



GRAND *Performance*

The latest addition to the Grand Banks line, the 53 Aleutian RP takes on all the sea has to offer and comes up smiling.

BY DAG PIKE

It was definitely a small craft advisory day, with the wind screaming through the rigging of the sailboats and the flags extending as flat as boards. With wind speeds registering more than 30 knots, I was convinced the sea trial would be cancelled. Most builders do not like to take new boats to sea in these conditions. Grand Banks is not most builders. Without a flicker of emotion, the skipper let go of the ropes and we headed out into a welter of white water.



This is what boat testing should be, but there is rarely a chance to put boats through their paces in such punishing conditions. The 53 Aleutian RP is billed as a long-range cruising yacht — so it should be able to cope with adverse conditions.

Just outside the breakwater, we encountered 6-foot head seas. Instead of backing off, the skipper opened the throttles and had us powering along at 20 knots with the wind on the bow. Spray was flying everywhere, but the motion remained manageable for passengers and the 53 inspired confidence. For the sake of comfort, we slowed down a bit when headed directly into the seas. Even on this most punishing point, the hull's fine entry coped with the punishment.

Following seas are usually the Achilles' heel of semi-displacement hulls. As we turned downwind there was considerable rolling at slower speeds, especially when hull speed was close to wave speed. Opening the throttle soon increased the dynamic stability, however, and as we started overtaking the waves we embarked on an exciting downhill run but had no problem maintaining control of the helm. This downwind course emphasized one of the benefits of the 53; with the speed topping out at more than 23 knots, you are able to match boat speed to the conditions, using throttle and tabs as needed to create optimum performance across a wide range of sea states.

The 53 gave a great feeling of confidence during a sea trial where the conditions were way beyond what you would consider normal pleasure cruising. Though it is rugged, this yacht also offers a great deal of comfort and style. Grand Banks' design team packed living space into the hull, and you have the option of a two- or three-cabin layout and a wide variety of optional extras. On this



FAMILY AND FRIENDS can mingle in the salon or step up to the forward house, which positions the settee and galley adjacent to the helm (top).

particular boat, the owner requested a private stairway down to the master cabin, which was installed under the internal stairs leading up to the flybridge.

As one would expect from Grand Banks, the 53 displays a traditional teak interior that creates a wonderfully inviting and intimate feel to the interior. The craftsmanship is exemplary, with detailed louver locker doors and curving handrails. Meanwhile, exterior brightwork is kept to a minimum — primarily the bulwark cappings.

JONATHAN B. COOPER (2)

Double doors lead from the cockpit into the bright salon, where opposing settees make a great social area. Large windows are set low enough to maintain an outside view. This well-equipped galley space sits comfortably behind the helm, with a compact dining area to port. A curved stairway leads down to the forward cabins where the VIP stateroom is in the bow and a double bunk cabin is to port. Both of the main cabins have en-suite bathrooms.

A door in the aft bulkhead of the master cabin opens to reveal a large utility room with the options of a laundry room, an extra freezer or a crew cabin. It is hard to imagine a crew cabin with the only access being through the master cabin, so this is an unlikely option — especially as the 53 seems very much an owner/operator type of yacht. The same access from the master cabin leads to the engine compartment, where the twin Cummins diesels sit high and are close-coupled to a V-drive gear box that, in turn, connects to the conventional shaft and propeller propulsion.

The helm is simple and traditional, with the navigation displays at the top and the controls below. The designers also followed tradition in fitting wide windscreen pillars

that do obstruct quite a section of the horizon. There are no such restrictions on the flying bridge, however, and the view is excellent. A canvas Bimini or optional hardtop covers much of this area. There is a built-in barbecue counter behind the settees, which still leaves ample space for tender stowage and a crane. A Portuguese bridge around the fore end of the superstructure gives access to a small settee built into the forward end of the coach roof.

I found this new addition to Grand Banks to be simply brilliant. There are a few things I would like to see changed, such as reducing those windscreen pillars and making some adjustment to the steering to give it a bit more "feel," but overall the 53 Aleutian RP represents one of the finest cruising yachts of its size now on the market. A couple could live aboard here for months at a time in considerable comfort, and that comfort would be enhanced by knowing they have a boat that not only looks the part of a serious cruising yacht but which can also act it. The way the 53 coped with the conditions on this sea trial should give owners every confidence in its ability to handle most things the sea could throw its way. ♣

53 ALEUTIAN RP

SPECIFICATIONS

- LOA:** 57'10"
- Beam:** 17'9"
- Draft:** 4'9"
- Displacement:** 73,000 lbs.
- Water:** 300 gals.
- Fuel:** 1,000 gals.
- Power:** Twin 600 hp to 715 hp Cummins or Caterpillar
- Contact:** Grand Banks, grandbanks.com
- Price (base):** Upon request

PERFORMANCE

TEST POWER: (2) 715 hp Cummins QSM 11 diesels/V-drive transmissions. Sea trial performed off Cannes, France; winds WSE at 30 knots. Speed readings measured by GPS. Loading included half-fuel and half-water with 12 people on board. Sea and wind conditions raised sound levels considerably above normal and reduced speed. Circumstances did not allow for a full range of speed and sound readings because rough conditions prevailed immediately on leaving the shelter of the breakwater, but the following were noted.

RPM	KNOTS	DB-A
600	5.3	65
1,800	12.4	74
2,550	22.6	78



INSIDE: ① The spacious, covered aft deck is complemented by a wide swim platform and opens to the salon by way of double doors. ② Protected side decks and a full Portuguese bridge provide excellent security for crew members. ③ Galley, helm and settee are centered on a raised central deck, creating a central social area with an excellent view through tall windows. ④ V-drive transmissions move engines aft to allow for a large utility area adjacent to the master stateroom. This space can be configured to meet the owner's needs. ⑤ Large side windows bring light into the master stateroom and head. ⑥ Guest head is spacious and includes a separate stall shower with a seat.