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Story By ROBERT M. LANE

# *Sonata*

## A Custom Voyager Full of Innovation





irst, they put John Deere in a box. Then they threw away the steering wheel.

The result: a true trawler yacht, quieter than a church on Monday, and a perfect cruiser/liveaboard for the couple who built her in a vineyard in Fresno, California.

*Sonata* combines traditional styling—a displacement fishboat hull with hard chines, a raised pilothouse, Portuguese bridge, and a towering bow—with the spacious comfort that can be found only in a steel yacht measuring 62 feet by 18 feet 6 inches.

Even though her Bruce Roberts design is almost ageless, *Sonata* is a contemporary, high-tech creature of the sea. From the electronically controlled single John Deere, roaring contentedly in its big insulated box, to a deceptively simple navigation station in the pilothouse, this yacht is all digital, miles of wire, sensors, monitors, alarms. And it all works.

I spent portions of two days aboard *Sonata* and then chased her by boat for about an hour one sunny spring morning as she motored eastbound in Guemes Channel at Anacortes, Washington, her temporary home port. Focusing my Nikon on her blue hull, my vote was that *Sonata*, with her single engine, efficient displacement speed, a long, heavy keel, significant storage, and plenty of fuel for long hauls, is one of the best put-together trawlers for a cruising live-aboard couple that I've toured in more than 10 years of writing for *PMM*.

Many ask if I live aboard my boat. On a 42? No way. They ask what it would take to get me to move aboard. Something much larger, is my reply. Bill Parlatore, editor-in-chief of *PMM*, frequently asks me which boat I would buy if I were in the market today. I haven't given him much of an answer.

Well, friends, and Bill, here's the answer: *Sonata* or a sistership comes close on both counts. It's probably good that I don't know how to weld.

So, it was kind of sad watching the trawler grow smaller as she motored toward the gap between Guemes and Saddlebag Islands, where Lee Simpson would turn a dial a few clicks, and *Sonata* would carry him and his wife, Diane, out of sight on a course to Bellingham.

For many days I had been able to catch a glimpse of *Sonata* from a city park across from her mooring slip. But now, she was being prepped for a trip to Southeast Alaska and a new home port in Sitka, where the Simpsons would truly test living aboard by spending the winter there. It was goodbye time.



Photos by Bob Lane

Lee and Diane Simpson have lived aboard *Sonata* for two years, but they'll test their love for life on a yacht by spending a winter aboard in Sitka, Alaska.

### DO IT YOURSELF!

We occasionally hear about a home-built or owner-built yacht that is the creation of someone who is better at dreaming than crafting. Lee Simpson undoubtedly spent as



much time dreaming as any other person who picks up a hammer, saw, or welding torch and begins building a boat, but he was better prepared than most to be successful.

Lee's been boating for decades. He sailed a 53-foot ketch to Mexico, Hawaii, and the South Pacific in the 1970s and '80s. After that, he bought a 58-foot trawler-type motoryacht and took her from Panama to Alaska. He lived in Fresno and kept the boat in Anacortes for eight years and jokes he spent more time on an airplane than at home or aboard the boat. "I decided the only way to cruise was to cut the ties," he says.

Undoubtedly, he spent some of his idle time aloft thinking about living aboard and giving up his frequent-flyer miles.

But there is more to Lee Simpson than dreaming or cruising.

In Fresno, Lee grew grapes for the raisin market. Hands-on ranchers often are skilled in engineering (even if it's by the seat of the pants) and in operating

machinery and building and maintaining equipment. Lee's success with grapes proves this theory.

Usually, grapes are picked and spread in the sun to dry, thus becoming raisins. Lee devised a system in which grapes dry on vines that grow on arbor-like structures and, after drying, are harvested by machines of his design and construction. This system significantly reduces labor costs and shortens the harvest.

