

Blue Fairways

Sabre's elegant 42 Hard Top Express
is the perfect vehicle for a Carolina golf cruise
By John Wooldridge Photography by Onne van der Wal

MOSS-DRAPED LIVE OAKS FRAME A RAISED GREEN AT LONG COVE CLUB (OPPOSITE). THE SABRE 42 HARD TOP EXPRESS DISPLAYS MODERN LINES OFF HILTON HEAD ISLAND.

It is a sad fact that the pithiest description of golf

is a negative one, Mark Twain's "a good walk spoiled." In all my years of duffing, I've often tried out phrases to replace it, but it wasn't until a recent winter cruise down through the Carolina Low Country that a solution came to me: Forget about the walk. Take a yacht!

And that is just what I did, forming up an amphibious foursome to take on some of the most beautiful, and challenging, courses in the South. Our gang included Bentley Collins, VP of sales and marketing for Sabre Yachts of South Casco, Maine; Ron Tucker, co-owner of the Yacht Registry in Dunedin and Naples, Fla.; and Bob Dykema, president of Thunderbolt Yacht Sales in Thunderbolt, Ga. Avid golfers all, they jumped at the chance to play a selection of South Carolina's famed courses while helping to move a brand-new Sabre Yachts 42 Hard Top Express from Charleston, S.C., to St. Augustine, Fla. As dream cruises go, it promised gorgeous resort golf amid moss-draped oaks, historic destinations, protected waterways and opportunities to sample regional cuisine prepared by talented Southern chefs. Yes, "blue fairways" sounded like an apt way to lift the Mark Twain curse...

Our plan was to get in a morning of golf on Kiawah, then move the Sabre 42 Express south to Sea Pines Plantation and the excellent yachting facilities of Harbour Town Yacht Basin, with its landmark red-and-white striped lighthouse on Hilton Head Island. Then we'd play two more exclusive courses within easy reach of those acclaimed facilities: Long Cove Club, serving a private community on the island, and the Rees Jones-designed course at Haig Point, a private enclave serving the owners of oceanfront,

oceanview and fairway-friendly homes. A good plan.

First stop, The Ocean Course: Designed by modern legend and course architect Peter Dye, it has 10 of its 18 holes running alongside the Atlantic Ocean and is very reminiscent of the seaside courses in Scotland, Ireland and England. As with yachting, the wind is always a consideration here, and the startling views of the ocean are a distraction, another kind of water hazard with which the yachtsman must contend. In any event, the course has been the site of numerous professional and amateur matches since 1991, and will be a challenging host for the Senior PGA Championship in 2007 and the PGA Championship in 2012.

We started later in the morning than was planned, due in part to a "frost hold" instituted to preserve the dazzling green turf grasses. This left us time to enjoy a hearty Southern-inflected breakfast in the clubhouse. When our foursome tackled the 7,937-yard course, it was good we were so well fortified, as we faced a blend of wind, sandtraps, marshes, drainages and pine and live oak trees. Still, at the end of the day, we were all delighted with the experience, and already plotting a way to return next year.

After making the decision to leave Charleston early the next morning, we headed downtown to Magnolia's, one of the city's more popular restaurants. Examples of outstanding Low Country cuisine abounded, but I gravitated to the Buttermilk Fried Chicken Breast with cracked pepper biscuits, mashed potatoes, collard greens, cream-style corn and sausage-herb gravy. Oh, heaven!

Dawn came early, but not as early as our departure. We slipped

THE SABRE 42 HARD TOP EXPRESS CUTTING THROUGH THE AFTERNOON LIGHT OF CALIBOGUE SOUND, OFF HILTON HEAD ISLAND.



