

# POWERBOAT REPORTS

*The Consumer Resource for the Powercraft Owner*

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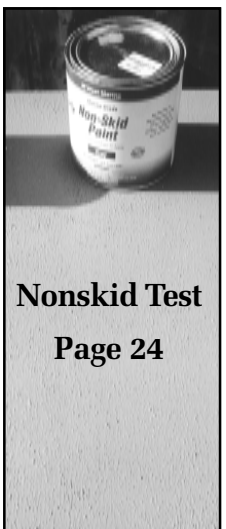
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# SeaCraft

*The Classic 23 boasts one of the best rides of any small monohull we've driven, but it comes at a very high price—\$58,000. For that, consumers deserve a longer warranty and a better fuel tank installation.*

**S**ometimes you gotta travel a little to get to the fish, but 150 nautical miles ... and in a 23-foot open boat? That's what Ian and Shep Murray did (twice) this past summer to reach their favorite fishing spots off of Martha's Vineyard, MA. The brothers, who hail from Greenwich, CT, crossed three different Sounds (Long Island, Block Island and Rhode Island) in their 2002 SeaCraft 23 Classic, a center console powered with a 225-hp Honda four-stroke.

"We left at 7 in the morning and we had our lines in the water by 1:30," said Ian. "We stopped a few times. It really wasn't that bad. It's a great-riding boat."

And it always has been. Since Bill Potter cranked out the first SeaCraft 23 in 1970, owners have been raving about its soft ride. In fact, older SeaCrafts—in all sizes—are all the rage these days, as evidenced by a flourishing website ([www.classicseacraft.com](http://www.classicseacraft.com)) where owners trade renovation tips and tales of slicing and dicing seas no other 23-footer would dare take on. (See the accompanying article).

We got a chance to test a SeaCraft 23. Like the Murrays' boat, it was rigged with a single Honda 225. Here's our report.

## Design

Research for this article included our usual sea trial and dockside inspection. In addition, we interviewed the Murray brothers, two other SeaCraft owners (one of them launched the aforementioned website) and a SeaCraft dealership on Long Island, NY. For some historical perspective, we spoke to the former owner of



***Above:** SeaCraft will pre-rig any engine brand but packages with Mercury and Honda. The boat hardly flinched during our sea trial, its legendary hull design living up to all the hype.*

SeaCraft, Bill Potter. He and the proud SeaCraft owners and L.I.'s Hampton Watercraft were quite helpful. We wish we could say the same about the current manufacturer of the SeaCraft 23, Tracker Marine, which also owns Mako. It took us three weeks before we could pin down sales and marketing president Frank Longino for an interview. And even then he would only give us "10 minutes." We hope that this I'm-too-busy (he was preparing for a boat show) attitude doesn't trickle down from corporate to the dealers and on to the buying public.

We actually ended up keeping Mr. Longino on the phone for about 30 minutes. The mission of the 23, according to Longino, is to deliver a smooth head-sea ride at planing speeds and yet troll and drift with minimal roll. "That's the reason for the 18-degree deadrise at the exterior

and 24 degrees at the centerline," he said.

Potter gave us more specific input into the design of the bottom, which as far as he knows has changed little since he ran the company. The SeaCraft website supports his belief: "The 23' Classic is currently built utilizing the same time-honored hull design as when first introduced in the early 1970s."

The key is the bottom's variable deadrise, which is distributed through longitudinal steps, said Potter, who took the patented design of SeaCraft founder Carl Moesly's 21-footer, extended it 2 feet and modified the bottom slightly to produce the 23 in 1970. "Instead of strakes, you have panels that are parallel to the keel line," said Potter, who is still active as a marine accessories designer for Seamark Marine in Florida

(www.hermco.net). "These panels flatten out as you move outboard."

Once on plane, water flows smoothly outboard, the steps reducing deflection, or "slapping," upon re-entry. On many other production monohulls, the water must fight past the strakes to escape outboard, which can lead to a rougher ride.

