

# BOATS & GEAR

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JENNIFER KARUZA PHOTOS

## THREE FOR THREE

A trio of Wilburs — two brothers and their cousin — take delivery of Dungeness crabbers.

BY JENNIFER KARUZA

One Pacific Northwest boat shop that is gratified by the amount of fishing vessel construction that has come its way this year is Petrzelka Brothers in Mount Vernon, Wash.

In June, Petrzelka Brothers launched not just one, but three commercial boats for use in the thriving Puget Sound Dungeness crab fishery. What made the launchings slightly unusual is that all three boats were outfitted for three men in one family, the Wilburs, who all live about 20 miles west of the shop in La Conner, Wash.

The first boat, for Mike Wilbur, was a joint building project between Petrzelka Brothers in Mt. Vernon, Wash., and Curry Boats in Bellingham, Wash. The hull of the 34' x 12'6" aluminum boat was designed by Bill Curry and built at his shop. Petrzelka Brothers did all the interior work and outfitting, which included

the installation of hydraulics and engines, mechanical, electrical and plumbing work.

"When it left here it was ready to go fishing," says Jon Petrzelka, one of the shop's owners.

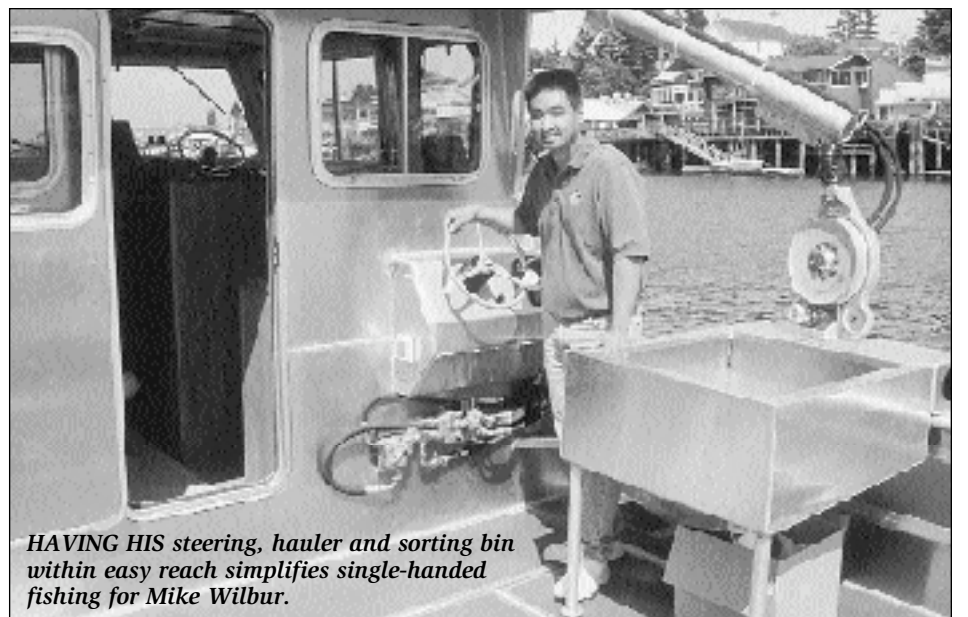
Wilbur estimates it cost around \$120,000 to build his 34-footer, the Salish Tradition. Construction on the boat was started in November, and she was setting crab pots by the middle of June. Wilbur says he decided to piece the work out between Curry Boats and Petrzelka Brothers after his initial quest for bids at different shops produced numbers more than double what he ended up spending.

"We shopped around and gathered information that way," says Wilbur. "Having the hull and cabin built one place, getting our motors, and having it finished out at another place was more economical to us than having one place do everything. We had more flexibility to make changes and got different perspectives and ideas on how to build this boat."

