

EXCLUSIVE:
SABRE 38 SALON EXPRESS

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A Cut Above

WITH SHARP DESIGN AND NOT A RATTLE TO BE HEARD, THE SABRE 38 SALON EXPRESS SLICES WAVES WITHOUT CUTTING EFFICIENCY.

BY PETER A. JANSSEN PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILLY BLACK

As my wife, Renée, and I stepped onto the swim platform of the glistening, just-launched Sabre 38 Salon Express at DiMillo's dock in Portland, Maine, we were prepared for a good day. The midsummer weather was warm, the breeze barely feathered across the water, and the new 38 was fueled up and ready to go. And after that promising start, things only got better.

"The 38 is a very flexible boat," said Kevin Burns, the new vice president of design and product development for both Sabre Yachts and Back Cove (Sabre's sister company), as he welcomed us onboard. "It's designed for the way people use boats today. It's fun to drive, to own, and to use." Even given Burns' inherent pride in his newest boat, it turned out he was right. In fact, the more we used the new 38, the more we liked it.

Over the course of an afternoon on Casco Bay, we found there's a lot going on in this boat, now the entry point for Sabre's lineup, which also includes 42-, 48-, and 54-foot models. Most important perhaps, is the easy-riding, soft-landing hull (with a 24-degree deadrise amidships flowing back to 17 degrees at the transom), which was designed for Volvo Penta's IPS pod drives. With Volvo's twin 300-horsepower D4 diesels, the 38 cruised easily (and

quietly) at 25 knots and topped out at just over 30. Then there's the smile-inducing fun of maneuvering the boat with contrarotating props on the pod drives, slaloming around lobster pot buoys out in the bay or docking with the joystick in a tight space. Inside, the new

Sabre has an unusually open interior, so that the whole crew can be part of the action. And the boat also

boasts some innovative design elements that simply make life onboard more enjoyable. Finally, the base price of \$525,000 seems quite reasonable for a quality-built twin-diesel boat with state-of-the-art engines and drives.

In terms of size and price, the Sabre 38 picks up where Back Cove leaves off. Back Cove yachts, also built in Maine, are all single-diesel, low-maintenance cruising boats with 30-, 34-, and 37-foot models. Base price for the

Back Cove 37 is \$435,000 (see "Timing is Everything," in our August issue for a full review).

One thing I liked right away about the Sabre 38 was the sliding three-person aft bench seat in the cockpit. "Watch this," said Bentley Collins, Sabre's vice president of sales and marketing, as he pulled a lever under the varnished cherry cockpit table. He then slid the table, and the rear seat and transom section to which it



Fitting right in on the coast of Maine, the Sabre 38 uses quiet pod propulsion for family-thrilling performance.



Drawing Sabres

When he was growing up in Rocky River, a suburb of Cleveland on Lake Erie, Kevin Burns says, "I was that kid who was always taking things apart. My Christmas gifts were frequently disassembled immediately." These days, Burns, now 40, is no longer taking things apart. Instead, as the newly appointed vice president for design and product development at Sabre and Back Cove Yachts in Maine, he's putting them together. Burns' career arc has always flowed toward a life afloat. After attending Miami University of Ohio, he enlisted in the Coast Guard, where he learned to love navigation, and spent his time on the bridge of a 270-foot cutter "with my nose in the charts." As a civilian, he captained 150-foot vessels supplying rigs in the oil fields of the Gulf. But Burns wanted a broader view: "I felt a captain should know as much about boats and naval architecture as a pilot does about aircraft and aeronautics." To that end, he went to The Landing School in Arundel, Maine, to learn yacht design. Burns then landed a job with the Setzer Design Group in Cary, North Carolina.

At Setzer, Burns was lead designer for *Wombat*, the 82-foot Lyman-Morse motoryacht that is arguably one of the most beautiful yachts of the past decade. There Burns embraced "the architectural concept of 'informed simplicity,' which is something I carry around with me. It's both a goal and an approach to design."

Six years ago, Burns joined Back Cove and today he lives with his wife and son, 7, and daughter, 5, in Friendship, Maine. Why Friendship? "It's authentic," he says. "It's a fantastic out-of-the-way coastal village to raise a family." On the waterfront there, Burns says, "I feel a camaraderie with the lobstermen. I value their company, as well as their perspective on boats, boating, and the sea."



See right through from the saloon to the master stateroom, thanks to a drop-down panel.

is attached, back 14 inches over a portion of the swim platform, opening up the cockpit area for maximum sociability. If you slide it forward, the table moves closer to the two-person, aft-facing seat at the forward edge of the cockpit, so that it becomes a more intimate area for dining or cocktails. Overall, it seemed to be a straightforward solution, and certainly a nice touch.

The engine room is immediately under the cockpit. Almost the entire cockpit sole raises for excellent, standing-room access to the two Volvos; there's plenty of space for daily checks or more serious work on the engines, including outboard areas. The engine compartment was gleaming with white gelcoat finish; if there were any oil or liquid spills (there weren't) they would be highly visible. A 6 kW Kohler genset was aft of the engines as, of course, were the tops of the pods. For balance, all the ship's tanks were forward.