Above the waterline, simple lines contribute to an attractive profile. With a straight sheer and freeboard proportioned to satisfy both form and function, we think the boat looks darn good. We wondered whether its performance would measure up to its looks as we nudged the throttle into forward at the 2002 Miami Boat Show.

## Sea Trial

The Miami Boat Show remains the ideal forum for us to test boats. Besides the quick access to the ocean, the fact that hundreds of powerboats pack the channels—and churn up washing-machine-like water—adds to the fun.

The two *PBR* editors who tested this boat brought different driving styles to the helm. Technical advisor Erik Klockars drives hard, in white-knuckle fashion that pushes the boat—and its occupants—to the limit. Let's put it this way, you quickly discover whether the vessel has an ample number of handrails when Klockars takes the helm. His bat-out-of-hell technique helps us uncover any bad habits or characteristics.

In contrast, editor Chris Landry concentrates on how the boat operates at cruising speeds, gauging how fast he can run comfortably, the responsiveness of the steering and controls, and visibility at the helm. (Stability while adrift and at slower speeds sits high on his priority list, too.)

The T-top supports on many center consoles often block sightlines, a safety hazard as well as an annoyance. Not so on the SeaCraft 23. Two support bars are pushed outboard and only slightly impede the helmsman's line of sight.

While battling our way through the roily waters of Miami's inlets, it became obvious that this is an excellent sea boat, one that rides much bigger

than its LOA. As advertised, the 23's strong point was its head-sea ride. The boat thought nothing of a 2-foot chop at a cruising rpm of 3500. **T h r e e - f o o t e r s** awaited in the ocean, and the SeaCraft was up to the task. She wasn't as smooth-riding in quartering seas, but still did an adequate job.

We had no problems with the hydraulic steering, finding it quite responsive with a tight four turns from lock to lock. Klockars pushed the throttles down to achieve a top speed of 38 knots and ran the boat in all directions in search of moments of uncontrollability. He found none.

Our sea trial was relatively dry. Winds were moderate, though. Remember, this is a small boat—and completely open, so it's no surprise that the Murrays report that they got wet on their passages to and from the Vineyard. In fact, Ian Murray said that "the boat is wetter than I expected." He might have to make the

same addition as David Pugsley, who frequently runs a refurbished (1979) 23 through Sir Francis Drake Channel in the British Virgin Islands. "I have spray rails starting about a foot up from the waterline in the bow and tapering down to waterline level about amidships," said Pugsley, marina operations director of Bitter End Yacht Club in Virgin Gorda. He uses the boat for both work and pleasure. "This is why this particular boat is so dry."

With that Honda four-stroke, our

## Fast Facts

|                                |        |
|--------------------------------|--------|
| Length                         | 23' 3" |
| Beam                           | 8' 2"  |
| Draft                          | 16"    |
| Deadrise @ transom (avg. deg.) | 20.5   |
| Dry weight (lbs.)              | 3,070  |
| Transom c/l height             | 30"    |
| Fuel capacity (gals.)          | 135    |
| Maximum horsepower             | 300    |

### Standard Equipment

- Gunwale mount rod holders (4)
- Under gunnel rod storage
- Transom baitwell
- In-deck baitwell
- Baitwell pump & circ. system
- Fishboxes (2)
- Raised casting deck
- Console tackle storage
- Cooler space under standard leaning post
- Single bow T-top
- Standard rocket launcher w/ handrail

### Optional Equipment

- Vertical rod storage
- Double bow t-top (w/ outriggers)
- Rupp Top Gun outriggers
- Fold-down mini tower
- Electronics box
- Fluorescent T-top light
- Spreader lights
- Backrest for standard rocket launcher
- Fixed-back rocket launcher
- Console cover
- Spray hood w/ boot
- Spray hood privacy curtain
- Bimini top w/ boot
- Cockpit coaming bolsters
- Bow coaming bolsters
- Casting deck/bow cushions

test boat consumed about 8 gallons per hour while attaining a speed of roughly 21 knots. And of course this V6 four-stroke murmurs quietly at trolling speeds—a mere 71 decibels pushing along at 1500 rpm. The four-stroke isn't going to pop her out of the hole as quickly as a two-stroke, but we wouldn't call it sluggish, either.

