The Atlantic 42
An easily driven powerboat

Design by Greg Siewert
Commentary by Robert W. Stephens

This boat presents me with a conflict. On the one hand, I admire much about her design, and believe that WoodenBoat readers will be interested in both the concept and many of the details that designer Greg Siewert has worked into her. On the other hand, I feel that she comes perilously close to crossing the (admittedly arbitrary) line of what is an acceptable topic for this magazine. In short: Is she a wooden boat?

This question becomes more relevant with each passing year, as composite technology becomes more of a continuum from cold-molded boats, through glass-sheathed cedar and lightweight core materials, to high-tech epoxies and space-age fibers. It’s also a question that hits close to home, as some of my own recent work has involved significant amounts of carbon fiber. How should we define a wooden boat? By the sheer weight-percentage of wood in the structure? By the structural importance that wood plays? Are balsa and cedar somehow less legitimate than mahogany and oak? Can we define a wooden boat by the methods employed in its construction, rather than strictly by the materials used? How wide can we open our arms to those worthy boats that stretch the definitions, without harming the elusive notion of the wooden boat tradition? Or are we just snobs, pure and simple?

The Atlantic 42 certainly pushes the envelope. While she might just pass the weight-percentage test, she depends heavily—primarily, in my opinion—on lots of fiberglass and vinylester resin for her strength. Cedar strip planking forms the core of the hull, sheathed inside and out with biaxial glass. Bulkheads appear to be tabbed with more of the same glass and resin, while stringers are foam, encapsulated in fiberglass and glassed to the inside of the hull skin. These methods are standard practice in the building of thousands of fiberglass boats every year, and produce a strong, low-maintenance boat at low labor cost.
The Atlantic's hull lines describe a semi-displacement hull with a broken sheer and plumb stem reminiscent of cruisers from the 1920s.
However, they’re a long way from chiseling a rabbet, or even splicing and gluing a layer of veneer. The construction plan shows nothing of the intricate frames, backbone structure, sheer clamps, or deck beams that we have come to expect in this column.

The deck structure consists of several layers of plywood laid over the bulkheads and sheathed in fiberglass, and the superstructure is built of balsa- glass sandwich panels, sheathed in more 'glass before having a mahogany veneer vacuum-bagged in place (which permits a bright finish). Traditional in appearance, certainly, but traditional in essence?

Once we distract ourselves from the construction details, it becomes much easier to accept and appreciate this boat. The profile shows an elegant nearly plumb stem and broken sheer reminiscent of the old Dawns and Elcos of the 1920s and '30s, while the lines incorporate modern thinking for semi-displacement performance. The deadrise is nearly constant for the after two-thirds of the underbody, while the buttocks rise gently toward the stern, showing a slight hollow in the last quarter of their run. This is a no-no for higher-speed craft, where the rising buttocks would point the bow skyward, while the hollow would generate enough suction to drag down both the stern and the speed; but in a boat designed to travel only slightly over pure displacement speeds, it’s more important to avoid the drag caused by a large immersed area of transom, while the hollow helps to suppress and shift aft the stern wave. The stern shows evidence of a slight chine, which will help resist squatting as she nears the top of her speed range; the quarters roll in to a pleasing tumblehome. A single 220-hp diesel will provide the motive power to push her to speeds in the low teens, according to Stewert.

That engine, a slow-turning model, nestles nicely beneath the sole of the raised central pilothouse, the real heart of this boat. This bright-finished "greenhouse" offers all-around visibility and good access to the deck through sliding doors on each side, easing docking maneuvers. Enclosed within is a spacious chart table, a raised dinette, and a sumptuous leather helm seat.

The after cabin, which opens onto its own private cockpit aft, forms a cozy saloon when only one couple is aboard—with sofa, armchairs, and writing desk. When the crew swells to two couples, the sofa converts to a double berth, and the saloon to a state room.

The roomy galley is open to the pilothouse, for fresh air and companionship, while the single spacious head with separate shower opposite is easily accessible from any compartment. The owners' state room forward is luxurious indeed, with a sprawling centerline double bed.
Greg Siewert drew a light and luxurious interior for the Atlantic 42.

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(it can’t really be called a berth). In all, Siewert has done a thoughtful and thorough job in working a spacious and comfortable interior into this rather small light-displacement craft. These drawings don’t indicate the location of the rather generous tankage—300 gallons of fuel, 200 gallons of fresh water, and 75 gallons of waste; I’d be quite interested to see where the space for them can be found. There’s a fair amount of room alongside the engine, but... [Yes, Siewert tells us that all tanks are located in the engine room.—Eds.]

The deck arrangement is equally well thought out. An electric windlass forward controls an anchor that can probably be deployed and retrieved from the helm, hands-free. The raised flush foredeck, sheathed in teak, will make handling docklines and fenders a treat, while the side decks are adequately wide to allow good access from the pilothouse to the foredeck. Moving aft from the pilothouse begins to resemble more of a rock-climbing stunt, however, as the width of the deck can be measured in inches rather than feet; many of us will be happier gaining access to the “back porch” through the saloon.

The saloon roof provides an excellent place for a real-size tender, or sailing dinghy, for those of us who will move to a boat like this after our big-boat sailing days are over, just as the designer is thinking of doing. Siewert says, “I still love sailing, but when I’m done, I don’t mind a cool shower and relaxing in air conditioning. My image [for the Atlantic 42] is that of the old Matthews and Elco cruisers back in the classifieds of WoodenBoat. We’re sitting up in the pilothouse cruising down the waterway, with a cup of coffee in hand, doors and hatches wide open and music drifting out.” An attractive picture...does the end justify the means? You be the judge.

Bob Stephens designs and builds boats at the Brooklin Boat Yard, Brooklin, Maine. Despite howls of protest from the rest of the crew, the last two boats built to his plans have been sheathed with carbon fiber. Plans from Siewert Design, P.O. Box 601, Charleston, SC 29402, 843-853-6154.