



Pat Patana's boat, the Summer Breeze, is a pretty 54-foot motor sailboat.

Ilwaco tuna fisherman Richard 'Pat' Patana sails a motorized sailboat in early retirement

Richard "Pat" Patana is a man who seems comfortable with himself. A rangy man with a quick laugh, he's been on the water, one way or another, most of his life. "My family were fishermen around here on both sides," he says. "I didn't have much choice."

Not that he's always gone about things the way others might. Take, for example, his boat, Summer Breeze, which stands out from the other commercial fishing boats moored in the Ilwaco, Washington, harbor. Summer's a pretty 54-foot motor sailboat and could pass for somebody's yacht except for its business-like looks.

As a young man with a growing family, Patana moved from trawling to a job with a more reliable income: working as a fisherman for National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration projects. Before long he was a chief boatswain on the night shift and going to school during the day to qualify for his Masters 3,000 Freight and Towing license.

"My impetus for getting my license was that the jobs I took kept me away for a long time," Patana says. "I wanted to have more time with my family. I had this beautiful young wife and five boys, and as a boatswain I was home one month out of the year."

He earned his license and got into towboating as a cook, at first, to get his foot in the door. Eventually he was driving towboats, including a stint on the Exxon Valdez cleanup, which resulted in extended time off with pay. Not one to remain idle, he became a part-time maritime science instructor at Clatsop Community College, teaching skills like net mending and celestial navigation and eventually teaching marine safety, "to cut down on tragedies at sea."

He spent over seven years as an instructor during the school year and fishing and driving a towboat on marine construction jobs during summers. In 1997, Patana says, "I wanted to go back to sea and NOAA wanted me back," so he returned to the federal agency until his retirement in 2013.

Patana purchased the Summer Breeze in 2012 for tuna fishing. "This was going to be my early retirement," he says. "I thought this boat would be easier than it was."

The motorsailer, with its deep hull, handles very differently than other fishing vessels. Patana usually motors with one sail reefed to the first reefing point. Then, he says, "It's a beautiful ride." If he sails into the wind, though, the sail can flog itself to death in short order, and with a sail up the boat is less maneuverable. This can make fishing difficult, but without the sail she is stiff handling with a quick, hard righting reaction to wind and waves.

All this took some getting used to, he says,



Photo by Dwight Caswell

Richard "Pat" Patana fishes for tuna out of Ilwaco, Washington, on his motorized sailboat.

but "I wanted a motorsailer for comfort and ease of maintenance," and the boat's virtues outweigh the difficulties. She's fiberglass, which reduces maintenance, and she's comfortable because the cabin and quarters are situated aft, unlike most fishing boats, where there is less motion than in the bow.

Patana has also invested in an expensive state-of-the-art blast freezer for the vessel. "It's more work," he says, "but the quality of the product can't be beat." He explains that with a blast freezer the fish are hung, "so they have that perfect shape," then quickly frozen by a large fan that blows super-cooled air past the fish. This freezes the fish before there is any cell damage or degradation. There are economic benefits to blast freezing, too. He doesn't have to return to port every few days, but can stay out until his boat is fully loaded, which saves on fuel costs.

"A blast frozen fish is sashimi grade," Patana says, "It's like a fish you caught a few hours ago, for people who have to have the highest quality."

"For a lot of us," Patana says, "fishing is what we grew up in. It's what we want to do, but it can be feast or famine." He is able to reduce the economic risk, though, by selling directly to consumers, who benefit as well. Patana doesn't filet the fish or do any other processing, but his customers can purchase his blast frozen whole tuna for about the wholesale price. And by buying directly from the fisherman, customers support a local industry with deep roots in family and history.

To purchase tuna from Pat Patana, call him at 360-957-0841.

Photo by Dwight Caswell