

# **Cruising Experience on *Summer Kyle (Belle Marie)***

**by Mike & Marie Martin**

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The following is a collection of notes and comments on *Summer Kyle/Belle Marie* that have been sent on by the Martins, in many delightful e-mail missives, over many months of intensive cruising:

## **Shoal-Draft Sheltering**

We've just spent several days on the N.E. Cape Fear River taking refuge from 40-plus knot winds that were the southern edge of the storm that gave you guys such a pasting. Had Marie's eighty-four year old father with us. He was comfortable and happy in the forward cabin with its own head. The last time he was in a boat, it was a troopship returning from Europe in 1945.

*Belle Marie's* ultra shoal draft keeps paying off in fun and safety. The Cape Fear River is quite deep and we couldn't find an anchorage out of the high winds. The depth was about thirty feet right up to the shoreline. Enough scope to anchor and we were out in the middle of the river being buffeted around badly.

I lowered the anchor to just touch the water and nosed the bow into the grasses under the trees along the bank, dropping the anchor with the inside control. We nestled against the bank all night out of the wind. A boat with a deep keel and rudder would have had a problem when the current turned the boat broadside to the shore with the current. *Belle Marie* was in no danger at all and we spent a comfortable night. Marie's dad did worry about wildlife coming aboard from the trees, we were so close. Used the bow thruster to push off the bank in the morning and didn't have to worry about the prop banging something on the bank.

## **It All Works**

We now have 274 hours on the engine, which means 220 hours since we reached Newport on June 27th. For a new, custom boat, I feel that we have had few problems and those of a minor nature with the sole exceptions of the stuffing box and the propeller. The rest have been niggling irritations and the usual process of learning a new boat. Even after 200 hours I feel that I'm still learning the boat. I can't tell you of the hundreds of times we have remarked on how well the boat works and is built.

## **Can't Get Enough Time On Board**

We now have three hundred hours on *Belle Marie's* hour meter and get very cranky and irritable when we are away from her more than two or three weeks in a row. December and January were the pits, but we've got the weather now to go back to our one week of the month schedule.

We will head for the Outer Banks of North Carolina in May, then back up to the Chesapeake in June. Will probably spend most of the summer exploring there again, then plan to bring the boat to Florida early next fall and keep it on the Gulf Coast.

## **Prop Well Protected From Debris**

You might remember that I was a bit concerned that *Belle Marie's* tunnel would direct debris right to the prop. Hasn't been a problem. The big box deadwood seems to push stuff away from the prop although the tunnel does tend to collect stuff from the surface. It just bumps along inside the tunnel and goes out the back. This tends to support your theory that *Belle* swallows her own bow wave from the surface.

## **Rough-Weather Passage**

We left Urbanna Friday the 22nd with light snow, sleet and thirty-five knots of wind - 0 degrees C. Nasty! The bay had six and eight foot rollers with whitecaps headed the same way we were. Made for interesting steering since the autopilot was completely overwhelmed, but I had the "pleasure" of seeing the GPS register 15-

plus knots for thirty seconds at a time as we surfed down ahead of the rollers. Marie kept saying that we'd waited too late in the year to move the boat South. Seas behind us that way we were fairly comfortable. Since the winds were NW and we were headed SSE, the steady sail helped again. I don't understand why more boats don't use them especially the Grand Banks which are notorious rollers. Again, thanks, Dave, for the insistence on the whole sail package.

We ran to the locks of the Dismal Swamp Canal, about ten miles south of Norfolk and spent the night in front of them. My notes in the log say "too tired to take tank readings and write in this log." Next day we passed the locks at 9:00 (lock keepers hours are shorter than bankers!) and transited the canal which is about sixty feet wide. It was originally surveyed by George Washington and dug by slaves in the 18th Century. It is absolutely beautiful. Fall colored trees lined both sides so high that the GPS went absolutely crazy. Evidently the trees interfere with the radio signals from orbit. We went four hours on just two headings.

We crossed the notorious Albermarle Sound the next morning just after dawn. Ten knots of wind with the tide made a nasty little beam chop! I would hate to cross it in a high wind and understand why boats will wait for days for better conditions before crossing the sixteen miles of the Sound.

The next several days were beautiful cruising down the Virginia and North Carolina coasts. *Belle Marie* draws comments wherever she goes. Had one gentleman in a new, sixty foot Hinckley call us on the radio to say that when he was tired of sailing he wanted a boat just like ours.

