

Living With No Fear

Brothers embark on the ultimate adventure
By Brady L. Kay



Their story may seem simple, yet it's actually quite inspiring: two brothers purchase a houseboat and head off to explore the waterways with their wives. It was a first-time houseboat purchase for Keith and Allen McGee, which is where the inspiring part comes in. Both were raised on a ranch on the dry plains in Wyoming. Diversified oilfield careers further exposed them to machinery their entire lives. They showed no fear or doubt when they decided to purchase the Gibson houseboat. The brothers simply took on the challenge of being first-time skippers like they do everything else in life—at full throttle.

After purchasing their Gibson Fifty Nine Hundred Series houseboat at the 2008 National Houseboat Expo, the two couples wasted no time as they began to plan trips.

"You talk to people and it's amazing they don't recognize there are thousands of miles of navigable waterways," says Keith. "The guy on the street has no idea. So far as the average boater is concerned you get on the Mississippi and head out to the Gulf of Mexico and that's it."





Well Traveled. In the first year and a half, the *Dream Manor* logged nearly 4,000 miles through 61 locks while burning over 3,500 gallons of diesel fuel. The brothers enjoy plotting different trips and are already making plans for this summer.



Wasting No Time

Known as the 4McGees on their blog, Keith and his wife Maryann and Allen and his wife Carol splashed the 59-foot Gibson in the middle of April in 2008. Less than 190 days later the couple had already traveled 1,716 miles and through 30 locks before docking it for the winter—not bad for first-timers.

Their second year of ownership started in May and by the time *Houseboat* magazine finally caught up with them in September on the Cumberland River near Gallatin, Tenn. they had already added an additional 2,171 miles. With a total of 532 hours on the engines, it was obvious from the beginning that the houseboat was purchased to be used, not to just sit in a slip all summer.

Plenty Of Power

The McGees' Gibson houseboat, named *Dream Manor*, is equipped with twin 315hp Yanmar diesel engines, and a year and a half into their adventure they calculated that they've burned 3,740 gallons of diesel fuel. The brothers are very meticulous when it comes to the fine details, so breaking down the fuel economy numbers is just something they enjoy keeping track of.

"We figured we were getting about .93 miles per gallon the first year, but by the second summer we were around 1.14," explains Allen. "We averaged about 7 gallons of fuel per hour over the first two years. We chose diesel engines for two main reasons: service life on diesels is greater than on gasoline engines. We expected to run a lot of hours and wanted long lasting engines with greater durability. The second reason is safety, but not less important. Diesel fuel is much more stable than gasoline. It has a lower vapor pressure, meaning it does not evaporate and make fumes as readily as gasoline. There is a much less chance of causing a fire with diesel fuel."

Why Gibson?

When Keith and Maryann started searching for a houseboat, they knew it had to be one that would allow them to travel because they had no interest in staying on one particular lake.

"The Gibson felt like it fit the bill for me and my wife, and when brother decided he wanted to get onboard with the program we just got a bigger boat," says Keith with a laugh. "Gibson's reputation for durability and longevity is what we liked most about the manufacturer. I also liked the draft of the hull that allows us to go places that other large boats can't."

Looking back now there isn't a lot that the McGees would change, which says a lot for their research as well as the builder. For never owning a houseboat before, the two couples really did their homework to make sure it would be perfect for their needs.

"We took the trash compactor out and replaced the washer and dryer with a roomy pantry, but that's about it," says Keith. "To do it again we'd put in just a shower instead of a shower and tub since no one uses the tub, but overall we feel it is set up just like we want it."

