



A Closer Look

You can't really appreciate a boat or a port until you've spent a little time with them.

By Capt. Richard Thiel

Photography by Billy Black

It's no secret that the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway offers boaters a unique combination of spectacular scenery and protected waters. From the Chesapeake to the Great Dismal Swamp to the seemingly endless grass flats of the Carolinas, the Atlantic ICW is a gift from Mother Nature to cruising boaters, with a little help from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

It's also no secret among cruisers that after you cross the Florida/Georgia line and leave St. Augustine astern, the ICW presents some of the most monotonous and flat-out boring cruising you'll ever have the misfortune to encounter. The ditch here can be so straight and featureless in spots, you'll find yourself begging for the sight of a bridge just to break the repetition. It is little wonder then that, weather permitting, most cruisers fuel up in Jacksonville and then jump outside for the run to West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, or Miami.

That's what I've always done, even when the weather was threatening. So when John Tegtmeier invited me to meet him in Vero Beach to make the run to the Miami International Boat Show aboard his Krogen Express 52, I didn't expect much of a passage. But Tegtmeier, who with his wife Betsie owns Krogen Express, insisted I would be pleasantly surprised with Vero as a cruising stop, and since I'd never actually been there I was inclined to accept. He also pointed out that while I'd been aboard the 52 many times, I'd never actually experienced her underway. That sealed the deal.

SPICE OF LIFE

One thing that life in general and cruising in particular have in common: They're both full of surprises, and you never know what you're going to find until you actually experience something, be it a boat or a destination. My first surprise came the evening I arrived in Vero Beach, at dinner with the Tegtmeys. Joining us were the Kwaks, a Dutch couple and avid boaters who own a Krogen Express they purchased from Tegtmeier which they keep on Florida's west coast. What started as a business relationship had clearly blossomed into a warm friendship.

The actual surprise arrived right after the appetizers when the quartet began singing the praises of Vero Beach as a cruising stop. Vero Beach? Every time I'd run Florida's east coast, I'd purposely passed it by as lacking in any real attraction. But here were four individuals who had cruised all over the world trying to convince me that the home port of Krogen Express was well worth stopping for a visit.

As they laid out their arguments, I began to understand their enthusiasm. For starters, Vero Beach is one of those increasingly rare towns that actually courts cruising boaters. And it has a lot to offer those who accept the invitation, starting with a great municipal marina. Located at Mile Marker 952, the Vero Beach City Marina is nestled in a cove that's so protected it makes an excellent hurricane hole.

Just to the northeast of the main channel, the marina offers 88 slips in total, 18 of which are transient, plus 57 moorings. At \$1.60 per foot the rates are moderate. The facilities are spotless and well maintained, and if you'd like to rest awhile, you can actually live aboard for just \$97.35 a month, although only from May through September.

The town is small—population around 15,000—but it has everything a cruising boater could desire, including a West Marine and a Home Depot. The beach district, with its waterfront restaurants

and boutiques, is within easy walking distance of the marina, as is the Riverside Theater (literally across the street), which bills itself as America's Largest Small Town Professional Theater.

But of course, not everything is within walking distance—the town center is about three miles distant and the Home Depot is even farther. But here is where Vero sets itself apart as a cruising destination: It has a free shuttle bus that stops right at the marina and takes you virtually anywhere within the town's 13 square miles, and even a bit beyond. For the cruiser looking to stock up on groceries or spare parts and who doesn't want to hassle with renting a car, Vero Beach is convenience personified.

Situated 190 miles south of Jacksonville and 135 miles north of Miami, Vero is also fairly close to the mid-point of Florida's east coast ICW, so it makes a great rest stop before you enter the glitter and glamor of the Gold Coast. And since the really dull stretch of the ICW is northward, from St. Augustine to Cape Canaveral (a distance of around 120 miles), if you do jump outside, you can duck back in via the all-weather Canaveral Inlet or the less reliable Sebastian Inlet and be in Vero Beach in relatively short order.

SURPRISE EXPRESS

After that list of enticements and a tour of some of the town's high points, I was sold on it as a cruising stop. But checking out Vero Beach was not the only reason for my visit. I had a boat to help deliver to Miami, and bright and early the next day John and I left Vero Beach in our wake, heading south. As the morning mist began to burn off, we motored down the ICW at a modest 9 knots, a speed that gave me time to get better acquainted with the Krogen Express 52.

Both inside and out, the Krogen Express is heavy on bright, roomy areas that feature excellent sightlines and good headroom.