In addition to his plans to chase Dungeness crab as far north as Blaine, Wash., Wilbur will use the boat to take his fam-

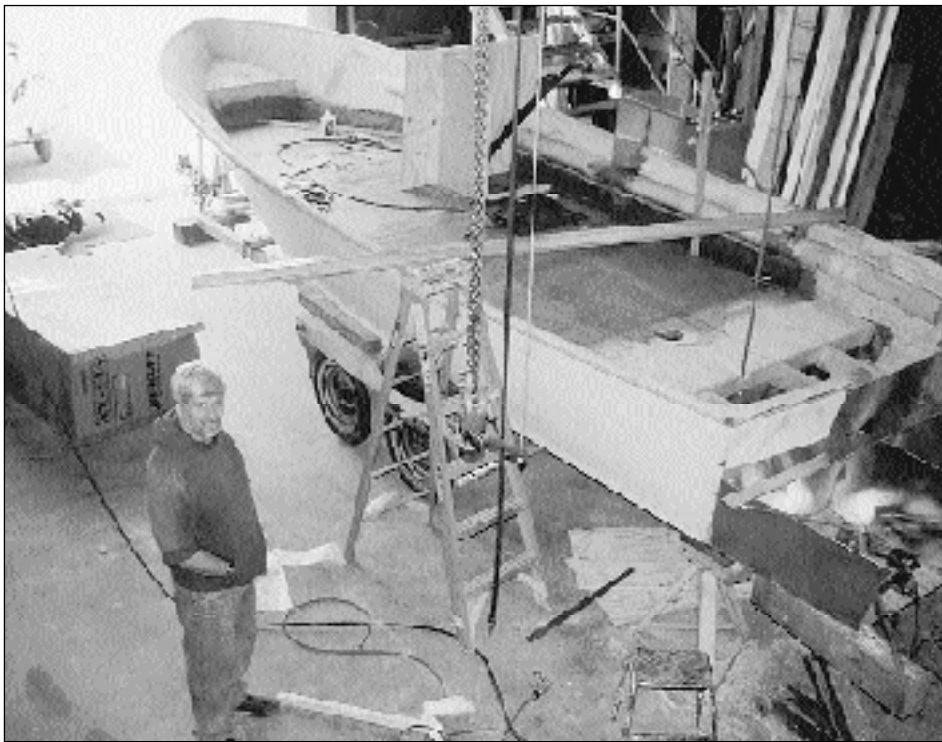
*MOVING away from the dock, the Salish Tradition doesn't make much of a fuss. The transom platform is a good place to clear line from the props.*

ily on camping and fishing expeditions. The dual use of the Salish Tradition is the primary reason Wilbur decided on an enclosed wheelhouse with a teak, vinyl, and Formica laminated finish. There are four bunks in the fo'c'stle and a galley ta-



*HAVING HIS steering, hauler and sorting bin within easy reach simplifies single-handed fishing for Mike Wilbur.*





**WHEN NOT BUILDING or repairing boats, Jon Petrzelka and his brothers head up to Alaska's Copper River for a few weeks of salmon gillnetting.**

ble that folds down into a double bunk. "It's a new crab boat, which is a little uncommon these days," says Petrzelka. "It's got a little more comfort because he has a little recreation in mind. But otherwise it's pretty much a standard little crab fishing boat."

The origins of the boat's design go back to the salmon bowpickers that Curry Boats became known for almost as soon as Bill Curry opened his shop in 1977 and started designing and building aluminum boats.

About seven years ago, Curry says, he started to modify his bowpicker design. The primary impetus for the modifications was the need for a hull that would work with jet drives. Curry doesn't want to reveal too many of his changes, but from about the center of the boat aft, he says, he added constant deadrise to the underwater sections.

Curry also has a boat 26 feet, 6 inches long that started out as a pleasure boat but caught on well with crab fishermen. Curry says Wilbur's boat looks like a larger version of that one. "He needed a bigger boat, that's why he has that one," says Curry.

The modified design, of which Sal-

ish Tradition is an example, is fuller and wider in the forward sections than a bowpicker would be. This allows for cabin space and provides buoyancy for the additional weight up forward.

Wilbur opted for one of the newer integrated systems in wheelhouse electronics chose Furuno's NavNet. The NavNet utilizes Ethernet network technology and can be used as a stand-alone unit or as part of an integrated network system. The

NavNet includes radar, GPS receiver, chart plotter, echo sounder and weatherfax.

