



## Boat Review

# Island Packet Estero

A sailor-friendly coastal cruiser | BY KIMBALL LIVINGSTON

Using a bow thruster to get a 36-foot boat off the dock was new to me, but fair to say, the folks at Island Packet know what they're doing. Without the thruster we would have required a heap of pulpit shoving and gear shifting to escape that narrow corner of the marina, so our easy exit to San Francisco Bay provided the perfect introduction to the Estero, the latest offering from a company where ease of use is a mantra.

## DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Island Packet founder and in-house designer Bob Johnson earned his education at MIT. You should be impressed by that, the more so because his career touchpoints included rocket design and surfboard engineering before he got down to his true calling, building full-keeled cruisers for true believers. The Estero, named for an island off Florida, follows Island Packet tradition while exploring new ways to mix the elements.

In a sea of deep fin keels and spade rudders, the Estero is eye-catching with its moderate draft and long keel that shelters the rudder and propeller. The sturdy hull and keel are single-piece, with the lead ballast fully encapsulated. A base interior molding is bonded to the hull and bulkheads, the chainplates are bonded to the hull and the flanged deck is bolted and also glued to the hull.

I don't think Johnson designed the Estero for sailing around the world, but he doesn't build boats that can't go long distances. He worked through the on-deck priorities and reconsidered the inevitable below-deck compromises. You can argue with the outcome, but only if what you want is a different boat. This layout works very well for weekend sailing and entertaining. In fact, it won our Best Boats award for accommodations design.

## DECK AND COCKPIT

Two things that turn me against a boat in a hurry are cockpit seats too short for stretching out and a cabinhouse you can't lean against

comfortably. No problem here. Life is good in the Estero's cockpit, with 7-foot bench seating and a layout to minimize the number of times you will have to leave the cockpit to work forward. The jib self-tacks on its Hoyt jib boom, the main furls in-mast, and sailing doesn't get much simpler than that. The boom is high overhead, so even an NBA player should survive a gybe unscathed.

One small criticism that's easily remedied: I found the cleats for the traveler at the wrong angle. Traveler adjustments required an extra reach and an awkward tug.

I felt secure on the deck but you need to watch out for the jib boom that makes the foredeck smaller while making the sailing easier. Our test boat had the optional swim step, and I imagine most buyers will want it.



