

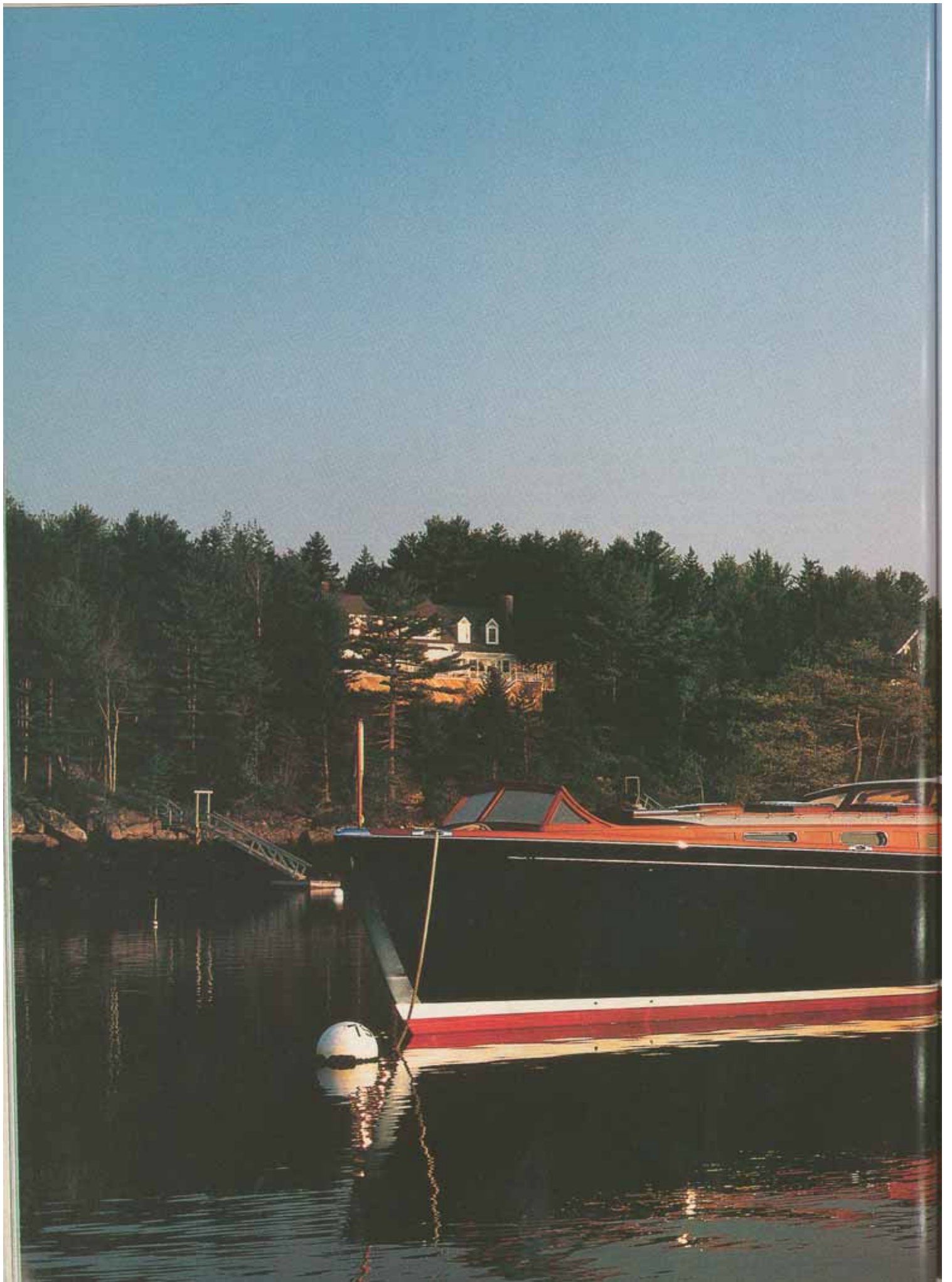
When rum was king, speed ruled and rum runners flourished. When Prohibition ended, these slick craft evolved into the gentleman's commuter, whose spirit lives in Liberty.

