

Alberg 35

This classic dates from the early days of fiberglass boatbuilding. Though aged, she has her good points.

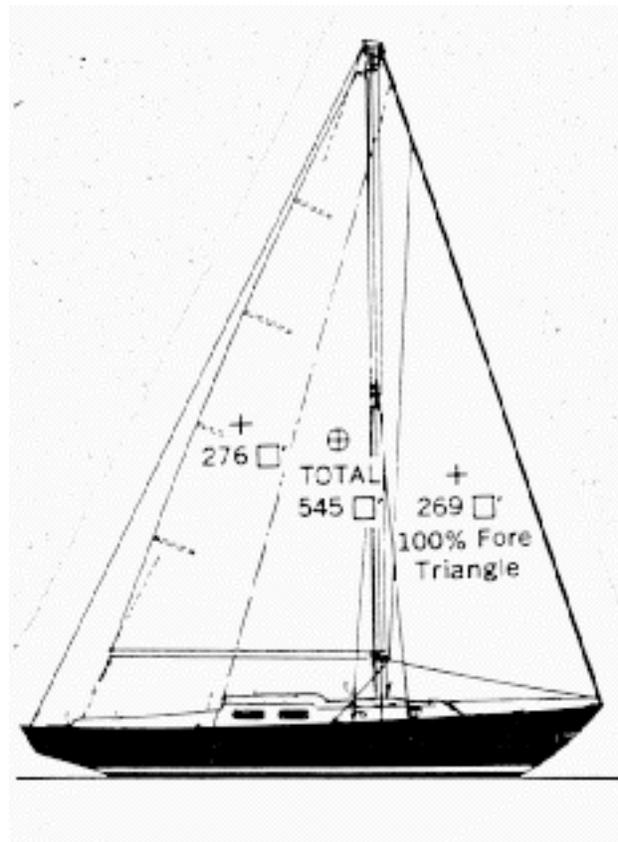
The year 1961 may not seem so long ago to those of us over 40, but believe it or not, it was pretty close to the dawn of big-time fiberglass sailboat building. Only a year before that, Hinckley stopped building production wooden sailboats. Two years earlier, in 1959, Pearson built the first Triton, the boat that was the prototype of the inexpensive small family fiberglass cruising sailboat. The Triton's big selling point was a low-maintenance hull that meant that Mom and Pop and the kids didn't have to spend all spring in the boatyard getting the boat ready for the summer.

These days, when getting the family sailboat ready in the spring may mean little more than a weekend spent washing and waxing the topsides, plus a quick coat of paint on the bottom, it's hard to remember that owning a boat some thirty years ago usually meant work—and a lot of it—or money, and a lot of that, too.

In 1961, Pearson added the 34' 9" Alberg 35 to its expanding sailboat line. The Alberg 35 was a fixture in the Pearson line until 1967. In 1968, the boat was replaced by the Shaw-designed Pearson 35, a slightly larger, more modern boat in keeping with the increasing demands of the market. During six years of production, over 250 Alberg 35s were built.

It's very tempting to call every good-looking, successful boat from the 1960s a classic. Well, the Alberg 35 is good-looking and was successful; we think it deserves to be called a classic. The boat has a handsome sheer, flattish for her day but old-fashioned and springy compared to current boats. She has a low, rounded cabin trunk with slightly raised doghouse, and just about perfectly balanced long overhangs both forward and aft.

Compared to more modern 35-footers, the Alberg 35 is narrow, short on the waterline and cramped.



Specifications

LOA	34' 9"
LWL	24' 0"
Beam	9' 8"
Draft	5' 2"
Displacement.....	12,600 lbs.
Ballast	5,300 lbs.
Sail area	545/583 (sloop/yawl)

The typical 35' cruiser/racer of the '90s is 4' longer on the waterline and more than a foot wider.

Sailing Performance

The term cruiser/racer was just entering the jargon in 1961. The Pearson sales brochure from 1967 calls the Alberg 35 a "proven ocean racer, cruiser." Note the term "ocean." The Alberg 35 was the smallest boat in the Pearson line to which that word was attached, unlike many builders who push anything with lifelines and a self-bailing cockpit as a "blue-water cruiser."

While the Alberg 35 had moderate success as a racer, the boat was—and still is—a cruising boat.

By current standards, the Alberg 35 is a slow boat for her length overall, with a typical PHRF rating of

Owners' Comments

"New, lighter hulls are clearly faster, but this is an excellent sea boat. Delamination has required considerable re-coring of deck. Gelcoat was seriously pitted when I bought her. Be prepared, until the wind gets up to 15 knots, to see all newer designs leave you far behind."

