



Q&A: DAVID HULBERT MAKES THE CASE FOR A PROACTIVE LIFEBOAT.

Mainer David Hulbert is president of Portland Pudgy and inventor of the boat that bears the same name.

YACHTING: What inspired you to develop the Portland Pudgy?

David Hulbert: While sailing around the waters of Maine with my 3-year-old daughter and my wife in

water that doesn't seem to melt ice cubes, even in the summer, I realized that our little fiberglass dinghy would be useless as a lifeboat. It could easily swamp and be impossible to bail, exposing us to the danger of hypothermia. I set out to design a tender-lifeboat.

YACHTING: How did the idea evolve?

Hulbert: I noticed that tour boats carried life-floats about six feet long. They are oval rings with a net bag on the inside that people can stand in [in freezing water] and beackets around the outside that people can hang onto as shark bait. It seemed silly to put an open net on the inside when you could put a floor on the bottom and have in effect an oval, unsinkable life float that would keep you drier and protect you from hypothermia.

But you would still be stuck in one place, so why not put a bow on the raft, and if a bow, why not a set of oars? Your immobile life float now becomes a lifeboat that you can row in the direction of land. Why not put a canopy over the boat to protect the occupants? Rowing is fine, but difficult over great distances, so I added a sailing rig. Now we have a boat, exposure canopy, oars and a sailing rig. I made the boat double-hull, with 12.5 cubic feet of watertight storage and flotation space between the hull walls and closed-cell foam under the floor to make the boat unsinkable. ...

The boat is very difficult to capsize, [and] it can be righted very easily.

YACHTING: Don't you have to prove the value of a boat like yours by sailing a couple hundred miles over the ocean?

Hulbert: We are hoping for some brave soul to take it out in a hurricane as a lifeboat, but so far, no volunteers. The Dutch magazine *Zeilen*, in the spring [cold and windy] of 2008, put two reporters in the Pudgy lifeboat 20 miles out in the North Sea. They sailed through the night to land with great success.

SELF-RESCUE CRAFT

The Portland Pudgy is a tender, sailing dinghy and lifeboat combined. Notice the choice of words: *lifeboat* not life raft. The Portland Pudgy is not a passive survival platform but a vessel that makes self-rescue possible. With a rugged, polyethylene double hull, its dimensions are 7 feet 8 inches overall length, 4 feet 4 inches beam, and it weighs 128 pounds. The U.S. Coast Guard rates its capacity at 557 pounds, enough for three average persons and a 2-horsepower outboard, which is greater than most 10-footers. The double hull and foam-filled bottom make the Pudgy unsinkable, and her beam provides exceptional stability. With an optional inflatable canopy, which is stowed aboard, the boat becomes a lifeboat that cannot be punctured or easily blown away. Once seas have subsided, the boat can be rowed or sailed to safety merely by removing a central section of the canopy.

The sail rig with telescoping mast is also stowed aboard and accessible through a hatch in the transom. The base boat costs \$2,495. The optional sailing system and exposure canopy are \$1,195 and \$1,895 respectively. Portland Pudgy, 207-761-2428; www.portlandpudgy.com



"David Hulbert Makes the Case for a Proactive Lifeboat," Peter Swanson, *Yachting*, May 2012, p. 55-56