The Pearson 424 is a sound trade wind boat

This solid world cruiser can be acquired for less than $100,000

Between 1978 and 1983, 225 Pearson 424s were built at the Pearson yard in Bristol, R.I. The Bill Shaw design evolved from the center-cockpit 419 built for the Caribbean charter trade. Pearson then redesigned the deck mold for an aft-cockpit version of the 419, and thus was born the 424 (42'4" LOA). Approximately 60 percent were ketch-rigged, 30 percent were sloops, and the remainder cutters.

Owners of about 80 of these boats subscribe to *The Pearson 424 Newsletter*, which has over the years reported on several 424 circumnavigations and numerous efficient ocean passages. Safety-at-Sea Seminar lecturer Hal Sutphen and wife Helen take Hull No. 27 (built in 1978), *Sea Duty*, to the Caribbean every winter and return to the Chesapeake each spring impressed by her passagemaking qualities during 1,000-mile-plus passages.

At this writing, 424 cutter *Serenella* (Hull No. 191) was bound for Turkey and Cyprus for the winter, singlehanded by Fred Motter of York, Penn. "The Pearson 424 has captured the admiration of most of the people at this marina," Fred wrote from the Tiber River in Italy. "Whether sailing or at the dock, I constantly receive compliments, and there are over 400 boats tied up here." Another 424 is in Central America, and yet another is island-hopping in the West Indies. And one 424 owner is a cruising class regular on the ocean racing circuit. Back when the design was new, high finishes on the racing circuit were not uncommon.

Noon-to-noon: According to Sutphen, the 424 tracks well and reels off the miles in relative comfort. *Sea Duty*'s longest 24-hour runs are in the neighborhood of 160 to 170 miles with full cruising load, which is not surprising. The 424's displacement/length ratio (D/L) of 246 indicates that the design offers sufficient displacement (21,000 pounds) to carry the gear and provisions necessary for long-distance cruising with minimal wave-making resistance. In comparison, a Shannon 43 (28,000 pounds) has a D/L of 255, a Valiant 40 (22,500) has a D/L of 256, and a J/44 (20,600 pounds) has a D/L of 160. Fine passagemakers all. The 424's displacement, loaded for extended cruising, will be more in the neighborhood of 24,000 pounds.

Designer Shaw wrote some 20 years ago: "The boat's sailing performance has been one of her charms since the day the first hull was launched . . . She has made fast passages between the mainland and Bermuda and cruised comfortably to the Galapagos. She has sailed for weeks on end, conducting whale research off the Newfoundland and Labrador coasts. While far horizons might not fit your itinerary, making fast passages with a minimum crew, having the ability to outrun threatening storms, and having on-deck/belowdecks comfort over extended periods are an important function of cruising boat design. It is nice to know that the 424 has proved herself to have these capabilities."

Pearson 424

LOA	42'4"
LWL	33'8"
Beam	13'0"
Draft	5'3"
Displ.	21,000 lbs.
Ballast	7,634 lbs.
SA (ketch)	719 sq.ft.
D/L	246
SA/D	15.2



The wide decks and low coachroof of the 424 are a delight while passagemaking, but the full-width dodger on some boats renders cockpit exit and entry difficult.

Of course, this is the designer talking, and what he says is probably all true, but what he doesn't say is that the short mast, especially on the ketch, renders the 424 ineffective in light air and hard on the wind. A dealer of our acquaintance told us that during the early '80s it was very easy for Moody, Westerly, and Brewer 44 dealers to sell against the 424 because of these limitations. Regarding comfort, Ted Brewer's comfort ratio–

an intricate formula involving beam, displacement, LWL and LOA–for the 424 is 29.2. Brewer says that the comfort ratio for "a modern oceangoing auxiliary will be somewhere in the 30s, although some light-displacement yachts will range below this." By comparison, the Valiant 40 has a comfort ratio of 34.0 and the J/44, a ratio of 24.3. However, as a day-in/day-out voyaging boat, the 424, with her long, modified fin-keel and skeg rudder, has much to offer.

