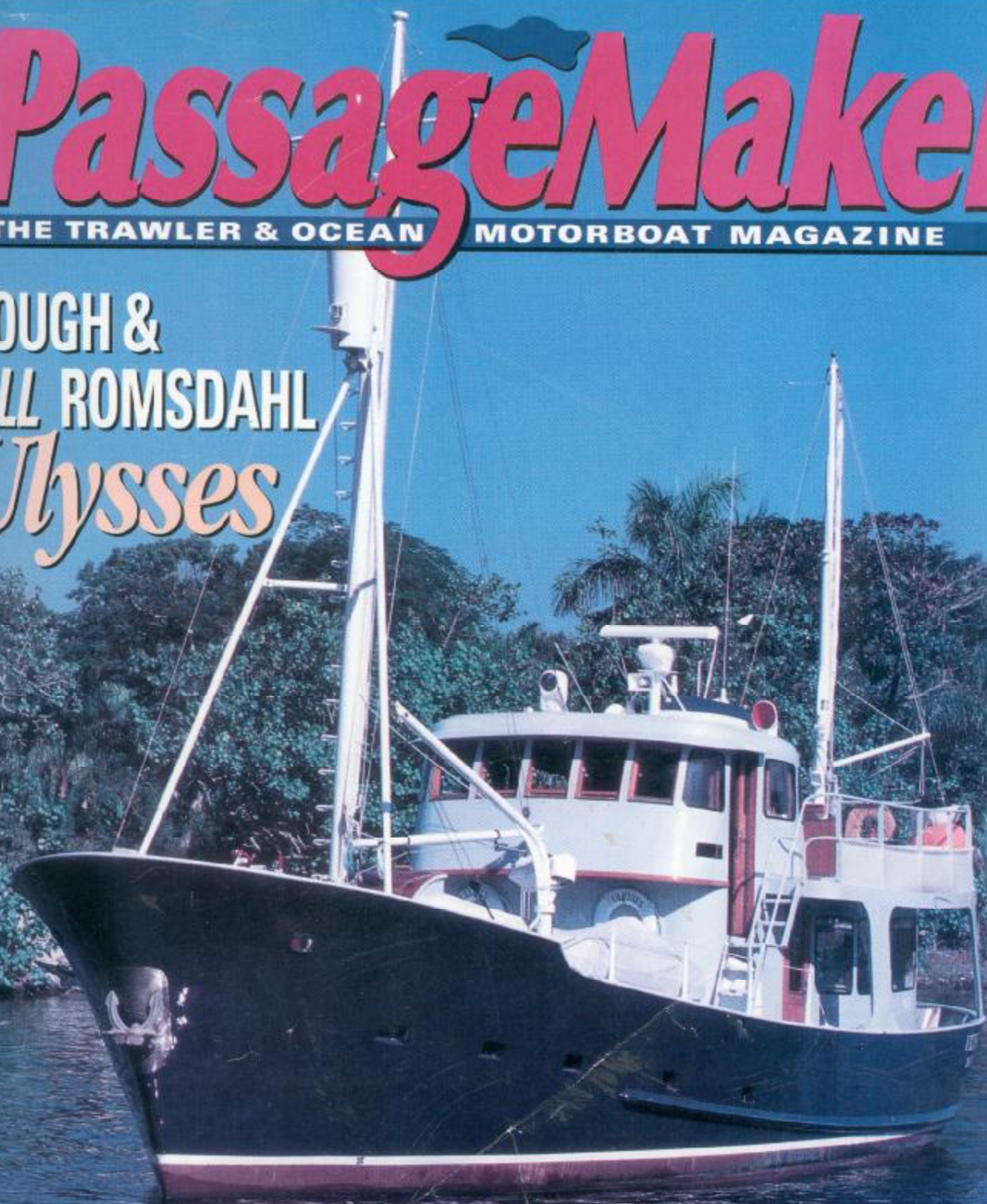


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Ulysses

**The Quintessential
Passagemaker—
A Real Deal Romsdahl.**

*by Bill Parlatore
photography by the author*

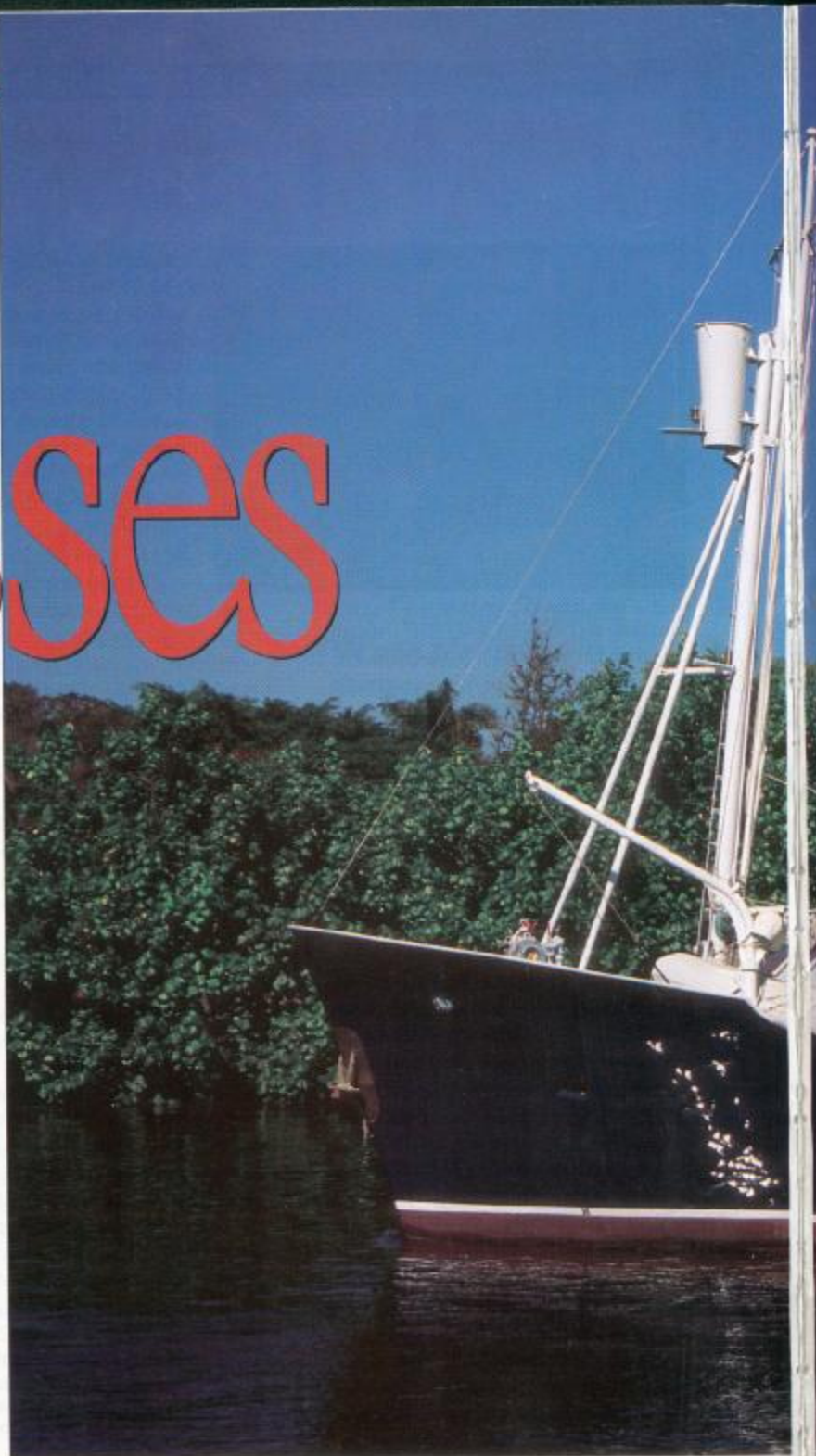
Most boating people dream of adventure, the fantasy of excitement and travel on the high seas. It is our nature, it is what makes us buy boats in the first place. We lust for the smell of the sea, the feel of a pitching ship as it parts the waves, the throbbing heartbeat of a rumbling diesel moving us steadily forward. Our fantasies summon us with romance, adventure, even a hint of danger.