—1962 model in ME

"Leaks at stanchions can rot balsa core. Solid fiberglass hull looks good, cabin trunk shows small craze lines at curves. Because of the age of this boat, which I've owned for over 20 years, I've replaced items subject to wear or failure such as sails, halyards, sheaves, spreaders, turnbuckles, engine, lights, pumps and electronics. The boat has performed well in the Atlantic and has been incredibly dependable."

—1962 model in MD

"The boat has poor initial stability due to narrow beam, good ultimate stability. Original joinery and trim are primitive, but solid. Glass work is simple, fair, solid. Forward cabin is roomier than needed. My water and fuel tanks failed, causing major surgery. Wooden rudder was rebuilt and sheathed in polypropylene. An Alberg 35 is a pretty, solid, inexpensive, able sailer. The deficiencies are manageable."

—1962 model in MA

"Did Honolulu to Tahiti nonstop in 23 days. Boat is very seakindly. I took this boat on an 8,000-mile cruise through the Pacific. It is an excellent vessel for cruising. I added a pilothouse and heavier

rigging, converted to diesel, added radar, an Aires steering vane and a galley freezer."

—1962 model in HI

"Spartan interior, inconvenient galley, cockpit too big for offshore. Berth size adequate, very plain interior, uncomfortable sitting, inconvenient table, no good navigation area. Good storage. Forefoot of keel easily damaged during dry storage. I bought this boat for beautiful lines, full keel, stability and price."

—1962 model in CT

"Reverse under power is a disaster—control is always in question. The boat is 25 years old and needs a lot of cosmetic work. It is solid, a good sailer, has handled our stupidities, and in general is a joy to own. It's not the fastest boat on the block. It's easy to sail, a little old-fashioned, but I'd recommend it without qualification."

—1963 model in MA

"New rig with bowsprit allows me to balance helm and walk away from the wheel for 30 minutes at a time. Deck gelcoat is in poor condition with small craze lines and very dull finish. Boat seems almost indestructible."

—1965 model in NJ

"Interiors nowadays are better designed, but in all other respects the Alberg 35 is an excellent compromise of essential qualities: speed, seaworthiness, looks, comfort, and cost."

—1967 model in IN

198. By way of comparison, her replacement, the Pearson 35, rates about 174, and the Ericson 35-2 about 150.

But Alberg 35s take to sea pretty well. The narrow, deep hull form makes for a very good range of positive stability—about 135°—and an easy motion in a seaway. Owners consider the boat slightly slower to slightly faster than other boats of similar size and type.

Unlike modern boats with wide beam and firm bilges, the narrow, slack Alberg 35 heels very quickly, despite a 42% ballast/displacement ratio. But narrow boats sail fairly efficiently at fairly steep heel angles. A modern boat such as the J/35 sails best upwind in 15 knots of true breeze at a 23° angle of heel, while a boat like the Alberg 35 will be sailing at close to a 30° angle in the same conditions.

With a rudder set well forward, it can take a lot of helm to keep the boat on course when reaching in a breeze. This isn't helped at all by the large, relatively low aspect ratio mainsail. At the same time, owners report that the boat tracks well, a quality missing in many newer boats.

The Alberg 35 was built both as a sloop and a yawl. Yawls were popular under the CCA (Cruising Club of America) Rule because mizzen and mizzen staysail area was lightly taxed. The yawl is not a bad rig for shorthanded cruising, since the mizzen can be used to help balance the boat, and is particularly useful in anchoring and weighing anchor under sail. From a performance and handling point of view on a boat this size, however, the yawl rig has few if any advantages. We would look for the sloop rig if we were shopping for an Alberg 35.

The mast is stepped on deck, over the doorway to the forward cabin. This requires substantial reinforcement of the bulkhead. Several owners in our survey report that the coring in the deck under the mast has crushed, allowing the top of the cabin to compress.

Both the sloop and yawl rigs have simple, fairly heavy aluminum masts. A varnished spruce roller-reefing main boom was standard. If we were buying an Alberg 35, we'd forget the roller reefing and set the boat up for slab reefing. In our experience, a roller-reefed mainsail is usually so baggy as to be useless for upwind sailing.

Several owners in our survey have added bowsprits to their boats, converting them to cutter rigs with yankee and staysail. This improves the boat's balance, as well as making sail combinations more flexible for cruising.

The cockpit is long and quite large, with plenty of room for daysailing hordes. Cockpit coamings are teak, and really look nice when varnished. The standard tiller takes up a lot of cockpit space, but most boats we've looked at have the optional pedestal wheel steering.

