



High Five

PETER A. JANSSEN TAKES THE HINCKLEY T34 FOR A RIDE IN MAINE AND DISCOVERS HOW THIS PEPPY CRAFT USES JET POWER TO EXEMPLIFY THE JOY OF BOATING.

A friendly voice interrupted my reverie. Speeding up *Somes Sound* off Southwest Harbor, Maine, on a cloudless early summer afternoon, my mind had meandered back to the same scene 18 years earlier, when I had cruised over the same waters on hull number one of the original Hinckley Picnic Boat with Shep McKenney, then the company's president. The Picnic Boat, of course, went on to become one of the most successful—and most easily recognized—boat lines ever launched. She was acclaimed for her graceful sheer, gentle tumblehome, and gleaming teak inside and out. Indeed, the Hinckley Picnic Boat has become an icon in the pantheon of modern yacht design.

But now, bringing me back to the present, Jim McManus, who's been the president of Hinckley Yachts for the past six years, was calling me from the cockpit of Hinckley's newest vessel, the T34, a somewhat smaller, sportier (and cheaper) version of the Picnic Boat. "Peter, you've got to come back here. You'll love it," he said.

Well, I wasn't exactly unhappy where I already was, settled in to the Hinckley-designed navigator's seat while Mike Arieta, Hinckley's VP for product development, was starting the test drive. The boat had been launched, after a little ceremony, just a few minutes before, and Arieta was opening up the throttles. But I couldn't very well resist McManus's invitation (or the ever-expanding smile on his face), so I walked aft; straight aft, in this case, since the helm deck and the cockpit are all on the same level, joining McManus on the transom bench seat. "Watch this," McManus said, urging Arieta to put the boat into a hard turn at about 30 knots. Arieta turned the wheel all the way over and the Hinckley carved through the deep-blue Maine water as if it were a Porsche on the test track in Stuttgart. As the grin on my face started to match the one already affixed to McManus's, I realized that, despite the low freeboard, we were both totally dry (the boat hadn't thrown back any spray at all). This was definitely a well-behaved, elegant, and above all, fun boat.

LOA: 34'3"
LWL: 31'5"
BEAM: 11'0"
DRAFT: 1'10"
DISPL.: 14,000 lb.
FUEL: 160 gal.
WATER: 35 gal.
TEST POWER: 2/260-mhp 6BY2-260
Yanmar diesels
TRANSMISSIONS: ZF 63
BASE PRICE: \$535,000

"It's supposed to be fun," McManus said. "You put the throttle down and you start looking around for someone to high-five."

With the new T34, Hinckley is on a roll. The company launched a new 48-footer a year ago, and it had already sold six of the 34s before the first one hit the water. But the 34 has been a long time coming. The original Picnic Boat, introduced in 1994, was a 36-foot-long, slender (10 feet 2 inches of beam), luxurious version of a Down East lobster boat with a single diesel engine and a Hamilton waterjet drive (for low draft, safety, and worry-free navigation through waters speckled with lobster pots). It wasn't particularly fast (top speed: 27 knots) and it ran on a relatively flat hull (only a 15-degree deadrise at the transom), but its drop-dead gorgeous looks guaranteed an owner list that went from Martha Stewart to Geraldo Rivera to Gulf-state sheiks. Hinckley made the boat even more appealing in 1998 by adding its patented JetStick drive, which coupled a bow thruster to the waterjet for joystick-controlled maneuverability. Using one hand, you could walk the boat sideways.



SEE MORE photos of the Hinckley T34 @ www.pmymag.com

With Hinckley's traditional lines and style, the T34 is the latest evolution of the iconic Picnic Boat.

Not wanting to tinker with success, Hinckley made only modest changes in the Picnic Boat until 2008, when it introduced a slightly larger (37-foot) version with twin diesels, more room inside and out, and a heftier price tag. Unfortunately, 2008, of course, was the start of the economic downturn. The new 34 was designed to fit in between the 29R, the smallest boat in the company's lineup, and the enlarged Picnic Boat. Price became important. Base price for the 29R (R stands for runabout) is \$383,000; the Picnic Boat is now \$835,000. The new T34 (T stands for Talaria, the winged sandals worn by the Greek god Hermes) comes in at \$535,000. "It's priced to bring new people in," McManus said. "More people can afford it."

In many ways, it's also designed as an all-around boat. "The boat creates a perfect day on the water," McManus said. "You can fish, if you want to fish, ski, if you like that, or have an elegant cocktail cruise with friends." Picnics are still encouraged, as are possible overnights (the galley and cabin are smaller than on the Picnic Boat, but the V-berth is still sized for two adults). But what the T34 has lost in size (and price), it has gained in performance. Michael Peters, the famed designer (and *Power & Motoryacht* columnist), drew the 34's underbody, which carries a 19-degree deadrise at the transom. The Hinckley design team drew everything

above the waterline. The boat's twin Yanmars—yes, twins—pushed the 34 to a top speed of 32.8 knots on that launch afternoon on Somes Sound, although I saw a two-way-average top speed of 33.5 knots on the GPS a few weeks later on Long Island Sound with three people onboard and a full load of fuel. The 34 is also user friendly, designed so that owners can spend a maximum amount of time actually enjoying the boat, and less time worrying about varnishing the bright-work and other maintenance. In fact, there's considerably less teak on the T34 than is the norm for previous Hinckleys, although you can add more (cockpit coamings, swim platform, cockpit sole, for example) as options.