RUSH HOUR ROYALTY

B Y T E D W E S T

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERT MITCHELL





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The Great Gatsby had one, surely. In the 1920s, everyone who was *anyone* in the glittering little duchies lining Long Island's North Shore—everyone, that is, worth a tip of your homburg—had one.

We refer to that singular gentleman's accessory, the commuter yacht. Call it a sedan or a car boat, if you like, but to the grandee of the Roaring '20s, it was *de rigeur*. Each Monday morning, following the weekend's society brawls, the gentleman of the house would emerge onto the great lawn, bleary-eyed and, em... "indisposed." Wearing silk pajamas, a smoking jacket and a lady's scarf of some kind from somewhere, he would walk as briskly as his delicate condition permitted toward his dock. There his bespoke, plumb-stemmed Art Deco commuter yacht *Beau Regard* awaited, staffed with a full crew, including Madame's omelet chef. While he leisurely shaved, showered, selected a morning coat and

took breakfast with *The Times*, *Beau Regard* whisked him at flank speed toward the towers of Wall Street. Not much later, he would disembark at Coenties Slip, Manhattan, a new man.

To a man of means, the commuter yacht, like a good haberdasher, was indispensable. Today, of course, we're more moderate and sensible. Perhaps, but if you happen to be standing on the breakwater as *Liberty*, the astonishingly dignified new 80' commuter yacht, passes by, you'll be convinced that this lordly class of craft is as indispensable as ever.

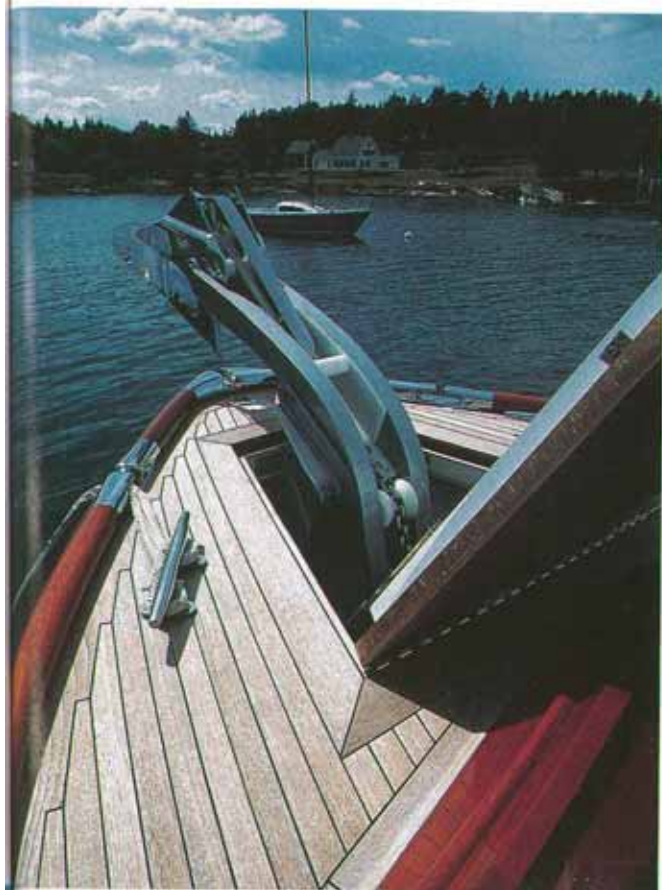
Liberty's perpetrator is master marine fantasizer Tad Roberts of Bruce King Yacht Design. He drew inspiration from various vintage sedans, especially *Saga*, a statuesque 68' by 12' commuter, before settling on *Liberty's* lines. Her owner formed his taste for large, fast coastal boats that can be run with minimal crew at the helm of one of the most refined of all the original North Shore com-

muters, *Ragtime*.

Built in 1928, *Ragtime* had been used precisely as intended by the Commodore of the New York YC, until she was conscripted for World War II. Then she changed moorings once or twice before entrancing her present owner. His intentions for *Ragtime*, however, were not limited to tying her up and having friends over for an ogle. She would not be the "nice old lady in the marina"—she would be run, and run hard.

