

# Bristol 35.5C

*Ted Hood knows all there is to know about centerboard cruisers; he applied it well to this boat.*

Around Bristol, Rhode Island—made famous by Nathanael G. Herreshoff—they tell this story: In the beginning, Bristol Yachts made rather ordinary boats. Along the way to success, Bristol's boss, Clint Pearson, collected some of the most skilled workmen in the business. Somewhere in the 1970s, in order to support about 130 craftsmen, Bristol upgraded sharply and took aim at the big boat, high buck market. It made good sense.

And that's when the centerboard sloop called the Bristol 35.5C was born. She debuted in 1977 and disappeared with the rest of the line a few years ago.

The inestimable Ted Hood designed her. He probably knows more than anyone alive about centerboard cruising boats. He's done a lot of them.

"This one just turned out great," he said. "She's about as small as you can get and still have really big boat appearance and performance. The interior just worked out very well." Hood owned one himself.

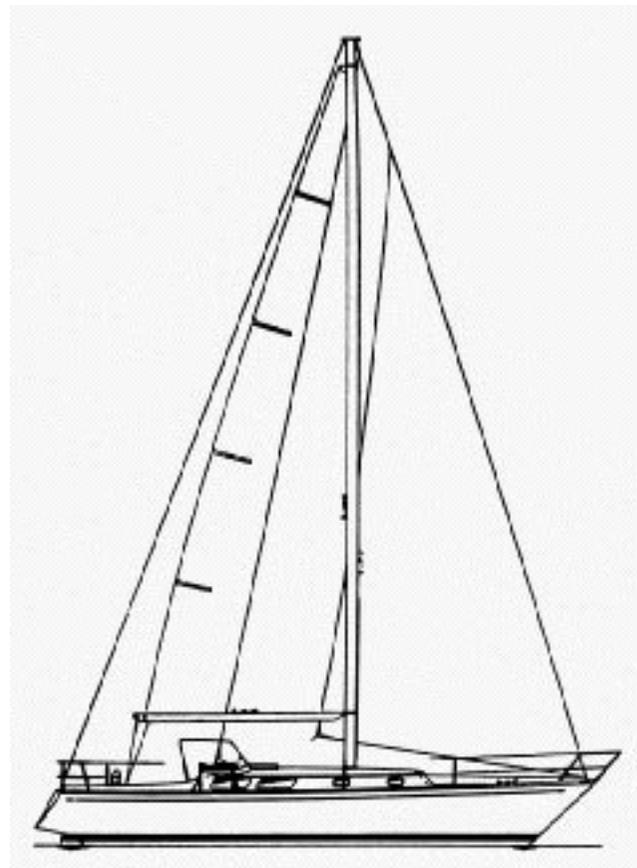
"She goes right along, doesn't she?" he said.

The Bristol 35.5C, which also came in a full-keel version (without the "C"), is an extraordinarily orthodox boat. There simply are no extremes in design, construction or performance, unless it is in her ability to flaunt her stern downwind and burn a lot of boats when beating in light to moderate air.

She's what is called medium displacement. Look at her dimensions. Nothing jumps out, except perhaps for slightly less beam than is seen in 35-footers of that era and certainly far less than is seen in more recent designs.

## The Interior

Despite the 10' 10" beam, the interior reflects Ted Hood's attention to comfortable detail. There simply are no tight spots, no clumsy corners and no head or hip knockers.



## Specifications

LOA .....	35' 6"
LWL .....	27' 6"
Beam .....	10' 10"
Draft .....	3' 9"/9'6" (board up/down)
Displacement .....	15,000 lbs.
Ballast .....	7,000 lbs.
Sail area .....	589 sq. ft.

You can walk into the head, turn around and even take a shower standing erect, if you're no more than 6' 2" in height.

