

## *Matagorda, 1986*



### WPB 1303; A-Type Island-Class

---

*Matagorda* was named for Matagorda Island, a 38 mile long barrier island on the Texas Gulf coast, located approximately seven miles south of Port O'Connor, in the southernmost part of *Matagorda* County. *Matagorda* is Spanish for "thick brush."

---

Builder: Bollinger Machine Ship & Shipyard, Inc.; Lockport, LA

Cost: Approximately \$7 million each.

Keel Laid: 1 March 1985

Launched: 18 November 1985

Commissioned: 24 April 1986; recommissioned 5 March 2004

Decommissioned: 7 February 2003 (for conversion to 123-feet); 3 December 2008

Disposition: Scrapped

Length: 110' (1986); 123' (2003)

Beam: 21'

Draft: 7'4"

Displacement: 165 tons (fl)

Propulsion: 2 x RP200M Alco-Paxman Valenta diesels (2880 BHP); 2 x propellers

Generators: 2 x 99kw Caterpillar Diesels

Speed:

Maximum: 26+ knots

Cruising: 15 knots

Range: 1,853 miles @15 knots

Potable Water: 900 gallons

Crane: 1 Hydraulic Appleton

Complement: 18

Armament: 1 x 20mm cannon; 7.62 MGs (1986)

1x McDonnell Douglas 25-mm; 2 x .50 cal MGs; various small arms.

Electronics/Navigation: Hughes/Furuno SPS-73 I-band radar; SCCS-Lite combat data system

---

### **Class History:**

In 1982 after then-Vice President George H. W. Bush directed that the Coast Guard increase the intensity of the "war on drugs" the Coast Guard began an abbreviated acquisition for a new patrol boat based on a pre-existing design. After a contentious court battle waged by the loser of the first round of contract bids, Bollinger Shipyards was awarded a contract to build the new patrol boat.

They chose a pre-existing hull design by Vosper-Thornycroft. Interior, deck arrangement and superstructure were designed by Bollinger to Coast Guard specifications. They were built with a steel hull and an aluminum superstructure joined by the Deta Couple system. They were originally designed for an endurance of five-days at sea.

Eight 110-foot cutters, CGCs *Manitou* (WPB 1302), *Matagorda* (WPB 1303), *Monhegan* (WPB 1305), *Nunivak* (WPB 1306), *Vashon* (WPB 1308), *Attu* (WPB 1317), *Metompkin* (WPB 1325), and *Padre* (WPB 1328) were modified by extending their hulls to 123-feet, adding a stern-launch ramp for a RHIB, and other upgrades under the auspices of the Deepwater Program. All 110s would have been converted as well after the conversion of these eight cutters returned to service after their modifications were completed but severe hull cracks were identified after operational testing. The Commandant at the time, Admiral Thad Allen, ordered all eight decommissioned in 2007 and the modification program was cancelled

---

## Cutter History:

*Matagorda* was built by Bollinger Machine Ship & Shipyard in Lockport, Louisiana. Her keel was laid on 1 March 1985 and she was launched on 18 November 1985. *Matagorda* was assigned to Miami Beach, Florida, after her commissioning on 24 April 1986.

She seized her first vessel, the P/C *Marquitin* on 29 June 1986 after discovering an illicit cargo of 796 pounds of marijuana. On 21 July she seized the P/C *Leslie Lee* for smuggling 60 pounds of marijuana. On 20 September 1986 she seized P/C *FL-0016-DW* for smuggling 350 pounds of marijuana. On 20 October 1986 she seized the P/C *North* smuggling 1 ton of marijuana. Eight days later she seized the F/V *Bahamas Runner* for carrying 6.5 tons of marijuana. On 26 January 1987 she seized the F/V *Jackie Pan* smuggling 2 tons of marijuana. On 22 March 1987 she seized the F/V *Wet Dreams* 120 miles southeast of Miami carrying 1.5 tons of marijuana. On 7 July 1987 she seized the P/C *Thunderbird* off Exuma for smuggling 1,418 pounds of cocaine. On 5 September 1987 she recovered 50 pounds of floating marijuana bundles. On 16 November 1988 she rescued 86 Haitians from a 26-foot boat 60 miles south of Miami and returned them to Haiti.

From 2001 to 2003 *Matagorda* made 20 LE patrols, conducted 194 boardings, resulting in the interdiction of over 234 *migrants* and over a ton of illegal narcotics. The cutter and her crew also participated in nine "daring rescues, one of which involved 65 illegal migrants foundering in a sailboat being battered by 35 knot winds and 12 foot seas."

*Matagorda* arrived at Bollinger Shipyards on 7 February 2003 and was decommissioned. She was the first 110-foot cutter to begin the Integrated Deepwater System modernization and life extension overhaul. A press release noted: "As the first Deepwater asset in production, the MATAGORDA will have her length extended 13 feet for an overall length of 123 feet; will receive extensive crew quarter improvements; state-of-the-art capabilities enhancements in communications, detection, and prosecution; as well as a stern boat launch ramp to accommodate the new 7-meter Short Range Prosecutor (SRP)."

The Integrated Coast Guard "Systems partnership" delivered the refurbished cutter to the Coast Guard at a ceremony at Lockport on 5 March 2004. After returning to operational duty, *Matagorda* and the other seven cutters modified under the Deepwater contract suffered from hull deformation and deck cracking along with shaft misalignment issues while operating in moderate and heavy seas. The Coast Guard conducted extensive studies and carried out two "structural fixes" that proved to be ineffective. On 13 April 2007 the Commandant at the time, Admiral Thad Allen, ordered all eight decommissioned and the modification program was cancelled. He noted: "The excessive cost and time associated with continuing to pursue an uncertain resolution to these structural problems has convinced me -- with the recommendation of my chief engineer -- that permanently removing these cutters from service while recouping any residual value and redirecting funds to other programs is in the best interest of the government.

The eight cutters were then laid up at Curtis Bay, Maryland to await the results of legal actions and were formally decommissioned on 3 December 2008.

Two hulls, *Monhegan* and *Attu*, were transferred to the Navy for use as targets while the others were scrapped.

---

## Sources:

110-Foot (& 123 Foot) Island Class Cutter File,

CGC *Matagorda* Cutter History File, U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office.

Latas, Robert M., Frank N. McCarthy & William M. Simpson, Jr. "U.S. Coast Guard 110' Island Class Patrol Boats: Concept to Completion." Unpublished paper; 110-foot Cutter File.

Scheina, Robert. U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft, 1946-1990. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990.

