Last fall, while attending the annual Pacific Seacraft open house at the builder’s new facility in Washington, N.C., I had the opportunity to sail a Pacific Seacraft 40 on the Pamlico River for a few hours one afternoon. Although I have been writing boat reviews for national magazines for 30 years and was friends with the guys who started Pacific Seacraft in 1979, I have to admit that I had never sailed the PS 40, nor written a review of it.

That had to be fixed, particularly because Pacific Seacraft—after a tumultuous few years—was purchased in 2007 by Steve Brodie and his family and moved across the country from California to North Carolina. The new company, which still employs many long-serving PS boat builders who relocated along with the molds, is a completely new and highly respectable operation.

The opportunity to sail the 40 also came during the same season as the passing of Bill Crealock, who designed the boat and was the conscience and inspiration for the whole larger range of Pacific Seacrafts. Crealock was a voyaging man as well as a yacht designer, so he brought to the design process a vast knowledge of the sea and a personal appreciation of how couples and shorthanded crews thrive aboard modest-sized cruising boats on big oceans. His book Vagabonding Under Sail is still a good cruising yarn after all these years.

An in-depth review of his classic 40-footer would be a good way for us to tip our hats as we say so long.

ON THE BREEZE

We tested a well-equipped, well-cruised 40 that belongs to Bill Kund. He is the second owner and...
was fortunate to buy the boat from a skipper who “did it right” when fitting out for cruising. Bill has kept the boat in true Bristol fashion and recently had the crew at Pacific Seacraft refurbish the varnish and gelcoats. Plus, he had Ullman Sails build him a new suit of cruising sails.

It had been raining all morning—sometimes in sheets—but by the time we broke free to go sailing, the rain had stopped and the wind had filled in nicely. Washington lies on the north side of the Pamlico. It is known as the last deep-water port along the river, and as such, has a storied history that goes back to the 18th century.

We extracted the 40 from its slip without fuss, made a quick K-turn and motored down the channel until we could find deep enough water to round into the wind. Under power, the boat handles surely, with the folding, three-bladed Max Prop bit-ting nicely and stopping the hull in reverse quickly.

The main is equipped with a stack-pack style pouch and lazy jacks, so you have to be truly head-to-wind to hoist it up between the jacks. Once we had it up all the way, Bill tightened the Cunningham to trim the luff and we fell off to power reach down river. The rolled-out, 125 percent genoa added to the horsepower.

In 17 to 22 knots true wind speed, the 40 put her shoulder down as she accelerated past 8 knots. The wind puffed in gusts over the riverside pine trees, so we had to keep an eye on trim and the position of the traveler, but we never had to sweat the helm. As the breeze gusted, we’d ease the traveler a few inches until the helm was light. Then, in the lulls, we cranked the traveler back to the centerline to power her up again. It was good to see that the boat was equipped with both a Cunningham and an easily adjustable traveler—both useful sail trim aids. Bill’s boat does not have a hydraulic backstay adjuster, which might be a good upgrade to help with both headsail and mainsail trim.

Once we sailed into the widest section of the river, we could harden up to see how the 40 handled close to the wind. The 40 is a fairly narrow boat, so even with the upper shrouds anchored on chainplates that are all the way outboard, the genoa sheeting angle was fine. We found that we could sail quite happily at 45 degrees off the true wind and could pinch her up with a slight decrease in speed to something close to 42 degrees. The boat tacks easily inside 90 degrees in a good breeze and flat water, but is happier at slightly wider angles in stiff chop or a running seaway.

Off the wind, we tried broad reaching to good effect and found
that she went best at about 160 degrees off the true wind. Running dead downwind, she did not lose too much speed and settled down nicely when trimmed wing-and-wing. For days and weeks of trade wind running, the 40 will be both fast and comfortable.

THE DESIGN

The 40 was conceived, designed and built as a world cruising boat for a couple, a small family, or a short-handed crew. The functional requirements for such a cruising formula dictate the form that the boat takes. For Crealock, that meant an easily driven, fairly narrow hull with plenty of stability and the ability to track surely in large following seas.

The canoe stern and the configuration of the cruising fin keel and skeg-hung rudder combine to give the boat great directional stability; however, the canoe stern also limits hull volume aft, which reduces the size of the cockpit and the space below decks that can be allocated to the aft cabin and storage. As in all compromises built into the 40, Crealock erred on the side of seamanship, safety and security. His fundamental belief was that you should return from an ocean passage better rested than when you left.

The design’s non-dimensional numbers say a lot about its characteristics. The sail area-to-displacement ratio of 16.27 is a full point higher than that of a Valiant 40 and indicates that the 40 has the sail horsepower to be efficient in light breezes. With a cutter rig, the sail area can be increased or reduced quickly from the cockpit.

The 40’s displacement-to-length ratio of 329 is high by modern standards; but that ratio is a bit misleading since it is based on the static waterline length and not the sailing waterline. The 40 has fairly long overhangs fore and aft and a short waterline when at rest that becomes longer wetted surfaces when the boat heels under a press of sail.