"It's one of these Furuno videos that's networked to your radar and GPS and fathometer," explains Petrzelka. "Kind of a combo deal. It's one big video screen and I guess you can even watch TV on it if you have the right modules plugged in.

It's pretty awesome."

Petrzelka Brothers comprises three brothers and six employees, all commercial fishermen. Since 1976, the shop has turned out several dozen boats, most bound for Alaska. Shortly after finishing the three boats for the Wilburs, the Petrzelkas headed up to Alaska to fish the Copper River salmon run.

"We've been doing that a long time, too," Petrzelka says. "We're all commercial fishermen, here, so we kind of understand the stuff that's going on."

The Petrzelkas participated in the Puget Sound Dungeness crab fishery in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They continue to keep a close watch on the fishery and have seen the bulk of their business focused in that direction. Last fall, they converted two former Bristol Bay gillnetters for men who decided Dungeness crab might be a better bet than the elusive sockeye.

"It's been pretty fair lately," says Petrzelka. "The permit values have gone up a little bit and some people have made some fair money at it. I know

there's way more crabs out there now than there was then. Some guys have done real well."

Wilbur certainly has the boat to do well. Once he starts hauling pots with his Canadian-built Hydraulic Hauler System crab block, he'll place his Dungeness in a 250-cubic-foot, tanked hold that's centered amidships. The crab tank is flanked on either side by 250-cubic-foot dry holds that will be used for storage.

Hydraulics on the Salish Tradition are run by a 35-gallon power takeoff mounted to the port-side main engine. A manifold directs flow to the anchor winch, circulation pumps, and crab hauler. The 12-inch puller is hung on a standard hydraulic davit with both up-and-down and in-and-out functions.

Besides the hauler, the spacious after deck, with a non-skid coating, has an aluminum sorting bin and second steering station, all arranged on the starboard side for single-handed operation.

Under the deck there are three watertight bulkheads made of 3/8-inch aluminum plating that provide transverse stiffness. Running fore-and-aft are 2 1/2" x 2 1/2" T-bar stringers that are 12 inches apart.

"It's pretty much a standard crab-fishing layout," says Petrzelka.

Although the 80-gallon freshwater tank will provide plenty of bathing opportunities for his family on outings and openings, Wilbur doesn't have hot water just yet, nor has he installed the shower.

He'll make good time on his way to the grounds with the help of twin 260-hp Volvo-Penta KAD 44 diesel engines driving duoprop outdrives. Built on the transom and over the duoprops is what a recreational boat owner might otherwise call a swim step, but on the Salish Tradition it serves a couple of functions more useful than assisting swimmers. The "step" protects the outdrive units when the boat is maneuvering around pilings or a dock, and if line gets in one or both of the props, someone can kneel on the step to clear the line.

Even when Wilbur's boat is just idling along, she moves easily through the water, and you get the idea she'll be a fast boat, which she is. On sea trials the Salish Tradition hit a top speed of 40 knots, but she will cruise at around 25 knots. Total fuel capacity is 400 gallons.

"Mike's boat flies," says Petrzelka. "It has a lot of power. It's fairly light.

"Typically," he added, "boats like his, that are outfitted for crab fishing, are quite a bit lighter than if they were outfitted as a gillnetter. When they're not loaded, anyway."

Of course, a gillnetter carries a net reel, which slows her down appreciably. Still, the Salish Tradition looks to have a good combination of speed and eye appeal. Even Curry admits that, "We got kind of lucky. She sets well and works well. That guy's happy. That doesn't always happen."

