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HINCKLEY PICNIC BOAT

A modern-day classic



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Hinckley Picnic Boat MK III

A modern-day *classic*.

BY HEATHER STEINBERGER



SPECS

LOA	38'11"
Beam	11'3"
Draft	2'1"
Weight	15,000 lbs.
Fuel Capacity	220 gals.
Power	Twin Volvo D-4 300-hp diesels
Jets	Twin Hamilton 274 Jet Drives
Price	Contact Hinckley Yachts

hinckleyyachts.com

To me, the most interesting thing about classics is that they once were contemporary; on the cutting edge of naval architecture and technology. It's fascinating to look at contemporary yachts and try to ascertain which models might stand the test of time.

One July morning, I caught my first glimpse of Hinckley's new Picnic Boat MK III at Irish Boat Shop in Harbor Springs, Michigan, and realized this striking, twin-engine, jet-powered cruiser might be a contender. To start, the Picnic Boat has already endured for 15 years—the MK III is the third incarnation of a steadily evolving design.

"The timing of her launch was driven by feedback from our existing boat owners," said Jim McManus, Hinckley's president and chief executive officer. "Owners asked that we preserve the beauty and quality of the legacy product but enhance the performance in terms of speed and sea-keeping ability. They also asked for a more open-air feel in the pilothouse and better operating visibility at the helm."

The Southwest Harbor, Maine-based boatbuilder used feedback from both owners and its sales team as focus for its redesign process. And they apparently hit the mark. Since the MK III's 2008 introduction, her increased comfort level and improved performance continue to garner acclaim. In fact, despite the rocky U.S. economy, the MK III's introduction has proven to be the most successful model launch in Hinckley's 82-year history.

Hinckley Sales Director Marty Letts welcomed me aboard *ZOI*, our test boat for the day, at Irish Boat Shop. We first reviewed the MK III's design improvements, including her deeper-V hull with improved variable deadrise and her twin engines, which now are tucked below deck.

"The new hull and twin engines are the major changes," Letts observed. "She has improved speed and handling, especially in rough seas; the twin engines make people feel more comfortable; and with the engines belowdeck, we have free rein in the cockpit."

Moving forward, we took a look at the MK III's raised bridgedeck, another key feature.

"We really wanted to achieve better visibility for the helmsman and guests," Letts explained. "The raised bridgedeck improved it so much."

In addition to the 360-degree visibility, I especially liked that the Picnic Boat's pilothouse manages to accomplish two things that might, at first glance, seem to be at odds. It offers outstanding protection without making you feel confined; yet no one will feel left out with such a wide-open layout.

The Picnic Boat has always been heralded as a platform for entertaining, and I was pleased to see that, despite the updates, the MK III still feels like a Picnic Boat.

"According to the original story, a sailboat customer didn't want the work anymore," Letts said with a grin. "He wanted to just go out and have a picnic."

Mission accomplished, to say the least. Hinckley designed its waterjet system to deal effectively with Maine lobster pots and gunkholing in otherwise inaccessible shallows, a concept that has adapted successfully to cruising grounds around the world. And the yacht itself is ideally suited to its propulsion system, since the company designed the hull around the waterjet rather than trying to shoehorn it into an existing model.

While most owners use the Picnic Boat as a day boat, she does pro-

vide substantial accommodations for overnight cruises. While her belowdeck layout is similar to her predecessors, it's bigger and provides more headroom.

The MK III's cherry interior incorporates a forward V-berth with large hanging locker and plenty of storage; a port-side galley with two-burner electric stove, microwave and icebox; and a surprisingly roomy starboard-side head with pull-out shower. The traditional teak lining in the V-berth area was a particularly nice touch, adding to the yacht's classic nautical feel.

"We primarily designed this boat for two people, although you certainly can entertain a group or use it as a family," Letts noted. "Lots of our owners have stepped down from big yachts; they want something simple and easy to use. Most of them are experienced, but we do get some newbies. They perceive this to be a user-friendly boat."

I was eager to see just how user-friendly the MK III handled. We cast off *ZOI*'s docklines and motored into a flawless summer day on Little Traverse Bay.

First I took a few minutes to familiarize myself with the patented JetStick, a Hinckley signature. I effortlessly slid *ZOI* forward, backward and sideways, throttling up a bit for more power. Even if the yacht was in gear, she would remain in place until I moved the JetStick.

Once I put her into helm mode, I could steer *ZOI* by wheel or JetStick, depending on my preference. I was astonished at how quiet and smooth the ride was. No noise, no vibration. That's due to engine placement, as well as to jet propulsion; as McManus observed, the belowdeck engines did more than open up the cockpit for entertaining.

"By putting the engines below, we reduced the noise levels at idle and underway by 20 percent," he explained.

As we raced back and forth, occasionally dipping the rail and spinning a figure-eight, I marveled at the waterjet propulsion. Not only does it give the MK III access to all but the skinniest waters, it means less drag and better fuel efficiency at high speeds.

That knifelike bow and deep-V hull made all the difference in the world as we sliced through a few wakes, trying to simulate rougher sea conditions on a flat-calm morning. *ZOI* never jolted us, and we never heard a cabinet or door bang down below. Rock solid.

Keeping the yacht in her 25- to 28-knot cruising range, I switched to JetStick steering. *ZOI*'s responsiveness was impressive; she rocked from side to side obligingly as I twisted the stick. Then we throttled her up to 31 knots, within a single knot of her top speed. The ride was butter-smooth, and it was so quiet we could talk without raising our voices.

"She's several knots faster than the old Picnic Boat," Letts commented. "She comes with 300-horsepower Volvo D-4s, but you can get 370-horsepower D-6s if you want."

According to McManus, the D-6s provide a 31.5-knot cruise and 35-knot top speed.

Returning to Irish Boat Shop, I couldn't help but notice all the other boaters noticing us. That, too, is a Hinckley signature. With their distinctive fit and finish and drop-dead-gorgeous lines, Hinckleys command some serious attention on the water.

Walking toward the parking lot, I couldn't resist looking back at *ZOI* one more time. Experienced boaters and newbies alike will be thoroughly charmed by the MK III. Without a doubt, she is a contemporary triumph—and she is surely destined to become a classic. ⚓