building Oysters for two decades, so a legacy of Oyster-quality is passed onto each new apprentice and employee.

Each boat and owner is guided through the build process by a project manager who takes care of the liaison with the builders. These managers have the sailing experience to



know what works on a cruising boat and the building experience to know what is possible and practical. In the end, the project managers ensure that the owners get what they want and what they pay for.

The 655 was designed to be an elegant family cruising boat that sails well enough to win offshore events, yet is easy enough to handle for a competent couple or small crew.

The boat's walk-through cockpit, which is similar to the cockpit on the 72, has twin wheels. The traffic flow in and out of the cockpit is great, and the sailing crew has plenty of room for trimming and managing sheets. The cockpit table is huge and will seat six or more for an alfresco meal.

The raised deckhouse over the saloon has a modern style, and the large, tinted windows have the look of ultra-modern, sporty sunglasses. This is a style that has been emulated by several builders in recent years because it is so distinctive and opens up the interior spaces with abundant natural light.

Climbing down the companionway ladder, which is equipped with curved stainless steel rails, you enter the saloon, with its large L-shaped dining area to starboard and a bench settee to port. There are several ways to design the dining arrangements and the table so owners will be able to tweak the saloon to fit their needs.

The nav station is just aft of the

companionway to starboard and down two steps. This large space has plenty of desk area for working with charts and computers, plus the vertical surfaces you need to mount radios, screen and instruments. The ergonomics of the nav station work so well that you will feel comfortable sitting here and navigating even when the boat is heeled to port.

Opposite the nav station is the huge, gourmet-style galley. The 655 will be a great party boat, and party central will be the galley where you and your mates will have the counter space and locker storage for preparing elaborate meals. But the area is also a proper seagoing galley where you can brace a hip or wedge yourself neatly while preparing meals in a real ocean seaway.

The master stateroom aft is reached via the hallway from the nav station. Outboard of the hall is a small double-bunk cabin that will be great at sea and for children while cruising. Access to the engine room is through two doors that open in the hall right onto the business side of the engine so you will be able to check fluids and change the oil easily. The space is large enough for all of the ship's engineering systems—and for humans to move around them for routine maintenance.

The master stateroom has a queen-size double berth on the centerline with large drawers and storage spaces beneath it. To starboard, there is a small built-in sofa and a large hanging locker. To port, the en suite head offers a large bathroom with a separate shower stall. This master suite will be a great home away from home for a cruising couple.

The two guest cabins forward offer a Pullman double to starboard and bunk-berths to port; both cabins have their own heads. Crew's quarters can be built in forward of the guest cabins, or the space can be



Opposite: 655 owners can tweak the saloon's set-up to suit their needs. Clockwise from top: the master stateroom's queen-size double berth, built-in sofa and ample storage; the 655 sails well in all conditions; the huge, gourmet-style galley is a chef's dream

reserved for sail and gear storage.

The fit and finish of the 655, like her sisterships, is completed to the highest quality with the best materials. Interiors can be designed and fitted with various veneers and a selection of hardware and lighting. The net result will be living spaces with windows, lights, fabrics, shades and hardware that all work together to create the ambience an owner wants.

BWS THOUGHTS

We have sailed Oysters many thousands of miles over the years and have seen the boats evolve as the design team continues to refine designs with innovative solutions. With hundreds of loyal owners sailing the world's oceans while remaining staunch members of the Oyster family, the design and marketing teams have a vast storehouse of practical knowledge

to draw upon, which guides their new design development.

The 655 follows in the wake of the popular 66 but incorporates innovations refined in the 72 and other recent boats. The result is a thoroughly modern offshore cruiser that is capable of sailing anywhere in the world while offering her owners and crew a floating home that is both elegant and extremely well thought out for passagemaking and the cruising lifestyle.

BWS's 300-mile jaunt down the Northeast coast of the U.S. gave us an appreciation for the quality and heritage built into each Oyster, which in turn gave us complete confidence in the boat. And, when the wind is piping on the nose and the seas building, that confidence is what every veteran sailor really looks for in an ocean-going boat. ≈

Oyster 655

LOA	67'7"
LOD	65'6"
LWL	59'6"
Beam	18'5"
Draft (std.)	9'8"
Draft (shoal)	7'3"
Draft (CB-up)	6'0"
Draft (CB- down)	14'1"
Displacement	85,980 lbs.
Fuel	502 gals.
Water	409 gals.
Sail area	2,830 sq. ft

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