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MAINE

BOATS, HOMES & HARBORS

The Magazine of the Coast

the Coast OF Summer

plus

Why every 12-year-old
NEEDS a Boston Whaler



The Hinckley T34

Here's a shocker: I design powerboats. Well, perhaps "design" is too strong a word.

ALTHOUGH I've plodded through the whole gamut of yacht design tasks, my specialty has always been aesthetics and what is often referred to as "the first drawing." When I worked in an office they called my little nook the "Art Department," and I'm proud of that intentional double entendre. Now that I'm on my own, even when working as a consultant with other known designers, I concentrate on the styling of boats.

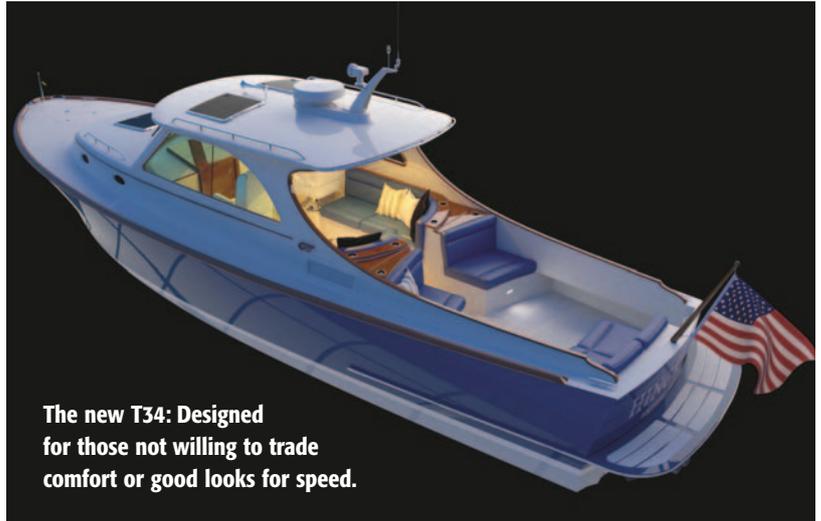
I'm working with an individual client right now on a powerboat project. It's a tough go—he hasn't yet put his finger on one of my 15 proposals, or to say, "THIS is it!" He is hard to please. How hard? During a recent meeting he made an offhand

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statement that he "wasn't in love" with the latest Hinckley jetboat, the T34. To me, this was astounding.

I've loved the looks of the Hinckley Picnic Boats and all their derivatives. From the very first time I laid eyes on the prototype, I predicted that this gorgeous and classy styling would sell by the thousands and rake in the millions, and time has certainly seconded my guess.

The look, feel, and performance of all Hinckley yachts—sail and power—have



The new T34: Designed for those not willing to trade comfort or good looks for speed.

illustrations courtesy the Hinckley Company

evolved over the years, and the T34 has been the beneficiary of that. The history of that evolution goes something like this:

Legend has it that when the molds for the Bermuda 40 were close to worn out the company destroyed them. Anon, the Hinckley 42 sailboat, a roomier and more modern offering, was born. It was an instant success, and probably extended Hinckley's august reputation as a builder of fine sailboats for another 20 years. The company undertook some much bigger cruising sailboats and even expanded into custom building for various designers and clients.

Companies need growth and change, and the occasional influx of capital therewith. A hotel developer and yachtsman from Virginia named Shep McKenney bought into the firm and suggested that something new was in order. Although all the corporate knees jerked in the customary direction of sailboats, he argued for a powerboat. After the boardroom gasps had sub-



Fine interior fit and finish, Hinckley style.



It looks like the Picnic Boat, which looks like a lobsterboat, which has a bit of Bunker & Ellis in its bloodlines (albeit with the tail of a rum-runner).

sided, the decision was made to offer a powerboat. Bruce King, who specialized in sailboats, would design it.

Almost everyone, and certainly this author, instantly loved what soon came to be called the Picnic Boat. It was the perfect length to provide some enclosure—36 feet—with plenty of sheer, shallow draft, and a sexy profile. To be sure, the extreme twist of the topsides, from flare forward to exaggerated barrel-tumblehome at the stern didn't please everyone. You either loved it or you didn't.

Those of us who specialize in the *art-work* of boat configuration consider some very obscure factors. We consider, for example, the effect of sunlight along a swept protuberance. Or, in the case of the sculptured Picnic Boat hull, how external surroundings will be reflected by the extremely warped, mirror-like Awlgrip surface.

The Picnic Boat sold like gourmet hotcakes, this despite—or perhaps because—the boat's impressive quality was matched by an equally impressive price sticker. The first-ever buyer, who was a bit of a collector of classic sailboats, ordered two, which got things off on a happy foot. It didn't hurt when Martha Stewart bought hers and then bragged about it during an entire episode of her television show.