The forward berths are more than adequate. Especially comfortable for one (but tight for two) are the pull-out extension berths in the main cabin. The big quarter berth is for that nose tackle in your racing crew. Luckily, only a few boats were built with pilot berths, because not having them means that the storage space is that much greater. With pilot berths, the boat theoretically sleeps no less than nine, but you'd feel like a 49er on a crowded clipper ship headed for the California Gold Rush.

The galley is a joy, with more counter space than many larger boats. Unobstructed, durable flat surfaces are always at a premium when preparing meals

### Owners' Comments

“Three Bermuda races, three prizes, once second overall. Good sea boat. Broke a centerboard after four years while racing upwind in very heavy going. Builder has treated me well. I’d choose the same type of boat if I were starting over again.”  
—1978 model in Westwood, MA

“Could use more interior lights in better places. Next to impossible to change oil filter without major spillage into bilge. She’s fast and rugged.”  
—1982 model in Shelton, CT

“Only good V-berth I’ve ever seen. Completely satisfied, except that you can’t even see much less get to shaft stuffing box. Engine access worries me, too.”  
—1980 model in Norfolk, VA

“Good looking, fast and interior is very livable.”  
—1979 model in McAllen, TX

“Everywhere you can put a foot is solid as a rock. Passing sailors comment on her good looks.”  
—1981 model in Long Island City, NY

or washing dishes. The truly huge ice chest obviously has superior insulation. Even with the engine running the ice lasts well.

The spacious cabin interior is enhanced by a well-engineered fold-down table, which, unlike many, can be rigged in five seconds.

If one were to be picky, the lack of a wet locker aft in a boat of this size might be noted.

Engine access is, at best, mediocre. It’s in a narrow compartment, with access in the front only by removing some drawers and the heavy step panel and on the port side through a panel in the quarterberth.

All joinery, laminates and solid wood, reflect the individual skills of Bristol’s work force. The main and forward cabins are wood-sheathed. The sole is teak with a handsome ash inlay, all hand-layed, screwed, glued and bunged.

Many Bristol 35.5s were customized to some degree. Interior wood, for instance, could be mahogany, cherry or teak, with the latter two carrying a considerable premium. Double sinks in the galley were another fairly expensive option.

However, most equipment is standard. Bristol used topflight components, like Racor filters, Brunzeel bulkheads, Nicro vents, Schaefer hardware, Almag 35 ports, Bomar hatches, Edson steering and Lewmar winches.

The boat’s deck is a first-rate work platform and,

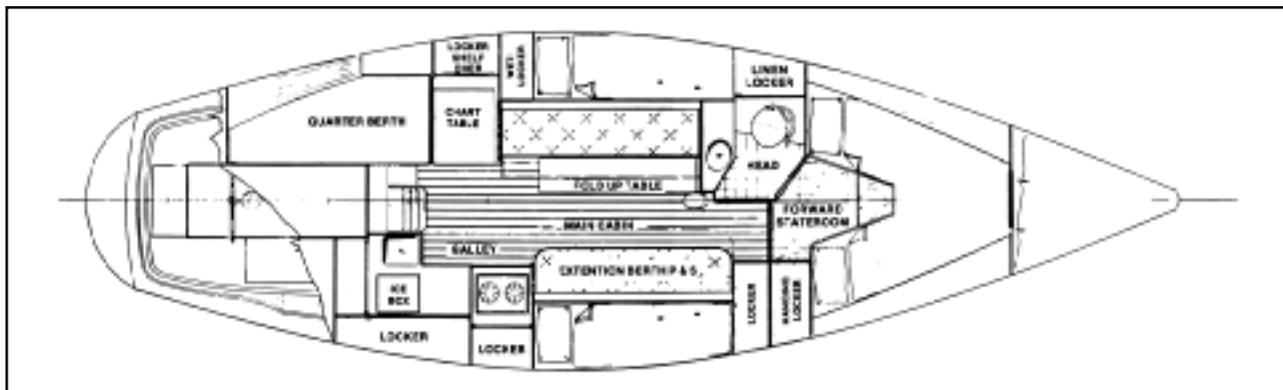
for comfort, the cockpit is the equal of any 35-footer. However, because the seats run the full length of the cockpit, one must climb up and over to reach the steering station behind the big wheel. It’s annoying. You can’t even slide aft.