So, Lee was not frightened by the prospect of building a 62-foot welded-steel yacht weighing 60 tons, or by thoughts of installing complex equipment and doing fine wood finishing for the interior spaces. He acknowledges lying awake at night thinking about the project, but he was sorting out what to do next and testing ideas, not so much worrying about how to do it.

Inspired by years of experience, Lee knew what he wanted in his liveaboard dream. "I wanted no steering wheel," he says. "I wanted a simple instrument panel. From my sailing days, I wanted a quiet boat.



Photos by Lee and Diane Simpson

Top left: Early in construction, framing is in place and the first steel plate is being attached. Top right: A crane hoists *Sonata's* deckhouse for loading on a transport trailer. Her hull is in the background. The two pieces were joined after the hull was launched. Above left: At 62 feet in length and with a beam of 18 feet 6 inches, *Sonata's* hull more than fills a city street en route to launching in Stockton, California. Above right: Her first taste of water. *Sonata* is moved toward a pier for attachment of her deckhouse. The owners moved aboard three days later.





"I wanted a boat that was more utility than yacht-style. My last was blue Awlgrip and had a lot of teak, and I wanted a boat that could take a scuff outside and it wouldn't matter."

He and Diane chose a 60-foot trawler yacht from the collection of Bruce Roberts, an Annapolis-based design firm, and stretched it 2 feet. The Roberts shop put all the computer instructions for cutting every piece of steel plate on a CD, and Lee sent it to a firm in Holland, which cut the steel and loaded it into two shipping containers. Later, two trucks dropped the steel plates at the ranch shed in which *Sonata* would be built.

With two employees hired for the job who brought to the table skills in welding, carpentry, painting, and machine work, he began construction in January 2002.

"Assembly was so intuitive," he says. Every steel plate was numbered and given alignment marks. "We knew where every piece would go."

The shed was large enough for construction of the hull, but the deckhouse was built in another building, and the two pieces were joined at launch time.

In July 2004, *Sonata* was almost finished, and the hull and superstructure were shipped separately to Stockton, 110 miles on a monster trailer, for final assembly and launch. Lee and Diane moved aboard three days later, in the midst of the chaos that accompanies the finishing of a major project, and have lived aboard since.

While the Roberts firm designed the hull, Lee and Diane planned the interior and created a remarkably spacious and comfortable yacht that works well as a liveaboard.

"I knew we wanted to live aboard," Lee explains. "So I wanted space in which to be comfortable. This boat has a lot more volume than my 58, and it is much more comfortable to live in."

Their commitment is complete. "We have nothing in storage," Diane told me. They've sold the ranch and disposed of many of their household possessions, and, on the first day I visited *Sonata*, they were about to close the sale of their truck. "I got rid of everything but the bare essentials."

While the yacht was lying in Stockton, Diane had an increasing number of loads of essentials carried aboard. Lee was worried about where it all would go, but Diane



Bob Lane

Stainless railing makes her boarding platform safe for fishing and loading gear. The steps are steep and shallow, but two grab bars make them easy to navigate. The door to port on the platform opens to the lazarette and engine room.

told him to let her worry. She found a place for all of it. Today, *Sonata* is well stocked and equipped, but there's not a hint of the unruly accumulation of stuff I've often seen on other liveaboard yachts.

After the yacht reached the Northwest, the Simpsons found moorage in Friday Harbor, on San Juan Island, to use as a base for cruising the Inside Passage. They also took her across Haro Strait to Sidney, British Columbia, for some detailed finishing work.

## ONE MAN'S CHOICES

Some of the 2 feet Lee added to the Roberts' design went to creating a boarding platform that's 48 inches deep. Literally, it is the front porch and the only entry.

Staples, which are U-shaped stainless-steel handrails spaced around the perimeter of the boarding platform, provide security while stepping from the mooring float to the boat, and other grabrails make safe a slightly cramped curving stairway to the cockpit. Eventually, Lee plans to install engine controls and navigation aids in or near the transom so he can operate the boat while fishing from the boarding platform.

