In an era when most builders raced to build ever larger, more elaborate, and often absurdly expensive new boats, it has recently seemed as though the average middle to upper-middle class family has been forgotten. The industry dares describe the suggested retail price a new, mid-sized yacht as “only” $2-million, implying that such a price tag should be commonly affordable. No matter how most families strain to stretch a budget, prices for most new weekend and vacation cruising boats remain out of reach.

Two new models from a local manufacturer will be of significant interest to local boaters wishing to explore the waters of the Pacific Northwest without a ridiculous financial sacrifice. Fluid Motion LLC, manufacturer of Ranger Tugs, introduced the Cutwater 26 and Cutwater 28 family cruisers at the 2011 Seattle Boat Show. According to Jeff Messmer, the man in charge of sales and marketing at Fluid Motion, the long lines of people waiting to board the boats displayed at the show resulted in nine confirmed orders. Post-show business has been brisk as well, and when we seized an opportunity to test one of the new Cutwater 28s it was easily apparent why the boat has been so well received.

It might be tempting to suspect that the Cutwaters are direct spin-offs from the Ranger Tug hull. Tempting, but nowhere nearly correct. The Cutwater’s patented Keel Stepped Hull is a unique combination of semi-displacement and planing designs. Cutwaters are single engine, inboard, direct drive boats. A raked stem and near-vertical forefoot, as well as a prominent keel, are reminiscent of features found on coastal cruising trawlers. When combined with a vented chine, performance enhancing strakes, and a full length “keel pad,” this configuration would seem, at least on paper, well suited to speedy cruising while maintaining stability in rough seas.

Cutwater hulls have 8’6” beams, and the dry weight of the Cutwater 28 is a
modest 6,400 pounds. As a result, Cutwater owners can save thousands of dollars per year in slip rental fees by storing the vessel on a trailer between uses. The ability to trailer has other benefits as well. It can be faster and cheaper to truck the boat to a remote location, launch it at a boat ramp, cruise the area for several days, and then return to the boat ramp than to run the boat on its own bottom. By trucking a Cutwater to Anacortes on a Friday afternoon, Seattle area boaters can be in the San Juans in less time than it might otherwise take just to get through the locks.

We were eager to get underway and see how the Cutwater 28 would perform during blustery weather on Port Gardner Bay, but first we spent some time at the dock noting the features and characteristics of the boat.

First Impressions

The Cutwater 28 carries a modest moniker. The molded portion of the hull is 28’ 0”, but with the standard swim platform and bow pulpit the actual LOA is 32’ 4”. What Fluid Marine describes as a “28,” many other manufacturers would designate a “33.” That’s an important fact to keep in mind when first encountering the Cutwater 28. Compared to other vessels sold as “28-footers” (and which may in reality by closer to 25-footers), there seems to be a nearly impossible amount of room and content built into the Cutwater 28.

There are two ways to board the Cutwater 28. At the dock, one steps across the swim platform to a starboard transom door. As a boat that will often be trailered to a ramp and launched, there also needs to be a way aboard that doesn’t involve walking out to the deeply submerged end of the boat. Cutwaters solve the launch ramp access dilemma with retractable boarding ladders at the stem.

Like their Ranger Tug cousins, Cutwaters feature a row of horizontal fenders on the aft edge of the boarding platform. Hoping to tie “stern to” at a cruising club function? No extra rigging is required with a Cutwater. Towing a dinghy? There is less risk of damage to the towed boat or the mother ship.

There’s easy service access to the single 260-horsepower Yanmar diesel under the cockpit sole. (Photo courtesy of C-images.net)

There is room for three or four anglers in the cockpit, with seating on both the port and starboard sides. The transom

The optional Wallas diesel cooktop heats meals and warms the cabin. (Photo courtesy of C-images.net)
Seat is rather unique: it can be essentially “rolled over” to face aft. (What a great perch for a little still fishing while at anchor, or when watching kids at play on dinghies or water toys!) A special fixture in the port forequarter of the cockpit is designed to hold a portable cooler in the upper portion and provide dedicated stowage for a barbecue below. Cutwater 28s include a cockpit sink and shower, handy for cleaning fish or blasting the beach sand off bare feet before entering the cabin. The boat we tested was optioned with a set of cockpit controls to permit open air operation. The cockpit controls will allow the skipper to join in the fun when fishing, and provide exceptional visibility when approaching the dock.