Self-steering: "Upwind, she'll sail herself," Hal told us, "and off the wind she needs a little more attention, but nothing you have to struggle with. When broad-reaching, the boat handles very well, is very stable, and is most comfortable." Because of this ease of handling, the 424 responds well to an autopilot, "but we did manage to wear out a set of gears on an Autohelm 7000," Hal added. The drive unit of *Sea Duty*'s autopilot is mounted belowdecks with a tiller arm that connects to the rudder shaft, so that the autopilot is independent of the steering system. It is interfaced with the boat's wind indicator, and uses wind-angle data from the masthead sensor so that the apparent wind is kept in the same direction. This arrangement has worked very well for the Sutphens during their offshore passages. And the 7000 seems ideal for the 424 in full cruising mode.



About 10 percent of the 424s built were cutter-rigged with a club staysail. The shallow draft, modified fin-keel combined with the short rig reduce windward efficiency. The separation between the skeg-hung rudder and the prop tends to thwart maneuvering under power.

The Pearson 424 would certainly be a good candidate for a windvane. Fred Motter, whose *Serenella* is now wintering in the Med, says, "I have no problems singlehanding. I have Furuno radar, Neco autopilot, roller-furling main and jib and a club staysail." We wonder if he has a windvane, too.

Reefing: The 424 can carry a lot of sail in 20 knots of wind, at which point sail area reductions are in order. "She'll carry the working jib and full main up to twenty knots," says Hal, who lists the reefing sequence as follows: (1) first reef in the main, (2) partially roll in the jib, (3) roll in the jib all the way, and (4) replace jib with staysail and sail with staysail and main. "I seldom use the second reef–and *never* use the third," he adds. One reason for all this could be the relatively short mainmast, which on the ketch rises 48'9" above the designed waterline. However, the tradeoff for this is a voluminous 135% working jib that must be reduced, then furled entirely, as the wind rises.



The saloon is open, airy and appealing, while remaining functional and seamanlike. Storage space abounds above the dinette and settee.

The decks: Most attributes of the 424's decks are what you would want on a seagoing boat: low house that's easy to clamber over and that won't catch the brunt of a wave, wide side decks for easy fore-and-aft movement, clean and uncluttered decks and cabin-top, double lifelines, and bulwarks to keep the seas from washing across the decks in a moderate seaway. The Sutphens have added guard rails on either side of the mast for further security. "She takes spray, but that's about it," says Sutphen. Which is fortunate, for the main cabin companionway, forward of the cockpit and to starboard, has been know to develop leaks.

This companionway cries out for a modest pram hood to keep the area dry, but you seldom see one installed. "A pram hood could be effective," says Hal, "but that's right where I store my life raft." Additionally, a pram hood would be a bit of clutter on an otherwise clean deck. Hal trouble-shot the leaks for about a year before a combination of foam gasket and vinyl storm-door stripping solved the problem. Some 424 owners seldom use their cockpit companionway, finding the saloon entrance far more convenient, especially when laying in stores.

A common complaint: The deck scuppers are not strategically positioned, and water collects along certain sections of the bulwarks. This is not unusual, and the effectiveness of the scuppers changes as the boat's trim is altered.

Cockpit: The 424's cockpit is huge. "Four adults could be lying prone in it and you'd still have room for four large dogs in the well," says Jane Cassell who, with her husband Barry, edits *The Pearson 424 Newsletter* and lives aboard Hull No. 23 *Far Horizon*. This is both good and bad. For in-harbor socializing, a large cockpit such as this is unparalleled, and for the entire crew it offers a front-row seat at a trade-wind frolic. But, as Hal Sutphen warns, "While I've never had a problem with it, I *never* want to see it full of water."

"I am fully in love with my Pearson," says Fred



The second companionway that leads directly to the saloon is popular as it increases light and ventilation below.



Galleys were configured in both U- and L-shapes. For offshore sailing, the U-shape offers safer working conditions.

Motter. "However, there is one thing that worries me: the size of the cockpit and the limited drainage. I wonder if anyone else has dealt with these problems?" According to Jane Cassell, some 424 owners have displaced cockpit-well volume with coolers, propane tanks and storage bins. The 18" space between the mizzen and the pedestal is ideal for a pair of 20-gallon propane tanks in a molded storage box.

The pair of 1½" scuppers at the forward corners of the well are adequate, but many 424 owners have supplemented these with 2" and 3" scuppers in the after corners–just in case. "I've never heard of a 424 sinking because its cockpit filled," Jane reassured us. "But you have to keep you hatch boards in when you're in a seaway." Good advice no matter what the size of the cockpit. The 80-gallon fuel tank is beneath the cockpit sole.

