

POWER & MOTOR YACHT



The Grand Banks 54 takes on all conditions.

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STAYING THE COURSE



SEA CHANGE

THE GRAND BANKS 54 CONTINUES A LINE OF EFFICIENT CRAFT THAT ARE
USHERING TRAWLERS INTO THE MODERN AGE.
BY SIMON MURRAY

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For a long time, the term “fast trawler” was an oxymoron. Nowadays, a “true” trawler describes a full-displacement yacht designed for long-range cruising—descended from the big, lumbering fish boats that drag a net, or a trawl, through the water. Were you to come across any recreational trawler tied up in a marina today, fast or otherwise, you might struggle to see the resemblance to those workhorse forbearers.

That is especially the case with the modern line of cruisers from Grand Banks, a venerable company founded in 1956. The evolution of today’s design sensibility at Grand Banks has taken decades and, for the most part, the changes have often been focused on broadening the line’s appeal to a growing demographic of cruising aficionados. In the very beginning, the drag nets were jettisoned, of course, and a flybridge with a helm station was added along with larger accommodation spaces that promote long-term cruising comfort and socializing. And because a notable downside to the full-displacement hullform is the lack of chines—a feature that virtually guarantees a serious roll unless some sort of stabilizing technology is applied—the founders of Grand Banks opted for a finer bow entry and flat sections aft to produce more lift and a bit more speed. By doing this, they effectively gave their boats semi-displacement, rather than full-displacement, hulls.

A couple of decades ago, however, things began to change at Grand Banks. What is today called “The Grand Banks Heritage Series” of boats slowly but surely began giving way to faster vessels with larger engines and more speed. In 1993, in keeping with the new concept, the company launched the Eastbay series, an entirely new line. The first Eastbay, a 38-footer, debuted with a C. Raymond Hunt deep-V hullform and a top hop in the mid-20-knot neighborhood. Larger, faster Eastbays followed. And planing hulls were added to the Grand Banks trawler line as well, along with beefier powerplants and performance-enhancing prop tunnels, developments that, again, produced some sporty top speeds.

With the launch of the Grand Banks 60 in 2017, CEO Mark Richards took the company a step further. Not only were its long-distance motoryachts going to go even faster, they would offer great fuel economy and range to boot. Detractors promptly claimed that the 60 wasn’t anything like the old, more traditional Grand Banks



| RPM | KNOTS | GPH | RANGE | dB(A) |
|------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| 900 | 8.8 | 5.5 | 1,431 | 68 |
| 1200 | 10.5 | 14 | 675 | 70 |
| 1500 | 14.1 | 26 | 488 | 70 |
| 1800 | 19.4 | 32.5 | 537 | 72 |
| 2100 | 23.7 | 50 | 426 | 73 |
| 2400 | 27.9 | 74 | 339 | 77 |

Seas: 1-2 ft. | Fuel: 3/4 full | Water: 3/4 full

LOA: 59'5"
 Beam: 17'6"
 Draft: 4'
 Displ. (dry): 47,400 lbs.
 Fuel: 898 gal.
 Water: 290 gal.
 Standard Power: 2/725-hp Volvo Penta D11
 Optional Power: Volvo Penta IPS 950



The intrepid yacht consultant Ed Roberts at the helm of the 54.

trawlers, and they were right. Innovation was everywhere. A carbon-fiber superstructure (similar to the ones seen in racing sloops) kept the weight down, and Volvo Penta diesel engines could push the boat to a top end of 30 knots. But the biggest surprise of all was baked into the hull itself: Even with an almost 67-foot LOA, the 60 had a feathery displacement of 63,900 pounds. Compare that to the Tom Fexas designed Grand Banks 64 Aleutian Class (built in 2002), coming in 3 feet shorter and with a heavy-weight displacement of 95,000 pounds, and you’ll notice that pound for pound, these boats are barely in the same class anymore. On the 60, the only thing that remained of the past were the faux-planking lines on the hull, an interior set off by exquisite woodwork and a brand that takes its name from the highly productive fishing grounds off Newfoundland, Canada.