### **Luxurious Accommodations**

*Belle* is wonderfully luxurious for two people cruising. We don't ever use the front cabin at all. If the water is smooth we run at 1,700 rpm which gives 10-plus knots. In rougher conditions where the prop wants to ventilate and stall a bit, I slow to 1,500 rpm which gives us 9 knots. Hot showers every day and the galley cabin is a wonderfully snug place to sit if it is cold and windy outside. [Note: engine max is 2,600 rpm, giving 12.1 knots.]

### **Docking and Backing Down**

We just got back, yesterday, from five days on *Belle Marie* exploring the Cape Fear River so I've had recent experience with *Belle's* handling characteristics. I deliberately tried a difficult docking and backing maneuver to gain practice. Backed into the slip rather than nosing in from a very narrow alley into a very narrow slip. There was no wind and the Stevensons were with us providing extra hands and fenders for insurance.

*Belle* spins so quickly to starboard with the wheel over and the bow thruster working that I can turn her in a space only about twenty feet longer than she is. I usually don't bother to back, just spin her around and put her in nose first.

My hypothesis about what is going on is that the prop acts as a big paddle wheel since the upper third is exposed, pulling the stern to port with far more power than in a fully submerged prop. Going forward, the hull shape causes the tunnel to fill far more quickly than going backward so the effect is not symmetrical. In fact, her forward acceleration is startling. Up to ten knots she feels like an outboard if you bring the RPM's up quickly. I've learned not to do that because it throws the passengers around.

*Belle* behaves about the same as my old Albin. Although the Albin has a fully submerged prop and doesn't walk to port so strongly, the bow is very shallow and falls off in a flash. The net result is that both boats behave in a very similar way. The Albin backs up, then walks to port. *Belle Marie* moves to port first, then backs up.

During my dockings this week, I was able to make *Belle* move almost sideways to

port by backing in short bursts and working the bow thruster to make the bow stay even with the stern. Short bursts of forward power kept it from backing far. I must have looked like E. Power Biggs on the mighty Wurlitzer, though. I wished for foot pedals at a couple of points in the sequence!

### ***Belle Marie Gets Lots of Attention***

We returned last night from four days on *Belle Marie*. Left Willmington, N.C. on Wednesday morning intending to go to Beaufort, N.C. then on to Okracoke Island and Manteo in the Outer Banks. Wind predictions made us decide to go to Oriental, N.C. on the Neuse River instead. Spent Thursday at Oriental, one of the popular stop over cities on the ICW route after a one hundred-thirty mile run.

Much of our time there was spent giving tours of *Belle Marie* and answering questions about her. We don't spend much time in marinas so are repeatedly surprised about how much attention she draws. We had at least ten couples come on board during the course of the day. It felt like the Wooden Boat Show again. Had one lady off of a sailboat say that she never thought she would regard any powerboat as beautiful, but *Belle Marie* changed her mind.

### **An Interesting Run**

On Friday made a one hundred forty-five mile run across the Pamlico and Albermarle sounds, both of which are notorious for their roughness and their connecting rivers and canals. Bumpy, but no big deal. The sail takes the curse off beam seas. We made these long runs to avoid crossing the rougher areas in some stiff winds. Glad we did since rough spring front went through the day after we crossed. Saturday morning brought us to Elizabeth City, NC, at the southern end of the Dismal Swamp Canal, about fifty miles south of Norfolk, Virginia.

### **We've Covered the Whole East Coast**

Hope to make Charleston by the 26th. When we reach Savannah, Georgia sometime in November, we will have covered the entire East Coast Intercoastal Waterway including the New Jersey Intercoastal which almost nobody cruises. (With very good reason!) I guess we could say that we have covered Cape Cod to Crystal River Florida, which is above the end of the Florida Gulf Coast Intercoastal Waterway. Now, we just need to do Cape Cod to New Brunswick to have covered all of the East Coast of the U.S.

Now that we have come South of Savannah, we have completed our travels of the East Coast Intercoastal Waterway, even the New Jersey portion which no one ever does (and we won't again!)

### **Rough Water Comfort and Plenty of Stability**

It's funny how time and experience changes perspectives. When we crossed back from the Eastern Shore last trip, last month, it was blowing 20Kts+ with 3-4 foot chop and whitecaps from the north. Put up the sail and tacked back and forth fifteen degrees every thirty minutes to avoid a direct beam sea. Everybody was comfortable and Marie was even able to make lunch. I've learned how little difference in direction it takes to change the motion drastically.

