

Mathews Brothers

On a clear and flat Chesapeake morning that promised to become a high summer steaming scorcher, I went down to Spa Creek to meet with Bob and Pete Mathews to take a spin on the Severn River on their Mathews 29.

This was a chance to review a home-boys' boat. Bob and Pete Mathews, with business partner Jeff McGuinness, bought Cecil Robbins' Cambridge-based boatbuilding operation. With it, among other things, were the molds for the well-proven Robbins 29. This became the foundation for the Mathews 29. Back in 2002, Mathews needed larger facilities, and Denton needed more boat builders, so their operation is now based there.

The 29 shows her Chesapeake Bay deadrise and box-stern heritage exquisitely. She has a moderate deadrise forward for a soft ride with no bad habits. That deadrise reduces aft progressively for stability and planning efficiency. She has substantial flare forward and a low, subtle sheer, which are the hallmark of this Bay style. The single screw is located behind a long, shallow keel, which provides directional stability as well as propeller protection.

The boat's basic layout is that of an expanded express cruiser. The superstructure and accommodations are well forward to allow maximum working (or partying) cockpit area. The Mathews 29 appears to have more cockpit area than most boats her size. Forward are a Vee berth, an enclosed head, and a galley with optional refrigeration. In the cockpit are an engine box, helm, and companion seats. The boats not rigged for hard-core sport fishing have a seat across the aft end. On this version, there is a starboard aft steering station in the cockpit. The accommodations and layout are good for a couple to stay over the weekend or to have a number of friends aboard for a party, creek crawl, fishing, or all three.

Running the vessel up to full speed showed her to be fairly quiet and to have a solid feel that belied her size. Her handling was predictable, and she was well-behaved. At full speed the vessel turned smoothly with a slight amount of banking as is typical of this bot-

tom shape with the long, shallow keel. There was little rotation (bow rise) throughout her speed range. As there was no wind or seaway to test her ride, we tried running her over her own wake, and that resulted in no slamming, just a smooth, solid feeling "crunch" as she powered through the wave train.

The Mathews 29 we ran was fitted with the optional Yanmar 315 horsepower diesel. At an indicated 3900 RPM she was turning up 24-25 knots. The standard engine is a Yanmar 240 horsepower diesel with a Uflex single lever control, and the steering system was the Teleflex Seastar hydraulic unit. The mechanical installations were clean, well laid-out, and accessible.

This boat was not fitted with the optional bow thruster. Docking and undocking in the small slip were fairly simple, however, as a knowledgeably used Bay-style aft steering station and a spring cleat make working through a tight slip layout a breeze.

The fit and finish of this boat, as is the case of other Mathews' boats I have seen, was excellent. The brightwork was flawless, the joinery fits were as good as they get, and the fiberglass work was beautiful. Within the limits of the fixed hull, deck, and superstructure molds, the boats are semi-custom. As each boat is individually built, a large amount of client input is possible so that each boat can be personalized to fit her owner. That owner input is filtered through Bob and Pete to assure that the result will be a dream boat. When asked how brothers can work well together for so long, they responded, "Well, we have to. We'd be fired in a week if we worked for anyone else."

Judging from the quality, looks, and finish of the Mathews 29, I doubt that.

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