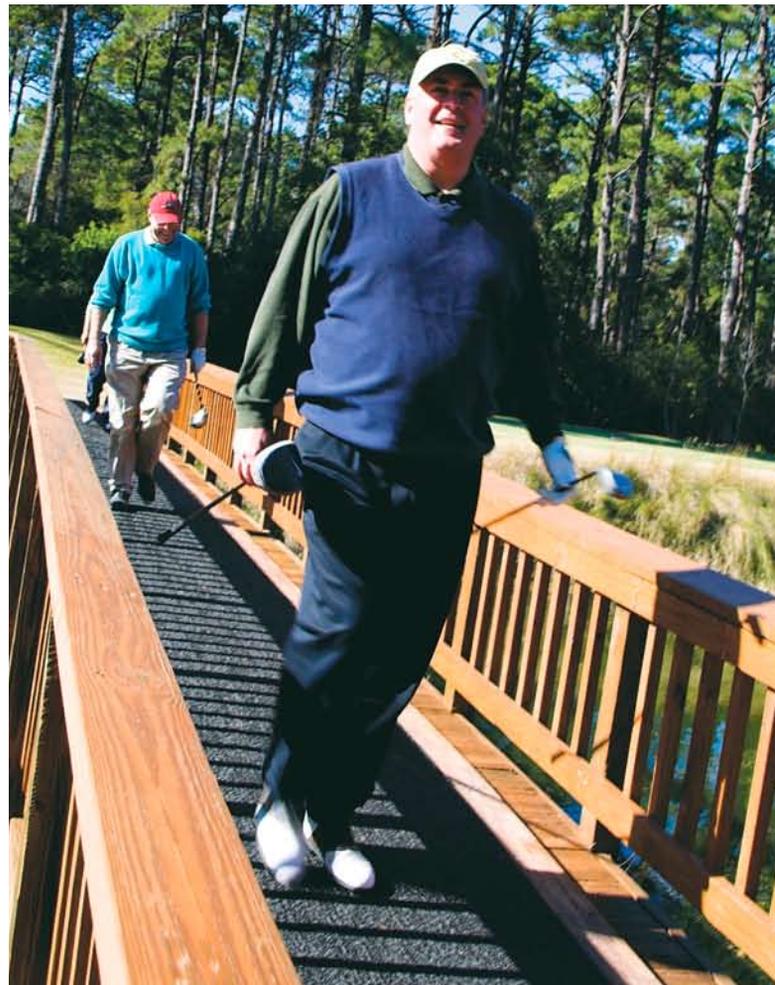


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CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: THE SABRE, CRUISING. RON TUCKER LINES UP A PUTT ON THE OCEAN COURSE. THE AUTHOR FOLLOWS SABRE'S BENTLEY COLLINS ACROSS THE WATER.



the lines an hour before first light and carefully proceeded down the Intracoastal Waterway with eyes on the twin Raymarine E-120 displays, set for course and depth, and the lighted marks ahead. It was slightly above freezing with a light breeze from the northwest, but the Sabre 42 Hard Top Express was well prepared to protect us. The heated bridgedeck kept us toasty while the hard-sided cabin enclosure kept the wind from raising so much as a goosebump. This 42 was the new single-cabin layout, leaving out the private guest cabin to create a wide-open saloon, larger master stateroom and expanded head compartment. We had more than enough room for our gear below—including our four golf bags. The thoroughly sound-proofed engine compartment, well-insulated hull and hand-built furniture, all carefully installed by Sabre's





A TIGHT GROUPING OF GOLF BALLS ON THE GREEN REFLECTS THE SPIRIT OF FRIENDLY COMPETITIVENESS AMONG OUR FOURSOME (TOP). HARBOUR TOWN YACHT BASIN'S FAMED LIGHTHOUSE WELCOMES THE SABRE (MIDDLE). BOB DYKEMA TAKES A LOW PERSPECTIVE ON A HAIG POINT GREEN (BOTTOM).



experienced Maine craftsmen, provided a quiet platform for relaxing as well as conducting business under way.

By noon, we were pulling into Harbour Town Yacht Basin where we were met by the well-known harbormaster, Nancy Cappelmann, and her very capable staff. Knowing that we were a bit overdue for a starting time at the Long Cove Club, Nancy organized a photo boat for Onne van der Wal, our photographer, and bid us enjoy the afternoon.