A transatlantic crossing, exploring the vast wilderness of Chile's coastline, retracing the route of the copra traders through the South Seas, gunkholing along the Great Barrier Reef, dodging bergy bits off Labrador or Alaska, sponge diving in the ancient waters of Greece—the voyages are limited only by our imaginations, fueled by the stories of our youth.

The dreams often involve some sort of rugged, no-nonsense little ship, the kind you imagine around the world carrying secret cargo, spies, and treasure from one remote port to an even more remote outpost. You know the kind of boat I'm talking about, a real rough-and-ready ship, the very image of which captures your heart and imagination.

If you ask other people to describe what the boat looks like, more often than not they will describe it as "...something that looks like a Romsdahl." A Romsdahl. Yeah, a Romsdahl. That name pretty much sums it up...a Romsdahl.

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**A classic
Romsdahl profile,
meandering on
New River.**

In northwestern Norway is a county of about 150,000 inhabitants known as Romsdahl. If you look at a map of Norway, you'll likely find that the nearest large city to this county is Ålesund. Well, Romsdahl is just north of Ålesund. There have always been scores of boat builders located in the Romsdahl region, whose capital city is Molde.

According to Norway's Bergen Maritime Museum, in Bergen, Norway, the history of the Roms-



dahl-style boat goes all the way back to the 1870s, and a boat builder named Lars Jensen Hameraas. He built the first of these incredibly seaworthy fishing cutters (which were sailboats) to a design closely related to the Scottish trawlers of the time. The success of Hameraas' boats was so universal that soon all of the other Romsdahl builders took inspiration from him, and the tradition of the Romsdahl-style was soon rooted in

maritime history.

Around 1900–1905, the trawlers began trading their sails for husky and reliable engines, and the canoe stern trawlers continued to fish for herring off the Storegga Banks, and the larger cod-fish off Norway's northern waters.

Up through the 1950s, these trawlers were all built in wood, in sizes from 35 feet to 70 feet. The Romsdahl tradition continued through the 1960s,



**A look that's
all business.**

although later boat construction was done mainly in steel.

Today there is still much active ship building in Norway, but after the 1960s, the diverse demands for supply ships, fishing trawlers, purse seiners, passenger transports, research vessels, and yachts changed the role of the traditional design—so many more shapes and sizes were launched, even in the Romsdahl region.

I have always had a fondness for the look and style of the traditional Romsdahl trawler, and I was excited to go aboard a steel vessel that had recently returned to Ft. Lauderdale from a long distance cruise up and down the U.S. East Coast. At 53 feet, *Ulysses* isn't as big as many of the wood Romsdahls built in Norway, but she is every bit the true bluewater explorer. Built in 1963 with a steel hull and aluminum house, *Ulysses* has the look and feel of a small ship, and, at over 120,000 lbs. displacement, she in fact is. *Ulysses* draws eight feet, fully loaded.

Sitting in a slip, surrounded by huge super-yachts at Bradford International Marina, *Ulysses* seemed a bit out of place among the glitzy mega-yachts, all with their 6–10 person professional crews. During my visit, even some of *those* crewmembers came over for a visit to see "the real thing." Yup, if you appreciate the look and feel of the traditional trawler, you'll no doubt find a yacht like *Ulysses* incredibly appealing. Everything else is just fluff.

The present owner of *Ulysses* has owned her for the last 27,000 miles. When her owner is absent, the vessel is often under the care of Jerry and Wendy Taylor. Jerry and Wendy are a professional, no-nonsense delivery crew, accustomed to delivering 50'–80' yachts around the Caribbean and the U.S. East Coast.

As successful professionals in a tough busi-



**Looking aft, note
the massive cleat
and hinged
scupper drain on
the secure side
deck.**

ness, the Taylors are selective in the assignments they take on. Wendy, an athletic New Zealander, told me, "We'll move any boat anywhere, but not for anyone."

