Where a Rose is a Rose is a helluva skiff

By Richard Lohrville
Field Editor

Like most Harkers Islanders, L.R. Rose turns his hand to building skills naturally. "My people, that's what they've done," he says, "and I sort of grew up in it."

Rose has built boats for almost all of his 43 years. Initially, he honed his skills working for some of the old masters — the Rose brothers, M.W. Willis & Son, Gillikin Craft — over a five-year period. He then spent almost four years as a carpenter at the Cherry Point Marine Air Station before setting up his own shop.

For the next eight years, he did nothing but build boats. When he first started out, most of them were in the 15 to 20' range, but a 36-footer was completed after he built a bigger workshop. During this time, his most popular boat was a 17'/18' boat with an outboard well. Later, he began building 21' and 22' shallow-draught tunnel boats. These, he says, were made mainly for the bays where it doesn't get real rough.

Most recently, he built a pair of versatile, deep-draught 23-footers. Sherwin Bonney of Bethany, N.C., has earned a fine frame on his boat, and he travels for crab and shrimp in Pamlico Sound. Carl Page and Grady Banks of Carolina Beach, N.C., are rigging their boat in longline offshore for snapper and grouper. All appear pleased with Rose's workmanship and their boats' performance.

"It's about as solid a boat as you can find," says Page, who also praised the owner's standbys. "It's not tender at all." Bonney says the Rose boat gives him twice the working area offered by a Chesapeake Bay boat of the same length. "It handles real well," he says, adding, "I've always kind of admired the type of boat they build down there."

The boats have 20° of deadrise at the bow tapering to 4° at the transom. Bonney's boat is powered by a 6.55 Detroit Diesel and Page's by the same manufacturer's 6-71.

The boat presently sitting in L.R. Rose's shop is a 22' x 9' x 1 1/2' shallow-draught tunnel design with a large cabin, sells for $15,500 excluding any hardware. The framing is heart pine and the planking, white cedar (jasper).

Unusual Construction

Rose builds each boat from the chine up. Instead of laying the keel first, he nails the 3 1/2'-4' wide white planks to the 4' x 6' st Creative King and bends them around a stretcher to give the hull its shape.

Next, he sets in place the 3 1/2' frames and floor timbers. Placed 16' on center, the frames curve gracefully outward to form the typical Harkers Island flared bow. They measure 4' at the foot, 3 1/2' at the top and are attached to the floor timbers with a pair of 1/4' galvanized carriage bolts. Rose uses slightly heavier 2' x 3' upright bracing to strengthen the stem.

The planking consists of 1/2' thick strips. These are nailed and glued with Waidwood gum above the waterline and nailed and sealed with 3M 5200 sealant below the waterline. The strips vary from 1 1/2' to 1 3/4' in width, depending on the amount of curvature in the sides of the boat.

When the sides are finished, Rose turns the 22'-footer upside down, lays the 3 1/2' wide keel into notches in the floor timbers and fastens it with two 3/8' galvanized fasteners that are sunk into each timber. The keel (Continued on Next Page)
While the 6’-deep tunnel enables the boat to run in shallow water, the rounded stern quarters and 30° rake in the transom make the 32-footer ideal for gillnetting.

Rose

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measures 14’’ at its deepest point.
The 6’-deep tunnel, braced by 2 x 3s where additional strength is needed, will enable the boat to navigate the shoals and shallows of the water around Harkers Island.

While Rose uses bronze Anchorfast nails to attach the side planking, he prefers stainless steel nails for the bottom — especially in high-stress areas.

"The stainless is a stronger nail," he explains. "Sometimes these higher powered motors have a tendency to map the heads off the bronze nails where you’ve got pressure, like under the bottom.

"Around the tunnel area, where you get that pressure from your prop, I prefer the stainless. I don’t think it makes a great deal of difference from midships forward, but most people want to stay with the stainless all the way down."

Finishing Off

After the bottom is planked, Rose flips the boat back over to finish its topsides. He uses 5/8” x 6’-wide planks for the side and stern decks, but he strip-planks the cabin the same way he builds the sides. A 6’-high, wast, or coaming, topped by a 6’-6” caprail runs from the cabin around the stern. The waist adds extra depth to the inside of the boat and keeps water on the decks from rolling in.

He uses 1/2” exterior AC fir plywood for both the main deck and the top of the cabin, which he then sheaths with fiberglass.

The soon-to-be enclosed deckhouse/ trunk cabin measures 9’ x 6’3”, large enough for a couple of berths in the cuddy, and a fold-up cafe table and two booth-style seats for eating in the main part of the house. There will be sliding glass windows on the back wall, a sliding window on each side, and three push-out 1/4”-thick plate glass windows on the front.

Rose says he can build the same boat without a cabin or modify the cabin for different uses. He points out that commercial fishermen seem to want the cabin arrangement that affords the most deck room.

His favorite engine is the 225- to 250-h.p. Chevrolet gasoline power plant set up as a straight inboard with direct drive and used in combination with a 1 1/2” stainless steel shaft and 15” prop. For diesel power he recommends an 85-h.p. Ford or Perkins with a 1 1/2:1 gear.

When completed, the boat will have a black iron rudder shoe and rudder on a stainless steel rudderstock, with the latter controlled by either push/pull Teleflex steering or a hydraulic system.

At the stern, there is a raised deck with room for a 50-gal. fuel tank beneath it. The square transom has a 30° rake and, reflecting the vessel’s heritage, rounded corners. (The older Harkers Island boats had a full round stern to simplify the job of working nets.)

Rose explains: "The rake makes fishing easier because when you’re pulling back, the water has a tendency to beat down more than it would if the transom were straight up. As for these round corners, the waves seem to sort of wash around them. It’s also a good design for gillnetting because your nets don’t hang up on the round corners."

A Proud Tradition

L.R. Rose takes a great deal of pride in his workmanship and the boatbuilding tradition he’s carrying on. He prides his skill and would rather not sell a boat at all than sell it too cheaply. He is also concerned by the lack of interest in boatbuilding among the young people of Harkers Island.

Part of the reason may be the difficulty of making a living in a declining industry. Three to five years ago, Rose himself foresaw a falloff in the local boatbuilding industry and began to diversify. He now operates a marine railway, a small marine and a marine supply store in addition to his boatbuilding business.

When high interest rates brought boatbuilding to a standstill, Rose managed to make a living from his other enterprises. As for a resurgence in boatbuilding, he remains cautiously optimistic.

"I don’t believe it’s going to come back as strong as it has been," he says, "but I feel it might eventually start moving again. I know it will come back if we can keep our prices down somewhat on our hardware. I feel that’s hurting us because they’re a little out of hand now."

Though Rose may not be overly optimistic about the future, he proves you can still find a good boat for a reasonable price on Harkers Island.

For additional information, contact L.R. Rose Boat Works, Star Route, Box 274, Harkers Island, NC 28531, tel. (910) 728-2860.