Back in 2005 when our sister publication, *Power & Motoryacht*, tested this boat, our overarching impression was that it was smooth, efficient, and quiet: So quiet, in fact, that barely an hour into our trip I had to remind myself that there were two 480-horsepower Yanmars in the engine room, not one. Of course we were inside and doing just about hull speed, but later in the day when we jumped outside for the run to West Palm, things remained every bit as smooth and quiet. Tegtmeier explained

that there are myriad reasons for this but a major factor is the standard Aquadrive, which allows the engines to sit on flexible mounts because a separate hard-mounted thrust bearing handles the propeller thrust. Constant-velocity joints obviate shaft-alignment anomalies, basically eliminating drivetrain-related vibration and sound. You really can't appreciate how well Aquadrive works on the Kroger Express until you've actually been aboard and underway.





Cruising couples rave about the Krogen Express's accommodations, which feature privacy in the form of ensuite heads and more separation from the social areas than many of their competitors.

In addition, the 52's sound-attenuation strategy has been worked out in conjunction with Soundown. The laminate schedule includes Corecell with Kevlar reinforcement below the waterline and balsa coring in the superstructure, producing a monolithic structure devoid of creaks and groans and resistant to the transmission of vibration. This being a bit of a busman's holiday, I hadn't brought along my sound meter, but the quiet was as obvious as it was impressive.

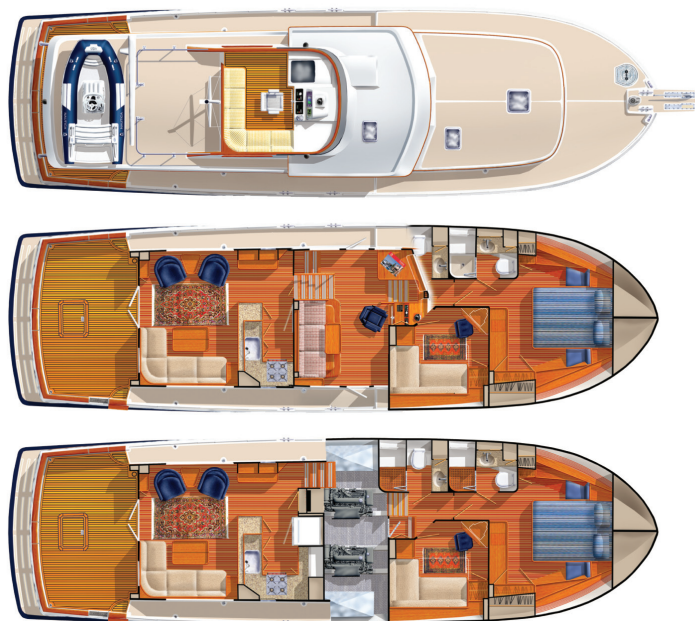
And that includes the outside leg, during which the 52's semi-displacement hull form allowed us to cruise between 19 and 22 knots. It was here that I came to appreciate the pilothouse layout on two counts.

One, because the lower helm is elevated, sightlines from beam-to-beam were exceptional, even when I was seated. Two, that elevated sole also creates an engine room with true stand-up headroom and superb access to all systems, which as a former mechanic, I especially appreciate.

The last big surprise came when we pulled into West Palm's Palm Harbor Marina for the night. When I'd been aboard the Express at boat shows, I'd always considered one disadvantage of her elevated helm layout to be that it allowed for only two staterooms.

But after living and sleeping aboard I appreciated just how expansive and private those accommodations are—they make the

LOA: 57' 6"
BEAM: 15' 11"
DRAFT: 4' 0"
DISPL: 44,000 lb.
Fuel: 700 gal.
Water: 370 gal.
Standard Power: 480 hp
 Yanmar 6LY (x2)
Displ. Speed: 9 knots
Displ. Range: 1,050 nm
Fast Cruise: 16 knots
Fast Range: 400 nm
Price: ~\$1,650,000
Contact: (866) 475-6436;
www.krogenexpress.com



Express an ideal couple's boat, yet one which two couples can enjoy, especially with two private heads. And with the elevated pilothouse separating the galley and saloon from the sleeping area, there's plenty of privacy.

When we finally pulled into Miami Beach in the early afternoon of the next day, I'd gotten really comfortable with the 52 and I understood why so many cruising couples rave about it. Its combination of quiet, comfort, and efficiency is hard to match.

And yes, I also understood why the Tegtmeiers and Kwaks think Vero Beach is such a great cruising stop. I guess it just goes to show that be it a boat or a town, you need to spend a little time with them to fully appreciate their charm. ■