The Taylor's association with *Ulysses* began when they first delivered her for her new owner from San Diego, through the Panama Canal to Florida. So much attachment developed with the owner and boat during those initial miles that the Taylors have stayed involved with *Ulysses* ever since, in one way or another, including managing a major refit of the trawler in 1995.

When not caring for *Ulysses*, or off on delivery duties, the couple lives aboard their Grand Banks 36 on the New River in Ft. Lauderdale. As I noticed when I dropped by for a quick look, the Taylors' GB reflects their experience from many miles at sea—the boat is a study in simplicity. But that is another story...

I first spoke to Jerry Taylor to arrange the tour on *Ulysses* when I hadn't yet been aboard. I asked Jerry how big she was. He told me she was 53 feet overall, which isn't as large as many

of the breed. But he quickly added that she is no lightweight trawler.

"Her last insurance claim was for \$3,000...to repair a dock," Jerry added with a laugh, giving me a bit of perspective. No lightweight indeed!

I arranged to visit the boat around the time Jerry and Wendy had brought *Ulysses* to Florida, after her owner's season of cruising the boat in the Northeast. She was due for some maintenance work, which would disrupt her interior for several weeks, so I quickly packed a bag, loaded up the Outback, and headed south.

Onboard *Ulysses*

One thing about Florida in the fall is the annual collection of big yachts and mega-yachts that gather each year for one reason or another. The many marinas in southern Florida fairly bristle with tall masts, antennas, and upper boat decks that rise above the roofs of the surrounding marina buildings. Driving past, it takes little imagination to visualize the mammoth size of these yachts, even judging from just their antennas!

In Ft. Lauderdale, especially, these boats and their crews congregate to use the first-rate marine services located around the Ft. Lauderdale waterfront.

"You need a new paint job for that 160-footer? No problem, just pull it into that covered paint shed, and we'll fix you right up...after we finish detailing this 185-foot motoryacht." No kidding. If you ever get a chance to explore the New River area in Ft. Lauderdale around this time of year, you will be astounded by the number of super yachts along the shoreline, and the extensive facilities that cater to all of them.

Ulysses has spent some time in Ft. Lauderdale over the last couple of years, even though she really looks more at home idling past a glacier in Iceland or Alaska, or anchored in a lush tropical lagoon, instead of being nestled among a bunch of 175-foot monster motoryachts. But at least it wasn't hard to locate the Romsdahl among the other yachts at Bradfords!

Approaching *Ulysses*, with her bow forward in the slip, the image was all-Romsdahl, a serious North Sea explorer. The dark blue hull and gray topsides were a sharp contrast to the white-on-white look of the surrounding yachts. Her forward mast with proper crow's nest, a large 6-person Switlik liferaft canister mounted on the open fore-deck next to her fo'c's'le, the high bulwarks of her side decks, all add credence to her heritage.

Normal entry is from hinged, 24-inch wide gates, port and starboard, which bring you on deck amidships. The side decks are 27" wide at these gates and taper down to 23" as you move aft. An overhead boat deck gives 6'4"-6'6" headroom around the side decks, which are well-protected by the 30-inch high bulwark. Three 7" high by 20" hinged flaps open out in the bulwark at deck level, so any water that does come aboard will drain quickly.

Walking aft along the narrowing side decks, there is plenty to hold onto on this steel vessel, and her exposed painted steelwork adds to the feeling of strength. Capped pipes extend through the side decks for fuel and water fills, as well as venting loops. Steel is adaptable that way, just put



Teak table folds out for civilized living on the boat deck.



The large door in the hollow stack makes it easy to store chairs and gear.

things where you want them, then weld it all up.

The double-ended stern keeps the aft deck on the small side, but there is a comfortable bench seat fitted along the transom, and there is still room for socializing—just not for twenty or thirty of your friends. Actually, with the high transom and 6'4" headroom underneath the protection of the overhead boat deck, it is a rather snug secure-feeling place to be. There is a locking watertight hatch on the aft deck into the lazarette.