

# 2006 Boats of the Year

2-bay varnish shop now graces the Lamoine shop. [www.redfernboat.com](http://www.redfernboat.com); 207-266-0270.

South Portland dealership **REO MARINE SERVICE** sold boats from the four lines that they represent: Larson, Aquasport sportfishing boats, Starcraft aluminum boats, and Novurania inflatables. New technicians and a new general manager joined the 9-person staff. [www.reomarine.com](http://www.reomarine.com); 207-767-5219.



*Intuition*

The Brooklin shop of **BRION RIEFF, BOATBUILDER**, designed and built *Intuition*, a Spirit of Tradition daysailer/weekender for an experienced local sailor. The light-displacement hull of cold-molded wood over a foam core, and carbon-fiber spars by GMT of Newport, Rhode Island, resulted in a traditional boat that is competitive on the race course. A 50' cold-molded Alden schooner was launched in November, a new design by the John Alden office in Boston that combines aspects of the original Alden schooners with modern materials and construction methods. A 19' cold-molded outboard launch was built based on lines taken off an older plank-on-frame version. Construction was under way on the first Hallet 33, designed by sailmaker Richard Hallet in conjunction with Fawcett Designs. *Flapper*, a 1938 Six Meter that was built in Norway, arrived at the shop in "sad shape" and emerged as a competitive race contender after a complete rebuild, with assistance from Pedrick Yacht Design, of Newport, Rhode Island. [www.brionrieffboatbuilder.com](http://www.brionrieffboatbuilder.com); 207-359-4455.

**ROBINHOOD MARINE CENTER** completed 10 repair projects—primarily sailboats—at its Georgetown facility. A number of boats were in for bottom paint removal, repair, and a new barrier coat and bottom paint. A Little Harbor 46 got a new hatch and deck hardware as part of extensive leak repair work. Deck cracks on a 40' Alden motoryacht were repaired and a 42' Kroger received a bottom peel and blister repair. Three sailboats were in for electrical upgrades, including a 34' Pacific Seacraft that now sports new autopilot and refrigeration systems, a high-output alternator, an updated radar/chartplotter/GPS, and new sails. Longtime general manager Joe McCarty retired, and owner Andrew Vavolotis has assumed those responsibilities. [www.robinhoodmarinecenter.com](http://www.robinhoodmarinecenter.com); 207-371-2525.

## Portland Pudgy

BY GRETCHEN PISTON OGDEN



*An unsinkable lifeboat that can serve as a utilitarian yacht tender under sail, oar, or power.*

IN 1985, JUST BEFORE MY HUSBAND MICHAEL AND I LEFT MAINE to go cruising aboard our 38-foot steel cutter, my mother gave us a copy of Steve Callahan's book *Adrift: Seventy-Six Days Lost at Sea*. In the enclosed note, she wrote, "Buy a solar still. Better yet, buy two." The book was a gripping read for a couple preparing to sail off into the unknown; I can only imagine what passed through my mother's mind.

Callahan spent 76 days drifting in a life raft in the Atlantic after his sailboat sank out from under him after a collision with...something. He battled dehydration, starvation, sharks, and his own demons before being rescued when his raft finally drifted to within sight of land. Once Callahan recovered, he embarked on a mission to change sailors' thinking about the subject of abandoning ship. He stressed the importance of having a rescue vessel that could be propelled toward safety rather than one that was at the whim of wind and current. His point was that had his life raft been sail-powered, he would have spent far fewer lonely, hungry, thirsty, frustrating days at sea.

We cruised for five years, and never came close to needing to abandon ship, a fact for which we remain extremely grateful. *Adrift* influenced us in many ways, though, including our choice of dinghy. Instead of an inflatable or a life raft, we had a two-part nesting fiberglass dinghy lashed to the foredeck during passages. Its sail rig was lashed to the rail. The idea was that should something happen to the mother ship, we would take to our lifeboat and, once conditions allowed it, set sail toward safety.

It wasn't a perfect setup. The sailing rig had to be stored separately from the dinghy. Bolting the two halves together in a seaway would have been impossible (although both halves did float independently). There was no canopy, very little storage space, and the hull was foam-cored fiberglass and thus prone to cracks, which took on water. After five years of service as our pickup truck and sports car combined, our dinghy weighed twice what it had at the outset.

Fast-forward 20 years. Callahan's book remains widely read. Even though weather forecasting and navigational tools have improved greatly, it's still a big ocean out there and the unexpected still happens. Callahan's mission to educate sailors about the need for a sailable rescue craft has not changed. In fact, he invented and built a prototype of a folding hard dinghy called *The Clam* (see the February/March 2003 issue for a review), which was built in Maine for a time but never made it into wide production.

courtesy Portland Pudgy, Inc.