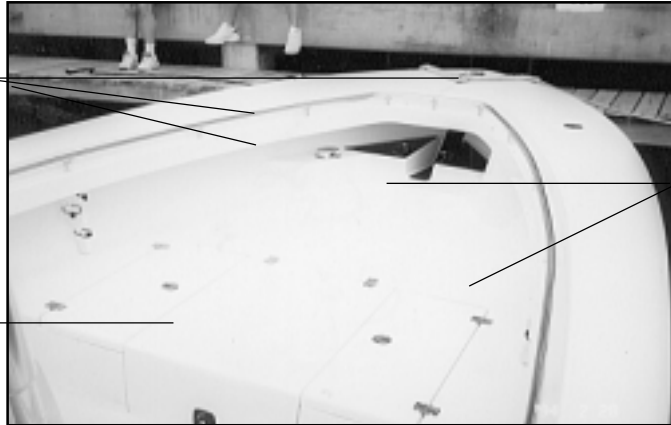
### Construction

Today's 23 is built to be lightweight but durable. The company uses a

# Critic's Corner / SeaCraft 23 Classic

## PROS

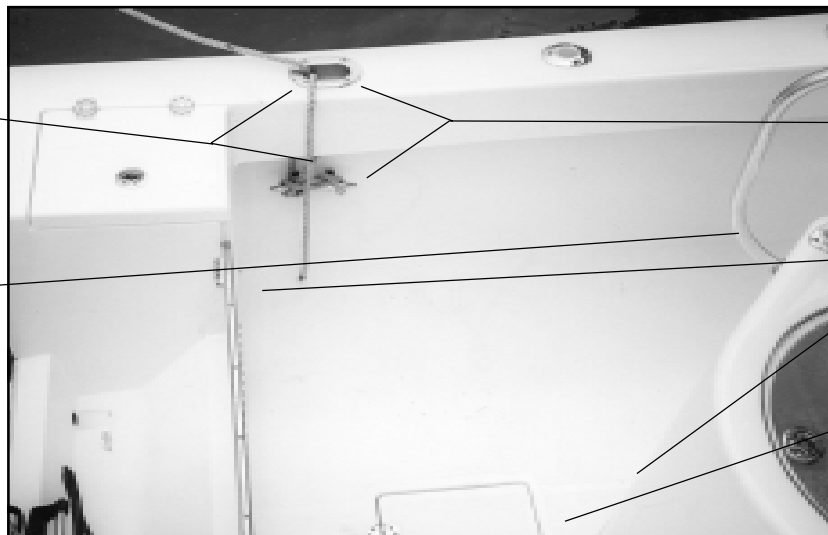
Rail, cleat and navigation light at the bow are tucked away to prevent snagged lines and hooks. Raised casting platform provides storage space.



## CONS

Once you step onto the casting platform, gunwale height decreases to only 17". A foredeck flush with the sole would be safer.

Hawsehole-accessed cleat makes for clean design. Built-in toekick at the hull sides and handrail on the backside of the leaning post's backrest adds to overall safety while crew stand/fish in the cockpit.



Conventional cleat mount allow you to tie a line quicker than this arrangement. No toekick in corners or around baitwell. No toerail at hull sides, either. Must cut cockpit sole to fully access aluminum fuel tank for inspection or removal.

T-top supports are pushed out-board so they do not obstruct sightlines.

Trim tab switches are close to throttle for quick access.



Windshield is too short to block wind while you're standing at helm.

Gauges should be higher for quicker monitoring.



