

Sea Sense - 1984 Pearson 385

When I first saw her in March of 1998, it was love at first sight. Without a sound, she called to me. I imagined spending the rest of my life with her. But, this couldn't be happening! I wasn't experienced enough to say, "this is the one!" I tried to deny my attraction and I suppressed my feelings. Little did I know that almost four years later I'd be sharing my life with her.

I am, of course, talking about the first time I saw "*Sea Sense*", my 1984 Pearson 385. At the time, she belonged to Sea Sense Inc. – the women's sailing and powerboating school. My friend and I were taking a 7-day, live-aboard, coastal cruising under sail course out of St. Petersburg, Florida. I had a lot of book knowledge, but not much hands-on experience. So, I told myself I couldn't take this attraction seriously.

After the course, I was restless. There was something about being on the water that I couldn't resist. This was quite surprising since I got seasick just being on the dock! But, I absolutely loved sailing and the rush from harnessing the wind. My love of sailing outweighed my discomfort from seasickness. Eventually, through trying different methods, I've learned how I can control it. Although, I can get seasick on offshore trips, but I've found that a lot of sailors do. And unfortunately, women are more susceptible to seasickness, period!

So, I listened to my heart, took a risk, and made a career change. I decided to leave the computer world of Lucent Technologies (in Illinois) and pursue a captain's license. I decided to move to Florida where there's lots of water and a year 'round season. In November of 1998, I settled in the Tampa Bay area.

As soon as I was settled, I contacted the Sea Sense school to see if they still needed assistant instructors. In January of 1999, I started assisting on courses aboard "*Sea Sense*". At first, I would coach students on the concepts taught by the captain/instructor. Finally, I worked up to teaching any section of the course. I found that I enjoy teaching and, from the student's feedback, I'm good at it. Assisting on the courses gave me a clearer vision of where I wanted my new career to go. But even for this, I need a license to be a full-fledged, paid instructor.

One of the requirements for obtaining a license is to document 360 days of experience on the water. Most of the captains I talked to had obtained a good amount of time from owning a boat. Owning my own boat wasn't something I'd considered - it was something I dreamed about. Then it occurred to me, this really was something within my grasp!

The more I sailed aboard "*Sea Sense*", the more I fell in love with her. I liked her simplicity, her roominess, and her storage. I'd done some of the maintenance on her and I found most projects were easily accessible. On a couple of occasions, I'd been caught out in bad conditions and I liked how she moved and handled. Even when down below in bad conditions, I felt secure and could move around safely. As I experienced other boats, I could compare them to her. And although that 56-foot Sun Deer is nice, I always came back to "*Sea Sense*" as the perfect boat for me (but, don't tell my friends that own the Sun Deer (-;)).

I also wanted a boat big enough to help me get my license. I have a 16-foot Hobie Cat, but if that were all I had sailed, then would someone automatically trust me with a 40-foot boat? I don't think so! So, I wanted to have a boat where my experience on the water would be solid.

Just as I was starting to look for a boat just like "*Sea Sense*", fate stepped in. The school decided to eliminate the expense of owning their own boat – "*Sea Sense*" was going up for sale! In January of 2002, I took ownership.

There haven't been many modifications to "*Sea Sense*", but I'll try to relate all of them. Starting below in the v-berth, a trapezoidal shelf has been added to store the deflated dinghy. The shelf is 37-inches along the forward edge (i.e., towards the bow), 59-inches along the aft edge and 25-inches deep. It rests on the outboard shelves and has a strip of wood under each outer edge to hold it in place. The strips of wood are attached to the underside of the dinghy shelf and slip just inside the raised edge of the outboard shelves.

Next, the folding door for the v-berth has been removed – too many doors. Opening the forward head door provides privacy for the v-berth. The shower in the forward head has been disconnected – it's more convenient to use the separate shower stall in the aft head.

In the salon/galley area, a small bookshelf is located high on the starboard side just outside the doorway to the v-berth. A Sea Frost refrigeration system has replaced the icebox. This system works off shore power or is engine-driven. The shore power unit is located under the aft berth. The engine-driven compressor is located on the port side of the engine.

In the passageway leading to the aft cabin (across from the chart table) a long, narrow piece of Plexiglas has been attached to the plastic bulkhead (above the counter and engine room door). Under this Plexiglas, are various quick references. I have two drawings of the layout for the boat, one indicates where everything is stored with the emergency equipment highlighted in red. The other drawing indicates every thru-hull on the boat. I also have a small card with emergency instructions for using the VHF and local tide charts. And for amusement, I have a small Far Side cartoon with a Viking captain standing on a beach with his arm around one of his men. In the background, is the Viking ship anchored, but aground on the beach. The captain and the man are facing the rest of the crew, and the caption reads, "Everyone can just put down their loot and plunder, and Sven here – yes, old Sven, who was in charge of reading the tide chart – has something to say to us all."

Finally, in the aft head, the shower curtain has been replaced with a household shower curtain and rod. The rod consists of a tension rod extending the entire width of the stall and sitting on small, rectangular teak blocks. The blocks have shallow, semi-circular notches for each end of the rod, and the blocks are epoxied to the stall wall. The curtain is clear with a pattern (like small bubble wrap) to let in light, but provide privacy. And, the bladder-type holding tanks have been replaced with a 30-gallon rigid tank stuffed into an area under the companionway ladder and batteries (but not sitting down in the bilge).

On deck, there are only a couple of changes. "*Sea Sense*" has been sailed with a roller furling jib, and I don't plan to put the genoa back on. A bimini covers the cockpit, and the main sheets

are in a Crosby set-up. A remote microphone has been added next to the engine instruments (very convenient and has good speaker quality). A suede cover has been added to the steering wheel (great for reducing hand fatigue).

My plans are to take a couple of years to make some modifications to “*Sea Sense*” and then, do some long-term cruising. I’d like to modify the bimini into a dodger/bimini set-up. My surveyor had some good ideas for me. The dodger would be part of the bimini, but could be separated via a zipper at the back edge of the dodger. The back supports of the bimini would be stand-alone. What I want to achieve is a stand-alone dodger that is as high as the bimini for better visibility. The dodger would, of course, have a zippered, roll-up window in the front for ventilation in hot weather. And, the bimini would provide shade in the hot weather. But in cooler weather (when you want some sun), the dodger could stand-alone to block the cold wind, but the bimini could be detached and rolled around the stand-alone back supports. This is still in the design stage, but I hope to talk to the canvas maker soon and make it a reality.

Then, for the following modifications, I’d appreciate any words of wisdom:

- running lines from the mast back into the cockpit,
- autopilot systems; both electronic and wind vane, and
- a Lazy Jack systems.

Purchasing “*Sea Sense*” has been a real dream come true for me. As a single woman, I didn’t think it was a possibility. And besides just having fun, she’s my stepping stone to another dream; my captain’s license.