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ASPEN C120

THREE STATEROOMS, TWO HEADS, AN ECONOMICAL SINGLE DIESEL AND 10 MPG

The Pacific Northwest has always been a hotbed of boat design, and PNW builders have been building those designs for decades. Builders in that geographical area embraced fiberglass as a building material for recreational boat construction when it first came to the market. In fact, the oldest continuous builder of glass boats in the world is North Vancouver's Hourston Glascraft. PNW builders also embraced aluminum when their fellow builders around North America considered that material suitable for only car toppers and swamp boats.

A BIT OF HISTORY

In 2011, another Pacific Northwest design burst onto the scene — in a big way. Aspen Power Catamarans, now situated in Burlington, Wash., introduced a wave-piercing power catamaran with a single diesel engine in its starboard hull. The 28-footer won a coveted Innovation Award at the Miami Boat Show that year. The Miami show, arguably the largest boat show in the world, features new boat designs and builds from around the

world, so Aspen was up against tough competition.

While Aspen was a new name in the industry, the man behind the company was not. Before setting up Aspen, Larry Graf had built Glacier Bay Catamarans into the world's largest recreational planing power cat builder. Graf was the first skipper to successfully complete both the Bermuda Challenge — an open-ocean dash from New York to Bermuda, without refueling — and *Pacific Yachting's* Pacific

Challenge — a 650-mile circumnavigation of Vancouver Island in one shot, also without refueling.

The new C120, a 40-footer, is the third hull length in the Aspen line, following the 28 and the 32. A 48-footer is on the drawing board.

UNHEARD OF EFFICIENCY

Aspen promotes its hulls as being very fuel efficient, so the first thing we did when setting out to test the 40 was make use of the engine's onboard computer and “fish” through the power settings until we found an engine speed that gave us a 10 mpg fuel burn. At 1100 rpm, we were getting 10 mpg and moving at 8 mph, or 7 knots. Over the years, I have not found any three-stateroom, two-head vessel that even approaches that fuel-burn efficiency at that speed. We found the boat to be eerily quiet, with our noise-meter reading 68 decibels. A normal conversation is about 70. The lack of noise is attributed to a quiet-running



The Aspen C120's interior is a modern blend of off-white Ultraleather upholstery and Amtico synthetic teak-and-holly flooring, and a large opening bulkhead window unites the outside with the inside at a twin-stool bar.



engine and Aspen's noise-abatement construction methods.

While 8 mph is a good speed for casually poking around the great cruising areas of the Pacific Northwest or the coral reefs of the Caribbean, there are times when more speed is useful — outrunning an oncoming storm or dashing out to a favorite offshore fishing spot. At wide-open throttle (3490 revs), the new Aspen stepped along smartly at 27.3 mph. At 3000 revs — the continuous cruise for the Volvo D6 435 hp engine — we were making 24.5 mph while getting 1.7 mpg. At 20 mph, 2690 revs, we got 2 mpg.

HANDLING

The new 40 continues the great handling characteristics of the two smaller vessels in the Aspen line. It responds smartly and very precisely to all helm inputs at all speeds, but there is one feature that boaters who have never experienced a wave-piercing cat design will find a bit unusual and perhaps a bit unnerving. Boaters sense the speed of a mono hull running in a chop by the noise and vibration as the vessel bangs through the seaway. The faster the vessel goes, the louder

the noise and the more frequent the slamming. The Aspen hull design slices smoothly, and quietly, through the chop. No slamming or banging. While this is a good thing, many boaters coming aboard an Aspen for the first time find the smoothness and quietness of the ride quite unusual.

When we finished our speed runs, we brought the vessel to a complete stop. Then, keeping the helm hard over, we slowly increased engine speed to wide-open throttle. The vessel banked into the tightening turn nicely and continued turning in just more than its own length without skipping, chatter or cavitation. The engine and running gear are clearly properly matched, and the drivetrain, overall, fits well with the hull design.

ON DECK

The new 40 features a wide swim step with pop-up cleats, a rarity on

swim steps, but their inclusion shows that Graf and his build team are not only builders, they actually use the boats they build. A good cleat on the swim step makes tying up the dinghy when at anchor a snap.

Access to the cockpit off the swim step is through a starboard transom gate. The cockpit itself is big enough for lounging about or for serious fishing, and the transom door makes easy work of hauling the “really big ones” into the cockpit. Cockpit lockers allow plenty of space for storage, and hatches in the sole provide easy access to the engine and generator. A comfortable cockpit settee and a well-finished wood table make sitting around for a beer very comfortable. The tabletop detaches and can be stowed in the area of a removable panel in the coaming.