100% vinylester resin throughout, which we'd expect in a high-end boat like the SeaCraft. Some builders claim to use vinylester, but it's actually a blend of polyester and vinylester.

Construction crews hand-lay the biaxial fiberglass fabric to a solid 3/4" thickness on the bottom. SeaCraft does use quite a bit of coring, but just not in the bottom, which is fine by us considering the fact that ensuring an intimate skin-to-core bond can be tricky. Also, a solid glass bottom can be more easily repaired than a cored one.

Airex PVC foam is used to core the sides and decks, according to Longino. The hull-to-deck bond seems durable—the shoebox joint is glassed together and further secured with stainless steel screws.

All hardware is through-bolted with lock nuts or tapped aluminum plates. Through-hulls are bronze and chrome/bronze, much better than those PVC through-hulls that dry-out, chalk and crack after 5 years.

The builder gives you a 7-year warranty on the hull and no gelcoat coverage. With the claimed high level of construction materials, methods and design, we asked Longino



**Above:** The SeaCraft 23's piano-hinged transom board keeps out green water but still allows for toekick space. The board is long (55") but seemed strong and stiff. It can be folded down to free space so the outboard can be fully trimmed.

why not offer a 10 or even 20-year warranty—and some sort of blistering warranty?

"It's bad business to do that—you're on the hook for 20 years," said Longino.

So what? Boatbuilders should be "on the hook" for more than a mere 5 or 7 years, in our opinion.

We don't like the fuel tank installation. To fully access the aluminum fuel tank, you'd have to remove the console and leaning post and cut the deck. Longino said foam is not used around the tank, which is good since it will trap moisture against the corrosive aluminum. We'd much prefer a plastic fuel tank. Aluminum

## Performance: SeaCraft 23 Classic

| RPM  | Decibels | Knots | MPH   | Gallons Per Hour | NMPG | MPG | Range NM | Range Miles |
|------|----------|-------|-------|------------------|------|-----|----------|-------------|
| 1000 | 69       | 4.04  | 4.65  | 0.25             | 16.2 | 19  | 1965     | 2260        |
| 1500 | 71.5     | 5.7   | 6.55  | 0.8              | 7.12 | 8.2 | 865      | 994.8       |
| 2000 | 73.75    | 6.91  | 7.95  | 2                | 3.46 | 4   | 420      | 483         |
| 2500 | 79.5     | 7.96  | 9.15  | 4                | 1.99 | 2.3 | 241.7    | 277.9       |
| 3000 | 80.5     | 12.2  | 14    | 5.9              | 2.06 | 2.4 | 250.7    | 288.3       |
| 3500 | 84       | 18.5  | 21.3  | 8.1              | 2.29 | 2.6 | 277.8    | 319.5       |
| 4000 | 85.5     | 27.1  | 31.2  | 9.1              | 2.98 | 3.4 | 362.2    | 416.6       |
| 4500 | 87.75    | 26.4  | 30.35 | 12.2             | 2.16 | 2.5 | 262.8    | 302.3       |
| 5000 | 89.5     | 30.2  | 34.75 | 13.2             | 2.29 | 2.6 | 278.1    | 319.9       |
| 5600 | 91.5     | 33.4  | 38.4  | 20.13            | 1.66 | 1.9 | 201.6    | 231.8       |

SeaCraft 23 center console, single 225-hp Honda four-stroke, 15-pitch stainless steel prop, 135-gallon fuel capacity, 72 gallons of fuel, 3 people, light gear, safety gear. Test performed off Miami, FL.

tanks, in our opinion, should be fully accessible for inspection and removal without having to perform major surgery on the deck.

## Helm/Deck

What do coaming bolster pads, snapped-down cushions, navigation lights, cleats and bow rails have in common? They snag fishing lines and hooks. SeaCraft tucks away most of these elements to minimize the snag-factor. The only exception: The pads on the two-person seat and backrest molded into the forward section of the console. Secured with long SS piano hinges, the pads (which also serve as the hatch lids) don't appear to be removable, either.

