



Six tons of free time

Free time is something we all yearn for, yet seldom find. When we do, it's often spent relaxing — enjoying leisure activities. We watch television, go camping or maybe play tennis. For Alan Cresswell and Katy Clay, however, free time is hard work.

When Cresswell is not teaching or tutoring physics at Portland State University and Clay isn't toiling over her history thesis at the University, the two put on their coveralls, head for their backyard and begin measuring, cutting, welding, and grinding. Cresswell and Clay are constructing a 30-foot, steel sailboat in their free time.

The boat is a "Spray 28" sloop, designed and named after a sailing vessel that carried Joshua Slocum on a solo trip around the world in 1893. Slocum wrote detailed accounts of his fascinating adventure in his book, "Sailing Alone Around the World."

Cresswell says his interest in sailing grew when he read the book as a child. The tales of pirate encounters, harrowing escapes and Slocum's resourcefulness intrigued him.

Cresswell's boat-building was inspired in part by his knowledge that Slocum had built his own boat, which he named the "Spray."

Building a boat is a commitment, almost like a marriage, Clay says. It is difficult, sometimes frustrating, but also extremely rewarding.

"We are committed to the boat just as we (she and Alan) are committed to each other," Clay says.

Cresswell and Clay began work on the Spray 28 in April, 1982. With \$3,000 they purchased the boat plans, the tools and the steel needed for the basic structure. Steel is the strongest material to build with. It is also the cheapest and easiest for an amateur to work with, Cresswell says. A steel hull can survive the impact of a reef, but wood or ferro-cement may not. Wood may have other problems such as dry rot and infestation from tor-

redos — small insects that burrow in the wood and eat the structure.

A steel sailboat is no heavier than a wooden one, since thin sheets of steel are used while wooden boats require thick beams.

When completed, the Spray 28 will weigh about six tons. One third of that weight will be the 4,000 pounds of lead that fills the keel.

"Neither one of us knew too much about building with steel, so we took a 30-hour course in welding at Lane Community College," Clay says. Steel is a relatively easy material to work with; it is flexible and forgiving.

Cresswell and Clay both agree that in boat-building, precision is a necessity, as is caution around the work area. But the biggest challenge is finding time to work on the boat. Finishing the construction is taking longer than they expected.

"All our friends are extremely supportive," she says. "Two years ago some friends sent us an anchor through the mail for a wedding gift! Any gift is wonderful because the costs, even though we are building the boat ourselves, are high."

Cresswell and Clay try to fabricate as many parts as possible to keep down the total cost, which they expect to be about \$15,000. Pre-made parts such as portholes are expensive. By making their own parts, not only can Clay and Cresswell save money, but they can customize the parts to suit their own preferences too. Commercially made sailboats of the same size and quality usually go for around \$60,000, they say.

The builders hope to christen the boat and take their first voyage on it this summer. "We'd like to sail down the coast, through the Panama Canal, and up the Eastern seaboard," Cresswell says.

But both Clay and Cresswell agree that their first desire is to finish work on the boat so they can relax a little bit — in their free time.



Photos and Story by Steven Wall