

WEATHERING THE WAVES

IF ONLY THE DECKS OF THESE LOCAL COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSELS COULD SPEAK

Story by JON BRODERICK

The harbors are full of characters, silent and strong. Each one's got a story, but it's pretty hard to tease it from a boat.

In Hammond's basin, recently repaired and maintained by Astoria Marine Construction Company, the halibut schooner Arrow is moored, a remarkable example of the heavy, slippery-hulled wooden long-liners built in Puget Sound boatyards nearly a century ago. "Dave Kelly owns it," says AMCCO's Tim Fastabend. "He's always taken care of it. He's adamant about that."

About 160 of these graceful boats were built, cabin aft, crew quarters or "foc's'le" forward. Their names are legendary: among them, Attu, Aleutian, Polaris, Thor, Resolute, Tordenskjold. Ten or so are fishing still. "It's pretty much an original, in amazing shape for its age," says Fastabend. "If you're living on it, it's just like you've stepped back into the '30s or '40s. No microwave. Just an oil stove and 32 volt lights."

Despite nearly a century of hard duty, carefully corked and painted, its wooden masts varnished, Arrow looks as ready for the season as Babe Ruth, in a clean, pressed woolen uniform, waiting in the on deck circle.

Clear across town in Astoria's East Mooring Basin a trio of modern trawlers is tied up waiting for tough weather to lie down. If Arrow is Ruth, then these steel boats — Sojourn, Ocean Beaut and Cassandra Anne — each painted crisply in white and royal blue, could be the top of the Kansas City batting order.

They fish year round, making three- to five-day trips, in federal waters three miles or more offshore, on either side of the Rockfish Conservation Area, a closed strip of water between the 100 and 150 fathom lines.



Nate Killops, with Astoria Marine Construction Company, helped work on the Arrow. Behind him is his current project, the Maija Liisa.

Like most trawlers, they carry two nets. "One to tow. One to sew," says skipper Matt Wait who runs the Cassandra Anne, the newest, biggest and most powerful of the three boats.

With its broad flying CA in white across the bow, a tidy deck and spanking rust-free paint job, Cassandra Anne was judged Prettiest Commercial Boat at this year's Astoria Regatta parade. "She drives like an 18-wheeler compared to Sojourn," says Wait. "In the harbor she's a pig, but once you get her out on the ocean where the weather's at, Cassandra Anne is way nicer."

In the West Mooring Basin, the Evening Star, with its navy blue hull, clean white house and graceful top-house, its white star shining on the bow stem, is another meticulously maintained fishing boat. It wasn't always so, though.

Built nearly 50 years ago in Fort Bragg, California, as the Sea Valley, the longliner worked the West Coast until 1989 when it was sold for an ill-fated conversion as a seiner for the Southeast Alaska salmon fishery. Renamed the St. Ruth, it lay neglected and nearly sinking at the docks in Bellingham, Washington, until Hatton Marine of Seattle bought it at a U.S. Marshall's sale.

'She's been taking my family to sea for decades, and she brings them back. She takes good care of them.'

— Marion Painter, speaking of her husband's F/V Evening Star



The Sojourn moored at the East End Mooring Basin.

When Jeff Painter, searching for a new boat, came across it in 1999, it looked familiar. "We knew her name was St. Ruth, but we didn't know her original name," says his wife, Marion. "She'd been so mistreated under that name that we went ahead, against superstition, and renamed her the F/V Evening Star." Only when Coast Guard documentation and title information was complete did the Painters learn that they'd bought an old friend. They'd fished their old boat Western Skies around her for years.

Evening Star trolls for tuna, longlines bottom fish, and fishes Dungeness crab. It also rescues people. As the Sea Valley in 1971, the boat participated in the rescue and recovery of 24 people when a DC-3 crashed into the rocky and stormy shore of Northern California coast. Years later, in 2007, Evening Star assisted in the evacuation of passengers from the tour boat Empress

of the North when that boat struck a rock in Southeast Alaska's Icy Strait.

"She's been taking my family to sea for decades, and she brings them back," says Marion Painter. "She takes good care of them."

Elsewhere in the West Mooring Basin lies yet another commercial fishing boat painstakingly cared for. Tom Dulcich has been fishing this traditional wooden Columbia River bowpicker since his dad bought it from Ed Koski in 1978. Dulcich was 14 years old. "It's a labor of love and a family heirloom," he says.

It's also a symbol of the cultural and economic importance of the Columbia River's commercial salmon fishery. Built in 1951 at the Columbia Boatworks in Youngs Bay, Seagull is one of the last three or four of its kind still fishing — another patient, mute storyteller in a harbor full of characters.



The Ocean Beaut, moored at the East End Mooring Basin, fishes year round, making three- to five-day trips in federal waters three miles or more offshore.



Viewers wave as the Cassandra Anne makes its way up the Columbia River during the 2015 Astoria Regatta boat parade in August. The boat was named Prettiest Commercial Boat at the parade.



The Ocean Beaut and Cassandra Anne make their way up the Columbia River during the Astoria Regatta boat parade.

Photos by Joshua Bessex

The Ocean Beaut moves up the Columbia River in September.