

Grand Banks 55 Eastbay SX

LIVE LIFE LARGE ON THIS WORTHY SUCCESSOR IN A HIGHLY ACCLAIMED LINE

BY CAPT. TOM SERIO

THE "DOWNEAST CRUISER" LINES OF THE GRAND BANKS EASTBAY series are embraced by generations of yachters as the epitome of classic styling. So when word of a redesign gets around, it's only natural some traditionalists would wonder what's in store for this popular series. The all-new 55 Eastbay SX should thrill the Eastbay faithful and win new devotees. The 55 SX offers more space, more style and amenities and more speed (achieved with a new fast hull/engine combo).

At the mention of Grand Banks, many cruisers think of its distinctive trawlers, which are still offered in the Heritage series from 41 to 52 feet. The company's Aleutian series (with models from 59 to 72 feet) offers stately yachts with the fine craftsmanship and open-water capabilities for which GB is known.

The Eastbay line includes yachts from 39 to 55 feet (the Eastbay 55

replaces the 54 SX) and offers all the amenities sought by discriminating cruisers. And the newly introduced 55 SX (SX stands for enclosed salon) takes the Eastbay line to the next level.

I had the opportunity to test Hull No. 1; its striking, creamy yellow bottom and white house is a stylish fit from Catalina Island to the San Juan Islands. At first glance, the 55 SX looks long and

lean, with an unbroken sheer from the upturned bow all the way aft. The raised foredeck is just the right height to give plenty of headroom below, but also to step on when hosing down or cleaning the three large helm windows.

You needn't feel intimidated by size with such a well-proportioned vessel. The lower accommodations sport 6 feet, 8 inches of headroom on average. The forward VIP stateroom has a centerline step-up queen berth and plenty of move-around room, along with an en suite head and shower stall.

The mid-ship master suite has a full walk-around queen berth, ample cabinets, locker and drawer storage and two portholes and a hatch that stream the

daylight. The en suite head also has a porthole for light and ventilation after a steamy shower.

Hull No. 1's galley-down configuration positions a port-side galley opposite the master. The galley features built-in microwave, three-burner electric cooktop, double sinks and wide expanses of black-speckled granite countertop/back-splash that invite culinary creativity. Vitrefrigo refrigerator drawers are easily accessible from under the counter, while the freezer is a few steps forward on the starboard side, over the washer/dryer combo unit. Ample storage rounds out the area, with dry storage compartments under the teak-and-holly flooring.

Don't think that since this is a gal-

An Inside Look



The 55 Eastbay's galley-down configuration positions a port-side galley opposite the master and allows the helm and salon areas to blend together nicely, making for clear views from nearly any position. Ample storage areas abound, including compartments under the teak-and-holly flooring.



TESTER'S OPINION

"With a push of the throttles, the C. Raymond Hunt Associates-designed hull took over the swells, basically riding over them with no pounding. Even when falling off the front of a wave, there was no jarring crash as anticipated. When the bow rode a little high, a couple of hits on the trim tabs brought it down to the horizon."

ley-down configuration that you are far from your guests in the salon. The passage way is wide open, and only five steps down from the helm.

Speaking of proportions, the helm and salon areas blend together nicely, with no obtrusive bulkheads blocking the views from any position. The 158-square-

foot salon is airy, thanks to the full-surround window configuration, including curved aft-corner glass. A large aft-bulkhead electric window fully opens (disappearing into the bulkhead below), making the salon feel even larger than it is.

A nice option is the electric sunroof in the forward part of the cabin top,

Grand Banks 55 Eastbay SX

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	55 ft., 1 in.
Beam	16 ft., 0 in.
Draft	4 ft., 4 in.
Height to bridge top	11 ft., 0 in.
Height to mast top	16 ft., 3 in.
Weight (dry)	56,800 lbs.
Weight (as tested)	63,300 lbs.
Deadrise at transom	19.5°
Fuel capacity	1,000 gals.
Water capacity	180 gals.
Base price	\$1,600,000
	(w/twin Caterpillar C-15 853 bhp diesel engines)

PERFORMANCE SPECS

Top speed	31 knots
Range @ 26 knot cruise	400 miles

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Twin Caterpillar C-15 853 bhp diesel engines w/Twin Disc gearboxes (1.92:1 gear ratio), Twin Disc E300 electronic controls, 31-in. (D) x 28.5-in. (P) 4-blade propellers, water-cooled exhaust, Racor filters, reverse-cycle A/C, 12/24-volt battery chargers, Sloop Sidepower bow thruster, entertainment system w/Bose package and Sony TV, Onan 13.5 kw generator, fuel-transfer system, Mastervolt inverter, Glendinning Cablemaster w/75-ft. cord, 20-gal. water heater, non-skid Awlgrip finish on deck and cabin house, half-inch stainless steel safety rails, bar cabinet, swim platform w/ladder, transom door, Delta T air demister for engine room, 5-year hull, deck warranty, osmosis blister protection.