An electrically lifted hatch in the cockpit opens to reveal exceptional service access to the single Yanmar diesel.

**Accommodations**

Once inside the boat, it’s impossible not to be impressed with the open and airy feeling created by four overhead hatches in the main cabin and the large windows. Traditional teak-and-holly flooring lends a nautical ambience, while hardwood solids and veneers are used unstintingly to trim out interior surfaces.

The galley is to port in the main cabin. Our test boat was equipped with the optional Wallas diesel cooktop — a clever device that doubles as an effective cabin heater. Baking and warming chores are handled by a combination microwave/convection oven. A stainless steel sink with hot and cold running water is mounted over a stowage locker. The port watch seat, forward of the galley, is hinged at the base and can be folded forward to reveal additional counter space for the galley. An AM/FM/CD player with iPod dock is most forward on the port side of the main cabin.

A dining table with forward facing seat is to starboard, opposite the galley.

“We were zipping across the crests of the waves, and only their subtle slapping on the hull betrayed that we were moving along a quite a clip.”

With a modest 8’ 6” beam and 6,400 lb dry weight, the Cutwater 28 is easily trailered with the right tow vehicle, enhancing range and reducing storage costs. (Photo courtesy of C-images.net)
Much like the transom seat, the two-person pilot seat can be flipped to face forward for use by the helmsman, or aft to double the available seating at the dinette.

The Cutwater 28 is loaded with surprises, and not the least of those is the seven-foot double berth located under the dinette. This “second stateroom” is an unusual feature on a boat in this category, especially with such a high degree of privacy. The lower stateroom would be ideal for kids, or for a couple of adult guests.

The forward cabin redefines the concept of a self-contained stateroom. The very spacious head is in the aft starboard quarter, featuring an electric flush marine toilet, and a hand basin with hot and cold water. The faucet extends to become a handheld shower in this waterproof enclosure, and an obscured-visibility skylight creates a bright and cheerful atmosphere. Access to the back side of the helm, along with connections for all of the electronics, is available through a locker door in the head.

There is headroom of at least six feet in the forward cabin. The berth can be used as a settee during the daytime. A hanging locker is provided. Perhaps the most unusual aspect in the very self-contained stateroom is a well-outfitted refreshment center. Boaters who wake up early in the morning can make coffee or microwave a sticky bun in the privacy and convenience of the forward cabin.

Getting Underway

It was a foreboding early spring day when we sea-trialed the Cutwater 28. A soaking rain washed over slate colored Port Gardner Bay as we set out from the Everett Marina. If our inspection of the interior of the Cutwater 28 fostered the impression that this is a very big 28-footer, the group of five adult men (none of us small in stature) finding comfortable perches in the warm, dry main cabin confirmed that this boat has enough room for an average family, and some to spare. The Wallas stove made the interior toasty and pleasant.

The Cutwater Hull:
An Evolution in Form

In a significant departure from conventional deep-V hull geometry, the new Cutwater hull design incorporates a number of features that together deliver a smooth ride, straight tracking, agile, responsive performance, and maximum fuel economy. With these advantages, each Cutwater model offers the range to expand cruising horizons while providing exceptional comfort underway.

1. The Keel Stepped Hull bottom with tapered intake tunnels distributes an uninterrupted flow of air evenly across specifically designated segments of the running surface, while vectoring air away from the propeller.

2. A keel pad runs the full length of the bottom to concentrate lift and add directional stability. The entire tunnel-step-keel pad configuration employs a consistent distribution of air along the bottom to reduce drag for a measurable improvement in hull speed and fuel efficiency.

3. A substantial skeg keel extends along the aftmost third of the hull, to improve straight-line tracking for efficient course-keeping and to resist rolling for greater ride comfort. This keel also protects the propeller and running gear against damage from submerged hazards.

4. Along either side of the keel where it meets the bottom is a rounded shoulder where the machinery compartment has been expanded to allow positioning the engine low in the hull. This in turn lowers the boat’s center of gravity for greater stability, and allows lowering the main deck structure to provide greater interior headroom while preserving the boat’s attractive exterior profile.