Big port and starboard cockpit lockers have poor locking arrangements, and drain straight to the bilge. Give a lot of thought to what will happen if the boat is pooped by a following sea, then go to work at improving hatch sealing and fastening.

Sail handling equipment on these boats is likely to be primitive. The old Merriman #5 genoa winches and #2 mainsheet and jib halyard winches date from the time when trimming and setting sails was expected to be a lot of work. We'd replace them all with modern, powerful self-tailing winches if anything other than daysailing is contemplated.

Likewise, there was originally no mainsheet traveler. On a narrow boat like this with the mainsheet led aft, there really isn't that much advantage to a traveler—it simply operates over too small a range of the boom's arc to offer much benefit.

If the mainsheet were re-led so that you could put a traveler on the bridgedeck, just in front of the steering pedestal, a traveler would be worthwhile. This, of course, would mean getting rid of the roller-reefing main, but in our opinion that's a good idea, anyway.

Wheel steering was an option, but you'll find it on a lot of Alberg 35s. We'd consider it a plus.

Engine

All Alberg 35s were powered by the ubiquitous Atomic 4 gasoline engine. If you're thinking about keeping an Alberg 35 for five or more years, the time has come to think about replacing the engine—preferably with a diesel.

Of course, a lot of owners have already retrofitted

their boats with diesels, but the installations will obviously vary dramatically in quality.

Fortunately, Universal Motors has a diesel engine that is literally a bolt-in replacement for the Atomic 4. It's the Mini 4, and it will fit the same engine beds, has the same shaft alignment and same length as the Atomic 4, is slightly lighter, and is only 1" higher. There is room to squeeze new diesel into the engine box under the companionway.

Like most boats with the rudder mounted well forward and the prop fitted in an aperture, the Alberg 35 backs down poorly. This is simply a fact of life, so you have to get used to it. Steering ahead, the boat handles fine. The Atomic 4 is perfectly adequate power, giving a cruising speed of about 6 knots in calm water.

Construction

A lot of Alberg 35s are used for offshore cruising. Plain, rugged construction is one reason why. The hull is a heavy, uncored layup, not particularly stiff or strong for its weight, but easy to repair and relatively foolproof.

Rudder construction is a holdover from the days of wooden boats. It consists of a wooden rudder blade bolted to a heavy bronze rod, formed to the shape of the aft edge of the prop aperture. The rudder of any Alberg 35 should be examined carefully, not because this type of construction is poor, but simply because the rudders are getting old. The rudders may have been damaged in groundings, or the stock bolts may be corroded.

One advantage of rudder construction is that it is very easy to change the rudder design. If we had an Alberg 35, we would get rid of the original barn-door rudder blade and replace it with a more modern design with a straight trailing edge and more area near the bottom of the rudder.

This *Constellation*-type profile became pretty much standard with the last long-keel CCA boats designed before the *Intrepid*-type skeg and rudder of the late 1960s. The bottom of the new rudder could be angled up slightly to reduce the chance of damage in groundings.

Two aspects of the boat's construction have caused some problems for owners. The ballast casting is a single chunk of lead which is dropped into the hollow fiberglass keel molding.

Along the bottom of the keel, some boats have a void between the lead casting and the fiberglass shell, making the shell vulnerable to damage in groundings or even when hauling and launching the boat.

A surveyor should carefully evaluate this area for voids by sounding with a mallet. Voids can be fairly easily filled by injecting epoxy resin into the cavity.

The other problem could be more difficult to

solve. Decks of early boats like the Alberg 35 were frequently built using edge-grain rather than end-grain balsa. Edge-grain lacks the stiffness or compression strength of a modern end-grain balsa sandwich. Flexing of decks cored this way can break the bond between the fiberglass skins and balsa core. If the deck feels mushy, it is probably at least partially delaminated.

Repair—assuming the core is dry—involves drilling an extensive network of holes through the deck skin and core, being careful to reach but not penetrate the inner skin. Epoxy resin is then injected in each hole until it runs out of adjacent holes. The deck should be braced upward from below and weighted down from above until the resin cures.

This method works well with small areas of delamination, but is a tedious job in larger areas. At best, you end up with a deck sandwich that is somewhat stronger than the original that failed.

Major refinishing of the deck will then be required. Extensive deck “softness” is cause for rejecting any boat, regardless of age.

You will find a variety of tankage arrangements in boats of different vintages. According to one owner, early boats have galvanized fuel and water tanks, which will eventually rust through. Another owner had a huge built-in fiberglass fuel tank forward, which developed a leak and was replaced by a monel tank in the same location. Design specifications for late boats in the production run call for an integral fiberglass water tank of 48 gallons capacity located in the bilge under the main cabin sole, plus a 23-gallon monel fuel tank under the cockpit sole.

