

story KIM KAVIN

Believe the Hype

BENETEAU SENDS HULL NO. 1 OF ITS SWIFT TRAWLER 47 DOWN THE WEST COAST TO PROVE SHE CAN HANDLE SERIOUS SEAS.

For Capt. Jackson Willett, the moment of truth came as he rounded Washington state's Cape Flattery and turned hard to port, into the open Pacific Ocean.

Willett owns a US Powerboating School in California, and he'd heard all the rumors about the boat he was aboard: The Beneteau Swift Trawler is no match for a true displacement trawler. It has a planing hull. It's light. It's French—what do those Europeans know about the Pacific Northwest, anyway? And to boot, this particular boat was Hull No. 1 of the Swift Trawler 47, not to mention the first Swift Trawler that Willett had ever driven.

He'd felt all right at the helm in Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, with a bluebird glass sky and not a swell to be found. "But when we came around that corner heading directly west around Cape Flattery and turning south, it was snotty," he says. "We had 15- to 20-knot winds, a 10- to 12-foot northwesterly swell. We were taking it on the front quarter for about two hours."

For a little while, he says, he thought about turning back. "I thought, OK, let's see what happens. It's not too late. Maybe we'll wait for a calmer day," he says. "But the boat did great. We chugged along at 12 knots up and down the swell. When we had to turn 90 degrees to start heading south, it was an interesting transition. Going uphill with the swell on the bow, the boat took the swell very nicely. But more importantly, I think, when we put the swell on the stern quarter, that's when some of these lighter boats get picked up. If the swell is coming from behind you, it will pick the boat up, and then as it goes under the boat, the boat will tend to slide down the face of the backside. It tends to slip and slide because it's not full displacement."

None of that happened aboard the nearly 28,000-pound Swift Trawler 47, which put on a performance that stunned nobody so much as Willett himself.

"This boat tracked well," he says. "Coming down the face of those swells, the boat really didn't slide at all. I was really surprised. It really does have a lot of similar driving characteristics to a displacement trawler."

The 47 is the newest in Beneteau's line of Swift Trawlers, which includes five models from 30 to 50 feet length overall. The company has built more than 1,200 of the boats in the past dozen years, according to Justin Joyner, powerboat manager for Beneteau America, who organized Hull No. 1's Swift Pacific Adventure from Seattle to San Diego to prove naysayers wrong about the concept's capabilities.

"I'm tired of being in the Pacific Northwest and hearing that a Swift Trawler isn't a real boat," Joyner says. "Well, yes it is."

Several captains took turns at the helm along the way, and they all told *Passagemaker* that during the diceiest times—especially with seas coming from astern, creating what one captain called a "surf fest" for lightweight boats—the Swift Trawler 47 maintained her heading. That captain was aboard when the autopilot was down, and he had to hand-steer through the slop. "I would've had no hesitation to go another 200 miles," he says. "I was eating lunch with one hand on the wheel. I was thrilled."

Willett even learned that the boat can handle a collision with a submerged log, which happened to him about 6 miles offshore coming out of Newport, Oregon, and heading for Coos Bay, where he had to arrive in time for the flood tide to get inside.

"Every time you pass these river mouths, they all flush logs out because of the logging industry and the nature of runoff," he says. "I was sitting on the flybridge, and *kerplunk*. It took out our port prop. We lost an engine. I was like, 'Oh, crap.' We had 30 miles still to go, and if we missed the flood tide, they would likely wave us off, and I'd be on one engine with no harbor."

The Swift Trawler—on one engine—maintained a speed of 11 knots and got him there in time.

"I kid you not," he says. "If we'd been in a normal trawler, there's no way we would've made it. The Coast Guard would've gotten involved. There might have been a rescue of some kind. The speed part of that trawler, even with one engine working, gave us the ability to get into port safely."

That's the whole idea of the Swift Trawler line. It looks like a trawler, is built to handle the elements, and yet can

Hull No. 1 of the Swift Trawler 47 tracked straight with swells coming from behind—besting other designs that aren't full displacement—and made it into port on time while maintaining a speed of 11 knots after losing an engine to a deadhead strike.





Beneteau calls the Swift Trawler 47 the entertainer's Swift Trawler, thanks to one-level living that connects the indoors and outdoors on the main deck. And the boat is built to take a beating, including from any overly curious marine life.



Doc White



hit 27 knots, according to the builder. Willett got her up to 26: "It will move," he says. "And when you get it up on plane at 16 or 17 knots, it takes on the characteristics of an express cruiser, which is a whole lot easier to deal with. It's really quite maneuverable."

Joyner says that express-cruiser living is also part of the 47's makeup. The boat's larger sistership, the Swift Trawler 50, has Volvo Penta IPS engines, which take up less space than conventional propulsion and allow room for an aft stateroom. On the 47, Beneteau went with straight-shaft propulsion because that aft stateroom isn't present. Instead, the layout allows for one-level living with no steps on the main deck.

"It is the entertainer's Swift Trawler," Joyner says of the 47. "Whereas the others have some level changes and less countertop space, this is a boat that we really tried to maximize that aft cockpit and salon and wheelhouse entertainment space."

The flybridge, too, got tweaks to amp up the entertaining quotient. "It's probably our best flybridge to date. It's just killer," Joyner says. "The entertainment space, the size of it, the ergonomics of it, and then you have a hardtop. There's lots of seating, there's a galley up, there's a centerline helm station—the way the table operates, it can fold out, and you can have the seating across the boat, actually use the table and seat 10 around it. Or, you can make it a table for two."

Willett says the creature comforts are nice, as is the trawler styling, but for him, it was the boat's performance that mattered most. He's no longer listening to the naysayers. He's handled a Swift Trawler in a rough sea, and she can take it.

"When we pulled into Coos Bay, there wasn't another boat like it. Everyone was coming down to take a look at it," he says. "It's a good-looking boat, but more important to me, with this boat, you can believe the hype." ❁

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