

Buying Boats A Rite Of Spring

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Acting on the premise you can never have too many boats even on a budget, my husband and I are always bottom fishing for great buys. Usually these turn out to be very expensive or very under utilized or both. Ten years ago, thinking to save money on dockage, I bought a 1500 dollar 24 foot sloop for trailer sailing. I put an \$1100 dollar trailer under it, and sailed the boat about ten times. Gradually I began to realize a trailer sailor doesn't save much money if you have to replace your Chevy Cavalier with a \$5000 dollar tow vehicle. I launched the boat with a friend's tractor, got a dock for her in a weedy corner of Sodus Bay, sailed her one season, hauled her out with another friend's pickup, and then sold the rig for \$1000 dollars. Net Gain negative 1600 dollars (including 200 dollars for the ads).

My husband is no better than I am at this sort of thing. He bought a wooden Lightning daysailer for \$500 dollars, purchased a trailer for it, built a workshop to fix it all up in, sailed it once and nearly sank. He gave the boat and trailer to a brother (but kept the shop). He did this because he had found a 26 foot fiberglass sloop with two holes in the bottom also for \$500 dollars. Wow, a nice big 26 footer for the price of a wooden Lightning with rot in the centerboard trunk-whatta deal! He spent a year and a considerable sum of money fixing that boat up, sailed it one summer, and gave it to another brother.

So our track record is pretty awful with bargain boats and it is probably a really good thing we didn't end up with the concrete Ingrid. She was a beauty though. We spotted her during a visit to San Diego last winter listed in the newspaper classifieds as a 38 foot gaff headed alkins ketch, which we interpreted as a gaff headed Atkins ketch. After a call to the broker, and a little Internet search we confirmed she was a variant of Ingrid.

There are certain designs of boats that are nearly legendary among the subset of good old boaters who gravitate by preference (or necessity) to the wooden classics and their knock offs and variants. Nearly all of William Atkins' designs are held in high esteem, but Ingrid is one of those select few like Hanna's Tahiti ketch or Slocum's Spray, that puts the day dream setting on high among those afflicted with the south seas syndrome.

"Let's go look at her-\$19,000 for a thirty eight footer sounds pretty cheap" we said. "Maybe we can get her for \$10,000." She was located over a hundred miles away up in Los Angeles but by pure luck only four miles from my aunt's house whom we had planned to visit anyway. So we went. The Internet's Mapquest gave us a bum steer in our search for the marina located at a place called berth

202. But after being chased off another wharf by a nice young homeland security guard, we eventually found it around the corner from the refinery, down behind the railroad bridge, and just past the Tidelands Oil Field row of pumps all nodding away ponderously extracting dinosaur blood from under the harbor.

Ingrid is based on the legendary Colin Archer designed double enders that were used by nineteenth century Norwegian life saving crews. Ingrid is a superbly seaworthy and sea kindly design that has been widely replicated by amateur and professional builders in wood, fiberglass, (as the Alajuela 38 and in several other variants) steel, and ferrocement .

This one was a proper little ship, rugged, simple, and salty. She was also obviously homemade, but the amateur had done a workmanlike if not yachty job on her. The hull was reasonably fair and looked sound enough to two freshwater mariners with limited experience aboard bluewater boats. She was well equipped and ready to cruise complete with provisions including a case of canned tuna, one gallon tin of soy sauce (almost full) and a gigantic restaurant pack sized can of refried beans.

But the feature that impressed us the most was her engine room. There was no other way to describe it. To two people who were used to contorting themselves into pretzels around the joinery, sink drains, and sea cocks of our fiberglass 32 footer just to check the oil, the space here was a delight.

There was room enough to sit comfortably on all sides of the four cylinder Perkins that reposed back in this tidy lair. And the constituents of this mechanical realm were clean, rust free and looked happy and well fed. After we sat and marveled at all the space back there for a spell we decided to see if the motor would start. After considerable searching we found the start button tucked away behind an opening port in the aft end of the cockpit and pushed it. After a few brisk cranks of the starter, the engine stuttered to life. There was a moment of panic when my aunt on the dock beside us called out "No cooling water coming out" but the appropriate waterline valve was soon located and opened. This was a huge relief because none of us could figure out how to shut the engine off.

As it chugged away contentedly, we puzzled our way around the cockpit, aft part of the cabin, and finally the engine itself. The problem was, between us all we had about five minutes of diesel experience-both of us and my aunt, a retired sailor, were outboard motor and Universal alumni familiar only with two cycle motors and inboard gas engines with ignition switches. There was no obvious button or key or switch anywhere to shut this thing off. I began to picture it

running for days until it ran out of fuel- roughly 75 gallons worth. "Call the broker up. Maybe he knows how to shut it off." somebody said.

"You're kidding" said the broker after I had reached him on the cell phone. "You don't see a shut off?" He sounded both amazed and annoyed at the depth of our ignorance. "Well look around. It's there somewhere". "Ok. Will do" I told him. A few minutes later a welcome silence settled over the boat. My resourceful husband had traced the throttle control cable to the front of the engine and noticed a strategic little part with a spring. After several tries he managed to push it against the spring and the motor obediently stopped. A thin piece of steel wire lay over the top of the engine, apparently accidentally pulled loose from the strategic part by a previous prospective buyer.

Somewhat unnerved by the depths of our ignorance, we decided we had seen enough of the concrete Ingrid. We closed her up and headed for the car. On our way back to civilization just past the row of oil pumps the cell phone rang. "Did you shut it off?" asked the broker sounding noticeably short. "Yes sir!" my husband told him. Maybe we're not quite ready for modern times yet. But boat shopping is so educational. I just checked E Bay this morning and saw an awesome wooden Lyle Hess motor sailor up in San Francisco, no reserve bid....

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