

Cruising Cat

We take the new ArrowCat 30 on a New England dream cruise to Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket.

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This was an entirely new experience for me: cruising across Buzzards Bay—the infamously nasty body of water that separates Cape Cod from the Massachusetts mainland—on a beautiful, late-summer, blue-sky day at 35 knots. I say again: 35 knots. Not on a Cigarette or a go-fast boat, but a cruising boat. A boat that, in fact, three of us were going to live on for the next few days as we headed over to Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket, some of the premier cruising destinations in the United States.

Oddly enough, perversely enough, as we left the dock earlier at Tripp’s Marina in Westport Point, Massachusetts, I hoped Buzzards Bay would do its thing and toss us around a bit in its usually short, ugly chop. That’s not because I like to suffer. Given my druthers, I’d be happy with calm seas and fair skies for the rest of my life. But I did want to test our boat, a brand-new ArrowCat 30 that is, as its name states, a 30-foot catamaran. The ArrowCat is by Robert Hill, the famed New Zealand designer who’s developed ocean-going catamarans for the rugged waters down there for more than 25 years.

But this morning rough seas were not to be; Buzzards Bay was uncharacteristically well-behaved. As we cleared the narrow, well-protected breakwater at Westport Point, waving to some kids fishing from the breakwater almost an arm’s length away (did I say the entrance was narrow?), we were faced with all of maybe a 5-knot wind and a 1-foot chop. I almost double-checked our Raymarine plotter to make sure we were in the right place.



NEW ENGLAND SCENES. *The ArrowCat at Brant Point in Nantucket (opening spread), and at Tripp’s Marina in Westport Point, Massachusetts (top). Cattle grazing in the Elizabeth Islands (middle), and a typical island scene with a typical heavy current (above).*

In any event, after we passed the semi-submerged wreck leading into the bay itself — a reminder of how the conditions can be truly awful here — I nudged the throttles forward and our twin Suzuki 175 hp outboards spooled up quickly. I simply watched in awe as the SOG readings on our GPS started heading north. The cat’s ride was so smooth and easy that I thought we were maybe going 25 knots when I glanced down and saw that, in



fact, we were at a 35-knot clip, putting the waters of Buzzards Bay behind us in a real hurry.

Our first destination was Cuttyhunk Harbor at the end of the Elizabeth Islands (the little chain that stretches west from the bottom of Cape Cod) and a favorite destination of my family’s and mine for many years. In fact, we used to spend the night there on our way from our home port in

Norwalk Cove, Connecticut, on our regular summer cruise to Nantucket. But that was on a Grand Banks 36, which topped out at 8 knots. On the ArrowCat, however, we were at the entrance to Cuttyhunk before I barely had a chance to tell Rob Harty, the ArrowCat brand manager from Seattle, and Billy Black, the photographer, where we were going.

We nosed around the harbor for half an hour or so. It’s the totally protected, quintessentially New England type of harbor where you could easily spend a week tied up at a mooring, feeling your blood pressure drop. Then we headed across Vineyard Sound to the small old whaling center of Menemsha at the western end of Martha’s Vineyard. Menemsha has a combination of still-operating commercial fishing boats flanked by Hinckley Picnic Boats. We tied up for an ice cream cone at the little stand (doing a booming business) at the end of the fishing dock. We then headed up Vineyard Sound all the way to the other side of the island for another quick stop at Edgartown, the large harbor closest to Nantucket.



ILLUSTRATION BY BRENDA WEAVER

MENEMSHA SUMMER. *A family fishing on the breakwater (top), and the crowded beach (above); with the harbor and village behind it.*

As opposed to Menemsha or Cuttyhunk, Edgartown is a major harbor/resort/city with a sense of bustle and purpose. After touring the harbor and getting a good look at Chappaquiddick, we took off for Nantucket, scooting across the Nantucket Shoals in a late afternoon breeze and 2-foot chop at an easy 25-knot pace.

I have to confess that I always love to come in the Nantucket breakwater. I've done this in the fog, rain and cold and in a whole lot of boats. Yet I still enjoy seeing Brant Point come into view with its small lighthouse and Coast Guard station. And then the centuries-old whaling town, with its cobblestone streets and white church steeple, emerges from around the bend. From 1740 to 1830 Nantucket was the whaling center of the world, and 125 whaling ships called it home. Today, the 15-mile-long and 3.5-mile-wide island is probably the premier boating/fishing/island resort destination on the East Coast.