It seems like good fortune that the steward of Grand Banks is a professional yachtsman who has won the Sydney Hobart Yacht Race more times than anyone else and has competed in two America’s Cup campaigns—though Richards assures me there is little overlap

in his racing passion and motoryacht designs, save for a singular mind geared to getting the most out of every boat. “It’s the way my brain works, mate; it’s all about performance,” he tells me from his home in Sydney, Australia. “The whole concept of this range was to create a product that you can cruise at high speeds efficiently with a hull shape that I’ve been developing for 25 years,” continues Richards, who started Palm Beach Motor Yachts in 1995 and now oversees both brands. “There’s a lot of beautiful boats out there, but to get anywhere you’ve got to cruise at 10 or 12 knots, you know? And really, most of them, anything over 12 knots they start to burn a heap of fuel, and that’s just not what we’re about.”

Inspired by that mission, and looking to create a more manageable size for owner/operators, Grand Banks added a 54 to its line, with an 85 set to debut in 2021. Richards says his designers started with a 52, but they couldn’t fit all the amenities they wanted on board. “If you

want two or three cabins and two heads and all that stuff to actually live aboard properly, that’s as small as we can make it without losing too much practicality.”

Clients are taking notice. Though the pandemic briefly sidelined production at the yard—which Richards compares to an America’s Cup facility for their advanced, high-tech build methods—when we spoke in the middle of summer, they had been up and running for six weeks with a full order book. As far as production is concerned, Grand Banks, I’m told, is business as usual.

For a builder that prides itself on lightweight composite construction and an efficient, long-haul cruising range, only a sea trial will tell the true story. “Once people see what these boats can do, it just blows them away,” Richards explains. “Our success rate from sea trials is extremely high; the product speaks for itself.” But with boat shows across the U.S. either outright canceling or drastically reduced

in size, the Grand Banks team was confronted with an interesting challenge: How best to get interested clients (and journalists) aboard their new boat?

Simple. You bring the boat to them.

On an overcast morning in June, I met the 54 at a fuel dock in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. Standing in the cockpit was yacht consultant Ed Roberts, who greeted me with a temperature gun to the forehead. This was in the interest of safety, as the 54 had traveled over 1,300 miles from Palm Beach to Saybrook Point Marina, with multiple stops in between to allow prospective clients to get aboard one of the most anticipated boats of 2020. The trip had taken all of 12 days thanks to an aggressive timetable and an average cruising speed of 22 knots. At that speed, with a three-quarter load, the 54 burns about 44 gallons per hour—which, thanks to a 900-gallon fuel tank, provides a range of about 450 miles, or 20 hours of continuous running.

I was curious: What does long-range cruising look like amid a pandemic? “It’s a natural way to keep physical distancing from people,” said Roberts. However, it’s nice to know some things never change. “Everywhere we go, we always get a thumbs up and [somebody saying] ‘that’s a beautiful boat,’” said Tom Zelinsky, systems specialist from Stuart, Florida, and acting co-captain on the trip.

Together, Roberts and Zelinsky explained a typical day in the life. It looked something like this: Run the boat for 10 hours, wash it down, show it off, sleep, run another 10 hours, wash it down, show it off, sleep—repeat. Thanks to that fairly extreme schedule, they were intimately familiar with all the systems on board. Together, the two said they had zero trouble with handling: a testament to the 54 being a yacht designed for an owner/operator.

Compared to the Grand Banks trawlers of the past, the 54’s interior feels bigger, owing to additional usable space on board. As mentioned above, the construction methods have evolved: In the old days, Grand Banks were constructed using hand-laid fiberglass. Today they’re resin-infused composite materials, with a deckhouse that’s made with infused carbon fiber. “With 54 feet of hull, and an LOA of 60 feet, it displaces about 51,000 pounds,” said Roberts, whose long career working in the marine industry includes an earlier stint with Grand Banks from the mid-1980s through the early 2000s. “A similar size boat would be closer to 58,000 pounds,” which is a fairly substantial weight savings, partially achieved by the composite construction and bonding all the secondary furniture so it does double duty as structural reinforcement. The bonding also significantly reduces any creaks while underway—a big plus.