The design has GREATER stability than either the Grand Banks or Krogan designs. The motion is really too quick and snappy for comfort in a beam sea because of the high stability and the steadying sail is a real boon and necessity. We have crossed from the Eastern Shore to the Western Shore of the Chesapeake (East to West) with a stiff beam wind and 3-foot beam seas in company with a Grand Banks 42. They had to slow down to about 6 knots and tack 45 degrees up then down sea while we went straight across at 8.5 knots. The Grand Banks was rolling her rails under and throwing people around inside. They might look salty, but they scare the devil out of me. Too much weight up too high. The sailboats were all reefed down and pitching over the swells enough to show light under their keels. *Belle Marie* is a GOOD sea boat.

## **A No-Problem Grounding**

The previous night the wind shift from the front passing had blown us aground while we were at anchor because I had anchored right at the edge of the shore. We sat there perfectly upright, safe and comfortable until the tide lifted us enough that the wind could blow us on around and back into deeper water. Can you think of another boat on which that would have been possible?

## **More on Backing and Docking**

I've found the stern will whip in any direction you want with full rudder and idle ahead for a second. I've taken to building up good momentum astern and kicking the stern around without losing all of the sternway. With no keel aft the stern slides easily with the rudder and thrust.

## **A Hard Grounding**

I've finally run the boat aground HARD! Before, I've known that the water was shallow and was drifting or moving at idle speed. We were running down the Intercoastal Waterway, in South Carolina, Saturday, in one of the long ditch-like sections of the ICW. I moved over to the edge of the cut to let a faster boat go by, but failed to notice the stream that crossed into the ditch. It had evidently built up a shoal out into the channel at the edge.

I hit this limestone ledge at 9 knots behind Myrtle Beach South Carolina. It was about two feet down and the boat "suctioned" down onto it before I could pull the throttle back. We came to a complete stop so quickly and I slammed into the wheel so hard, the wheel nut left a big bruise just south of my belly button and my poor wife was thrown down, barking her hide in a half dozen places. The stern wave then caught up with us and washed us over the ledge and we just kept going. Nothing rattled (but our teeth and eyeballs), no creaks, no groans, no doors popping open, nothing. When I pulled the boat several months later, I could see the gouges in the bottom paint that ran from about two thirds of the way back on the stainless steel armor plating and down the massive bronze skeg that protects the prop and the rudder. In any other boat it would have broken the keel and wiped off the prop and rudder.

## **Hydrodynamics**

There is something really different that goes on under *Belle Marie* than under other boats. The hull shape and tunnel must really make the water flow in very different way than with a standard hull shape.

First, there is no bow wave. Either the bow is so fine that it never gets over displacement speed or the tunnel swallows the displaced water from the bow.

Second, the quarter waves stand out about seventy degrees from the hull rather than the forty-five degrees that other boats generate.

Third, those quarter waves are large rollers. We seem to be moving a huge amount of water in one place, but must be taking back some of the energy that moves the water since we burn so little fuel. These rolling quarter waves are fantastically attractive to porpoises. They can evidently "see" the roll with their sonar and will come hurrying from a hundred yards away to ride our quarter wave. They will slide along in it without effort for ten minutes at a time. I'll get it on video one day and send you both a copy. At one point during this last cruise, we had five on one side (including a pink baby) and three on the other. It looks as if we generate most of our wake underwater rather than on the surface. (Possible?)

Fourth, the hull can "feel" the bottom in depths of less than ten feet. At ten feet, cruise RPM speed drops a knot. Less than ten feet and the stern begins to settle. Less than six feet and speeds of over seven knots are not possible. More evidence that this hull displaces water downwards rather than sideways. Kind of a nice early warning system too.

### **Shallow-Creek Anchoring**

It's really neat to be able to get up inside the little shallow creeks along the Waterway to anchor for the night. Watched a Grand Banks hit bottom twice trying to get into the same place we were anchored. It must be a sin to feel that smug.

### **Nearly 500 Hours and Going Strong**

We are now at 480 hours and still attract a huge amount of attention. Got the "Beautiful, what year is it?" question from the Captain of a 100-foot, jet drive, super yacht last week. He looked real puzzled when I told him 1996.

### **Sipping Fuel**

We make about 10 knots on 3.5 gallons per hour, at about 1,700 rpm--about 1.5 knots faster than the full displacement trawlers. Our 210B Cummins is too much engine, but was the only six cylinder motor that was low enough to fit. It cost a bit less and was smoother than the four cylinder Yanmar that Dave had specified. Fuel consumption of the two engines is exactly the same.

### **Ten Thousand Islands**

We have just returned from a long trip through the Ten Thousand Islands and the western part of the Everglades. We celebrated our thirtieth wedding anniversary during this trip, which hardly seems possible, so we didn't take anyone with us.