CONSTRUCTION

Hand laid solid fiberglass hull below water line, PVC closed-cell foam cored construction above water line and deckhouse, TDS deck seaming, epoxy/clear gel-coat below water line, three-layer epoxy barrier coat, Awl-Grip painted exterior metals, wiring runs bound, numbered and colored, fiberglass and foam hull structural grid

COMPANY PROFILE

Years in business	51 years
Boat lines	Heritage, Eastbay, Aleutian

BUILDER

Grand Banks Yachts, Ltd., Seattle, WA; (800) 809-0909; www.grandbanks.com

WEST COAST DEALERS

Oceanic Yacht Sales, Sausalito, CA; (415) 331-0533; www.oceanicyachts.com

Passage Maker Yachts, Seattle, WA; (206) 675-9975; www.passagemakeryachts.com

Stan Miller Yachts, Long Beach, CA; (562) 598-9433; Newport Beach, CA; (949) 675-3467; San Diego, CA; (619) 224-1510; www.stanmilleryachts.com

bringing more of the outside in. To ensure you don't bake under a hot sun, there is a fully retractable two-part blind that can be set to close half the space or the entire space.

The size of the salon does not overpower the overall style, even though it is fitted out with deep cabinets along the starboard side that also house the recessed Sony 26-inch flat-screen TV. To port is a large U-shaped settee with a high/low table for snacking or laying out charts to plot your course. Overhead soffits on both sides house speakers, lighting and air-conditioning ducts.

Forward of the settee and across from the helm is a triangular table nestled with an L-shaped settee—a nice setup to keep your guests close to the captain. An optional double-wide second helm seat in this space may work better for a cruising couple, allowing for the second set of eyes to help keep watch or take in the sights.

The starboard-side helm on our test boat had a full Raymarine installation, with E-series plotter, radar and fish finder, along with autopilot and radio. Twin Disc Quick Shift single-lever engine controls were effortless. The full wood helm station did not have an overabundance of switches; these were off in the electrical panel just to the left within easy reach.

From the helm, visibility is good in all directions. And a sense of control is achieved with the helm close to midpoint. A starboard side door at the helm allows the captain to easily handle lines or take in more of the outdoors while underway.

The cockpit on the 55 Eastbay SX is a roomy 103 square feet. A settee (optional) across the stern seats at least four comfortably (and hides an optional davit), yet there's still room for tables and chairs, and enough space to bring in dinner from a day of fishing. Molded-in seating across the aft bulkhead is low enough that guests' heads don't obstruct the view from the helm. The full-teak sole adds to the vessel's classic feel.

Access to the engine room is through one of the forward bulkhead seats and though it's roomy, there's padding in case you bump your head when exiting. Everything you need to access on the Caterpillar C-15 diesels rated at 853 hp (optional C18 engines are rated at 1,000 hp) can be found along the center walkway. You should be able to easily get to

all the ancillary systems, such as the generator, air-conditioning units, Cablemaster, etc.

In close quarters, the 55 SX's prop bite was assured with no delay from the helm. A few pokes on the bow thruster influenced the bow swing as needed and even at approximately 31 tons (with half-fuel and full water capacity, along with three passengers), the 55 SX sat where you wanted.

Underway, we were welcomed by 5-foot swells against the wind, with a few breakers mixed in. With a push of the throttles, the C. Raymond Hunt Associates-designed hull took over the swells, basically riding over them with no pounding. Even when falling off the front of a wave, there was no jarring crash as anticipated. When the bow rode a little high, a couple of hits on the trim tabs brought it down to the horizon. The ride was a little wet in this slop, but each windshield had a beefy variable-setting wiper.

Hull No. 1's Caterpillar power package brought the Eastbay 55 SX to life. It ran toward the inlet wide open at 2,265 rpm, producing 28 knots in the rough seas, according to the helm instrumentation. A slower cruising speed of 18 knots can be obtained around 1,700 to 1,800 rpm, with the boat drinking approximately 50 gallons per hour.

The test boat, at 80 percent load per the Caterpillar engine displays, offered approximately 25 knots at 2,000 rpm, consuming about 70 gallons per hour. The 55 SX cruises very comfortably and has the added horses to get you home quickly when necessary. The price of the 55SX will vary based on equipment and options; the test boat (Hull No. 1) was fully commissioned and outfitted for \$1.6 million.

A Grand Banks representative said the 55 SX model likely will appeal to a mature cruiser, and in fact, many owners of the Eastbay series fall in the 55-year-old age bracket. It makes perfect sense that the comfort-oriented baby boomer crowd is a large fan base for this vessel, given its classy looks, beautiful joinery, luxurious accommodations, spacious gathering areas for guests and convenient layout that's geared toward a cruising couple. Plus, the 55 SX has all the reserve power to get you back to port, whether you take it out on a weekender or an extended cruise. ♥