As for cockpit protection, Sutphen says that his dodger and the bimini that fits under the mizzen boom serve nobly in that role. "Depending upon how your dodger and bimini are set up, it can be tough to exit and enter the cockpit," Jane offers, which says to us that jacklines and safety harnesses must be set up carefully on the 424.

Ground tackle and gear: About a foot aft of the stem head is a shallow, overboard-draining anchor locker, which is handy but presents a problem when trying to install a windlass. "It's tricky, but not impossible; there's not a lot of space," says Jane Cassell, whose boat has a Maxwell 1200 squeezed between the locker and the rollers, on which are mounted a 41-lb.Max and a 44-lb. Bruce. She says that some 424 owners mount the windlass *in* the locker, while others build a platform aft of the bowsprit, if there is one, or aft of the rollers.

Fred Motter has a 35-lb. CQR on a chain/rope rode, which is stowed in the deck locker, and a 45-lb. CQR on an all-chain rode that leads to a Simpson Lawrence Anchorman Power 1000. The windlass is mounted to starboard of the anchor locker. Chain drops through a "chain-drop" hole in the deck into the lower chain locker, which is accessed by way of the foreward cabin. Fred overcame the drop problem by installing an aluminum slide that directs the chain to the center of the locker While the wildcat's purchase on the chain would be somewhat diminished by this arrangement, Fred says, "It works well so far, with a remote control from the cockpit."

Under sail: "With its short mast and shallow keel (5'3" draft), the boat doesn't sparkle upwind," Hal says. "You can't pinch her up because that'll create tremendous leeway, so you have to reach off to get her moving ahead." According to Hal, *Sea Duty* can be squeezed through 90°, but tacking angles are more realistically about 100° to 110°.

Hal says that he counts on 5½ knots to windward "with cruising load." Off the wind, the 424 does excel. "She's fine broad-reaching," Hal says. "I have a cruising chute, but rarely use it."

With its short rig, light air is not one of the 424's strengths. Its sail area/displacement ratio of 15.2 is subterranean compared to the J/44's 22.1, for instance, or the Freedom 42's 17.5. Hal Sutphen improved *Sea Duty*'s light-air performance by replacing his conventional prop with a three-bladed feathering PYI Max-Prop. "We haven't been able to transform her into a light-air boat," says Jane Cassell, "but a feathering prop and new sails would help."

Under power: The design is not handy under power because of the separation between the prop and the rudder. Adding a feathering prop seems to have made a big difference in maneuvering and control among Pearson 424 owners, however. A common power plant and drivetrain is the 54-h.p. Westerbeke 60 with D.D.W. RV-20V-Drive, 2:1 reduction gear, and 20 x 13LH three-blade propeller. Fuel capacity is 80 gallons.

Accommodation: Both dinette and settee arrangements were available, and each was spacious, airy, appealing and sensible–and able to boast 6'4" headroom. The most common arrangement below seems to be port and starboard settees with drop-leaf table amidships, L- or C-shaped galley to port, double "pilot" berth aft of the

galley, head aft of the starboard settee and nav-station aft of that. According to Jane Cassell, "Many owners have tweaked the nav-station." The original layout has a swingout stool that faces the 3' x 4' fore-and-aft chart table with counter-space and bins forward on the starboard side with circuit-breaker panel and gauges above. Hal Sutphen modified his by building a permanent aft-facing chair and a swing-out extension to the chart table. The Cassell's replaced the stool with a swing-out chair. Hal has modified *Sea Duty* "to gain access to all available storage space."

The dinette model has a second full head to port just forward of the dinette. Some settee models have a dressing seat to starboard just aft of the V-berths that can be converted to a toilet and a vanity with sink opposite to port. Some heads, like that on *Far Horizon*, have separate shower stalls which, Jane says, is really neat. One frustration with the drop-leaf table on the settee model: With both leaves extended, it's difficult to get by the table to go forward.