These waters are ideal for *Belle Marie*. SHALLOW!! We routinely cruised in less than five feet of water and crossed bars and stayed in anchorages with about three feet at low tide. We actually went so far up the Little Shark River into the Everglades that we were on the Wilderness Waterway, a canoe trail through part of the Glades. If you look on a map of Florida and see Cape Sable down on the very tip slightly towards the west, the Little Shark River is the first stream just to the north of it.

We scared the devil out of some canoeists who were not expecting to see a cruising boat coming around the bend.

The weather was perfect. Warm days and cool nights. We really needed the neat screens that we had made last summer to cover the hatches and drop windows in the pilothouse. This was really a nice trip and we are looking forward to getting into the Keys and maybe the Bahamas.

### **The Joys of a Hard Dinghy**

We got many envious looks in Punta Gorda from people in inflatable dinghies who were going to the same fancy restaurant we were. We arrived in our smartest clothes with dry butts in our elegant dinghy. They arrived in their fancy clothes with wet butts. I had also forgotten how difficult it is to get out of an inflatable onto a dock because of the wide tubes in the way. Do love our hard dinghy!

### **A Dolphin Magnet**

We continue to attract dolphins when in shallow water (less than ten feet) and every time we do I remember that I forgot our camcorder. This time one of the dolphins had a tiny baby, about two feet long and pinky beige in color, with her...couldn't have been more than a couple of weeks old. It kept perfect station on her tucked just above her port side fin and perfectly mirrored every move even when she made leaps out of the water. It was just wonderful to watch and ten knots didn't bother the baby at all. I wish I had gotten it on tape, though.

### **Praise From A Pro**

I have to pass on an experience to you that happened to us on our cruise south on the St. John's River last month. We were in a very narrow part of the River, going through a little town called Astor, when we met up with a huge oil barge and towboat. All of central Florida around the Orlando area is supplied with power from a bunch of oil fired generating plants that are sited on the chain of lakes that is the headwaters of the Saint John's.

The towboat captains are the "lords of the river" who never deign to speak to a pleasure boater unless the amateur does something to incur their displeasure. We usually give them a wide berth, but had to crowd close due to the narrow tight quarters. I was therefore a bit apprehensive when the captain of the monster towboat called me on channel 16 and asked to talk with me on 68. Instead of chastising me for some stupid maneuver, he said, "I just want to compliment you on what a beautiful craft you have. Not only are the lines lovely, but you keep her in beautiful condition." Wow! Talk about flattery from above!

## **Cruising Aboard *Twombly*** **by John Perretti**

John Perretti owns *Belle Marie's* sister ship *Twombly*. (Both are the *Summer Kyle* design or class.) A world-renowned martial-arts champion and a movie and television stunt coordinator, John doesn't mince words. Here's his terse email account of his entire trip from Miami to Long Island:

Writing to give you some overviews of the *Summer Kyle's* performance (*Twombly*) on this trip up. We loved making the vultures [Tow US] crazy, scooting through two feet of water. They said we were bad for business. Nothing beats beaching her and going crabbing with neoprene gloves in the Carolinas. It was six to eight feet off Cape fear and the hull speed was almost sixteen knots SOG, down waves. We saw Trawlers with flopperstoppers out burying rails. We were planing although with no help of the engine. The whole wheelhouse is just so quiet. The Simrad autopilot worked beautifully. We came right across from Norfolk, almost one hundred and fifty miles off Long Island in a thousand fathoms and got spooled twice by something BIG. Dolphins rub their backs on the stem whenever they see us. Flying fish are picked up on the aft deck for the frying pan. She is a great offshore boat, cruising at 11-12 knots with the Gulf Stream push.

All for now.

You can get most of it, but John really is a man of action and few words. Luckily he called me on his cell phone several times, to give me live updates along the way. Here's an expansion.:

Almost every time they went into really shallow water, local boaters—including the towing service boats—would motor over or radio to "save" them. No one would easily believe that *Twombly* drew less than 2 feet.

Off Cape Fear they were running down 6 to 8 footers, in really confused seas. John said the boat handled it great; registered almost 16 knots speed over the ground for minutes at a time. Then—when he got back into the calm Intercostal Waterway again—he saw there were lots of crabbers working. So he simply found a beach; eased the boat up onto it; jumped off; stuck the anchor in the sand; and went crabbing by hand, with neoprene gloves. He tells me *Twombly*, backed back off—when they were done—easy as pie. Just gave her a few burps in reverse and away they came. Crabs for dinner.