She was used for extended coastal cruising, and to the surprise of some, proved extremely serviceable. It's conventional to think of long, slim craft of her type as unstable, tender and wet. Not without reason. But as Bruce King points out, this overlooks her chief attribute—speed. Like the Navy's tough World War II PT boats, which owed more than a little to the marine grandees of Long Island Sound, the commuter yacht's quickness allowed her to outrun weather, and when caught, maneuver with





The helm (facing page) is as modern as they come and is arranged so the helmsman can see many of the essentials in his peripheral vision. The custom deployment system for the anchor retracts below the foredeck to restore *Liberty's* wonderful profile.

moorage fees per cubic foot of boat—of beamier craft. The marinas are a bulge with fat-jowl big-boys and not a one that fits *Liberty's* description.

As we said, this stunning new mega-commuter is the product of strong convictions. As sure as her owner loved *Ragtime's* style and elegance, he also admired her ease of handling and great speed. *Liberty* would, therefore, incorporate all the best design techniques and equipment updates made available in the 70 years since *Ragtime's* first splash.

In homage to *Ragtime's* proportions, *Liberty* is 79'10" LOA but only 15'0" beam. She has an extremely fine entry, though considerable flare keeps the decks reasonably dry and provides lift in head seas. For pure Art Deco drama, she has pronounced tumblehome and a stunning torpedo stern.

Roberts knew well when to stop mimicking, too. In the interest of speed, the typical 1920s commuter had a round bottom, so was easily driven. On the other hand, it liked to

Gazing at Liberty may be enough for some folks, but she really comes alive when you fire up her big diesels

speed and agility.

Alas, *Ragtime's* elegant bones weren't up to the stresses of regular coastal use. As Capt. Jeff Lowell, who now stands on the bridge of *Liberty*, tells the story, off New Jersey one night in a strong blow, *Ragtime* was running in short, steep swells when her old ribs and planks flexed and strained enough that she took water through the hull. Lowell brought her safely to port, but her limit had been found.

Whereupon her owner made two decisions. First, convinced of the virtues of *Ragtime's* light, high-speed hull, he would build a brand-new boat of roughly her type, only using modern design, materials and construction tech-

niques. The new boat, *Liberty*, would be huge, light, fast and as tough as a politician's grin.

His second decision was still more extravagant. Immediately, he hauled *Ragtime* and began a total keel-up structural refit. She's well on the way to a complete recovery. She'll be stronger and finer than she was in 1928. But why lavish this enormous expense on an old lady gone lame, you may ask, especially when you already have a voluptuously handsome spring chicken like *Liberty* riding at dockside? Plainly, sir, "because it's the right thing to do!"

One nagging question remains, though: If you're going to build a huge custom yacht, why on Earth make it a pointy, skinny commuter? The rest of the world opts for the roominess—and therefore minimal

roll in beam seas and was wet. *Liberty* has a hard chine and long chine flats instead, which provide stability, improved dryness and powerful lift. Her warped V-bottom features deep convex sections forward and 13 degrees of deadrise at the stern. Powered by twin 1,100 hp MAN 2842LZ diesels, she delivers a smooth ride, near-level running and comes up onto plane with a will. At her 32.5 knot maximum (cruise is 25 knots), she runs no more than two degrees out of trim.

For all her elegance, *Liberty* is a tough, powerful coastal craft with excellent sea-keeping qualities. Her fine entry and 75,000 lb. half-load displacement slices through seas that would force some of the fat-boys to throttleback to a chug. All the while, she holds plenty of speed in reserve

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for outrunning threatening seas.

Hodgdon Yachts of East Boothbay, Maine, in business since 1816, spent three years making *Liberty* as magnificent structurally as she is exquisite in style. She's planked in four layers of cold-molded fir, cedar and mahogany, each layer $\frac{3}{8}$ " thick on the bottom and $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick from the chine up. Each laminate was vacuum bagged at 14 lb. pressure per square inch. The hull was then glassed and post-cured at 140 degrees. To form *Liberty's* extraordinary torpedo stern, however, required eight layers of $\frac{1}{8}$ " plywood, because $\frac{1}{4}$ " stock wouldn't take the compound curves.