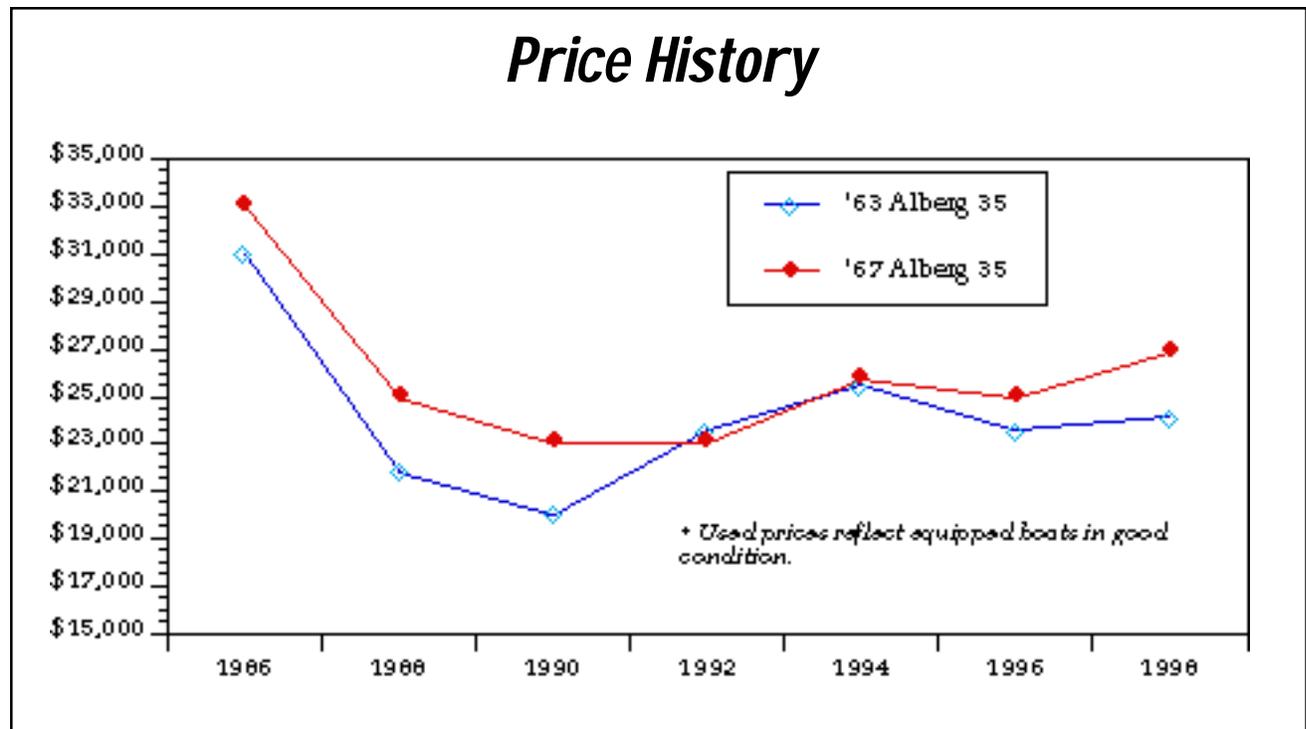
The advantage of the monel fuel tank is that it will not have to be replaced if a diesel engine is installed: simply flush it thoroughly with diesel fuel to remove any traces of gasoline, and you’re in business. Monel is absolutely the best material for either fuel or water tanks, but it is prohibitively expensive.

Like most sailboats this old, you may find extensive gelcoat crazing and fading on both the hull and deck. This is a cosmetic problem up to the point where crazing allows water to migrate into the laminate, at which time it can become a structural problem. If the gelcoat has begun to buckle and peel, it’s best to avoid the boat unless you’re looking for a boat at a rock-bottom price for offshore sailing. Cosmetic repair of superficial crazing is labor-intensive, involving sanding, multiple coats of high-build epoxy primer, and complete refinishing, preferably with polyurethane. To have this done professionally would be prohibitively expensive.

The deck gear, standing rigging, and spars on these boats are getting old. Many of the boats have high mileage, since a large percentage are used for long-distance offshore cruising. Be prepared to do relatively simple jobs like removing and rebedding stanchions and deck fittings, installing backing plates, and replacing a lot of rigging. Sails more than five years old—other than storm sails that have seen little or no use—are candidates for replacement.