The spring and stern cleats are mounted on the hull sides and accessed through stainless steel hawseholes. The bow cleat is the pop-up type. At 6" and all alone, this cleat needs to be bigger to handle two docklines.

The boat has no bow rail of the conventional sort. A recessed 1"D rail begins just outboard of the leaning post and rings the bow. It sits inside the deck liner's L-shaped radius on the inboard side of the gunwale top. You'll find this low-profile rail on some of SeaCraft's competitors, notably Contender.

The raised casting platform at the bow diminishes the rail's purpose,

however, since the rail is only at shin level once you step up 9-1/2" onto this surface. We prefer a flush foredeck so that the gunwale rises high in front of you, increasing safety on this least-stable section of the boat. The downside: the loss of storage space, but we'll live with that for the increased safety factor.

Moving aft, standard rod racks line the gunwales and flush-mounted rod holders sit inside the gunwale tops at the stern. Freeboard measures 26" just outboard of the helm and 24" at the stern. We'd prefer higher (28") sides for safety's sake.

The windshield height (61" off the sole) is too short to protect a standing helmsman. The builder stuck the horn switch amongst a strip of others under the steering wheel. We'd move it up higher—and make it red—for quicker recognition and access. Leave the Lenco trim tabs switches where they are—between the throttle and the wheel for no-look operation. The helm seat was comfortable.

We found the batteries in the console, secured firmly and with terminals covered with rubber booties.

SeaCraft has done an exceptional job with the livewell/leaning post module. Two beefy handrails extend

## Value Guide: SeaCraft 23

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Overall utility        | 3 |
| Overall appearance     | 5 |
| High speed performance | 5 |
| Low speed performance  | 4 |
| Seaworthiness          | 4 |
| Construction           | 4 |
| Hull integrity         | 4 |
| Fit and finish         | 4 |
| Ease Maint./Repair     | 3 |
| Passenger seating      | 2 |
| Design/Layout          |   |
| anchor stowage         | 3 |
| foredeck               | 2 |
| cockpit                | 4 |
| head                   | - |
| Helm station           |   |
| seating comfort        | 4 |
| sightlines             | 4 |
| instrumentation        | 3 |
| ergonomics             | 3 |
| Electrical (overall)   | 4 |
| access                 | 4 |
| Mechanical systems     | 4 |
| Fuel tank installation | 1 |
| Engine access          | 4 |
| Warranty               | 3 |
| Standard equipment     | 4 |

Ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=poor; 5=excellent).



**Left:** The SeaCraft boasts a clean deck layout, with recessed hardware. **Above:** A clear livewell lid helps some baitfish survive longer. Crew standing in the cockpit will appreciate the waist-high grabrails on the leaning post.

from the top of the backrest down to the livewell. They're up high, too, so you don't have to hunker down. On a speedy boat meant for offshore use like this one, crewmembers need something meant for clutching—not the rocket-launcher rod holders (on some boats, you're lucky to get even that). The builder has selected a clear lid for the livewell, which gives some baitfish a better chance of survival. SeaCraft also builds a livewell into the deck, a nice alternative since transporting bait from a casting net into a raised baitwell gets tricky. Our test boat had a third livewell, raised and in the starboard quarter.

Since the Classic's on-deck design incorporates a cut-out transom, a splashboard forward of the engine is necessary to block green water when backing down or adrift in rough seas. We were impressed with the design of the splashboard and motor well. The stiff 55"-wide board is angled aft to



allow for toekick. In fact, the only places you're deprived of toekick space is at the transom corners. (For an even higher safety factor, we'd like to see standard toerails at the gunwales.)

That transom board also folds down on a piano hinge to make room for the motor when it's trimmed up.

