

Crossover Cruisers

After a lifetime of sailing Europe's coasts, this Dutch couple is discovering America in a Krogen Express 52.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY PIERCE HOOVER





QUIET TIME. The Kwaks prefer quiet anchorages to marinas and are delighted to find opportunities for solitude on North American waterways.

The motoryacht *Scylla* is anchored on a quiet bend in a dark-water river. Surrounded by jungle and exotic wildlife, the boat is thousands of miles and an ocean away from its home port. For its owners, Hans and Thea Kwak, this solitary anchorage on the central St. Johns River — just downriver from the sleepy town of Welaka, Florida — is the latest venue in a long line of cruising adventures that have spanned four decades and put more than 60,000 miles under the keel. They are amazed to have the anchorage and the river all to themselves on such a lovely spring morning.

“What you have here is unique and very special,” Hans says. “Americans don’t always realize what amazing cruising areas they have along the East Coast. There are so many miles of wild and scenic shoreline, and it’s really something to be able to go through almost 2,000 miles of sheltered waterways without stopping for a single lock.”

In the years to come, the couple plans to explore these waterways, moving north and south with the seasons, but with no set itinerary. It will be the culmination of a life-long romance with each other and with boats.

“I bought my first sailboat at age 14 with money earned from a paper route,” Hans, now 65, recalls. “I didn’t tell my father, but when he did find out he was so impressed he bought me a new sail. I spent a lot of time that year scraping paint and learning about woodwork and varnish.”

While studying mathematics at the University of Amsterdam, Hans met Thea, 62, who grew up spending time aboard her father’s vintage Dutch leeboard sailboat. Hans maintains it was the girl, not the boat, he was most attracted to. Ultimately, though, he entered into long-term relationships with both. He and Thea were soon married, and they purchased the boat from his father-in-law. For the

next two decades, that boat became their family’s platform to adventure. While raising a son and daughter, they spent holidays and summer vacations exploring the inland and coastal waterways of Northern Europe and beyond. In 1980, Hans took a sabbatical year from his teaching profession and the family spent the winter transiting the French canal system and exploring the Mediterranean.

After trading academia for a second career in commercial development, Hans prospered. As he approached early retirement in 1993, he commissioned a 47-foot aluminum sailboat. For the next decade, he and Thea cruised for some six months of each year, logging more than 50,000 miles while ranging from Russia and the Baltic Archipelagos to the eastern Mediterranean.

Thea always loved the cruising life, but was not wild about the open ocean. Several times, she braved the 300-mile passage through the North Sea to Norway, but when Hans set his sights on a trans-Atlantic crossing in the fall of 2001, she chose to fly and meet the boat in Madera and

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE. Check out additional photos of the Krogen Express 52 at our website, motorboating.com.

KROGEN EXPRESS 52



SPECIFICATIONS

LOA (w/swim platform): 57'6"
Beam: 15'11"
Draft: 4'
Disp.: 43,000 lbs.
Transom Deadrise: 5 degrees
Fuel: 700 gals.
Contact: Krogen Express, krogenexpress.com
Base price: \$1.4 million

again in the Caribbean. From Martinique, the couple sailed the Windward and Leeward Islands and passed through the Bahamas on their way to Florida. Later that year, they moved the boat north to meet relatives and cruise the Hudson River. This is when they had their first experience with the Intracoastal Waterway, and it was love at first sight.

“The Intracoastal is incomparable with anything in Europe,” Hans says, “both in terms of the sheer scope of the waterway and the abundance of uncrowded and wild areas. In Europe, the waterways can be beautiful, but there is always a lot of traffic. And if you want to go north to south without going into the rough offshore waters, you have to pass through more than 300 locks.”

After a somewhat stormy passage back to Holland, Hans decided perhaps it was time to try a powerboat, especially if he and Thea planned to spend more time on American waters. That winter, Hans and Thea returned to Florida, where they purchased a 36-foot Monk-designed trawler. “Being sailors, we didn’t mind the 7-knot speed,” Hans says. “On that boat, we discovered more of the waterway and went as far north as Montreal.

It was a good boat for a couple, but we often had guests and family aboard — sometimes four at a time.”

In addition to being on the small side for entertaining, the Monk was also a single-engine boat, something Hans says he was never entirely comfortable with. “In a sailboat, you always have the sails if an engine quits,” he says. “I always felt uneasy going into the ocean with just one engine.”

After three seasons of wintering in North America and returning to Holland for the summers, the Kwaks realized they were cruising back home less and less and they wanted to spend even more time on this side of the Atlantic. They downsized their home in favor of a condo, sold the sailboat to their son and started shopping for a larger powerboat that could accommodate family and friends, yet remain true to their laid-back cruising style.

“Holland has a long tradition of nautical craftsmanship,” Hans says, “so we expect quality. We wanted something that showed excellent traditional craftsmanship, but also used the latest construction techniques. That’s our taste. We like modern art and furniture, but prefer classic boats.”

Neither the sleek lines of Italian cruisers nor the



ELBOW ROOM. From the bright, open salon (left) to the well-organized engine room (right), *Scylla* provides generous living space and ample storage.



GUEST QUARTERS. In addition to adding twin berths in the second stateroom, the Kwaks fitted *Scylla's* pilothouse with a removable privacy curtain.

high-sided look of many North American motoryachts appealed to the Kwaks. They are admirers of the low-profile style of motorboats popular in Holland, and they also appreciate traditional American designs from the Maine and Chesapeake boatbuilding traditions. While cruising through Fort Myers, Florida, in January 2006, they saw a boat that epitomized everything they were looking for. It was *Loose Toes*, a 52-foot Krogen Express. Two months later, they made a trip to the Palm Beach Boat Show, where they met company principal John Tegtmeier and were given a thorough tour of the boat.

