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YACHT STYLE BY HERB McCORMICK
PHOTOS BY BOB GRIESER

With a versatile sail plan, powerful turbodiesel, efficient controllable-pitch prop, and inviting interior layout, as a dedicated long-range passagemaker, the Nordhavn 56 Motorsailer exceeds the sum of its parts.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

FOR COUNTLESS STARRY-EYED SAILORS, THE TROPICAL islands of French Polynesia have ignited many a voyaging dream. It's no wonder, really. As a target to set one's sights upon, the legendary South Seas isles provide plenty of incentive to shuck the shackles of the workaday world and point a bow over the horizon. For John Graham and Susan Felton, however, their offshore hopes and aspirations didn't culminate with a tropical Pacific landfall. In fact, you might say they got it backward. Their first, fledgling steps on the path to becoming long-distance, liveaboard cruisers actually *began* during a Polynesian retreat.

Only later, after an extensive search for their notion of the ideal boat, did they come to the firm resolution that the Nordhavn 56 Motorsailer would be the vehicle to enable their vision.

But let's begin at, well, the beginning. Partners Graham and Felton, successful professionals from Palm Springs, California, loved French Polynesia and often vacationed there. They were so enamored of the archipelago, in fact, that on their last visit, they thought long and hard about purchasing an island home. But after pondering the notion, Graham—a native Scot who'd spent many fond years at sea as a marine engineer before pursuing a career in real estate—came to a different conclusion.

"There are so many different and beautiful islands," he said. "I thought to myself, why buy a house? We'd be much better off with a boat. And that's when I discovered that Susan always wanted to

The Nordhavn 56 MS (left) has been described as a "trawler-sailer," which seems apt. Susan Felton and John Graham (top) plan to take their 56 MS to French Polynesia. The interior's focal point (above) is the spacious saloon/wheelhouse.

live on a boat, too. We'd just never talked about it."

With the seed planted, the conversation became serious. The couple began searching for a vessel in earnest, plying the U.S. West Coast and inspecting scores of craft. As the search expanded, so did their ambitions, and before long this ambitious couple was planning not only an offshore Pacific trek but a full-blown circumnavigation.

From the outset, they were taken with the Nordhavn line of oceangoing trawlers. They appreciated not only the seaworthiness and quality but also the family atmosphere at the company headquarters in Dana Point, California. Finally, they made a decision, and they signed a letter of intent on a new Nordhavn 60 displacement powerboat.

And then Graham experienced a second flash of enlightenment. "I was doing some delivery work in Southern California and got talking to a guy on a fuel dock who said that with rising fuel prices, people weren't going out much and business was slow. That really resonated with me. I didn't want to be like that, worrying about the cost of fuel. I went back and talked to Susan, and we decided to cancel the order. We needed to be on a motorsailer. We needed to be sailing."

As it turned out, they didn't need to wander far to find what they were looking for. Most conveniently, Nordhavn already had something in the works that would prove to be just the ticket.

THERE'S INDEED A FAMILY AURA in the suite of Dana Point offices that serve as the U.S. base for Pacific Asian Enterprises. Longtime friends and partners Dan Streech and Jim Leishman hold the ranks of president and vice-president, respectively, while Jim's brother, Jeff, is the chief of design.

The distinctive, rugged style of the Nordhavn brand of long-range motorboats is familiar to anyone who spends much time on the water, but few may be aware that the trio who form the apex of the company pyramid launched their careers selling and building well-found cruising sailboats. Once you know the history, and begin to understand the company's solid foundation in both sailing and powerboats, the only real mystery is why it took them so long to combine their vast experience in both disciplines and apply it to a dedicated motorsailer. Certainly, when viewed from that perspective, it's hard to imagine anyone better suited to the task.

Back in the mid-1970s, yacht brokers Streech and Jim Leishman began to import Taiwanese-built sailboats into the United States, which gave them tremendous insight into Far East boatbuilding. By 1977, they decided to tackle their own project, and they persuaded naval architect Al Mason to redraw the lines of a previous 38-footer, a boat that would become the Mason 43.

To bring the concept to fruition, they partnered with the Ta Shing boatyard in Taiwan. The first 43 was launched in June 1979 and was an instant success. The boat has stood the test of time, and many cruisers still roam the world in Mason 43s.

