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Nordhavn 56 Motorsailer

A WORLD-CLASS CRUISER

BY CAPT. PAT RAINS

DAN STREECH AND JIM AND JEFF LEISHMAN started out building the well-respected Mason line of sailboats. After great success, their designs eventually lead to their now-famous trawler line.

During my 15-year yacht-delivery career I eventually grew into long-range powerboats. Now in retirement, I ponder the details of my perfect long-range cruising boat, and it's always a beefy pilothouse motorsailer.

Streech and the Leishmans came to the same conclusions and recently added the N56-MS, the first motorsailer to their long line of world-cruisers. The N56-MS is a single-engine 56-footer with a 73-foot mast; perhaps you noticed the long line of looky-loos waiting to tour the first Nordhavn motorsailer, at boat shows this winter.

Why? A motorsailer combines the best of both worlds. The powerful engine gets you where you want to go, even in light or contrary winds; yet the more curvaceous sailing hull below the waterline adds natural stability and seakindliness, which gives a safe and comfortable ride to the inhabitants. And when the wind is right, the efficient sailing rig gives you free propulsion to extend your fuel range.

For those of us who value comfort, fuel efficiency and passage-making capabilities, the sight of high bows shouldering through big waves makes our heart-strings thrum.

Although there's no mistaking the iconic Nordhavn lines, the 56-foot motorsailer hull has a much lower center of gravity than its all-power brothers. Without such high bows, it was much sleeker and offered less windage. I'd find out later under pure sail that its center of effort is well balanced as well.

ENGINE ROOM AND LAZARETTE

Before lighting off, we inspected the engine room, which is amidships. It's a stand-up-and-walk-around engine room, very unusual for a motorsailer of this size. The engine is a single 165-horsepower Lugger (L1066T) with a wet-exhaust system, with the weight balanced in the center of the boat.

While delivering six Nordhavn motoryachts from Florida to California, we grew fond of their fuel management system, and the N56-MS is similar. It has three 250-gallon fiberglass tanks grav-

ity feeding a 14-gallon aluminum day tank. The day tank has a sight tube calibrated in 1-gallon increments, so you can verify your hourly rate of fuel burn.

To keep weight balanced when you're crossing the ocean on one tack, for example, fuel can be pumped to any other tank, passing through a Racor filter to clean it. Or it can be routed out of any tank, through the filter and then back into the same tank in order to clean the fuel. The value is clear if you've taken on suspect fuel in foreign ports or when returning to the boat after it's been sitting for some time.

For operation and maintenance, you have adequate access all around the engine and fuel-transfer systems, though the area is not quite as roomy as Nordhavn's comparable-sized powerboats. But the huge lazarette makes up for it.

Back here you'll find the generator, battery banks and freezer, plus easy access to the steering gear and emergency tiller. Keeping the generator out of the engine room is a plus from a safety aspect; if you were in an emergency and taking on water, the engine room often floods first, yet a separate generator room allows you to retain shipboard power and radios for communication.

UNDER WAY

As we backed out of the slip and jogged through the marina, the N56-MS was agile and handled very well. Not surprising, because this boat has both a bow thruster and a stern thruster. This is the first stern thruster I've ever operated on a sailboat, albeit a motorsailer.

Our hull #1 was equipped with a huge, 36-inch 4-blade prop for good torque and vibration dampening. It uses the Hundested variable-pitch system with push-button controls (easy to use) and an indicator at the helm station. By using the pyrometer and fuel-flow meters, you can manually adjust the prop pitch and find the sweet spot for best fuel consumption at any rpm and in any sea conditions. Under sail later, we fully feathered the huge prop to create zero drag.

As we brought it up to full-cruise rpm I felt no noticeable vibration when we measured the noise level in both the pilothouse and main salon at 69 decibels, quiet enough that we didn't have to shout over the engine.

An Inside Look

TESTER'S OPINION

"The Nordhavn 56 is worth standing in line to tour at the next boat show. It's spacious enough for two couples on vacation and well thought out, so experienced boaters can cruise the coastal waters without a crew. And it can definitely make passage."

The main dining salon is aft of the galley, and the refrigerator is between the dinette and companionway, so guests can help themselves without getting in the cook's way. Below, the two athwartship staterooms are separated fore and aft for privacy, and they both have their own full heads.

FUEL MATTERS

While motoring down the California coast, we tested the N56-MS for fuel consumption at two different rpm, one for best speed and one for best fuel efficiency.

At 1750 rpm, this boat made 9 knots and burned 5 gallons per hour. That rpm is not pushing the Lugger hard at all. The engine's top rpm is 2400, so it can be driven a little faster than that, but because this is a displacement hull, it then burns a much greater amount of fuel for very little return in speed.

At 1175 it burned only 3 gallons per hour and loped along at a respectable 7.25 knots. By playing around with the Hundested controls a little more, I think we could have found better consumption. And of course going slower would extend the range even more.

HAWAII DREAMS

I imagined taking this boat on the familiar California to Hawaii run, about 2,200 miles. Normally the winds are light when you're departing the Southern California coast, so you need to motor out about 100 miles before breaking out of the lee of Point Conception. There you pick up strong northwest winds and start sailing. The wind slowly comes around until you are running in the Pacific trade-winds all the way to Hawaii.

