

# Coastal Cruising Under Power

HOW TO CHOOSE, EQUIP, OPERATE, AND  
MAINTAIN YOUR BOAT



Gene and Katie Hamilton

Foreword by Capt. John Wooldridge, *Yachting* magazine



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# Coastal Cruising Under Power

How to Choose, Equip, Operate,  
and Maintain Your Boat

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# Foreword

In July 1977, I became the editor of *Inland Sea*, a Chicago, Illinois-based Midwestern regional edition of the nationally circulated *Sea Magazine*. I met Gene and Katie Hamilton by chance, walking across the street to McCormick Place to attend IMTEC, the largest recreational marine trade show of its day. When they told me that they had returned just the year before from a cruise that took them through the Great Lakes, along the Erie Canal, down the Hudson River, south along the eastern U.S. coastline, and through the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) to winter in the Bahamas, I wanted to know more—much, much more.

On a cold, wind-whipped afternoon later that fall, Gene and Katie visited my office in downtown Chicago, and we walked across Michigan Avenue to find a bit of lunch. It was the beginning of a friendship that has spanned 28 years. Their stories rang with authenticity, and I soaked up their experiences like a student musician attending a Master class. They explained that they were both teachers, and that they had taken a year off to make their cruise over the winter of 1975. They hoped to make a living writing for recreational marine magazines, and they had a few book ideas to develop along the same lines.

"You *had* to go cruising to write authoritative cruising stories," Gene said. Their first coastal voyage was in a Rhodes 41, which they sold in Annapolis, Maryland in the

summer of 1976, after enjoying the Bicentennial activities taking place in the nation's capital and in cities and towns along the Chesapeake shoreline.

Gene and Katie returned to Chicago in 1976, bought a house in need of tender loving care, and began writing about their home improvement experiences as well as their cruising adventures.

I moved to California in November 1979, to take the helm of *Pacific Skipper*. Gene and Katie continued to write for *Sea*, and also did stories for *Lakeland Boating*. Katie's monthly column, "First Mate's Forum," was a staple for Midwestern women who loved boating. Even though their fame was spreading for their home improvement articles, they never lost their love for the water, nor their desire to go cruising again.

In 1985, after being land-bound and boatless for several years, Gene and Katie bought a wooden Grand Banks 42 located on the east coast, named her *Old Grand Dad*, rented out their Chicago-area home, took a year off, and went down to Florida for the winter. On their return trip the following summer, they spent some more time in the Chesapeake, liked it, and stayed, living aboard for a time in Castle marina, Kent Island, on Maryland's Eastern Shore. But because they were working on a book project (as well as articles for *Popular Mechanics*, *Popular Science*, and *Family Handyman* magazines), and needed the reliable phone connection that wasn't easily avail-



able in their marina, they made the decision to move ashore and rented a house nearby. I had moved to Annapolis in 1982 and, when I found that they were living in the area, I urged them to stay. They settled on St. Michaels as their new home.

Gene and Katie sold the GB42 in 1989, bought a J/24, and raced it around the buoys near St. Michaels. Meanwhile they launched a home improvement website that proved to be a huge success. They purchased a C&C 35, a boat they had lusted after since their days in Chicago, and took it to Florida for a winter in 2000. On their return to the Chesapeake the following spring, they sold it and bought a Grand Banks 36, which they still own and cherish. As I write, they are moving it up the Waterway for the third year.

Transiting the ICW and cruising along the coast in the fall and spring they experienced changeable weather firsthand. "The difference was windshield wipers," they quipped, referring to the difference between a sailboat and powerboat. Having made that trip a few times myself, I can tell you that cold and wet seem adventurous for only so long. "You get

a different perspective sitting above the waterline," said Gene, "but the speeds from point to point are not that much different. It's very comfortable."

Now, hundreds of boating articles later, Gene and Katie have penned *Coastal Cruising Under Power* to pass along the knowledge and experience they've garnered from numerous coastal passages. It comes just in time, as more and more boatowners turn to displacement and semi-displacement powerboat designs as platforms from which to view and enjoy this country's coastlines—to view America from a perspective most landlubbers hardly know exists.