The large rear window separating the cockpit from the saloon drops down, and the glass door next to it folds open so that the cockpit and the saloon become a large social area. Some other boats also have this type of arrangement, but what was unique here was the view forward. "Stand here," said Burns, looking through the rear window, "and you can see the entire interior." He's right. And not just the saloon and helm station, or even just to the lower galley, but also because of a neat drop-down panel separating the forward section of the galley from the master stateroom, all the way up to the forward bulkhead in the master stateroom at the bow. You can close some doors and raise the galley panel for privacy, of course, but the wide-open feeling is somehow inclusive and inviting.

Inside the saloon, there's an L-shaped settee and high-low cherry table to port. For-

ward of that is the passenger seat, which is arranged so the person sitting there, Renée in this case, could sit looking forward, acting as a navigator, or sideways, facing the captain to starboard in a single Stidd helm chair. The back of the passenger seat can flip forward to open up the saloon settee; in this configuration, three couples could sit around the table for a comfortable dinner.

The galley, down three open steps ("We don't want a closed-in feeling," Burns said), is open to the saloon, and is well equipped for cruising. There's even extra stowage for dry goods on the interior side of the "lower lounge" area aft of the galley, where an L-shaped settee serves as a pleasant spot to have a cup of coffee in the morning, a glass of wine in the evening, or to just sit and look out the side window when the boat's underway. At night, the settee pulls out and becomes a double berth.



Make yourself at home in the functional galley (top), while the saloon and galley area offer comfortable spots to spend time together.

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	RANGE	dB(a)
1000	6.1	1.9	866.8	64
1500	8.3	5.0	448.2	68
2000	10.0	9.9	272.7	71
2500	16.5	16.0	278.4	74
3000	23.1	20.0	311.8	74
3500	29.1	27.0	290.9	79
3540	30.5	30.0	274.4	79

LOA: 38'0"
LWL: 34'5"
BEAM: 13'4"
DISPL.: 21,500 lb.
FUEL: 300 gal.
WATER: 100 gal.
TEST POWER: 2/ 300-hp Volvo Penta D4 diesel engines linked to Volvo IPS400 pod drives.
GENERATOR: 6 kW Kohler
BASE PRICE: \$525,000
PRICE AS TESTED: \$600,000

TEST CONDITIONS:

Air temperature: 83 degrees; seas: calm; load: 300 gal. fuel, 100 gal. water, 4 persons, 200 lb. gear. Speeds are two-way averages on Casco Bay off Portland, Maine, measured by Volvo Penta GPS engine data display. GPH also measured by Volvo display. Range is 90% of advertised fuel capacity. Decibels measured at helm in dB(a). 65 dB(a) is the level of normal conversation.

NOTEWORTHY OPTIONS:

Dark hull color, \$3,900; Ultra-leather upholstery in saloon, \$1,150; Volvo Penta active corrosion protection system, \$4,675; Fiberglass molded electronics mast, \$3,125; Inverter/charger 2,800-watt true sine wave with remote control, \$4,650; Blind and curtain package for saloon, \$5,875.





Get a grip for safe passage forward with a good high bowrail and a grabrail on the house.

Opposite the galley is one of the largest heads (with separate shower area) I've ever seen on a boat this size. It has one door opening to the galley area, and then a separate door leading to the master stateroom. The master itself is large, with two small steps leading to the forward berth, lots of stowage, and enough cherry wood to maintain Sabre's Down East heritage.

The only teak on the boat is a thin strip running the length of the house side as an understated, eye-pleasing design element. (Teak is an option for the cockpit sole, caprail, and swim platform.) In the cockpit, Burns pointed out the gentle curves, the radius of the corners that match the overhang, and the aft corners of the saloon. "We embrace the fact that we can make it right," he said. "Sabre and Back Cove have challenged people's notion of what Down East can be. That's not to say they don't carry the timeless Down East appeal. They do. But we're not afraid to push the boundaries if it results in a better boat."

Underway, it quickly became apparent that that better boat has an appealing comfort level. It started with the outstanding, 360-degree sightlines at the helm (and other spots, as Renée found, looking out the windows wherever she sat). It continued along to open ventilation throughout the saloon from sliding windows on both sides and two large overhead hatches, plus the drop-down window and open bifold door aft. And it wound up with an uncommonly low noise level for a production boat, registering less than 80 decibels even at wide-open throttle.

But the Sabre 38's real appeal is in its performance. It has very little bow rise coming up on plane, and the ride is so soft and comfortable that I had to double-check the GPS as I settled in at the helm. I thought we were going perhaps 15 or 16 knots; in fact, we were moving through the water at 24. And turning at speed is simply fun; the IPS props dig in and the boat carves through a turn without missing a beat.

Before too long, Sabre may move up in size, making yachts larger than the current 54. Meanwhile, there's much to enjoy in the new 38. "This is a bookend boat for us," Burns said. "It's where we want to be today. In terms of size, performance, and price, we nailed it. And the pods make it fun to drive." Judging by the smiles on our faces as we climbed off the boat late in the day, Renée and I certainly would agree. □

**Sabre Yachts, 207-655-3831;
www.sabreyachts.com**