The first Picnic Boats were offered with either a water-jet propulsion system or an inboard-outdrive. In jig time the market voted overwhelmingly for the

many advantages of the jet. One of few drawbacks was that the skegless and rudderless jetboats could skate sideways,

Hinckley T34 Specifications

LOA 34'3"

Beam 11'

Draft 1'10"

Displ. 14,000 lbs.

Fuel 160 gals.

Water 35 gals.

Top speed: 32-36 knots

Deadrise angle @ transom: 90°

Base price: \$535,000

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which made docking tricky. Instead of a draft-deepening keel or some such, a bow-thruster was added; it proved itself useful, especially in the initial series, which had only a single nozzle and was of limited maneuverability.

Hinckley's JetStick®, which further improved the Picnic Boat's maneuverability, was developed by a young tinkerer named Kent Fadeley, who worked with other experts in hydraulics, electronics, and computer-interface. This joystick controller blended vectors from thruster, waterjet, and reversing-buckets, and allowed the rankest amateur to

maneuver the hull any which way, including sideways.

Hinckley perfected and sold hundreds of this boat that any wealthy owner could skim over flotsam and jetsam and lobsterpotsam, then crab into its dock effortlessly. You might think they would have left well-enough alone. Not so. Versions of the basic style were offered with more room or more speed or more of a "speedboat" look and feel. That's when the boats were given the appellation "Talaria," a reference to the winged foot of the Greek god Mercury that years ago was stylized into the cove stripe of all Hinckleys. Some were powered with twin engines, which further increased maneuverability, as reversing buckets could be variably lowered and nozzles cranked over to help "twist" the ship.

A twin-engined version of the original Picnic Boat was developed that was a foot longer and a foot wider. As might be expected, it too sold like hotcakes, as did a model with an extended shelter. All these boats came to be manufactured in a new state-of-the-art facility 20 miles north of the original Hinckley yard in Trenton, Maine.

The huge success and worldwide appeal of these smallish powerboats from the back-of-beyond in Maine attracted a big-time corporate system of management and sales. Hinckley expanded in every way—including a change of ownership—with a real-estate component, sales and service operations in several states beyond Maine, and a head office in Rhode Island. The heart of Hinckley nevertheless remains downeast. Which brings us to the present.

Right now customers have made clear their increasing preference for twin-engined boats. Just as in aircraft, there is a small added margin of safety with redundant propulsion. Two engines will push a boat faster (although not nearly twice as fast). Two engines are inevitably located higher in the hull, one result of which can be a shallower overall draft. Finally, side-located twin engines can be hidden beneath attractive upholstered seating rather than in an engine box amidships in the cockpit.

Thirty-seven-foot Picnic Boats were

going out the door at more than three quarters of a million dollars apiece, but today's realities argue for a smaller boat and a lower price. Enter the T34. It looks like the Picnic Boat, which looks quite like a lobsterboat, which has a bit of Bunker & Ellis in its bloodlines (albeit with the tail of a rum-runner), and a base price, with page upon page of included amenities, of \$535,000. Bruce King may have retired from yacht design, but the T34 still looks as Kingly as the first Picnic Boat.

Much of Hinckley's powerboat market has been in Florida, which has been the nexus for fishing and motorboat racing for a century. The company began consulting with designer Michael Peters about the time when the single-engine 36 was expanded into the twin 37. Certainly it was Peters, with his sportfishing experience, who suggested deepening the overall dihedral vee from the maybe-a-bit-shallow 15° to the pound-perfect 19°.

I should emphasize here that nowhere in any brochure or specifica-

tion sheet is Michael Peters named as the T34's designer. Title blocks credit the design to "THC," which stands for The Hinckley Company design teams, located both in Maine and at the company's main base in Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

Modern buyers at the top end of the marketplace like a fast boat.

Credit where due: While certainly many of the company designers had input, I suspect that Peters had the final say.

Modern buyers at the top end of the marketplace like a fast boat. While at this point the tooling is under way for the T34—no prototypes exist—performance predictions indicate that the boat will go about 32 statute miles an hour with a pair of Yanmar engines and nearly 36 mph with bigger Volvos.

As in the past, each hull will have the very best core and skin materials, includ-

ing an outer layer of Kevlar. The hulls will be built using the SCRIMP (Seaman Composite Resin Infusion Molding Process) method, which provides a slightly higher ratio of strong fiber to solidified plastic, and thus a stiffer panel that can be repeatedly punished without breakdown.

I'm not at heart a powerboat guy—I'm mostly just an artist—but I see the T34 as an incredibly comely and unusually practical boat. Perhaps the oval forecabin windows are one size too small, but that's a minor quibble.

Phil Bennett, the chief salesman for Hinckley in Maine who provided me with much of the above information about the new T34, has offered me a spin in the first boat, which is scheduled to be launched in late June. I plan to take him up on it. ★

Art Paine is an author, artist, and yacht designer who lives in Bernard, Maine. He recently restored himself a Luders, just to keep his hand in.