The 6-foot-deep cockpit has potential for relaxing and entertaining, but when I went aboard it was crowded with a table saw and other woodworking equipment. Lee has some finishing work yet to do (deck boards in the lazarette, for example) and is a bit reluctant to move the equipment ashore.

*Sonata* has no side decks. Generally, side decks are invaluable for crew convenience and safety while making



a landing or picking up a mooring. In rough seas, they keep the crew secure. Lee understands the issue.

"My last boat was a wide body, and I loved it. I would rather have the interior space than side decks for docking," he says.

*Sonata* has a single engine and bow and stern thrusters. Lee argues that with the thrusters there is no need for anyone to be on a side deck, and he would demonstrate later how easy it was to park the big yacht and hold it against a mooring float with the thrusters while Diane easily stepped ashore to handle mooring lines.

One more point: Without side decks, the only route from the cockpit to the



Photos by Bob Lane

Top: An electronic piano (on the right side of photo) and a dining table fit neatly on the starboard side of the saloon. Stairs lead to the raised pilothouse. Above: A pellet stove provides a homey touch in *Sonata*'s full-width saloon. Cherry wood trim and leather-upholstered couches add color. Opposite page top: A galley from Lowe's provides work space, storage, and convenience—plus good views of passing scenery. Below: Artwork, books, family photos, and the rich cherry finish prove a yacht can be as comfortable as any home on shore.





bow of the boat is via the saloon. Enough said.

The advantage of wide-body styling is quickly obvious: It allowed the Simpsons to create a large, homelike saloon that, at nearly 18 feet wide, is more expansive than the living room in many homes.

Stepping through the aft door, I quickly noted an electronic piano on the starboard side, two leather-upholstered couches and a pellet-burning stove to port, and a storage cabinet and dining room table farther forward on the starboard side. The galley, forward and to port, has home-size General Electric Profile appliances, space for two to work, and a bar for breakfast and snacks. The yacht has a diesel-fired furnace, and Lee acknowledges the pellet stove was installed more for the coziness of an open fire than for its ability to heat the boat.

The saloon is carpeted, the wood trim and cabinetry are of cherry, while the galley has a Pergo wood-

laminate sole. Side walls are finished with vertical strips of cherry, not the veneer panels found on most yachts.

The galley cabinets were designed, built, and topped with Corian by Lowe's, the big-box home-improvement store. A pull-down projection screen is concealed in the valance above the saloon's aft bulkhead. Eventually, a projection-style TV will be built into the overhead.

Missing is an overhead grabrail, which means a passage through the saloon in dirty weather may resemble the course of a billiard ball. In the saloon, the piano and pellet stove are fixed to the sole, but all other furniture "just sits there," Lee says.

"We came up the coast [from California to Anacortes] in some bad stuff, particularly off Cape Mendocino. We caught it right on the bow, and you couldn't see the sky because of the seas and spray."

But none of the furniture moved. *Sonata* does not have stabilizers, so that performance in the Pacific shows that her design offers reassuring stability. Lee determined that stabilizers were not vital because he and Diane planned to go coastal cruising and did not intend to cross oceans.

## A WIRED YACHT

From the saloon, a centerline stairway leads forward and down to master and guest staterooms, and a shop any boat owner would envy.

In the Roberts' design, the yacht had three staterooms. Lee and Diane finessed the design and converted the third stateroom into a shop, which includes a drill press, air compressor, and other full-size shop tools. In addition, some of the gear normally found in an engine room is in the shop area.

A bank of Racor filters, a 10-valve fuel manifold that controls main and day tanks, the house battery bank and disconnect switch, the furnace, and a watermaker also are in the shop. Lee passes through the shop en route to the engine room, so it should be easy for him to quickly check the filters and fuel settings before stepping into his most unusual engine room.