The Nordhavn 56-MS would sail quite well with a typical trade wind breeze under sail alone, or you could increase the speed with the engine at low rpm for low fuel burn, then arrive in Hawaii with plenty of fuel reserve.

That's the concept the Leishmans came up with during their 2001-2002 circumnavigation aboard the all-power Nordhavn 40. Most of their route was in the trade-wind belt under conditions similar to those en route to Hawaii.

UNDER SAIL

Leaving Dana Point, the wind was very light and the seas flat. Nevertheless we raised the sails.

It had only been the previous afternoon that the sails were raised for the first time, just to make sure they'd be

Nordhavn 56 Motorsailer

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	57 ft., 5 in.
Beam	16 ft., 7 in.
Draft (full load)	6 ft.
Fuel capacity	750 gals.
Water capacity	250 gals.
Engine	Lugger L1066T Diesel

PERFORMANCE SPECS

9 knots @ 1750 rpm
7.25 knots @ 1175 rpm

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

LUGGER L1066T 165 hp@2400 rpm, Twin Disc 3.00 to 1.00 Transmission, (1) 24 volt 175 amp Leese Neville large case alternator, (1) 24 volt 40 amp small case alternator, SAE "A" hydraulic pump drive, gear driven on timing cover, engine instrument panel, Hundested propeller and propeller shaft, four blade left-hand CPP 36-inch-diameter, stainless shaft, (4) Vibracon chocks, input flange. Vinylester resin used in firs laminations, all exterior gelcoat, cabin side (vertical surfaces) and Foam Klegecell R75, and more.

OPTIONAL FEATURES

15 hp stern thruster, Reverso oil change pump, Seafire Fire Protection System, 110v high-pressure freshwater anchor washdown system, upgraded water heater to 20 gals., granite on galley and head countertops and more.

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ready for this voyage to San Diego. So this was its maiden sail, if not maiden voyage.

The sloop-rigged mast is 73 feet tall, rising from a comfortable optional sailing cockpit just forward of the pilothouse. Sailors will like this spot for its good view of the sails. The 645-square-foot mainsail can be hydraulically raised from the Forespar in-boom furling system, operated by electric winches at the base of the mast.

The genoa head sail (563 square feet) furls hydraulically, and you can handle the sheets with port and starboard electric winches located just outside the pilothouse doors. If you were to lose all power, the sails can be handled manually with good-old winch handles. I was amazed at how fast the sail rolled back up. Two people could easily handle this sailing rig, and I suppose an iron-man singlehander could do so too.

In the light winds, we played with the sails and then motored along with just the mainsail up. Then the afternoon sea breeze kicked up to 10 knots, so we set the genoa again and shut down the motor. Even in this light breeze, on a broad reach we were doing 4.5 to 5 knots. We were equipped with a cruising spinnaker, which we did not try, but because it was a larger sail it should have pushed us along at a better speed.

As we closed with Point Loma the breeze picked up to 13 knots, so we put the wind on the beam and reached 5.5 to 6 knots. Despite the fact that this is a displacement hull with a full keel shielding the prop and skeg-hung rudder, it "came about" on the opposite tack under pure sail in light winds, without the need for motor assist.

LAYOUT

The aft cockpit is on the main deck level, so you only need to step over the watertight ship-type bulkhead door. The aft end of the pilothouse extends full width, and in our test boat it contains a dinette and seating area. If you use your boat a lot you may want to replace the freestanding chairs with a pilot berth or bench seating.

Dutch doors on both sides of the pilothouse are also ship-smart; you can open the top half for natural cross ventilation yet keep spray out with the bottom closed. Beefy forward windows have fittings in case you want to add clear storm shields, for example, before crossing the Pacific or Atlantic.

The path from the foredeck to the aft cockpit leads you through the pilothouse, which is a safety plus. On deck, the cleats are well spaced near these pilothouse doors, so you can work dock lines or hang and retrieve fenders without twisting your back.

Below deck the two athwartship staterooms are separated fore and aft for privacy, and they both have their own full heads. The master stateroom is aft of the galley and engine room, located three steps lower, so it will probably be more comfortable in a heavy seaway. The forward stateroom can be reached by a portside hallway that runs past the engine room access and laundry room; all cloaked in nice hardwood paneling.

The U-shaped galley to starboard is oriented fore and aft, so you can't fall out of it in a seaway. I like the opening hatch overhead and two opening ports for air and views. The combination refrigerator freezer on our test boat is a bit small for long-range cruising, so I'd make this all fridge and place a separate freezer in the lazarette. The gimbaled stove with pot-holder rails is wise on a boat that heels under way. By eliminating the center sailing cockpit, you could extend the galley head space.

The main dining salon is aft of the galley, and the refrigerator is between the dinette and companionway, so guests can help themselves to cold drinks without being in the cook's way. If you cruise at night very often, you'll appreciate having the diners out of the pilothouse, so their lights don't threaten your night vision.

There's room to carry a 10-foot inflatable dinghy and motor atop the pilothouse roof, using the mainsail boom to crane it on and off. The swim step would be a good place to board the dinghy while cruising.

So is it really worth standing in line to tour the Nordhavn's 56-foot motorsailer at a boat show? The answer is a resounding yes. It's spacious enough for two couples on vacation and well thought out, so experienced boaters can cruise in coastal waters without a crew. And it can definitely make passage.

Nordhavn has a 68-foot version of this motorsailer in the works.