## Island Packet Estero

### → VITAL STATISTICS

**HEADROOM:** 6ft 6in

**BUNKS:** 6ft 5in

**DINETTE:** 7ft 3in each side

### → SPECIFICATIONS

**LOA:** 36ft 5in

**LWL WITH OPT SWIM PLATFORM:** 38ft 5in

**BEAM:** 12ft 4in

**DRAFT:** 4ft

**DISPLACEMENT:** 17,800 lb

**BALLAST:** 7,100 lbs

**SAIL AREA (100% FT):** 708 ft<sup>2</sup>

**FUEL/WATER/WASTE:** 60/120/35 gal

**DISPLACEMENT/LENGTH RATIO:** 256

**SAIL AREA/DISPLACEMENT RATIO:** 16.6

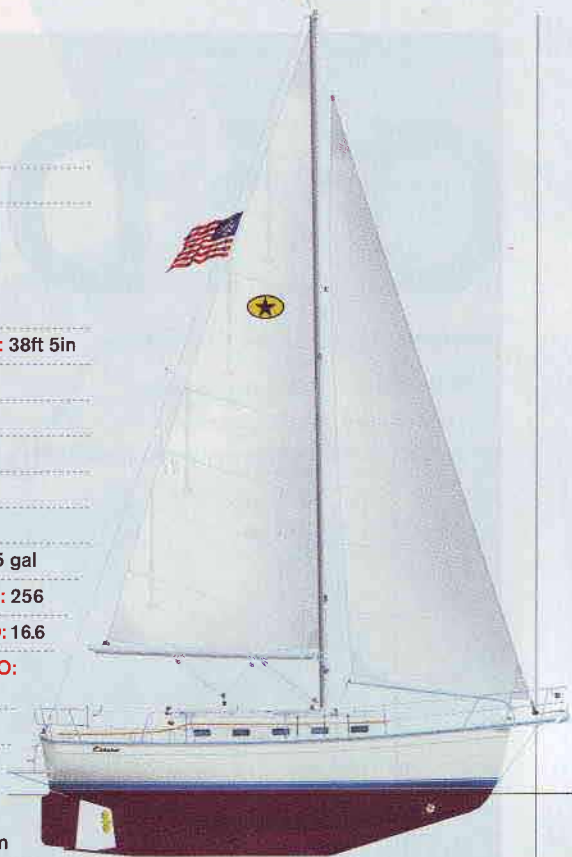
**BALLAST/ DISPLACEMENT RATIO:** 40%

**POWER:** 40hp Yanmar diesel

**DESIGNER:** Bob Johnson

**BUILDER:** Island Packet Yachts,  
1979 Wild Acres Road, Largo, FL  
33771; 727-535-6431; www.ipy.com

**PRICE:** \$298,950 when delivered in  
the lower 48



### ACCOMMODATIONS

Belowdecks the Estero reveals a different kind of interior. Rather than the usual saloon interrupted by a bulkhead, with a sleeping cabin forward, the visual space flows freely from the companionway steps to a wraparound dinette that banks up to the anchor locker. The space feels big, but it's all about reallocating resources. The private sleeping area has moved aft, to a snug owner's cabin on the port side. To starboard is a quarterberth that doubles as a navigator's seat (and will probably see duty as storage space).

If a two-couple boat means one couple plus occasional guests, this is a workable arrangement. A pocket door closes off the quarterberth for privacy when guests are aboard. Otherwise it functions with the main cabin. I checked out the bunks and found ample room in both for a six-footer. I would be able to rest comfortably against either wall of the owner's cabin (on either tack). Over in the guest quarter berth, however, heeling on starboard tack would roll me up against a shelf that is fixed only 13 inches above cushion height.

With a minimum of 6ft of headroom throughout and a maximum of 6ft 5in with 10 high-quality opening ports, 5 hatches and 2 Dorade vents—this is an airy production. The U-shaped galley should be easy to work in, with sinks near centerline for good drainage, double iceboxes and many small necessities (pan storage, dish racks) already worked out.

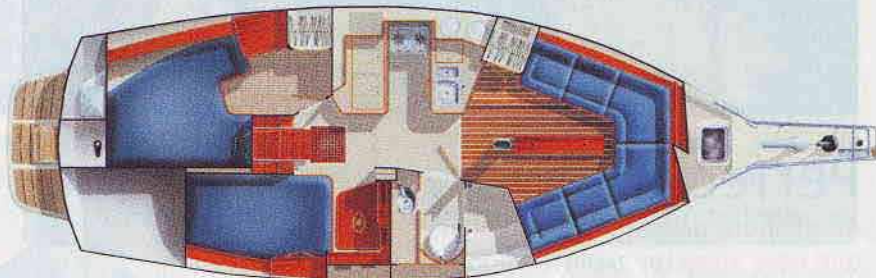
### Our Take

#### PROS:

Generous accommodation  
Quality systems  
Moderate draft

#### CONS:

Compromised sail plan



The look is stylish, and the dinette will accommodate six adults without a squeeze. The table leaves drop to maximize space and the table top rotates. I picture pleasurable in-port entertaining accented with the boat's dimmable lighting. The dual settees

also qualify as single berths. Optional filler cushions convert the package to twin doubles for those into serious pajama parties.

With the head and shower amidships, not crammed into a narrow end, this often-neglected space becomes almost luxurious.

→ **UNDER SAIL:** As compromises go, the Estero's easily-handled sails steal a bit from potential performance. Some people will care and some will not. In a breeze of 8-10 knots I was able to get about 4.5 knots out of the boat to weather, with a tick more on a beam reach. In smooth water the boat tacked through 90-95 degrees and the steering

felt precise. When we poked our nose out into the bay's "wind slot" I discovered that it's best to reef early—only four feet of draft—but once that's done the Estero will take care of its own.

→ **UNDER POWER:** Tight turning 180 degrees, the Estero will end up about one length from its original track. She's no champ for backing

(or maybe it's me), but don't forget, we have the thruster to bail us out.

Asking a casual 2,000

rpm from the Yanmar, driving the standard fixed prop, yielded a smidgeon over 6 knots.

With the hammer down you can demand 8 knots.

→ **CONCLUSION:** Island Packets are not middle-of-the-road boats. The company has a point of view and a loyal following. In the Estero, Bob Johnson has rethought the interior and wrapped it up in a package that will please the unfurled cruiser who values peace of mind. **AL**