Owing to his unique perspective, and having seen the design evolution firsthand, I asked Roberts if longtime Grand Banks owners would gravitate to these new builds. “I think there are some very traditional owners who will find that the change in the underbody and increase in performance is unnecessary since they were happy to cruise at 10 or 12 knots,” he said. “But you have a whole bunch of other people who will come into a Grand Banks because they like the high-quality construction and the craftsmanship but want a more modern platform both in design and performance.”

Our 54 was powered by twin 725-hp Volvo Penta D11 diesels. (Engine configurations include both IPS and straight-shaft options.) The cockpit included a wet bar with a sink and forward-



Grand Banks uses advanced composite materials in its builds, including carbon fiber in the superstructures.

facing seating. To starboard there was an aft-facing board door, with a handheld shower to port. Storage was everywhere, recalling the setup of a much larger sportfish. Engine room access was through a hatch in the cockpit, which also provided easy access to the pumps and lazarette. Zelinsky said owners could also place a washer/dryer down there if they wished—there’s that much room. Standing room in the engine room measured 5 feet, 7 inches, and felt roomy for a yacht of this size.

That feeling of abundant space continued in the salon. Hull number one was configured with a galley down, which felt like another room unto itself thanks to a generous companionway between cabins. And it was far from a dungeon, as natural light poured in from the windows, illuminating the multiple cabinets, one of which included a dishwasher. (The washer/dryer could be found under the stairs.) Grand Banks allows for owners to customize nearly everything, including the number of cabins (two or three), the galley (up or down) and different salon layouts. On this version, a forward VIP and master cabin felt close to parity, with the only exception being the couple staying in the VIP would have to use the day head to port. (Only the master had an en suite.)

“It’s ideal for an owner that likes to cruise with another couple;



What is a beautiful salon on the surface serves a dual function: All of the furniture you see is bonded to the hull, reducing creaking while underway.

they don’t feel like they’re camping,” said Roberts. “Although I’m a big believer in cocktails for six, dinner for four and sleeping for two.” Now that’s some math I can get behind.

As rain threatened to pour during our sea trial, we congregated in the salon, which had a flip-down flat-screen TV behind the helm. Conditions were mild as we entered the Sound and I took the wheel. It didn’t take long to see how well the 54 performs, especially the way it handles, thanks to a set of Humphree interceptors and stabilizing fins. For a yacht in this size range, you wouldn’t normally consider performance to be such a big sell. But throughout the entire RPM range, even close to its top end of 31 knots, the 54 felt like it was damn near riding on rails. This is a fun yacht to drive. With its 900-gallon fuel tank, and staring down a long weekend, the sky is the limit on where you can go.

The thought reminded me of something Richards had said when we spoke. If there is a silver lining to this pandemic, it’s surely pushing people to get more in touch with nature and the sea. And they’re not traveling all that far to get there either. “I think it’s made people realize that their backyards can be a lot of fun as well,” Richards said. “I’ve seen here in Australia that it’s introduced a heap of new people into boating.”

Are we on the precipice of a new age, where people are more inclined to use yachts to explore their home waters or even the world? If so, Grand Banks feels uniquely poised to take them there. That’s all thanks to innovative platforms like the 54, which can certainly handle the mileage with great efficiency while offering enough amenities on board to thoroughly enjoy the trip. With time always threatening to crunch us, faster boats that sip fuel will continue to be valued. That feels like a trend that’s going to continue even after the pandemic is in our wake.

Richards is already seeing a change in owners. “It’s really weird, but you’re hearing these Grand Banks customers say they want to cruise at 25 knots. I mean they’ve never done 25 knots in their life!” he laughed. “It’s opening up a whole new world of cruising for them. They’ll go to the Bahamas for the day whereas before they wouldn’t.”

It’s hard to argue: If you can get someplace quicker, you’re going to do it. Richards agrees. “If you can turn a six-hour trip into a three-hour trip, Mum is going to be pretty happy with that,” he joked. “She won’t get as much knitting done, but people are busy; they’ve got stuff to do.” That includes grandparents. “I’m a grandparent myself,” said Richards, “and I haven’t got time to cruise around at 8 knots.” □