Joint Adventures

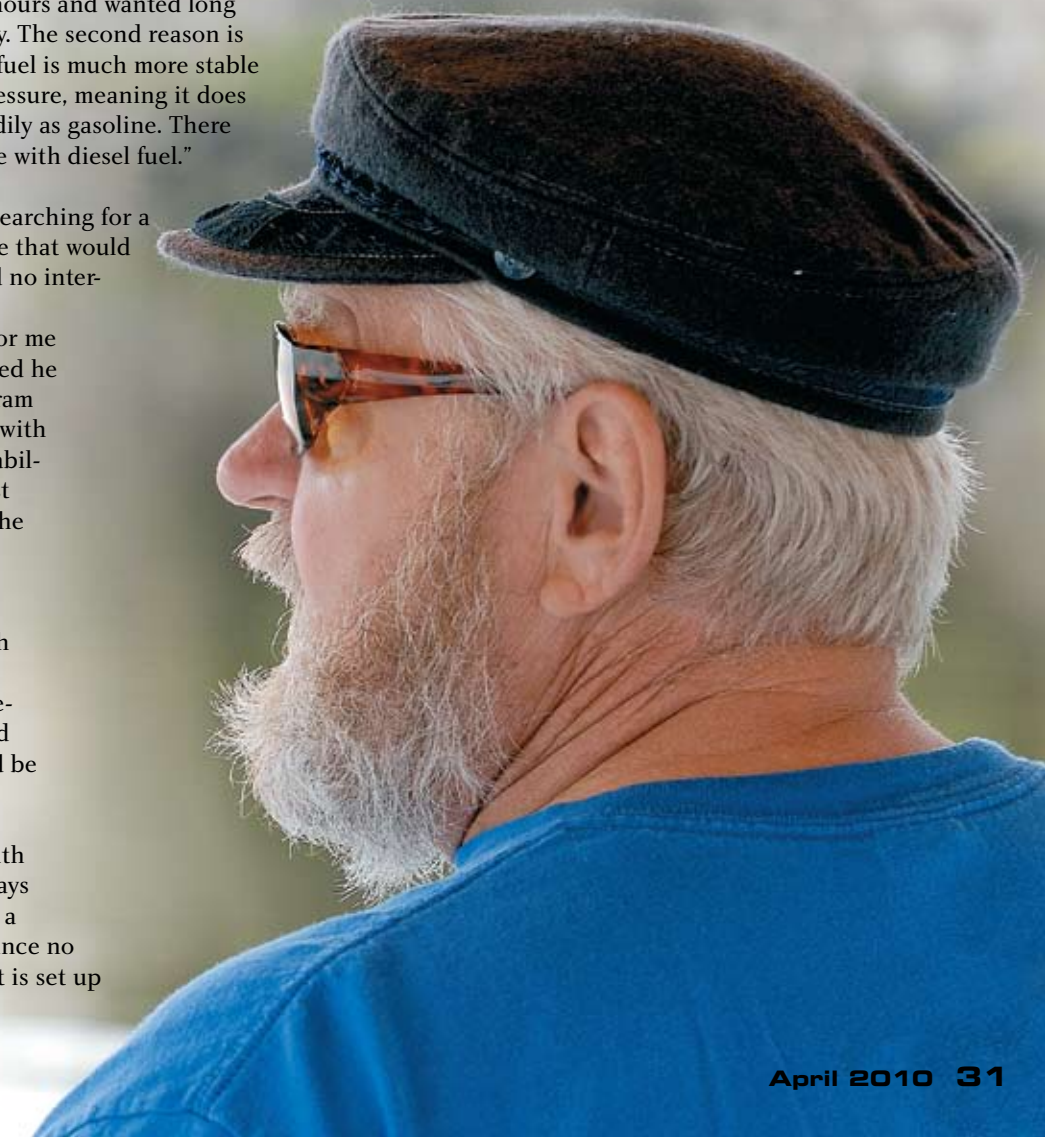
The layout provides two queen-size beds with identical closets. Plus there is storage below the beds, giving the houseboat "no shortage of room," according to Keith. Besides the equal staterooms for the owners, they also created a joint credit card and joint checking account for all boat expenses that they equally pay into to avoid any possible issues.

"When grocery shopping, you just use the joint credit card," explains Keith. "It's not a money issue when you do it like this. The biggest issue that most people have is over money, but our way of doing the expenses takes that factor out of it."

The brothers admit they have their moments at times, but overall they all get along well and the arrangement works great for them. The McGees started traveling together back in the mid 80's on other types of vacations to reduce the overall costs so sharing a houseboat isn't that much different for them.

Inspiration

The McGees enjoy their Gibson and the lifestyle and freedom that it offers and they're always encouraging others to follow their lead. But they also recognize that not everyone is willing to come aboard and leave their home for months at a time.



Co-Captains. Allen and Keith McGee are two brothers who share a lot of interests including becoming first-time houseboat owners together. The brothers have no fear when it comes to trying new adventures, which is inspiring others to follow their lead.



"Most people that can do this are in my age group or older and most feel they need to be at home to pay bills and take care of this and that," says Keith. "First thing they've got to be is computer literate and feel comfortable paying their bills and handling their affairs from long distance. This is the probably the biggest challenge that keeps those in my generation tied to their home."

Why They Do It

The boat was kept in Demopolis, Ala. last winter and in Columbus, Miss. this year. Plans for 2010 are already in the works. Last summer the McGees toured the Tennessee, the Little Tennessee, the Tellico, the Little Emory, the Hiwassee and the Cumberland Rivers, utilizing Fred Myers' Cruise Guides. Where they go this summer is anyone's guess.

Sold! At the 2008 National Houseboat Expo, the McGees (from L to R), Allen, Carol, Maryann and Keith, purchased the Gibson houseboat and the couples have been on the go ever sense.



"The scenery is spectacular, the days are never boring and 99 percent of the people we meet are wonderful," says Maryann. "Plus our summers are even more enjoyable when we have visitors aboard *Dream Manor*."

To read about past adventures and to keep up with the McGees you can follow them through their blog at www.mcgeesadventures.blogspot.com. The couples are great about keeping the site updated as they sightsee in different areas.

"We've still got a lot of miles to go," says Keith as he reaches for his map book. "It might be fun to head down to the Florida Keys."

Wherever their next adventure takes them it's sure to be a good one.

To start your own adventure on a Gibson houseboat you can contact the Tennessee-based manufacturer by calling 615-325-9320 or visit www.gibsonboats.com.



Dream ^{McGees} *Manor*
Port of St. Louis, Mo