"I was extremely impressed by the quality of the interior woodwork," Hans says. "Equally impressive was the attention to detail lavished on the electrical and mechanical systems. Here was a boat that had a very classic and stylish look, but it was built with the latest materials, strong and light, and to the highest standard." It didn't take long for Hans and Thea to come to a decision and sign a contract for hull number seven.

While awaiting delivery of their boat, the couple had one more decision to make: choosing a name. "We knew that boat names were supposed to be feminine in English, and we wanted a name that would be the same in English and Dutch," says Thea. From a list of 15 possibilities, family and friends took a vote. The winning entry was *Scylla*, and while that creature is best known as one of the sea monsters in Homer's *Odyssey*, Hans points out the name also applies to a beautiful sea goddess who caught the fancy of Poseidon.

A Different Breed of Krogen

Most boaters will recognize the Krogen name and might associate it with the seaworthy full-displacement trawlers that roam the globe bearing the Kadey-Krogen nameplate. But while the Krogen Express 52 can trace its DNA to the Krogen family (father and son James and Kurt Krogen were instrumental in the development of its predecessor, the 49 Express), it was avid boaters John and Betsie Tegtmeier who became the driving force behind the 52.

As former Kadey-Krogen trawler owners, the Tegtmeiers were fans of Krogen designs, and when the urge to own a faster boat struck, they were drawn to the 49-foot Krogen Express. Attraction morphed into association, and the couple acquired the rights to manufacture the Express.

An ambitious retooling and upgrade process was completed in 2002, and one of the Far East's most prestigious yards began to build a limited number of what is now the Krogen Express 52. The Tegtmeiers' goal in entering the boatbuilding business was not to become a major force in the cruising market, but rather to develop a lean, hands-on business model that would allow them to maintain personal contact with their customers.

When each Krogen Express reaches the United States, John and his team take personal delivery and oversee final details of commissioning and delivery to the owner. As their customers can attest, this personal approach has created a very satisfied family of owners. krogenexpress.com

Forgotten Florida

Every cruiser transiting the ICW to or from Florida will pass the mouth of the St. Johns River, but only a small fraction will take the time to explore this waterway. Those who do will find themselves traveling back into a little-known chapter of Florida's past, a time when steamboats provided the primary access to the state's wooded interior and riverfront towns boasted grand manors and winter resorts.

Most of these river ports are now just faded memories, but cruisers can catch glimpses of Old Florida at settlements such as Welaka. Once known for its mineral-rich spring waters, which were bottled and administered as medicinal tonics, this quiet town is now noted primarily as the site of the Welaka Maritime Museum (right). The unassuming museum is an extension of Rand Speas' wooden boat restoration shipyard and features hand-carved wooden boats, vintage



motor launches and engines and steamboat memorabilia.

The town maintains a public dock that can accommodate boats up to 50 feet and more. There are no utilities, but no charge for overnight dockage.

With its classic lines and deep-blue hull, *Scylla* is certainly worthy of its beautiful mythological predecessor, but it is also a very practical boat. "I really wanted twin engines, not for more speed, but mostly for redundancy," Hans says.

With twin 470 hp Yanmars, *Scylla* is capable of speeds up to 20 knots. That's nice to know when you might have to sprint ahead of a storm, says Hans, but for the most part, they take it slow. "At 8 knots, we burn just 3 gallons per hour, which is outstanding for a boat of this size," he adds.

Scylla has several small modifications to the interior, including fixed twin berths in the guest stateroom. This allows couples or two individuals to share the cabin, while the addition of a simple privacy curtain in the wheelhouse turns the extendable pilot berth into a third

stateroom of sorts. "It's quite comfortable with four aboard, or even six," Hans says, "but it's also quite easy for the two of us to handle, and the 4-foot draft allows us to get into smaller marinas."

Scylla was delivered in the spring of 2007, and soon after the Kwaks departed for the Chesapeake. "That fall, we had to return to Holland to settle some affairs, and that's when we realized one of the other benefits of owning a Krogen Express," Hans says. "It's a small company run by boating enthusiasts, and John treats owners like family. When you are living 4,000 miles away, it's good to know there is someone you can trust to look after your boat when you are gone."

Last winter, the Kwaks were back on *Scylla*, and this time for good. Their future cruising plans include runs to Maine, Nova Scotia and the St. Lawrence River, as well as winters in Florida and the Bahamas and a possible circumnavigation of the Great Loop.

"We're gypsy souls," Thea says. "We're too young to become dock-bound live-aboards, and after a few days at any one place, we like to pick up anchor and move on." Typically, the Kwaks prefer anchorages to marinas and like to spend four to five days out of each week on the hook. "We do enjoy our time ashore, and being Dutch, we are big on riding bikes," Hans says. "If a store is within 5 or 10 miles of the marina, we are likely to use the bikes."

For the Kwaks, there is no end in sight to their cruising adventures. "We're still relatively young, and we see ourselves still doing this when we are 80," Hans says. "The cruising life is like no other, it brings you in contact with so many different people, rich and poor, young and old. And everyone has a story to tell." ♦



LAZY RIVER. Cruising the St. Johns River at a relaxed 8 knots.