*Sonata* carries 3,500 gallons of diesel fuel in four epoxy-coated steel tanks. They feed a 225-gallon day





Photos by Bob Lane

tank. The tanks are integral to the hull: The sides and bottom of the boat also serve as the sides of the tanks. Fuel is filtered as it is pumped from the main tanks to the day tank and again before it reaches the engine.

Lee knowingly installed automotive-style Racor filters. The marine-rated version would cost \$1,000 more, he says.

Also in the shop are AC and DC control panels, a pair of Victron inverters, a workbench with a stainless-steel top, and elements of a high-tech device I have read about but never seen, the Krill Systems electronic monitoring equipment that watches over batteries, AC and DC electrical systems, fuel and water, and almost anything that ticks, turns, or moves on a yacht.

This type of gear is common on large vessels, but Krill Systems, Inc., a Bainbridge Island, Washington, electronics firm, offers a system for recreational yachts.

Monitors encircle large battery cables and sense temperatures, tank levels, and cooling system operations, and fine electrical wires transmit data to a nearby panel, from which data is transmitted to a central monitor on the bridge via an Ethernet and wireless 802.11 technology. Lee is able to monitor battery-charge levels, exhaust



Top: What a great space: *Sonata's* shop has a stainless-topped workbench, an array of fuel valves and filters, a diesel-fired furnace, a hydraulic system manifold, and space for stuff—and this is just one side of the shop. Above: The owner deliberately chose automotive-style fuel filters, but they are in full sights, along with the fuel manifold valves, every time he goes below to start the yacht's main engine. Opposite page: The other side of the shop: batteries, inverters, a band saw, drill press, and a wall of storage.





cooling, water-flow alarms, the loads on two inverters, generator or shorepower status, and fuel and water levels at a glance.

Lee says he installed the Krill system himself in about 10 hours at a cost of about \$6,500. He is working on displaying all operating data and engine diagnostic reports on his PC as well. "I like cutting-edge stuff," Lee adds.

*Sonata* is wired for 30-amp/120VAC electrical service, because that's the best one can expect at marinas in northern British Columbia and Southeast Alaska, where she will be cruising. If the demand for energy exceeds the shorepower supply, the ship's electrical system will switch on one of the two inverters to make up the difference.

The yacht is equipped with a 240VAC dryer in the laundry center. A step-up transformer produces the energy it needs from the basic 30-amp/120VAC system.

The bank of Rolls 6-volt batteries in the shop stores 820 ampere hours (at 24 volts) for house use and will provide long, quiet hours at anchor. When more energy or battery charging is needed, Lee will start the 9kW Northern Lights generator.

The John Deere is linked to a ZF V-drive reduction gear. Lee chose a V-drive because it allowed him to move the engine farther aft, creating a larger shop space.

### THIS IS AN ENGINE ROOM?

Lee swung open the engine room door and watched for my reaction. I was stunned. First, it's spacious. It is a stand-up, easy-to-walk-around-in engine room that looks like a computer room: white, brightly lighted, spotless, uncluttered.

Down the centerline is a white metal box that reminded me of the air conditioned vaults in which large computers sometimes function. There is nothing in sight that would tell the unsuspecting there is an engine and related gear in the box, until one looks aft on the starboard side and spots the exhaust line and starting batteries that are outside the box.

A large mechanic's toolbox and an electrical panel hint at the function of the room, but rows of cherry-finished storage cabinets high on both sides of the room suggest something else.

Lee opened one of three doors along the port side of the centerline box, and there was the 330hp John Deere 6081. Normal service work would be easy, I thought.

Other doors opened to expose more of the engine and other gear. In the rare event that engine removal is required, the box may be dismantled.

"A sound shield was offered with the generator, so I thought, why not a sound shield for the main engine?" Lee explains.

How does one get a sound shield for a John Deere engine? Lee and his crew designed and built it. A more immediate question: How does the John Deere get the air flow it needs for operation?