Coastal cruising is hardly all flat water and bluebird weather. Being knowledgeable and prepared, mentally and physically, is vital. The prudent mariner relies on all sources of printed and electronic information to ensure the safety of crew and vessel. The book you hold in your hand is just such a source.

John Wooldridge  
Managing Editor  
*Yachting* magazine



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# Introduction

## *An Invitation to Come Cruising*

**P**icture this scene: you're at anchor in a quiet cove under a starlit sky with a nice breeze to cool the cabin and keep the bugs away. In the forward cabin you're lulled to sleep by the peaceful sound of water lapping against the hull. This is cruising.

You're underway, enjoying crisp weather under sunny skies just a short distance from your destination, a new town and marina never visited before. This is cruising.

The boat is tied to a dock, it's pouring rain, the wind is pitching the boat back and forth making you feel like you're inside a blender. This is cruising, too.

Cruising on a powerboat can be anything from weekend boat camping on a 24-footer to a month or more aboard a 50-foot yacht. The spectrum of cruising styles is as varied as the spectrum of boats and cruisers—of whom we've met plenty in all our years at the helm. Some, who take a leisurely pace, are happy to make 50 miles a day at 7 knots, others are fast-track cruisers interested in getting to new cruising grounds in a hurry. Slowpokes or go-fasts, we all find our niche.

We've been boating since 1969, when we bought our first boat while living in Chicago, and we've been "messing about in boats" ever since. In this book we want to share our enthusiasm and experience of cruising the coastal waters of the United States, and hope

it encourages you to do the same. The thousands of miles of shoreline in and around the United States offer an endless number of destinations—close-to-home harbors and protected anchorages—where you can cruise comfortably and safely, without crossing wide oceans.

The book begins with a section on choosing a cruising boat, with a look at all the aspects you need to consider. In Part I we show how the shape of the hull determines the way a boat moves through the water, and how its engine and drive system power it at slow or fast speeds. We also provide an overview of different interior layouts and of a boat's electrical and freshwater systems. Then we discuss the nuts and bolts of buying a boat and how to choose a marina.

A boat is an empty shell until you load it with gear and equipment that help you navigate and communicate, so in Part II we outline how to outfit a cruising boat. We take a serious look at what safety gear to have aboard. To round out this section we review the documents and paperwork necessary to operate and register a boat, and how to keep them organized on board.

In Part III we lay out the necessary skills of operating and using a boat, with a review of the Rules of the Road and the basics of boat handling, anchoring, piloting, and naviga-



tion. Since weather can have such a profound effect on your boating, we include a primer on understanding weather and how to read present and upcoming conditions.

A routine of maintenance and cleaning is necessary to keep all the systems and components of a boat working at their best. Part IV includes three key chapters with our take on keeping a boat working, and what tools and spare parts to carry on board.

Over the years we've met many boaters who enjoy different styles of cruising, so the cruising lifestyle is the focus of Part V. We look at the creative ways people use to pay for cruising, how they cruise with kids and pets, and the many things we've learned from all of them.

The last part of the book, Part VI, features our favorite coastal areas for cruising—charming harbor towns with marinas and safe anchorages for gunkholing—destinations we know and enjoy.

At the end of the book, in the appendices, we list resources and contact information

you can use to find out more about many of the topics we discuss in the book.

We hope you'll find the book helpful and use it as a starting point to venture out on your boat, exploring coastal waters. As your experience of operating your boat grows, and your confidence builds, you may want to learn more about specifics like navigation and piloting or how your engine works. You'll find plenty of good books about every aspect of boating.

Anyone who cruises aboard a boat will agree it can provide hours of contentment interrupted by moments of sheer terror, but most of the time cruising is being free to go where you want to go, at the speed and comfort level you choose. And that's what we like about it.

A sense of humor, a sense of adventure, and a boat are the key ingredients to attainable cruising along the coastal waters of the United States. In this book we'll tell you what we've learned about cruising and how to enjoy it any way you can.