5. Well forward, the raked stem curves downward near the waterline to a slender, near-vertical forefoot that cuts oncoming waves to ensure a smooth ride. This nuance also extends the waterline to improve fuel efficiency, and allows fuller sections throughout the forward hull sections for greater useable interior space. Together, these refinements enable the Cutwater hull to deliver an ultra-smooth ride and superior performance, plus an extra measure of ride comfort.
When a strong current is running in the Snohomish River, getting off the Everett Marina’s guest dock can be a challenge. Jeff Messmer engaged the standard bow and stern thrusters to simply walk the Cutwater 28 sideways into the fairway. With dual thrusters, a complete novice would probably need 10 minutes of practice and instruction to be able to dock this boat with confidence.

Once clear of the Snohomish entrance buoys, we throttled up to see what sort of speed the Cutwater 28 could achieve. We made a solid 24-knots, once again with more adults than many Cutwater 28 owners will have aboard. We were zipping across the crests of the waves, and only their subtle slapping on the hull betrayed that we were moving along a quite a clip. Despite the grumpy weather, the Cutwater 28 rode smoothly.

We backed down to 15 knots, which might prove to be a popular speed for boaters interested in a suitable combination of performance and fuel efficiency. At 15 knots, we were realizing about 2.5 nautical miles per gallon. That’s respectable efficiency, considering that even boats in the trawler category will achieve no better than 3 nmpg while motoring along at roughly half the speed of the Cutwater 28. The Cutwater 28 proved to be fast enough to be “fun” for anybody, yet efficient enough for cruising reasonable distances. With 100 gallons of fuel, the Cutwater 28 can go more than 200 miles between fuel docks.

By trailering closer to the cruising grounds and then launching at a boat ramp, families enjoying at Cutwater 28 can use very little fuel for a three-day weekend cruise.

**Conclusions**

Fluid Motion LLC has clearly launched a winner with Cutwater Boats. The 28 is large enough to be a family boat, yet still small enough to save mooring fees by trucking it home on a trailer. The boat is fast enough to pull water toys, roomy enough for an extended vacation, and elegant enough to allow some well-deserved pride of ownership. Here’s a boat that makes sense from a number of perspectives, and has much to recommend it.

Boating will never be an inexpensive pastime, but the Cutwater 28 will make new boat ownership a reality for a lot of families who might have previously imagined that boat ownership was entirely out of the question.

With a long list of standard items, a new, ready-to-cruise Cutwater 28 retails for less than $170,000. Our test boat was lavishly equipped the max, yet sported a price tag that was still under $200,000. For additional information, please call Cutwater Boats at 1-800-349-7198 or visit the web site [www.CutWaterBoats.com](http://www.CutWaterBoats.com).

**Cutwater Features**

1. Deck-High Cabinet with ice chest and storage below for barbecue
2. Microwave convection oven
3. Alcohol/Electric or optional diesel cooktop
4. Double sink with hot and cold water
5. Under-counter fridge with freezer
6. High-low dining table, converts to third berth
7. Extra-large transom platform
8. Teak-and-holly decking throughout interior
9. Private 7-foot double berth below dinette
10. Integral fenders at platform trailing edge
11. Concealed swim ladder for effortless boarding
12. Optional cockpit helm station with engine
13. Transom gate with latching door
14. Cabinet with sink and shower
15. Aft-facing reversible transom seat
16. Electric lift engine hatch
17. Bow pulpit with retractable ladder
18. Anchor hawse pipe and chain locker
19. Master berth converts to seating for four
20. Swivel companion seat
21. Hanging locker
22. Stateroom refreshment center
23. Flat-screen television
24. LED docking lights
25. Double helm seat, reverses for dinette seating
26. Wine Cooler
27. Private head with 6-foot headroom
28. Five stainless steel opening portlights
29. Cabin-top sport rack
30. Double bench seat 31. Large deck hardware accepts properly sized docklines for a secure tie

**SPECIFICATIONS AND DIMENSIONS**

- LOA: 53' 10''
- LOD: 28' 0''
- LOA: 32' 4''
- Beam: 8' 6''
- Draft: 28''
- Fuel: 100 gallons
- Water: 40 gallons
- Waste: 30 gallons
- Weight (dry): 6,400 lb.
- Standard engine: Yanmar 6BY2 260-hp