Lee and his crew installed an air-handling system that pumps 1,500 cubic feet per minute (cfm) of outside air into the engine box and then exhausts air from the box at the rate of 700 cfm. He calculated needed air flow



himself, without consulting John Deere. The system works well, Lee says, and the engine has performed without incident since launch.

The John Deere has keel cooling and a wet exhaust, and the functioning of all the equipment in the box is monitored electronically.

If sensors detect fire conditions inside, for example, the engine is stopped, the fans and ventilators are closed, and an automatic fire extinguisher is activated. And it is all done automatically.

Lee started the engine from controls outside the shield, explaining that he always starts the John Deere from the engine room because it becomes second nature to check oil and water levels before turning the key. With the engine idling and all the sound shield doors closed, standing within 2 feet of the shield, I measured 72 decibels (A scale) on my sound meter. With the door open, the reading soared to 90dBA.

Later, with the yacht under way at about 8 knots and the engine turning 1400 rpm, I measured decibel





Photos by Bob Lane

readings of 52 in the shop and somewhere near 50dBA in the master stateroom forward and in the raised pilothouse. I'm uncertain about those readings, because the sound meter registers only to a minimum of 50dBA, and the needle was quivering on the 50 mark.

It was like reading in a library—an empty library. In the distance somewhere there was a discernable sound, but it was more like the movement of air. Seated at the helm, I became aware of another subtle sound. It was the cooling fan on the PC tower that was in an open cabinet at about knee level.

Builders of production yachts beam with pride if the sound level at the helm is in the mid-70s on the A scale. Normal conversation is possible at that noise level, although the rattle of diesels is loud in the background. Large, fast yachts with high-revving, high-horsepower engines may have readings near 80 at the helm, and normal conversation is difficult. I've been on one yacht in which the sound level in the aft stateroom reached 90dBA, and it hurt me physically to endure more than a few seconds of that roar.

Decibels, defined as sound energy or intensity, are measured on a scale that's based on multiples of 10, to eliminate the use of unwieldy numbers. I'm told that means an increase in a meter reading of 3 decibels is perceived by humans to be a doubling of the noise energy. The sound of a jet aircraft is a trillion times greater than that of leaves rustling. So, the difference between 70dBA and 50dBA in the pilothouse is enormous and, usually, quite costly to achieve.

The quietest boats I have toured have come from custom yards and were the result of finicky owners who wanted silence. They were willing to pay more to get it, and skilled builders knew how to please those customers.

A sound shield is not practical for every boat, but innovative and motivated custom builders like Lee Simpson prove that quiet is possible, and they should inspire production-line builders to do better.

## GOING FORWARD

Two staterooms, a pantry, and two heads are down a few steps and forward of the saloon. The pantry contains





a freezer and storage space. Just off a passageway leading forward are a guest head and stateroom with two berths, one full size and the other a bunk.

The master stateroom, with a queen-size bed, is in the bow. Because of the great beam of the boat, it's a spacious forward stateroom. It has two large hanging lockers, cabinets for storage, book shelves, and two opening skylights.

As Diane guided me through the boat, I noticed she was carrying a small remote-control device. She tapped a switch on the X-10 remote to switch on stateroom lights and explained that all boat lights are controlled remotely. They can be turned on and off and dimmed without reaching for light switches, of which there are none.

The master head has space for the washer/dryer, as well as basin, toilet, shower, and storage. Diane opened a

cabinet door set into the partition between the head and the passageway. Although there is not much space there, she has devised a cascading hanger system where Lee hangs several pairs of slacks neatly out of the way.

On a boat tour, staterooms usually are sterile spaces that lack decoration or the books and photos that create a homelike atmosphere. The Simpsons' stateroom, in contrast, was warmly and comfortably finished.



Opposite page: Guess what this is. Would you believe an engine room? Yes, the John Deere diesel is enclosed in this large box that contains much of the engine's roar. Above: Sensors send information to this Krill Systems 072. Right: Lee demonstrates the ease of reaching service points on the diesel engine. Lee designed and built the sound enclosure.