Aspen's design team is staying current with the industry trend of blending the outside and the inside.

Testers' Opinion

➔ The new [Aspen C120] is every bit as good as its smaller siblings. In fact, in some ways it's even better.

The new C120 features a large hinged bulkhead window in the aft of the deckhouse that opens onto a bar, with two swing-out seats.

The optional flybridge is accessed up a ladder from the port side of the cockpit. As might be expected, visibility from up top is superb. There is a comfortable U-shaped settee, with reversible backrests on the aft bench that allows sun worshipers to face forward or aft.

INTERIOR SPACE

The interior of our test boat, hull #1 in the new series, was a modern blend of off-white Ultraleather upholstery and Amtico synthetic teak-and-holly flooring. The flooring is more expen-

sive than the real thing and is much more durable. It also provides better wet footing than the traditional high-gloss natural wood. The combination of off-white and teak-and-holly colored flooring, good teak cabinetry and Corian countertops will appeal to both the modernists and those who like a bit of tradition in their boat interior.

Cabin windows are all solar-guard bonded glass, which keeps the interior cooler on hot, sunny days. Two of the salon windows are fitted with small inset opening glass ports to allow fresh air into the interior. It is clear from the many grabrails properly located throughout the vessel that Aspen designers and builders are serious boaters who know that the ability of crew and guests to move around safely, even when the sea is up, requires such items.

Aspen has been one of the leaders in the use of low-draw LED lighting, and the new 40 boasts adjustable bulbs that can be activated by a normal switch or by a ring on the outside of

each bulb. With the low draw of interior LED lighting, the solar panels are able to more easily keep batteries topped up.

The galley has the usual complement of appliances: a propane stove with an oven, separate freezer and refrigerator, and a draw-style microwave. There is plenty of galley storage in ceiling-mounted and under-counter shelves and cabinets. The dinette features an electrically operated adjustable table and reclining seating, also electrically operated. At the forward end of the dinette, a flat-screen TV drops down from the headliner.

The interior helm station is forward of the settee and large enough for a pair of multifunction displays as well as the standard gauges, switches and an electronic throttle. Visibility from the comfortable bucket helm and companion seats is excellent all around. There is an opening window close to the helm seat in case the skipper wants a bit of fresh air while underway.

STATEROOMS

The master stateroom, complete with a king-sized bed and located forward between the two hulls, is reached from the main deck either down a set of steps to the starboard of the helm station and the through the master head, or directly via a set of steps to the port side of the helm station. The master has a massive amount of space with storage shelves, drawers and hanging lockers. Natural light floods the space through a pair of overhead opening hatches.

The master head boasts a separate glass-door shower compartment with teak grate flooring, Corian countertops, glass-tile backsplash, a very quiet Dometic toilet, an opening port and a vent fan.

The second (aft) stateroom, in the starboard hull and accessed via the stairway to starboard of the helm station, features a raised queen bed, hanging lockers and plenty of storage. It shares the master head with

the master cabin.

The third cabin, really a quarter berth, is small but comfortable and is located under the aft port settee. It is reached down moveable steps from the aft port side of the salon. It is a space younger kids will just love, and they will quickly make it “their own.” However, the berth is 6 feet, 3 inches long and quite comfortable.

Throughout the vessel, Aspen has taken the opportunity to provide storage space. An example is the starboard steps leading down to the accommodation area, which feature hinged drawers that tip out to reveal a wine storage space.

When a successful boat builder decides to add another, larger boat to its lineup, there’s always a concern that the new offering will not be as good as the vessels already in the line and that the reputation of the builder will suffer. Aspen need have no fears of that happening. The new 40-footer is every bit as good as its smaller siblings. In fact, in some ways it’s even better. 🐾

SPEC BOX

LOA	42 ft., 6 in.
BEAM	13 ft., 10 in.
DRAFT (HALF TANKS)	39 in.
DRY WEIGHT (EST.)	22,500 lbs
FUEL	180 gal.
WATER	80 gal.
PRICE (BASE)	\$610,800

STANDARD & OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT

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BUILDER

ASPEN POWER CATAMARANS, Burlington, Wash.; aspenpowercatamarans.com; (360) 668-4347

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Tester’s Favorites

➔ Low-draw LED lighting

➔ Synthetic teak-and-holly flooring

➔ Versatile cockpit

➔ Fuel efficiency