Mike Wilbur's brother, Marvin Wil-

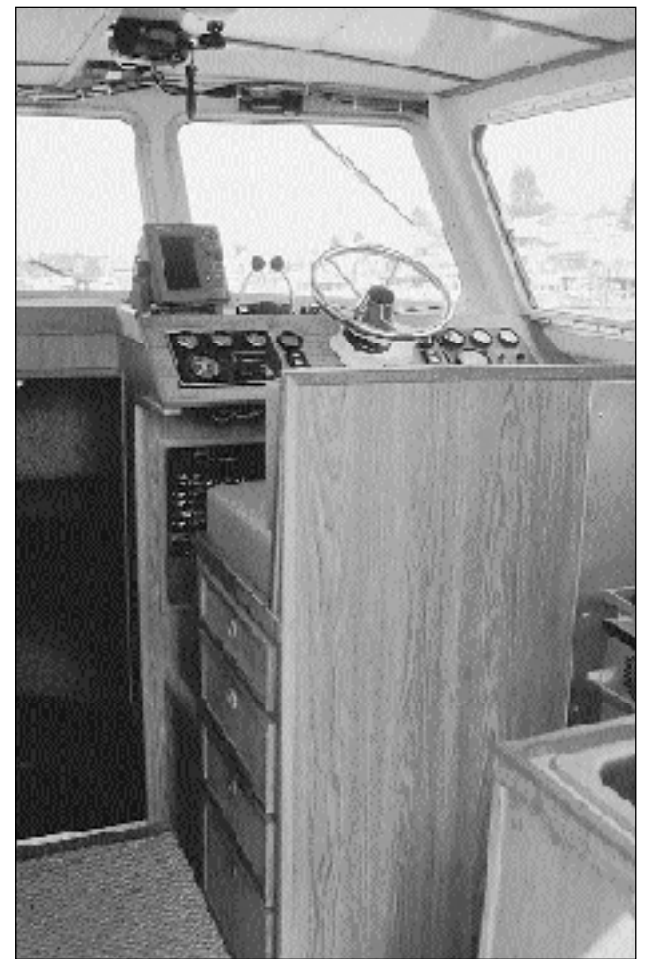
bur Jr., brought a decade-old, 36-foot Canadian herring gillnetter to Petrzelka Brothers to be finished out as a crab boat similar to his brother's. The first thing Petrzelka Brothers did was remove the cabin.

Next off came the gillnet gear and hydraulics. After building a new forward cabin, putting in new hydraulics, installing a crab block and hydraulic davit, the shop's work was done; the transformation was complete.

The converted 36-footer is powered by twin 260-hp MerCruiser gas engines with Bravo II outdrives. The boat has the same wheelhouse NavNet electronics as the Salish Tradition. Because her owner does not plan to use the vessel for recreational use, she was built strictly as a workboat. She costs less than half as much as the Salish Tradition.

"It's all real plain. No woodwork on the inside or anything like that. All metal and quite sparse," Petrzelka says. "But it looks very much like Mike's boat now, other than it's an old hull."

The third boat the Wilbur family entrusted to the Petrzelka family is for cousin Tandy Wilbur. The 23-foot, fiberglass open skiff, which now has a hydraulic crab block and davit on board, is a former Bristol Bay setnet skiff and is



**NICELY FINISHED in teak, vinyl and formica, the Salish Tradition will be comfortable fishing or camping.**

powered by an outboard motor. It's the third boat the Petrzelkas have outfitted for Tandy, and it will also fish crabs in Puget Sound.

"They're great people," Petrzelka says of the three Wilbur fishermen.

In late June, Mike Wilbur launched the first pots from the first boat he's ever had built. The report from the grounds, accompanied by a good-natured chuckle, was "so far, so good."

"It all worked out great," he says. **NF**

*Jennifer Karuza is a freelance writer living in Seattle.*

*For information on companies mentioned in this article, see page 57.*

## INSIDE THE SALISH TRADITION

- **Builder:** Curry Boats, Bellingham, Wash., and Petrzelka Brothers, Mount Vernon, Wash.
- **Designer:** Curry Boats
- **Owner:** Mike Wilbur, La Conner, Wash.
- **Dimensions:** 34' x 12' 6"
- **Material:** Aluminum
- **Bottom plating:** 1/4-inch
- **Transom plating:** 1/4-inch
- **Side plating:** 1/5-inch
- **Deck plating:** 1/6-inch
- **Wheelhouse plating:** 1/6-inch
- **Bulkheads:** 3/8-inch
- **Longitudinal stringers:** 2 1/2" x 2 1/2" T-bar on 12-inch centers
- **Power train:** Twin 260-hp Volvo KAD 44 diesels