## ON THE BRIDGE

Four steps lead from the saloon to the raised pilothouse. Two helm seats, bought from a truck-supply company, dominate the space. I tried them both and found them adjustable, comfortable, and good looking, and was impressed to learn they cost a fraction of marine-style helm seats. Separated by a console, the two seats face a sweeping instrument panel fitted with three large monitors for display of navigation information and radar images and for computer use. And, yes, there is no steering wheel.

Lee uses the Simrad AP25 autopilot for steering, employing a joystick and follow-up steering on the AP control panel. On the console between seats is the electronic engine controller, the joystick, the mouse for his computer, and a large, complex Kensington Expert



mouse to control the Nobeltec navigation/radar systems.

Indeed, the helm looks simple. The three monitor panels and a selection of critical switches, the autopilot, the touch pad controlling the windshield wipers, and the hydraulic thruster controls were installed precisely where they are needed. The Krill System performance display is to the right of the helm, and a monitor for a developing NMEA 2000 system is to the left.

Simple in appearance, complex in delivery. The helm is one that an owner will need to use frequently in order to keep in practice and to develop the instinctive reactions needed for operating a large yacht.

To simplify servicing electronic systems, Lee hinged the entire instrument panel forward of the helm



Photos by Bob Lane

Top: A big mouse, joystick, and engine controller fit neatly on *Sonata's* console. She doesn't have, or need, a steering wheel. Middle: A Krill Systems, Inc., display offers information on almost every system on board. This screen reports on the status of *Sonata's* electrical system. Above: The console between helm seats gives left-handed Lee easy use of engine controls and computers. The seats were purchased from a supplier of truck accessories.





(or where it might have been). It can be lifted open to expose wiring and the black boxes associated with electronics gear. The space is large enough for someone to climb in for close-up work.

*Sonata* has redundant systems more than one GPS, for example, and failure of one component will not bring the boat to a halt. Even with the electronics systems down, the John Deere will continue to run and the ZF gears will turn.

The saloon has a white vinyl overhead, with contrasting strips of cherry. The pilothouse, however, has a charcoal-colored fabric overhead. "There was only plywood there when we were coming up the coast, and we had constant problems with reflections in the wind screens," Lee says. The search for a nonreflective material led to the charcoal fabric.

A starboard door leads to the wing and foredecks and a short stairway to the boat deck. A settee and small table are on the aft saloon bulkhead, and to port Diane has an office area for her laptop.

Visibility is good from the helm, but for close-quarter maneuvering in a marina, Lee goes to the boat deck. The yacht does not have a flybridge, but Lee has a remote panel on a long umbilical cord, and he can stand anywhere on the boat deck and use the remote to control throttle, gears, and bow thrusters with a clear view of boat corners and of a marina float the yacht is approaching.

The upper deck provides storage for an aluminum fishing boat (with jet drive for shallow water exploration), a small sailing dinghy ("for the grandkids"), and a pair of kayaks.

*Sonata's* hull is painted a medium-blue color with product from Ameron, whose paints are more often found in marine industrial settings, such as on tugs, oil rig crew boats, supply boats, refineries, oil-drilling platforms, and many other commercial workboats.

It doesn't have a glossy surface, but the paint does what Lee wants—takes a scuffing and touches up easily. The deckhouse is white, while the exterior decking has a



If Lee Simpson needs to service electrical and electronic circuits, he simply swings the helm station open to reveal wiring, control boxes, and other gear.

heavy nonskid texture rolled into its covering of paint.

## FINALLY, TO SEA

Having held steering wheels in my hands for 30 years, I'm wary about steering a yacht electronically.

Lee easily drove *Sonata* out of her slip at Cap Sante Marina, through the gap in the breakwater, and out the narrow channel to deeper water. We turned left into Guemes Channel and set a course for Rosario Strait.