Then, in 6,000 feet of water, at the canyon, 150 miles off Long Island—again in 6 to

8 foot seas—they decided to go fishing. Set a line and got an immediate strike. Whatever it was so big that it stripped all the line right off the spool. They did it again, and got the same result! (I told him, if they'd been tuna and he could've landed them, he could have paid for the boat.)

*Twombly's* too has proven to be a dolphin magnet just like *Belle Marie*. John also got another free dinner of fresh flying fish, just waiting on aft deck to be cooked.

## **Launching and Delivering Belle Marie** **by John Steele, Covey Island Boatworks**

### **Skeptics and Questions**

*Belle Marie/Summer Kyle* was launched in June of '96, just two weeks behind schedule. She floated to her lines, and all present pronounced her a pretty boat. Being such an unorthodox hull, though, skeptical comment was inevitable. Among the onlookers who'd visited the shop, looked and left shaking their heads were a couple of designers who knew a thing or two as well as several experienced builders and scores of lifelong boaters. We're used to this sort of thing at Covey Island. Nova Scotia is steeped in tradition, a place where new fangled ideas like epoxy and building hulls upside down didn't gain acceptance for most of the two decades we've been using them. Although we, too, had some questions, we were sure of the boat. After all, Billy Atkin was no fool and years ago he had designed and built many boats using this concept. We weren't losing any sleep over her, but I admit our curiosity did grow as launch day approached.

### **Sea Trial by Ocean Passage**

Sea trials began immediately and she handled well. The hull was more easily driven than anyone expected, anyone except—as Dave Gerr later pointed out—Billy Atkin! After a minimum shakedown time, it was off to the Wooden Boat show in Mystic. We set off down the coast of Nova Scotia and across the Gulf of Maine, with a chorus of skepticism verging on doom ringing in our ears. We were taking a shallow draft gunkholer on a route that would put us over a hundred miles offshore crossing the mouth of a bay that not only boasts the world's highest tides, but is also renowned for fog. The Gulf of Maine has also seen a breeze or two.

### **Offshore in Rough Going**

Eight hours out from the secure lee of Cape Cod it breezed up to twenty to twenty five knots solid and the seas grew to six to eight feet right on our beam. Guess what? She took it all in her stride with a solid comfortable motion. Even in these conditions we continued to bunk down in the forward cabin. Later, on the other side of Cape Cod where the canal empties into Buzzards Bay, things were just a tad nastier. The same wind was now on our nose and the waves were close together and steep, bad enough to shake up any boat. Square seas, six to eight feet tall and apart marched at us right up the middle of the narrow channel. *Belle Marie* really showed her stuff by putting her shallow draft to work and slipping into shallow water just outside the channel. We proceeded down the bay in a civilized manner and, as I recall, had a cup of tea. Our maiden voyage had clearly established this as an able, well mannered and very comfortable boat.

## **A Charter Skipper's Experiences** **by Captain Jim Stanek**

Delivering *Twombly*—*Belle Marie's* sister ship—from Norfolk, Virginia to Ft.

Lauderdale, the delivery skipper had this to say about her:

*Twombly* went through the water beautifully. Even when the weather blew up hard between the openings [of the inland waterway], the flare of her bow split the waves really well.

I couldn't imagine how she could be so stable.

I now see the endless possibilities of a shallow water cruiser. As someone who has had long-legged sailboats myself, I realize all the water I've been missing!

Jim Stanek, is a delivery captain with 30 years experience on all types of vessels.

### ***Twombly* Renamed *Moonbeam* by New Owner and Continues to Prove a Superb Cruiser**

The 42' Dave-Gerr shoal-draft, built by Covey Island as *Twombly* in 2000, is now owned by Ed Curtis of Bradenton FL. Renamed *Moonbeam*, she will be based in York Harbor, ME, beginning next season [2007]. Ed and his wife, who both have 30 year's sailing and power-boating experience, say they are delighted with their new vessel:

The boat has performed very well for us in all sea conditions, including a brief but nasty short passage from Martha's Vineyard to Wood's Hole (west chop) in 50-plus knot winds and short, 10- to 12-foot seas.

During our 200 hours this summer, we used an average of 3.8 gallons per hour with most of the time spent underway at cruising speed—9.5 knots at 2700 RPM on the Yanmar 170 HP diesel. I estimate that this translates into just over four gallons an hour at cruise, which is not inconsistent with the engine's performance specs.

The boat is quiet and very comfortable for two people living aboard or on extensive cruise. The light and airy cabins are delightful, and the design draws lots of attention and admiration. It is a great design that you executed beautifully.