During the depth of the recession, Hinckley management thought a long time about the 34, and even held what McManus said was "a slew of focus groups." In planning a new model, Hinckley always interviews owners of other traditional Down East brands—people with Hunts, MJMs, and Sabres, for example—in the appropriate size and price range. But for the 34 they looked at a larger universe, and asked owners of Grady-Whites and Boston Whalers what they wanted in a new boat.

"People overwhelmingly expressed interest in a simpler boat," McManus said. "They have a limited window of opportunity to use the boat, and they want to have fun." Part of the fun was speed, maneuverability, and nimble and sporty handling characteristics. Having

spent some time on the boat, I can attest that the T34 delivers on all these fronts.

The focus groups also were clear about the desire for twin engines (as opposed to a single), a comfortable helm, and a large head, even at the expense of the galley area. Again, Hinckley delivered. The T34's helm is both ergonomic and graceful (and sightlines are superb), with just enough teak and elegant curves to maintain the Hinckley tradition. The head is indeed generous for a 34-footer, while the galley is more appropriate for a picnic than an extended cruise. To maintain the boat's socializing space, with two separate seating areas (one with U-shaped lounges just aft of the helm, protected by the hardtop, the other with forward- and aft-facing seats in the cockpit), the forward cabin has been shortened a bit from the size of the Picnic Boat while the helm is proportionally farther forward. "You could call this our cab-forward design," McManus said.

The boat's sporty performance, of course, is due in large part to her weight, her twin 260-horsepower Yanmars, and the ever-maneuverable jet drives. To save weight while maintaining structural strength, Hinckley has been using the SCRIMP (Seemann Composite Resin Infusion Molding Process) system with vinylester resin, Kevlar, E-glass, and balsa core for almost two decades. An additional 700 pounds or so was saved in the 34 by optimizing resin flow

during infusion (cutting curved areas perfectly so resin flows evenly without creating channels in the outer bends), and eliminating parts of the internal grid by using some interior features as structural members. As a result, the 34, even with twin engines, weighs in at only 14,000 pounds.

The design advantages of twin engines are that they add to stability, and they eliminate the need for a center engine box taking up space in the middle of the boat. Access to the engine room itself is extraordinary: Push a button and the forward section of the cockpit rises on two struts, providing standing headroom between the diesels, with plenty of space all around for daily checks or more serious work. You can climb into the engine room from the cockpit, of course, but there's also a walkway forward if you need to pick up a rag or something from the helm area.

But that's getting away from the fun part. With its elegant design and classic good looks, Hinckley's new T34 is simply an aesthetic delight. That's all well and good, but the real treat is spending some time onboard, carving some turns, speeding up a sound, blowing all your cares away in the joy of the moment. As the afternoon slipped away, our test ride ended. Back at the Hinckley dock, McManus and I got off the boat, looked at each other, and exchanged high fives. □

Hinckley Yachts, 866-446-2553; www.hinckleyyachts.com



The T34's heartbreaking tumblehome encases a technological marvel.

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	RANGE	dB(A)
1000	4.5	1.0	648	68
1500	5.6	2.4	335	76
2000	7.9	4.8	237	74
2500	9.8	8.0	176	78
3000	15.6	14.2	158	81
3500	26.3	21.8	173	83
3800	31.2	25.4	176	84
4000	32.8	28.2	167	87



READY FOR TAKEOFF
Hinckley's jet drives, paired with twin 260-hp Yanmars, give the T34 excellent speed and maneuverability.

TEST CONDITIONS:

Air temperature: 81°F; wind: light; seas: calm; load: 120 gal. fuel, 17 gal. water, 6 persons. Speeds are two-way averages measured by GPS. GPH measured with Yanmar engine display. Range based on 90 percent of advertised fuel capacity. Sound levels measured at the helm. 65 dB(A) is the level of normal conversation.

NOTEWORTHY OPTIONS:

Teak pilothouse and cockpit soles (\$15,020); Teak insert on swim platform (\$1,950); Varnished teak cockpit coamings (\$3,850); Hinckley-designed stainless steel bowrail (\$4,300); 5-kW Onan genset with sound shield (\$16,250); reverse-cycle heat and air conditioning for interior and pilothouse (\$16,850); Raymarine ST6002+ autopilot interfaced to GPS/chartplotter (\$3,600).