In season, Guemes Channel is busy with pleasure





boats, as well as tugs, charter craft, and Polar-type oil tankers that are nearly 1,000 feet long. On this day, the channel was almost empty, and we had nothing but a 2-knot ebb current to deal with.

We immediately became fascinated with the ship's AIS (automatic identification system) receiver. Large ships now are required to broadcast via VHF radio information about course and speed and other identifying information, often including the ship's name. With that data, a computer can calculate the closest point of approach for two vessels on reciprocal or crossing courses.

A Nobeltec product, *Sonata's* AIS receiver takes data picked up by a VHF antenna on *Sonata's* upper deck and feeds it into the computer running the Nobeltec navigation software. Three yellow icons popped into view on the plotter monitor, indicating three Washington State ferries were at the Ship Harbor terminal.

One icon began moving away from the terminal and turned onto a course that would take it across Rosario Strait and through Thatcher Pass. Lee clicked on the icon, and a stream of data across the bottom of the monitor told us the ferry's speed was approaching 18 knots and that she was on a westerly course. Because she was running away from us at twice our speed, we had no worries about the closest point of approach.

What's surprising is that this AIS receiver costs only about \$300. It does require up-to-date versions of

## SONATA

DESIGNER	Bruce Roberts
BUILDER	Lee and Diane Simpson
LOA	62'
LWL	56' 4"
BEAM	18' 6"
DRAFT	6'
BRIDGE CLEARANCE	26'
DISPLACEMENT	120,000 lb.
FUEL CAPACITY	3,500 U.S. gal. in four steel tanks and day tank
WATER CAPACITY	250 U.S. gal. in plastic tanks
WASTE WATER	125 U.S. gal. in a polyurethane tank
GRAY WATER	125 U.S. gal. in a polyurethane tank
POWER	Single 330hp John Deere 6081
CRUISING SPEED	8 knots at 1400 rpm
FUEL USE	4.2gph at cruise



Photos by Bob Lane

Left: The boat deck has space for toys galore. The aluminum runabout is used for fishing and exploring shallow bays and streams, the sailing dinghy is for the grandkids, and Lee and Diane enjoy kayaking, too. Right: Rather than have fixed controls at a wing station, Lee created a mobile system that allows him to stand anywhere on the bridgedeck for close-quarters maneuvering. The remote has engine and gear controls and allows operation of the yacht's hydraulic bow and stern thrusters.



Nobeltec software, either VNS 8 or Admiral 8, and a dedicated antenna.

*Sonata* proved her seaworthiness on the trip from California and on cruises north along the Inside Passage and had nothing new to prove on our sea trial. We generally were sightseeing, talking, and munching on sandwiches. Chatting was easy in the near-silent pilothouse.

We puttered along at about 8 knots until we were near the south tip of Cypress Island, where we did a 180 and headed for home. The Deere was running at 1400 rpm and burning 4.2 gallons an hour.

Lee climbed to the bridgedeck and retrieved his mobile remote system from storage as we approached the marina. He slowed the boat and began turning her as we neared her mooring space on B Dock.

A light northwest wind was blowing diagonally across the mooring float, but he backed in neatly and, using the thrusters, put the hull against the float. Diane stepped off the boarding platform with a springline in hand, and we were home.

Lee and Diane have perfected the art of living aboard. And to show they are cruisers, too, they planned to spend only a few more days provisioning and taking on fuel. And then they would be off for Sitka.

The advantages of building your own boat? First, you get what you want. And the cost may be less. Despite hiring a pair of workers for the project, Lee estimates that *Sonata* cost about half what he would have paid for a production-line yacht of similar size.

Finally, it probably is one of the most rewarding things one can do. I understand the satisfaction that comes from completing a small boat project successfully.

Lee and Diane Simpson



Imagine the high that would come from building a yacht from scratch.

Living aboard is as much about lifestyle as boat design. The Simpsons have the style and the boat that works for them.

I might like a Roberts 62, with a few changes here and there, but I think Lee would rather cruise than build me a boat. 