



Why Panga Vessels Continue to Thrive in the Drug Trafficking World

OE Watch Commentary: The vessels used by Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO) have evolved over the last two decades. They also vary regionally based on distance travelled, size of the shipment transported, and ability to deceive authorities. For these reasons, traffickers use a gamut of vessels that range from fishing boats, yolas, pangas, go-fast vessels and even submarines. While all of these vessels play an important role in maritime drug trafficking, pangas appear to be the one that traffickers consistently turn to. The accompanying passages discuss why pangas are so popular in the drug trafficking world.

The original panga gained popularity in the 1960s at a time when they were primarily used for fishing. However, the panga style boat can be easily retrofitted into what is known in the drug trafficking world as a “go-fast” boat because of its design. As the first passage discusses, the original panga was built out of wood, but over time, producers realized that fiberglass versions could be mass-produced quickly and cheaply from molds rather than crafted from wood. The fiberglass models also proved to be incredibly durable and able to handle outboard engines.

For drug traffickers, the fiberglass feature is significant, as it provides pangas the ability to evade radar detection. Furthermore, as the second passage discusses, pangas tend to be very versatile, plane easily, have good stability in both deep and shallow water, and can be outfitted with multiple (up to five) 250-300 horsepower engines allowing them to travel up to 100 kilometers per hour in ideal open sea conditions. They are also relatively cheap to build, making them popular along the entire coast of Central America because fishermen as well as drug traffickers appreciate the attributes of the vessel.

Another feature of the newer pangas is the “Delta pad” which is a flat, slightly concave running surface that extends along the keel. According to the third passage, this feature is approximately two inches wide towards the bow and about 16 inches at the transom. It is beneficial to drug traffickers as it allows them to quickly pull their panga from the ocean into shallow waters, and onto the beach for a fast offload. Furthermore, the pad, combined with the narrow beam, influences the boat’s sea-keeping abilities. This means that the panga pops onto plane almost instantly and skips on top of a bay chop rather than cutting through it. For drug trafficking purposes, this is key because the hollowed out interiors of these vessels can carry up to 1,500 kilograms or more of cocaine in a single shipment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“Pangas utilized for drug trafficking purposes are generally outfitted with GPS equipment and satellite communications systems. They also possess night vision equipment and can carry 20 barrels of gas each containing 55 gallons which means they can travel long distances without having to re-fuel.”

Source: “The History of the Panga,” *Boating Magazine*, 10 August 2017. <https://www.boatingmag.com/boats/history-panga#page-10>

Here’s how modern fiberglass pangas changed the world: They could be mass-produced quickly and cheaply from molds rather than crafted from wood, were incredibly durable and could handle an outboard engine — like the 40 hp one that Yamaha happened to be marketing to indigenous commercial fishermen around the world. Furthermore, pangas can run in all kinds of conditions.

Source: “Los barcos de los narcos (Boats Used by Drug Trafficking Organizations),” *La Semana*, 12 December 2016. <http://www.semana.com/nacion/recuadro/los-barcos-narcos/127063-3>

Pangas utilized for drug trafficking purposes are generally outfitted with GPS equipment and satellite communications systems. They also possess night vision equipment and can carry 20 barrels of gas each containing 55 gallons which means they can travel long distances without having to re-fuel. Another important feature of drug trafficking pangas is that they are painted blue, black, or green in their interior to better camouflage themselves in open sea. The design of these vessels is also important as they are versatile, plane easily, have good stability in both deep and shallow water, and can be out-fitted with multiple (anywhere from 2-5) 250-300HP engines allowing them to travel up to 100 kilometers per hour.

Source: “About Pangas,” *H & H Boat Works*, 10 December 2017. <http://handhboatworks.com/about-pangas/>

The classic Panga style hull features a high length to beam ratio, with a sharp bow that transitions to a shallow dead rise at the stern. In addition, true Panga hulls will have a “delta pad” which is a flat running surface starting at the stern that transitions to a point toward bow. These hulls are exceptionally predictable in heavy seas, as they can be easily stay on plane to speeds much lower than today’s deep V hulls. The delta pad and narrow beam also allows for an easy transition to plane, without any sense of “plowing” as experienced in heavier deep V hulls at below planing speeds.