We headed for the fuel dock at the Nantucket Boat Basin for a slip assignment, and George Bassett, who's been running the place for 23 years, welcomed us and gave us directions. With 240 slips for boats from 30 to 280 feet, the Nantucket Boat Basin is one of the cleanest and best-run marinas I know. It's a short walk to Main Street, the restaurants and even the whaling museum. Passing the megayachts Med-moored on the outer dock, we headed into the boat basin and our slip. I backed the ArrowCat in easily. Visibility from the helm is a full 360 degrees and the boat handles well at fast or slow speeds. I anticipated some problems getting used to a cat, but there really weren't any.

Before we left for dinner, I had time to explore the ArrowCat 30. I heard the major advantages of a cat were speed, stability and space. I already established the speed. In the course of the day, we put the boat through some high-speed turns and I was impressed with its stability as well. It just powers through the turns without any appreciable sense of leaning over. Now, tied up at the dock, I explored the space — and there's a lot of it. Moving-around space was generous, even under way. There's room for four adults on the port side settee opposite the helm, and you could add many, many more in the cockpit. Storage space abounds throughout the boat, behind the seats, under the seats, in the lazarette.

Sleeping accommodations were ample for the three of us. The master stateroom has a large bed forward; then there are two other berths tucked



ARROWCAT 30

SPECIFICATIONS

- LOA: 29'10"
- Beam: 10'
- Draft (engines down): 26"
- Disp.: 7,500 lbs.
- Fuel: 152 gals.
- Water: 46 gals.
- Contact: ArrowCat Marine, arrowcatmarine.com
- Base Price: \$187,500

PERFORMANCE

TEST POWER: (2) 175-hp Suzuki outboard engines. Speeds measured by GPS in Nantucket Sound in 5-knot winds and 1-foot seas with three people on board, half fuel and full water. Sound levels measured at the helm in dB-A.

RPM	KNOTS	MPH	DB-A
1,000	3.7	4.2	66
1,500	5.1	5.8	72
2,000	6.5	7.4	76
2,500	7.2	8.2	79
3,000	14.0	16.1	80
3,500	17.3	19.8	91
4,000	21.0	24.1	87
4,500	23.7	27.2	88
5,000	29.3	33.6	90
5,500	35.7	41.0	92
6,000	39.1	44.9	97



NANTUCKET-BOUND. The ArrowCat explores Nantucket Harbor (top and top right). A typical scene at Madaket at the end of the island (above), and Peter Janssen enjoys the view (right).

PROS:

- A comfortable cruise at 30 knots and a top speed of 39-plus.
- An even keel in turns, even high-speed turns.
- Tons of space throughout the boat.
- Great visibility from the enclosed helm station.

CONS:

- Engine noise was a bit high.
- A quibble in the chart plotter era, but the compass is mounted much too low.
- It would be nice to have a bit more headroom in the side berths.
- The side decks are fairly narrow.

under the bridge deck on either side. They are a full 7 feet long, but there is very little headroom. Still, the point is there are three separate, private sleeping areas on a 30-foot boat that also has a large bridge deck and a large cockpit. And there's a galley up on the starboard side with the usual fridge, microwave, cooktop and storage. There also is a stand-up head with sink and shower on the forward port side. In short, there are enough creature comforts for three or four people to spend a considerable amount of time living on board. I also was impressed with the boat's all-foam construction and hand-laid lamination; this is a sea boat.

We spent the next day touring around Nantucket, cruising down to the western end of the island to explore the tiny harbor at Madaket. (Watch your depth as you make a few S-turns through the low-lying grasses.) Then we headed all the way up Nantucket Harbor itself for the views of the town and the stately old waterfront homes. After two

nights we had to leave, and we sped back across Nantucket Sound at 20 knots in growing 2- to 3-foot seas (where the ArrowCat behaved as before), entering Cape Cod at Wood's Hole for a little exploration of Hadley Harbor. If Norman Rockwell had painted small New England harbors, Hadley Harbour would have been a favorite.

Our return trip across Buzzards Bay was just as uneventful as our departure, and before we knew it we were tied up back at the dock at Tripp's. Over the three days on board I grew used to the ArrowCat 30. It delivered on the speed, stability and space promise. And, as I discovered, it was definitely a fast cruising cat. ❖