Keeping weight in check was a prime concern. Rudders, rudder stocks, struts and foil-shaped shaft shrouds are carbon fiber, not bronze, saving hundreds of pounds. Decks are faced in teak veneer for traditional appearance, but the underlying structure is a honeycomb sandwich. This construction delivers great strength at one-third the weight. Interior soles, bulkheads and cabinetry use the same construction, though always faced in traditional materials.

Virtually every piece of wood or hardware on *Liberty* is hand-carved or custom-cast. There are four chocks per side, for instance, but due to the sensuous curve and taper of the deck cap, eight different molds were necessary. *Liberty's* eight ports per side required six separate castings of two pieces each. The graceful wooden windscreen in her bow cockpit, echoed handsomely in the main cockpit windscreen, was sculpted from enormous blocks of flawless mahogany. Each side is one glorious piece of hardwood, running in three planes—aft, athwart and vertical.

Belowdecks, designer Allan Walton of Boothbay, Maine, remained faithful to the commuter-yacht spirit. The deckhouse, forward of the central cockpit, is devoted entirely to seating and features a cleverly designed high/low dining table and a pop-up television that vanishes into its mahogany cabinet at the touch of a

Dinner *a deux* in the saloon

ought to be romantic enough

for anyone. The windows of

the saloon lower to magical-

ly transform the area from a

room into a patio. The notion

of keeping things on the

dinette table with fiddles

seems to escape production

builders.

button. Port and starboard are large roll-down windows for light and air, and the cabin sole is beautifully matched quarter-sawn maple. Aft and down three steps is the master stateroom, full-width and lined with panel after panel of book-matched mahogany. Farther aft is an enormous full-width, fully furnished head.

Forward of the main saloon is the fully equipped galley and full-height pantry. Naturally lit by elegant custom glass skylights, its cabinet fronts are leadedglass. Opposite the galley is a large head, which can be entered from the galley or the forward stateroom. The state room is spacious and incorporates twin berths. Tastefully repeated on *Liberty's* interior panels and cabinetry are inlaid, handsomely understated mahogany patterns—a star motif is used forward of the galley, a rosette motif aft. Beyond the forward stateroom is a glorious bow cockpit. Cozy up there at 30 knots, you sit back and hear nothing but the thrilling *whuu-ssssshh!* of water.

This commuter yacht is carefully designed to be handled by her master

and one or two crew. To make this easier, she features a Bruce King-designed remote retracting anchor system that disappears completely within the chain locker. In the interest of easy maneuvering, *Liberty* has a retractable, flush-mounted bow thruster designed by H.P.S. of Portland, Ore., that seals tight when the boat's under way.

Although gazing at *Liberty* may be enough of a good thing for some folks, she really comes alive when you fire up her big diesels. At dead idle, she's exceptionally quiet and runs at seven knots with minuscule wake. Crack open her MANs and she surges on plane in one great lunge. Her 25 knot cruising speed at 1800 rpm is quiet and nearly free of vibration, but she still has enough broad-shouldered torque left that when you open her throttles to the stops everyone on the bridge "takes two big steps back," Lowell says. From there on, her engines produce a sweet, melodious growl that declares all is right with the world. Lowell says, "She's like a big speedboat."



The operative word here, of course, is "big." Don't be fooled by *Liberty's* portraits—her proportions and grace make her seem smaller than she is. At sea, her length makes a huge difference. She's long enough to span the length between waves, so even in a serious seaway, she'll stay comfortable, stable, heads-up and dry knifing through 8' swells at a steady 25 knots. She's everything her owner dreamed she would be, and she'll be plying the Eastern Seaboard, Maine to Florida, for years to come. Maybe you'll get lucky and catch a glimpse. If you do, she'll stop you dead in your tracks. "Ooooooo," you'll utter involuntarily and wonder who just spoke. After we took a short test run in her, Jeff Lowell, wearing a smile a yard wide, put it nicely: "She's like driving along in a grand piano." □

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