Before I left, I was treated to an insider's look at the Harbour Town Yacht Basin's villas overlooking the harbor and long views of Calibogue Sound. This top-drawer meeting and accommodations

facility is just a stone's throw from shopping, tennis and, of course, the nearby Harbour Town Golf Links, which hosts the annual Verizon Heritage PGA Tournament. I played this course several years ago and remember the picturesque 18th hole, which finishes on a green just opposite the harbor lighthouse.

The temperature had warmed to 60 degrees by the time we reached Long Cove Golf Club, and we had time to grab a quick sandwich in the Grill before the starter came to find us. Our server also plied us with homemade macaroons that, I'd venture, deserve national attention. The 7,000-yard, par 71 course was another Peter Dye masterpiece, its 18-hole championship layout winding through 630 acres of live oaks, pines, magnolias and saltwater marsh. Water hazards and long, rambling sand traps were everywhere. Hole number three proved interesting: When my tee shot rolled off to the left of the fairway just behind a berm, I grabbed a metal three wood



a while, then retired for an early morning start to Haig Point.

We didn't have far to move the boat the following day, as Haig Point sits just one mile across Calibogue Sound, flanked by the Atlantic Ocean and the Intracoastal Waterway. Playing this lovely private course at the invitation of a member, we found a course and club of distinction, with amenities for owners that include a Southern mansion, Low Country Clubhouse and all manner of sports nearby. Haig Point is a marvel, dotted here and there with vibrant homes that take full advantage of their water views and an incredible sense of peace and quiet. The deceptively challenging golf course, with its wide green fairways that narrowed markedly as you approached the rolling greens, made me wince more than once. I still have haunting memories of the prettiest par three hole with raised tee and a green tightly surrounded by tall marsh vegetation.

In the afternoon, we cruised down to Thunderbolt, Ga., tied up at the docks near Bob Dykema's yacht sales office, and stayed ashore with him and his lovely wife, Pam. Over drinks at the Savannah Yacht Club, Bentley and I made plans to take the boat all the way to St. Augustine the next day. Ron and Bob, who were both getting off the boat in Savannah, tried to convince us that going outside was



VIEWS OF SURROUNDING WATERS (TOP) WERE ONE OF THE ADVANTAGES OF TAKING THE SABRE 42 HARD TOP EXPRESS. IN THE WARM WINTER DAYS, GOLF ENTHUSIASTS SHED THEIR COATS AND SOAK UP THE SUN, MUCH LIKE THE LOCAL WILDLIFE (ABOVE).

and strolled down the left side of the fairway. Cresting the berm, I looked down to see my ball was about two feet from the water's edge and 10 feet from a six-foot alligator sunning on the bank. Since he didn't seem too intimidated, and since I'd thoughtlessly left my Crocodile Dundee-style gator pick ("Now that's a knife, mate!") back on the golf cart, I made a casual turn toward the fairway, dropped another ball and accepted the penalty without protest.

That evening we dined at CQ's, a delightful harborside restaurant with the cozy ambiance of an inn and excellent entrees ranging from steaks to seafood. Over glasses of wine from a cellar sporting 400 selections (the attentive staff will draw a glass from any of 70 varieties) we dissected the day's bright moments on the course, both triumphal and otherwise. Tuna Carpaccio with avocado, edamame and onions was a tasty intro, followed by a shrimp-stuffed local skate that was perfectly baked. We lingered for

less frustrating than navigating the numerous no-wake zones we'd have to transit. While it would have been easy to put the Sabre 42 Hard Top Express through its paces in the open Atlantic—which it is more than capable of handling—we wanted to enjoy one last day of our dream cruise, and we were not to be moved.

It was strictly a case of beauty before speed, as the stretch of Intracoastal Waterway from Charleston to the Florida border is one of the most beautiful cruising grounds I've ever seen. Lined with golden sawgrass in the winter months, bathed in a clear winter's light, it is more than worth the effort, and a chance to see our country from a perspective that relatively few ever see. The snug protection of the comfortable pilothouse allowed us to swap turns at the helm and in the comfortable Stidd pilot chair while gazing at the wonders of the coast through unobstructed windows on all three sides. When you have a boat like the 42 Hard Top Express at your command, there's very little excuse for staying put—and if you get a chance to throw the golf clubs aboard, so much the better. □

DREAM ON

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