Interior

Because the Alberg 35 is narrow, it will seem cramped to those used to the condo-like interiors of modern 35-footers. The arrangement, though, is pretty good.



Two interiors were built: one is the “traditional interior #1” of practically every boat built in the last 50 years, the other is “dinette arrangement #1,” which became popular when people started looking for more workable galleys about 20 years ago.

Both boats have large forward cabins, with V-berths, a hanging locker, a bureau and drawers under the berths. This is one reason the boat appeals to a lot of minimum-budget livaboards. The forward cabin can be a real owners’ stateroom, even though it lacks a double berth. If you were handy, you could rip out the V-berths and build a good-sized diagonal double along either side of the cabin, building in additional storage opposite. The cabin is large enough that this wouldn’t totally destroy standing space.

There are two bronze-framed opening ports and a hatch for ventilation in the forward cabin.

The head is aft of the forward cabin, and runs the full width of the boat—a good arrangement on a boat this narrow. With the doors to the main cabin and forward cabin shut, this gives a head compartment with a lot of elbow room. For daysailing, you only need to shut the door to the main cabin to get privacy—no worse than shutting the head door on any boat.

Ventilation is provided in the head via two opening ports plus a pair of cowl vents in Dorade boxes.

The Alberg 35 was one of the first boats of this size to be built with standard hot and cold pressure water, plus a shower. It was a big selling point back then; now it is taken for granted on a 35’ boat.

The main cabin will have either the conventional arrangement of settee berths on each side with a fold-down table between, or the galley along one side with a U-shaped dinette opposite.

The dinette arrangement is a decidedly mixed blessing. By lowering the dining table, the dinette converts to a double berth. The original stove well in the dinette arrangement was big enough for a three-burner gimballed stove with oven, while the conventional aft galley has the rinky-dink two-burner alcohol stove that was standard equipment on most boats for many years.

With the dinette, there are two quarterberths aft which extend under the cockpit, and they are reasonable sea berths. In the conventional arrangement you would use the main cabin settees as sea berths, which is also fine.

Quarterberths can be stuffy in tropical climates, and they tend to end up as inefficient catch-all spaces for anything that is too big or awkward to stow in lockers or drawers.

But the aft galley is no prize. Galley counters are quite low due to the boat’s low freeboard. There is a small single sink, plus the aforementioned instrument of torture in place of a stove, and an icebox whose top must perform double duty as galley work

space and a rudimentary chart table. With the dinette arrangement, the dining table will probably double as the nav station, although we’d be tempted to sacrifice one of the quarterberths to build in storage space plus a usable stand-up nav station.

It’s no wonder that at least one owner reports tearing out the entire aft galley and starting from scratch.

Ventilation in the main cabin is non-existent, except for the main companionway hatch. Because of the step in cabin profile, fitting a ventilation hatch over this cabin is tricky, but it can be done.

Interior decor is very “period,” and the early 1960s were perhaps the nadir of interior design in sailboats. “Low maintenance” fever was at its peak, and wood-grain plastic laminate ran rampant.

Fortunately, this is nothing that a little painting can’t cure, or if you’re really handy, you can laminate nice, clean, solid-color Formica over the old stuff on the counters and bulkheads, then varnish the wood trim. The improvement in interior appearance and apparent space would be amazing.

Conclusions

We’ve presented a pretty intimidating list of drawbacks to the Alberg 35. Now let’s look at the positive side. This is a sturdy, ruggedly-built boat whose design and construction are suited for serious off-shore sailing, with the caveat that you go through the boat from one end to the other, replacing every piece of gear that’s tired, reinforcing and repairing as necessary.

There are not too many boats that you can buy for this kind of money and then head off to Tahiti in reasonable security.

It’s a tinkerer’s dream. You may not be ready to build a boat from scratch, but you can do modifications on the Alberg 35 to your heart’s content without going broke or destroying your investment.

The boat is really good-looking, especially compared to a lot of modern high-sided tubs. If you’re a fanatic, you can clean up, paint and refinish the boat to look almost as good as a Hinckley Pilot—almost.

Some Alberg 35s have been meticulously maintained, and are in beautiful condition. Some of them have been beat to pieces by other owners going cruising on the cheap. We’d look for a nice one, or one that had only cosmetic problems. The trick is figuring out which problems are only cosmetic.

A livaboard couple can be comfortable on this boat, having much more elbow room than on a smaller modern “live aboard” cruiser for which you’d pay more money.

You want a decent-sized boat for serious cruising, while spending about the same money as you would for a new 27-footer? Consider the Alberg 35. Buy it, and be off for warmer places.

• **PS**