USED BOAT review

CAMANO 31

BY STEVE KNAUTH / CONTRIBUTING WRITER

IN THEIR WORDS

If Steve Willett never sees another hurricane, it'll be too soon. Not long after the 58-year-old retiree from Cocodrie, La., bought a 2002 Camano 31 trawler, hurricanes Rita and Katrina brought on the mass destruction of the region's cruising grounds. "The boat was idle for nearly eight months," says Willett.

Since then, however, he and his wife, Marsha, have been making up for lost time. And Spirit, which they've owned for two years, is taking them farther and farther afield. "We've made a few trips to Houston and a pair of month-long trips along the Florida Panhandle," says Willett. "And, of course, many shorter overnight and day cruises here in Louisiana."

Steve and Marsha Willett

The Camano 31, a single-stateroom, single-engine, twin-helm pocket trawler, is a good fit for the cruising couple. Willett discovered the 16-year-old Canadian builder while researching used boats. He found the boat (originally known as the Camano 28) in Ed McKnew's "The Boat Buyer's Guide to Motor Yachts and Trawlers" (International Marine/Ragged Mountain Press). "I liked what I read," says Willett, who wanted to step up from his 23-foot cabin fishing boat. Inquiring on the Internet, he got a host of favorable responses and a lead on a Camano 31 in nearby Gulf Shores, Ala.

"My wife and I took a demo ride, and we really liked it," he says. "We decided to buy." The boat was in excellent shape, and the agreed-on price was around $170,000.

Among the plusses:

- No exterior wood. The hot, damp southern Louisiana climate is very hard on wood trim, says Willett.
- A single engine. Willett says he likes the extra room below and relative ease of maintenance with one engine. Questioning other boaters on the subject, one replied, "Look along the bayou, and you'll see hundreds of shrimp boats — almost all will be single engine." That convinced him.
- Standard bow thruster. It was a big attraction and has been a help in maneuvering in tight quarters, although using it in a marina often will get you razzed for "cheating," Willett says.
- Overall length of 31 feet. The Camano fit the hoist at the Willetts' fishing camp.

The Willetts have made a few changes to Spirit in the relatively short time they've owned it. Most have been to add cruising performance and convenience — for example a 4 kW generator, trim tabs, a fuel monitoring system, front and side curtains for the flybridge Bimini, and a dinghy on the swim platform. "I have also fitted her with rod holders and lights for night fishing," says Willett. "It's not an ideal [cockpit] for fishing, but there's room for two or three people."

Spirit is equipped with a 200-hp diesel and cruises an easy 8 to 9 mph burning about three gallons an hour. "We've been fortunate with weather conditions and have not been out in very rough [water]," says Willett. "When it's gotten choppy, we usually speed up to around 12 mph and get a nice ride. When we need extra speed, our Camano can run over 16 mph."

The Willetts' future plans call for cruising along the Gulf Coast and more of western Florida. "I think the Camano is ideal for the plans I have now," says Willett. "It's a nice size boat with plenty of room for my wife and me and our dachshund, Coco. But one of the most enjoyable things about the boating and cruising experience has been the friendships we have made along the way."

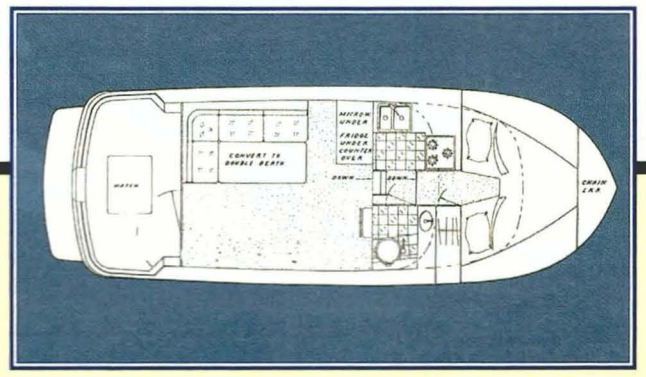
WALKTHROUGH

The Camano 31 pocket trawler features a simple layout, both inside and out, with a large flybridge and a spacious interior. The rugged, salty look is indicative of the boat's Pacific Northwest roots. The profile shows a high, slightly angled bow and a gentle sheer over ample freeboard, with a tall pilothouse topped by the flybridge. The look is further enhanced by the Camano's wraparound forward windows, reminiscent of a harbor tug or ferry.

There's a sizeable foredeck with room for an electric windlass, and it's safely accessed by the side decks (with railings) or through a hatch over the V-berth. The flybridge, accessed by a ladder, is large enough for a full upper helm station, three seats and an L-shaped settee. The cockpit, though not large, has a lazarette with plenty of room for storage.

The cruising-couple interior starts with a V-berth forward and an adjacent head to starboard, equipped with sink, vanity and wand shower. The galley-down is to port and comes with standard two-burner stove, 12-volt refrigerator and shelf-mounted microwave oven. The saloon is well-lit by tall side windows, which also provide 360-degree visibility at lower helm station. There's a table at the L-shaped settee, which can be converted to a dining area or a double berth.

The Camano 31 rides the builder's proprietary Keelform hull. A combination of displacement and planing shapes, the bottom has a deep stem and forefoot that gradually flattens and broadens into a planing surface at the stern. A full-length keel provides stability as well as buoyancy as the boat accelerates and begins to plane, according to the company. Powered by a single diesel (150 to 200 hp), the Camano has a top speed of around 20 mph. A bow thruster is standard.



BACKGROUND

Camano Marine Ltd. of Delta, British Columbia, began as a builder of small, rugged recreational trawlers and has held true to that mission for more than 16 years. Its first — and for a dozen years, its only — boat was the Camano 28, introduced in 1990. Designed along the lines of a working northwest fishing boat (down to its single engine), it's called a "salty little cruiser ... with a distinctive profile and an efficient cabin layout" by McKnew in his "PowerBoat Guide." Among the boat's design features is the Keelform semidisplacement hull, a displacement/planing hybrid shape created by Camano Marine. Now known as the Camano 31, it's been a popular pocket cruiser over the years, with about 150 boats sold to date. In fact, its success has led to the creation of a larger version, the Camano 41, inspired in part by the designs of trawler icon Kurt Krogen (Kadey-Krogen Yachts).

AVAILABILITY

Camano 31s (and 28s) have made their way around the country in the model's 16-year production run. Boats can be found on both coasts, and resale value is high. Most are in the mid-$100,000 range and come with the 200-hp diesel. A 1997 model, for sale in Florida for $145,000, was listed in "immaculate condition" and was outfitted for cruising, with modern electronics, air conditioning, full refrigerator/freezer, Bimini with curtains, and a 200-hp diesel. A 1998 model in North Carolina was offered at $165,000, with the bigger engine and a full slate of electronics at the lower station: GPS/plotter, 25-mile radar, fish- and depth finders, and autopilot. Extras included a washdown, windlass and remote spotlight. A 2001 model in "new condition" was available in Maryland, priced at $175,000. Equipment on the 13-knot vessel included a 200-hp diesel (with 250 hours), air conditioning and a generator, autopilot and electronics. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 31 feet
BEAM: 10 feet, 6 inches
DRAFT: 3 feet, 3 inches
WEIGHT: 12,000 pounds
HULL: semidisplacement
TANKAGE: 133 gallons fuel, 77 gallons water
PROPULSION: single diesel
BUILDER: Camano Marine Ltd., Delta, British Columbia. Phone: (604) 946-5352. *www.camanomarine.com*