

Hunter's Own Crash-Test Dummy

IN THE PANTHEON OF AMERICAN BOAT-building, Steve Pettengill deserves a special nook. For years he ran a Midwest trucking company before succumbing to the virus that infects all long-distance solo sailors. He sold the business, moved east, and headed offshore in a series of voyages that gave the sailing world early indications of just how nuts a man can be. In one high-profile voyage, Pettengill joined Rich Wilson aboard the trimaran *Great American* in an attempt to set the speed record from San Francisco to New York; that exploit ended when they capsized in the monstrous and frigid waves off Chile. He went on to take second in the 1994-95 singlehanded, round-the-world BOC Challenge aboard *Hunter's Child*, the 60-foot sloop originally designed by Lars Bergstrom and Sven Ridder for Warren Luhrs, the boatbuilding scion.

While most boys leave their careers in petty vandalism well behind them by the time the acne clears, Pettengill, age 54, now has the job that every grown-up sea urchin only dreams of: He's employed by one of the largest U.S. boatbuilders to destroy boats, if he can. His fancy title—Director

of Offshore Testing and Sailing Events for Hunter Marine—belies a job description that amounts to open-throttle groundings on a hard-sand beach and full standing jibes in 30 knots of wind and heavy seas.

"I try to find any weak point I can," said Pettengill recently, "before our owners do."

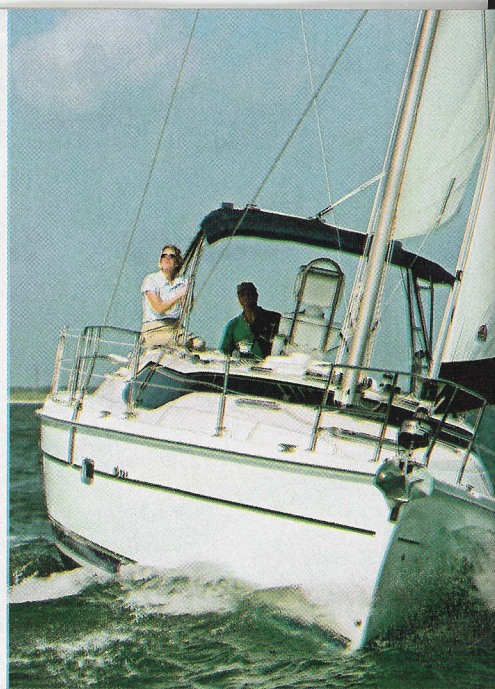
To a crowd of journalists gathered in St. Augustine, Florida, for the launch of Hunter's center-cockpit 45, Pettengill de-

scribed one test the company performs on the first several boats of every new model line. He calls it the "chainplate pull test." The yard crew straps the new boat into a trailer, then attaches cables with an inline scale to the chainplates. Next, heavy machinery induces between 8,000 and 10,000 pounds of load—with Pettengill inside the boat.

"There's a lot of noise," he said with a deadpan chuckle. Hunter's new 45 CC had passed Pettengill's full battery of tests shortly before we took her sailing off St. Augustine. With more interior volume and more amenities than the 456 CC she replaces—a model so popular that 350 were built—the 45 CC represents the new high-water mark in Hunter Marine's zeal for listening to its clientele. According to Hunter's John Peterson,



Pettengill at work



Hunter's new CC 45 goes for a sail in sunny Florida only after surviving the rigors imposed by Steve Pettengill, whose job is to find the weak points in a boat before the buyer does.

the company's design team studied customer-service surveys from 456 owners, then designed a boat that's full of such homey luxuries as memory-foam mattresses, a 23-inch flat-screen television, a microwave oven, and a Bose sound system. The 45 also realizes its design goal of being easy to sail shorthanded. Hunter's signature arch keeps the mainsheet out of the cockpit, and Doyle's vertical battens give back some roach to the in-mast-furled main.

If you're at the fall boat shows, look for the debut of the 45. And if you're sailing around St. Augustine, Florida, give a wave to Hunter's own crash-test dummy.

Tim Murphy