A hatch in the cockpit sole aft of the deck livewell leads to bronze seacock fittings with shut-off valves. The bilge pump and switch are logically mounted on an L-shaped bracket—just remove the bracket when it's time to replace the pump and/or switch. You won't have to drill holes in your boat. Klockars gives it a thumbs up. Pie hatches in each corner provide access to fuel lines.

### Conclusion

With the single Honda 225-hp four-stroke, the SeaCraft 23 Classic retails for \$58,545. Optional equipment includes trim tabs (\$680), Top Gun outriggers (\$1,400) and coaming bolster pads (\$425). SeaCraft sits among several other high-end center console fishing boats. Certainly, you should consider the competitors, especially the Regulator (\$54,500 MSRP) and Contender (\$49,899 MSRP with minimal standard equipment). Remember to sea trial all three—don't just look at them at a boat show.

What does the SeaCraft have going for it? A head-sea ride we can safely say is one of the best we've encountered in a small boat. We think the Classic's topside design is commendable, too, especially the fold-down transom splashboard, snag-free hardware and double-handrail setup at the leaning post. We have no complaints about fit and finish or electrical components (all wiring is tinned). The helm could use a few modifications (move that horn switch up higher), but we like it for the most part because it doesn't interfere with sightlines.

Our biggest concern with the boat is its inaccessible aluminum fuel tank installation. No matter how good the installation, a boat owner should be able to access his fuel tankage without cutting up the boat, in our opin-

## Website Helps Owners Revive Old SeaCrafts

Remember that old shampoo TV commercial where images of a beautiful model's face multiply as she explains "And I told two friends, and she told two friends, and so on ..."? That's what it has been like for the membership list over at [www.classicseacraft.com](http://www.classicseacraft.com). Rhode Islander Jason Goldfarb launched the site while restoring a 1968 20' SeaCraft.

"One e-mail led me to five [used SeaCraft] owners, then 10. I was talking to them all, but my fingers got tired, so I created a website."

The membership now bulges at 250 with SeaCraft enthusiasts from all over the country—even the world (homeports include France, Bermuda and Cabo San Lucas). Most of the boats were built in the 70s or 80s. The oldest: a 1967 19-footer, which Goldfarb writes "is the most impressive boat on the site, hands down." The owner "has taken great care of his 19, and has all the original documentation, warranty cards, and articles about his boat. His boat is an I/O with a 160-hp Chevy inline six with a MerCruiser outdrive."

Goldfarb writes a sizeable portion of the descriptions accompanying the before-and-after photographs. But the site very much belongs to the owners, most of whom could never afford a new SeaCraft (a 23 retails for a whopping \$58,000).

"There was a lot of talk about how great these boats are, but not having deep pockets I thought I would never find out how good,"



*Above: In addition to before-and-after photos of refurbished SeaCrafts, the website gives you a little history: SeaCraft's founder, Carl Moesly, designed and built the first SeaCraft, a 21-footer, to race offshore.*

writes Steve Syler in his dramatic buildup to his discovering of a 1979 23-footer for \$7,000. He worked for an entire winter—nights and weekends—stripping and then refurbishing the boat.

One of the most common old SeaCraft repairs has been the replacement of wet transoms, which were built with wood and encapsulated in fiberglass. Goldfarb says a project like this might seem overwhelming at first but is quite doable with the help of an ever-growing group of SeaCraft owners to fall back on.

Yes, bringing an old SeaCraft back from the dead is hard work, but guys like Syler have no regrets, especially once they feel that smoothing-riding, variable deadrise hull beneath them.

Contact—[www.classicseacraft.com](http://www.classicseacraft.com); Jason Goldfarb: 508/295-9700.

ion. We also think the builder should provide more than 7 years for a warranty, and offer some sort of protection against blistering. In our view, this is not too much to ask for considering its price, which equates to

more than \$2,500 per foot—no wonder used SeaCrafts are so popular. ■

Contact—**SeaCraft**, 4355 NW 128th St., Miami, FL 33054; 888/732-2723; [www.seacraft-boats.com](http://www.seacraft-boats.com).