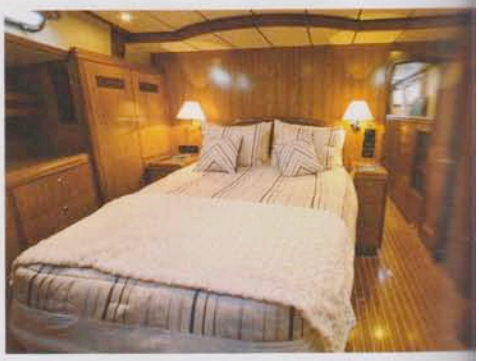
A Mason 53, and then a 63, followed. In the early 1980s, Jeff Leishman joined the concern and soon after revamped the burgeoning line into the Mason 44, 54, and 64, respectively. But by the middle of the decade, sailboat sales were in decline. A well-timed commission for a full-displacement powerboat not only revamped the company's focus but also, in the very near future, its sales trajectory as well.

"We thought we could design a really cool motorboat, one that could go to the same places as our sailboats but was maybe a little easier to handle," said Jim Leishman of the boat that would become the Nordhavn 46 trawler.

Ta Shing took a pass on the 46, and P.A.E. sought out a different builder for that project, but after its highly successful launch, Ta Shing signed back on for the next boat, the Nordhavn 62. The partnership again flourished, and it remains firm to this day.

For the better part of the next 20 years, P.A.E. channeled its energy into a growing fleet of Nordhavns. Earlier this decade, the company decided to showcase the prowess of their Nordhavn 40—and have an in-house adventure, too—by taking one around the world, doing so in record-setting time for a production powerboat of its size: a mere 26 weeks.

During that trip, said P.A.E. engineer Pete Eunson, who would become the project manager on the Nordhavn 56 MS, "we started talking about sailboats. A lot of evenings, we thought it would've been nice to have an outside steering station. One thing led to another, and here we are. We're kind of back to our roots."



The mid-level deck of the boat (above) is home to the vast engine room as well as the spacious galley, which would be the envy of many a shoreside cook. The exquisite staterooms (right), equally impressive, feature amidship queen-size berths.

HULL NUMBER ONE OF THE 56 MS, Graham and Felton's *Nord Sail One*, was commissioned in Southern California, and soon after its official launch, I ventured to Dana Point to join the P.A.E. team as it conducted its initial round of sea trials. First impressions are always lasting, and mine was one of mild surprise.

Before laying eyes on her, I'd seen photos and drawings of the boat, but in person she was a much more substantial yacht than I'd imagined—and I'd imagined a substantial one—with, from bow to stern, a vast foredeck with a slightly raised coachroof to address interior volume in the accommodations below; a Gunboat-style forward cockpit; an ample, enclosed pilothouse embedded in a striking superstructure; and a useful, cozy aft deck/cockpit that opens into a prominent, beam-width swim platform.

And then, of course, there's the double-

spreader, keel-stepped rig featuring a Forespar Leisurefurl in-boom mainsail-furling unit, which, by necessity, is situated above the pilothouse and well off the deck. Frankly, there's a whole lot going on here, but in practice the various, somewhat opposing parts actually blend together pretty well, in no small part thanks to the sweeping rubrail that acts as a visual sheer line and the corresponding high bulwarks that encapsulate the side decks. It's a true hybrid vessel, one that writer Ralph Naranjo has called a "trawlersailer," a term that rings true to me.

The gear, from stem to stern, is top-shelf and includes a Lugger L1066T fuel-injected, 165-horsepower turbodiesel engine; a Northern Lights 12-kilowatt generator; a Lewmar Commander 400 hydraulic power package that operates winches, the anchor windlass, furling systems, and related functions; a full suite of Lifeline A.G.M. batteries; a Cruisair air-conditioning system; a Reckmann headsail furler; a TCI Side-Power bow thruster and a separate stern thruster; and on and on.

Construction is a straightforward and solid fiberglass laminate in the main hull; there's limited use of end-grain balsa and Klegecell foam core in the deck and pilothouse, though all high-load areas are solid glass. The hull employs a cutaway forefoot at the entry that slopes into a long, straight run aft, with an aperture between the prop and the skeg-hung rudder.

The Danish-built 36-inch, four-bladed Hundested controllable-pitch propeller could be the subject of its own dedicated article. At a cost of around $75 grand, the price of the unit exceeds that of the auxiliary engine. In full sailing mode, it can be fully feathered to drastically reduce drag. Under power alone or a combination of sail and power, the pitch can be manually operated for optimal efficiency, in effect allowing the helmsman to regulate speed, fuel consumption, and rpm directly via the propeller pitch.