### Construction

The Bristol 35.5s are solid fiberglass. The hull is built in halves and joined down the middle, which makes possible Bristol’s fine hull-to-deck joint. The hull is flanged inward and the deck is bolted on top of the flange with a teak toerail also through-bolted. It makes for both a watertight joint and a very rigid structural beam at the rail.

Centerboards frequently are a source of major headaches. However, the Bristol 35.5C’s board, which does not protrude into the cabin sole, must be well designed and executed.

The board is controlled by a low-g geared horizontal winch on the coachroof. A stainless steel wire runs forward to a stainless vertical pipe at the corner of the chart table, down and across to the centerline under the floorboards. It makes three turns. The cable is entirely enclosed. If it were to cause trouble, it would be difficult to fix. However, only two of the *Practical Sailor* readers who own Bristol 35.5Cs report problems. Only a few boats were built before Bristol made modifications to the centerboard.



## Sailing Characteristics

Make no mistake: The Bristol 35.5C is tender, as are most centerboarders. In return you get a very lively boat that is quick in any air, like many more modern fin keelers except that with her moderate keel and centerboard, the Bristol 35.5 doesn't require slavish attention to the helm.

The centerboard version has an IOR rating of 25.38, which means she should move out on a C & C 35, an Olson 38, a Hughes 38, a Pearson 35, a Tartan 37, a Morgan 38 and a J/34. That's pretty good company for a design of this vintage.

The IMS numbers show the centerboard version to be faster than the keel version. The heavier centerboarder (with 500 pounds more ballast) gives the keel model 6.8 seconds a mile in light air and 9 seconds a mile in 20 knots.

Despite being a centerboarder, the Bristol 35.5C, because of her ballast, has a very respectable calculated static stability of 115°.

The boat's phenomenal light-air performance is delineated in the Performance Package supplied by the United States Yacht Racing Union. In a true wind of 6 knots, close-hauled (44.5 degrees), the Bristol 35.5C, with a 120% jib, should do 3.9 knots. The velocity made good will be 2.8 knots. She'd be heeled only 5°. Beam reaching in the same conditions, the boat should do 5.4 knots.

In 20 knots true, the boat would do 6.1 knots, but would be heeling 31°. Broad reaching in 20 knots, she'd turn up slightly more than eight knots.

We've spent many happy hours sailing out of

Newport, Rhode Island, aboard a 35.5C owned by Dwight Webb, who never has been known to overuse the engine. He's a sailorman. Beautifully maintained (with all exterior teak varnished) and with excellent sails, including Hood furling on the headstay and a Doyle Stackpack on the main, Webb's boat always moves well in any air.

In the past, Webb has owned quite a few boats: a Meridian, Triton, Morgan 30, Pearson 33, Pearson 35, Bristol 39, C & C 33, Sea Sprite 34, C & C 34 and a C & C 38.

He's passed on 10 years with the Bristol 35.5C, which he deems simply, "Best boat I've ever owned."

## Conclusion

If a Bristol 35.5C takes your fancy, try for one with either a Westerbeke diesel or the equally satisfactory three-cylinder, 24-hp diesel made for a time by Universal. Avoid the Yanmar 2QM 20H, a two-cylinder diesel that struggles unsuccessfully to get up to hull speed.

Beware of a 1978 model without the modified centerboard.

Also, don't pay extra for a boat with a half dozen headsails. The Bristol 35.5C achieves her polar diagram optimums with a single 120% or 130% jib, which ideally will be on furling gear. Jibs bigger than that simply overpower the boat.

You'll pay heavily for a newer one, and because so few were built, the older used ones also are somewhat dear. 1981 is about where the ideal prices seem to occur. Those built later than 1981 seem to carry premium prices. • PS