The 40’s beam is 12 feet, six inches. This is fairly narrow amongst the modern cruising fleet, where 40-footers often have beams of 14 feet and length-to-beam ratios of three or more. The L/B ratio of the 40 is 2.5, which indicates a lean, easily-driven hull that won’t get cranky in rolling and confused seas and will be efficient in light breezes. A narrow hull will obviously have less volume for accommodations—another Crealock compromise tilted in the offshore sailor’s favor.
THE DECK LAYOUT

As a seagoing boat, the 40 has few peers in the modern cruising fleet when it comes to practical safety considerations. The cockpit is fairly small and will never be a problem should it become filled with water in rough seas. The winches in the cockpit are positioned so that trimming sheets is not at all awkward and you can always get plenty of purchase on the winch handles. With the dodger in place, you are well protected from spray or rain and have a secure place for trimming sheets, reefing and keeping watch.

The 40 has low bulwarks around the decks, upon which are mounted higher-than-usual lifelines. The bow and stern pulpits are heavy gauge stainless steel and feel very solid and secure.

The foredeck works well at sea since there is always something to hold on to; the staysail, whether rolled or flying, gives you a great anchor for a free hand. The 40 has good handholds everywhere you turn, so while working on deck you are always able to keep “one hand for the ship and one for yourself.”

Bill’s 40 is equipped with a large, horizontal-access Lighthouse windlass, which is spec’d by Pacific Seacraft for the boat. With two gypsies and wildcats, the windlass makes handling the two main anchors simple and quick. For off the beaten track cruising, this windlass and two good anchors permanently mounted on the side-by-side rollers will make your life at anchor extremely secure.

LIVING ABOARD

The 40’s accommodation plan works well for a couple with occasional guests or a family with one or two children. The focus of the saloon is the large, G-shaped galley equipped with twin, centerline sinks (so they drain on both tacks), a Force 10 stove/oven and a large fridge/freezer powered by a Sea Frost refrigeration system.

Opposite the galley, the chart table faces forward and has a large surface for spreading out charts. Instruments and radios can be mounted outboard and in a small cabinet facing forward. There is plenty of room for charts, cruising guides, pilot books and all of the paraphernalia needed for world cruising. Both the galley and the chart table are fitted with high fiddles that keep tools in place.

The dinette seats six and the table can be folded down to form a double berth for extra company. The settee to port doubles as an amidships sea berth. There is plenty of storage throughout the saloon for dry stores and supplies.

The master cabin forward can have either a large V-berth or a centerline queen. The cabin has a small vanity with a sink and mirror. There is ample storage throughout this cabin, so you can bring a lot of souvenirs aboard.

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when cruising.

The after cabin could be tight for two American-size people, but is comfortable as a large single and will be a great sea berth. Again, there is plenty of storage for guests visiting for a week or two.

The head is well designed and laid out, with the toilet mounted facing forward, the sink and vanity outboard, and the separate shower stall forward. The self-draining wet locker is behind the toilet.

The fit and finish of the new 40 is as good as that on any semi-production boat built in America, or anywhere else for that matter. The craftsmen who joined the Brodies when the company moved east brought with them a generation of fine boat building skills that are evident in every joint, drawer and door. The varnish work is impeccable and the choice of latches, lighting fixtures and furniture hardware top class.

**BWS THOUGHTS**

The rebirth of the Pacific Seacraft company under the guidance of Steve Brodie and the craftsmen who joined him means that a great American brand is back in business. A generation ago, *Fortune* magazine named Pacific Seacraft one of the “20 Best Companies in America.”

Today, the boats are built once again with the hands-on care and semi-custom attention to an owner’s wishes that is hard to find in North America these days. The finished 40 and other boats in the line have an enduring value that can honestly be passed from one generation of sailors to the next.

The 40 we sailed, and the 40s that Pacific Seacraft are now building, are true blue-water boats. They look salty.
They sail well. They are tough and seakindly. And, they will take you wherever you dream of sailing.

If you are looking for a trendy boat that puts accommodation ahead of seakindliness, you will want to look elsewhere. Pacific Seacrafts are not for every sailor, but if you and your partner want to sail far and wide in a beautiful, traditional, couple’s cruising boat that will always look after your hide, the Pacific Seacraft 40 should be right at the top of your list.

**Pacific Seacraft 40**

- **LOA** 42'2”
- **LOD** 40’1”
- **LWL** 31’3”
- **Beam** 12’5”
- **Draft** 6’0”
- **Draft(shoal)** 5’1”
- **Displ.** 24,000 lbs.
- **Ballast** 8,600 lbs.
- **Mast Height** 55’0”
- **Aux. power** 54 horsepower Yanmar
- **Sail area** 846 sq. ft.
- **Stability limit** 140 degrees
- **Headroom** 6’6”
- **Fuel** 67 gallons
- **Water** 122 gallons

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Bill Kund, above, and his PS 40, top, have cruised the length of the East Coast and explored the Bahamas.