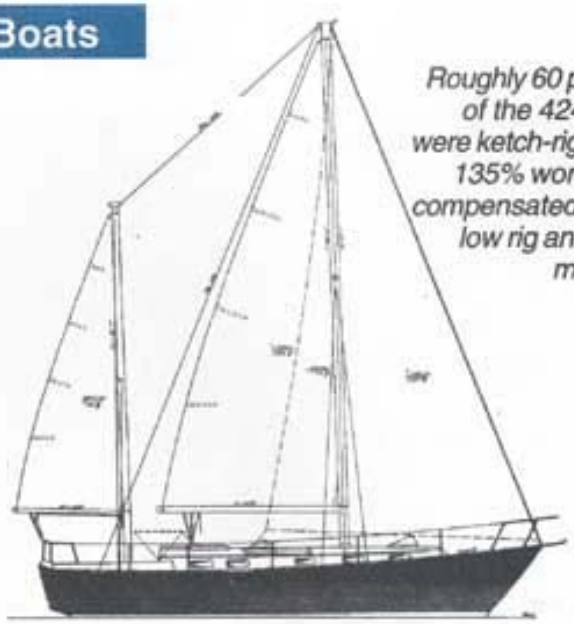
There is storage space beneath the double berth, which is often used for air-conditioning units or hot water heaters. Lockers and bins are outboard of the settees. Water tanks are under the settees and a third is under the V-berths. Total fresh-water tankage is 170 gallons. The Sutphens rig lee cloths for a crew of four when they head offshore and, Hal says, they sail "in great comfort."

The standard galley had a three-burner propane stove, deep double sinks, trap-bin stowage under the counter, trash bin under the sink, and an enormous reefer that was extremely deep but, Hal says, "not as well insulated as it should have been." Pan stowage is under the range and a large dish and food locker is outboard of the counter bin. Both *Sea Duty* and *Far Horizon* have L-shaped galleys.

A large hanging locker is just aft and to starboard of the main companionway. A wet locker greets you when you descend the main cabin companionway, all the more reason to use this access frequently.

Construction: Capt. Hal reports that the hull layup is solid. No surprise here, for that was Pearson's precise reputation. Solid. Nothing fancy. Hal did say that flat sections on either side of the bow "tend to flex in a heavy head sea." While this hasn't caused any problems on *Sea Duty*, Hal says that another owner claims that shelving over his boat's V-berths has worked loose because of this. He adds that there is some flexing of the coachroof top, and suspects that a gap exists between the coachroof and the liner. But, he adds, "This has causes no difficulties at present."

The editors of *The Pearson 424 Newsletter* have not heard of one of these boats sinking at sea, but a number have reportedly sunk during storms while at a dock or slip. According to Jane Cassell, the plastic above-waterline thru-hull fittings used by Pearson might have



Roughly 60 percent of the 424s built were ketch-rigged. A 135% working jib compensated for the low rig and small mainsail.

been the problem. The theory is that they became brittle, broke when concussed, and water was able to enter the hull through the thru-hull holes. All of the plastic thru-hull fittings on *Far Horizon* are being replaced. Below, the headliner panels are held up with hook-and-loop fastener tape. Hal reports that the glue that bonds the hook-and-loop sections dries up and fails. This is a small annoyance, and one with which new owners of old 424s might have to contend.

Decks are balsa-core with all the little problems that accompany the laminate. Rebedding deck fittings is almost a way of life on older fiberglass boats, and the owners of *Far Horizon* are in the midst of their latest chapter in this pursuit. Wherever there are deck fastenings there is the possibility of ingress of water and, thus, rot. Sections of the deck may have to be cut away and filled or replaced. Owners of 424s report no more or no less deck problems on the 424 than do owners of boats built at other reputable yards.

Before buying a pre-owned 424, check out the fuel tanks. They may need to be replaced. Some fuel tanks reportedly were aluminum and others steel. The aluminum tanks reportedly were held in position with bronze straps that caused electrolysis and pinhole leaks. "Replacing tanks is possible, but it's not fun," says Jane Cassell. "You have to pull the engine forward and lift the tank out through the aft companionway.

Recent brokerage ads list '79, '80, '82 and '83 Pearson 424s from $75,000 to $119,000. That's a lot of boat for the money, and they usually come loaded and ready to sail away. And if you were to buy a Pearson 424, you'd never want for a support group. The owners meet in the pages of *The Pearson 424 Newsletter*, edited by Barry and Jane Cassell, 900 Swan Creek Road, Slip A-55, Fort Washington, MD 20744. Slip A-55; that kind of says it all. It seems that owners of 424s are usually poised to untie the dock lines and head to sea. Why not? They've got the boats to do the trick.