# Around the Yards

Enter David Hulbert, an industrial designer with a long career of inventions and designs in his pocket. Now in his early 60s, Hulbert moved to Maine from Brooklyn, New York, a few years ago to found Hulbert Design and build one of his designs: the Portland Pudgy. He first got the idea for the craft when he saw the standard, oblong life rafts with net bottoms that are carried aboard most big ships and thought, "There has to be a better vessel for open-water survival." Developed with the help of seed grant money from the Maine Technology Institute, the Pudgy is about as far from those life rafts as one can get. Hulbert describes it as a multifunction dinghy—a survival platform, a service dinghy, and a recreational boat rolled into one.

Hulbert's design aesthetic is apparent in every facet of this very well thought-out boat. It is self-bailing; the leeboard trunks are designed to keep water from splashing in; the marine-grade, UV-treated polyethylene hull has some "give" and inherent flotation. Additional flotation is built into the bottom half of the boat, making the vessel nigh-on unsinkable. The sail rig, oars, sea anchor, exposure canopy, ditch bag, and boarding ladder all stow within the walls of the hull in clever cubbies that are accessed through watertight deck plates. This helps insure that the sail and the canopy (and your survival gear) will all actually be on board once the chaos of abandoning ship is over.



*A canopy converts the Pudgy into a Spartan survival pod.*

Most multifunction products must walk a fine line between getting all the jobs done and doing them well. Often, some functions work better than others. For example, my home office-copier/fax-machine/printer/scanner doesn't scan very well, but it prints well and makes good copies. Since those are the functions I use the most, I am happy with the machine.

The Pudgy, on the other hand, seems to perform each of its various jobs well. It is light enough to carry atop the average car, and should prove relatively easy to hoist onto the cabin top for passagemaking. It tracks well under oar or outboard power (2 hp recommended), due to the skeg molded down the centerline of the bottom. The center seat adjusts to provide two rowing positions. Moving the boat about on land is made easier by a double roller wheel that is built into the bottom (a brilliant innovation). A motor mount, collapsible oars, towing/sea anchor bridle, and a compass are standard equipment.

The Pudgy's seaworthiness will make it a great boat for beginning sailors. The reefable sailing rig is optional, and should be easy to set up on the 8' telescoping mast. The sail has enough area to make sailing around an anchorage lots of fun. The leeboards float, and can be stowed under the aft seat, as can the kickup rudder.

Other options are a pre-wired 12-volt electrical system with a rechargeable battery to power navigation and compass lights.



*A molded skeg on the bottom allows the boat to track well.*

There is even an option for a solar panel to recharge the battery.

Should the worst happen at sea, one would be cozy and fairly comfortable under the sturdy canopy while waiting for the storm to blow over. The three-section inflatable cover has windows and secures to the boat via 12 stainless steel pad eyes. It can be inflated by CO<sub>2</sub>, hand pump, or mouth. There is even a sea anchor designed specifically for the boat.

A word I heard used a lot when the boat was on view at the MAINE BOATS, HOMES & HARBORS SHOW last summer was "cute," and indeed, the Pudgy, which comes in "sunset" yellow, orange, and red (safety being a primary concern) is as endearing as its name would imply. (The boat does also come in white with gray flecks.) That cuteness may work against it in some markets, where a go-fast manly look carries more weight than safety and functionality, but this is a real boat, designed to do a real job. What's wrong with cheerful colors and sassy curves, anyway?

Given a choice on an offshore passage between the Pudgy and an inflatable life raft or the average dinghy, there's no doubt which I'd choose. I bet that Steve Callahan would, too. ☆

## SPECIFICATIONS / PORTLAND PUDGY

<b>LOA</b> 7'10"	<b>Sail Area</b> 35.6 sq. ft.
<b>Beam</b> 53.23"	<b>Floor Space</b> 16.1 sq. ft.

**Weight** 128 lbs., dinghy alone. With all accessories and equipment, about 168 lbs.

**Carrying Capacity** USCG approved for 4 persons. 557 lbs. total capacity (people, motor, and gear).

**Price** \$1,895 for basic boat with oars, bridle, and compass; about \$4,000 completely fitted out for survival use.

**Designer/Builder** PORTLAND PUDGY, INC., 48 Tyng Street, Portland, ME 04102. 207-761-2428; [www.portlandpudgy.com](http://www.portlandpudgy.com)