The focal point of the 56 MS's teak interior layout is the central wheelhouse, with its commanding, 360-degree view, adjacent wraparound settee, and 40-inch flat-screen television, which disappears into a cabinet to port via a nifty remote control. The main bridge is graced with a complete set of Icom radios and numerous chart plotters, GPS receivers, radar, and wind instruments from such industry leaders as B&G, Furuno, and JRC. Redundancy is the ongoing theme. *Nord Sail One* has the second, aforementioned steering station and cockpit forward, but this is an option that can be forsaken to open up the living quarters below.

Aft of the pilothouse, a huge compartment under the rear cockpit is accessed via a four-step ladder and houses the battery banks, steering quadrant, generator, fuel and water manifolds, a huge freezer, and the stern-thruster box, and it's also an immense storage area. Forward of the inside steering station, down another set of stairs, a mid-level deck is home to the ample engine room, the L-shaped galley, a breakfast nook, another freezer, the washer/dryer, and so on. The staterooms at opposite ends of the vessel are of roughly equal size, and each includes an amidships queen-size berth and connecting heads with separate shower stalls. The woodwork, joinery, and fittings throughout the boat are exquisite.

NORDHAVN 56 MS

LOA	57' 5"	(17.50 m.)
LWL	52' 6"	(16.00 m.)
Beam	16' 7"	(5.05 m.)
Draft	7' 0"	(2.13 m.)
Sail Area	1,217 sq. ft.	(113.1 sq. m.)
Ballast	17,500 lb.	(7,938 kg.)
Displacement	70,410 lb.	(31,937 kg.)
Ballast/D	24.9	
D/L	217	
SA/D	11.4	
Water	250 gal.	(946 l.)
Fuel	800 gal.	(3,028 l.)
Holding	75 gal.	(284 l.)
Engine	Lugger L1066T diesel	
Range Under Power	3,000+ N.M.	
Designer	Jeff Leishman	
Price	$1,870,000	

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IRONICALLY, IT WAS DURING THE circumnavigation on his company's 40-foot powerboat that Jim Leishman came to realize how appealing a motorsailing version of a Nordhavn might be. "Going around the world, on so much of that trip you just have beautiful winds," he said, while noting that a startling fraction of the overall fuel consumption on the voyage was devoted to providing juice for the offshore stabilizers.

"On a passagemaking powerboat, you can't imagine how hard the active-fin stabilizers are working to keep the boat flat in the water," he said. "A sailboat or motorsailer, when the winds are right and the sails are set just right, doesn't need that stabilizing gear. Plus, the sails give the boat a lot of drive. And with that Hundested propeller, you can just dial in the exact efficiency you want for any given rpm.

"It's kind of like the ultimate cruising boat," he concluded. "You'll have all the benefits of an existing Nordhavn, and then be able to capitalize on the qualities of a cruising sailboat. It's like the best of both worlds."

Obviously, it's not an idle claim, and I was eager to see how the theory translated to reality. First, we put the boat through the paces under sail, in breezes ranging from 5 to 12 knots. Mind you, only in the breeziest conditions will the 56 MS be driven under sail power alone. Sailing closehauled in about 7 knots, the boat slid at over 5 knots, and when the breeze rose into the low double-digits, she registered over 6 knots on the speedo.

It should be noted that *Nord Sail One* is equipped with a 100-percent yankee-style jib and that many subsequent owners are opting for a 130-percent genoa, which would notably enhance performance. Nordhavn representatives claim to have registered 8.5 knots under sail alone on a previous sail trial. Bearing off to a beam and then a broad reach with the cruising spinnaker, the boat managed a very respectable 4 to 5 knots in 7 to 8 knots of wind. The hydraulic steering provided little feedback while driving, but this is a boat that'll be steered by autopilot the majority of the time. Given the boat's displacement and overall countenance, my overall impression was quite favorable.

Under power, a Nordhavn hand demonstrated the Hundested prop. At face value, it's exceptionally easy to use: There's an on/off button, another set of up/down buttons, and a pitch-indication gauge. In concert with the engine's exhaust-gas temperature gauge and fuel-flow monitor, one can monitor engine loads on yet another gauge and manually adjust the pitch. At 1,700 rpm, the 56 made 8.7 knots under power at an 83-percent load.

As we returned to the slip, John Graham took the remote control and, from a spot on the foredeck, with the able assistance of the bow and stern thrusters, executed an absolutely picture-perfect docking maneuver. He looked like a happy man.

"I'd highly recommend a Nordhavn to anybody," he said. "Great boats, great people, and great service."

And about that circumnavigation?

"It's going to take a while," he laughed. "The last thing we're going to do is hurry."

Herb McCormick is *Cruising World*'s senior editor.