



An Updated Icon

The new Hinckley Picnic Boat is bigger, faster and even prettier than the original.

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When I drove hull number one of the original 36-foot Hinckley Picnic Boat outside the factory in Southwest Harbor, Maine, in 1994 with the company's then-president, Shep McKenney, I couldn't help but be impressed, as were my wife and then-teenage daughter, who were with me. After all, the boat was drop-dead gorgeous, with just the right combination of New England tradition (sweet tumblehome, long, sweeping sheer line) and contemporary elegance.

It was a boat that made you smile just to look at. It was a boat you wanted to drive, to own, to have hanging on the dock behind your house.

As impressed as I was, I had no idea at the time that Hinckley (arguably America's most elite brand) was creating a genre, that in the intervening 14 years the Picnic Boat would spawn imitators on both coasts of the United States and even in Europe and the Far East. Now, more than 370 Picnic Boats later, it's time for an encore. It's time for Hinckley to answer, "What's next?" In response to owners' (and prospective owners') requests, Hinckley has come up with a new, improved version. The 37 Picnic Boat is bigger and beamier, with two diesel engines instead of one and with a deeper-V hull for improved offshore performance. Yet it still features the water jet drives that let you virtually pull the boat up to a beckoning beach (it still is, after all, a Picnic Boat).

When he unveiled the new Picnic Boat at the Newport Boat Show this fall, Jim McManus, Hinckley's president,



SWEEPING VIEW. Looking aft from the bridge deck (top) with an expanse of teak coaming; the galley (above) with lots of countertop.

said it was an evolution of the line — now stretching from 20 to 55 feet — but “with revolutionary performance and looks.” I walked through it then at the dock and thought it seemed like a much larger, cleaner and heftier version of the original, with some very nice touches, such as the oversized electric-powered side windows.

A few weeks later, I climbed on the boat again for a test drive in Annapolis, Maryland, with Ed Roberts, Hinckley's vice president for sales and product development. Over the years, Ed and I have done a few boat tests together. The most notable was two years ago when we drove a Hinckley 29 runabout around Lake Como in northern Italy. When we tied up the boat for the night outside a lakefront restaurant, Ed asked the owner how much he owed him for the dockage. In halting English, the owner replied that we didn't owe him anything because “the boat is so beautiful I want it here.” It was a very Italian response to style and beauty, but one that applies to Hinckleys around the world.

Climbing on the 37, I immediately realized why it seemed so much roomier. The original version had the engine box in the cockpit; the new version raised the level of the cockpit and bridge deck a bit so the two Volvo Penta D-4 300 hp diesels are now below in a traditional engine room. This means several things: First, there's a lot more space in the cockpit for socializing; you can walk straight from the cockpit to the helm station; and having the engines underfoot (and under insulation) makes for a quieter boat. All are major advantages.

I was anxious to get under way, so before I explored the rest of the boat we cast off the lines and headed out into the harbor on a gorgeous, crisp fall day — one of those days when it seems like you can see forever. We rounded the point of the Naval Academy, where what looked like two old minesweepers were heading out for training, and cruised up the Severn River. With its gracious homes and docks lining the shoreline, this seemed like perfect

Picnic Boat country. Nailing the throttles, I wasn't surprised to find that driving the 37 is really fun, as was driving the original. The boat was designed around the Hamilton water jet propulsion system (no rudders, no worries about snagging lobster pots or anything else) so the balance, at speed or in tight turns, seems just right.

HINCKLEY PB-37

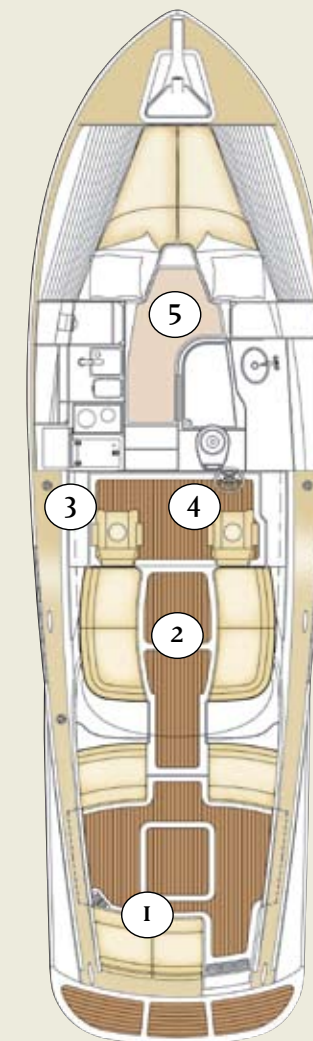
SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 36'11"
Beam: 11'3"
Draft: 2'1"
Disp.: 16,000 lbs.
Fuel: 220 gals.
Water: 40 gals.
Contact: Hinckley Yachts, hinckleyyachts.com
Base Price: \$715,000

PERFORMANCE

TEST POWER: (2) 300 hp Volvo Penta D-4 diesel engines with twin Hamilton 274 jet drives and Hinckley JetStick controls. Speeds measured by GPS in the Severn River off Annapolis, Maryland, in fair weather and calm seas with two people aboard, seven-eighths fuel and half water. Sound levels measured at the helm in dB-A.

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	DB-A
1,000	4.7	1.2	72
1,500	6.2	2.6	74
2,000	8.3	6.2	75
2,500	11.1	11.0	80
3,000	17.9	18.8	81
3,500	31.6	30.0	84



INSIDE: ① The cockpit is large, with luxurious seating. ② The bridge deck, with its facing settees, is particularly inviting. ③ The side windows also are large and slide open electrically. ④ The view from the helm is superb. ⑤ Below, the galley, V-berth and head are large enough so a couple could easily extend the picnic into a long weekend aboard.

PROS:

- Iconic Picnic Boat, in larger, more luxurious, twin-engine iteration.
- Hinckley quality — none better.
- Beautiful, flowing lines.
- Lots of room for entertaining on the bridge deck and in the cockpit.

CONS:

- Side decks are fairly narrow.
- The new flush-mounted boarding steps into the cockpit could be bigger.



WHAT IT'S MADE FOR. A picnic on a cove in Maine with the new Picnic Boat in its natural setting. The boat's lines are exceptionally clean.

The jet drives also make it easy to spin the boat or to turn quickly without any sliding or cavitation. Indeed, I put the boat into a full-out 3,300 rpm turn and it carved through the water like a hot knife through butter, with a totally under-control, solid feeling that made me want to do it again and again.

The Picnic Boat's new slippery hull comes from the drawing board of Michael Peters, the Sarasota, Florida, designer who has created everything from race boats to the new Chris-Crafts to megayachts. He drafted a 19-degree deadrise hull for the 37 (as opposed to the 15 degrees of the original Picnic Boat), plus a lower center of gravity, since the engines are down below. The boat's deeper-V should help with offshore and heavy-weather performance (since life isn't always a picnic). In fairly flat conditions on the river we registered a top speed of 31.6 knots (a few knots faster than the original). It was clear we could cruise comfortably all day, relaxing at the 37's luxurious helm station or on the bridge deck, watching the miles go by in the mid-20s. Peters designed the hull;

Hinckley did the rest. The hull is a vinylester resin-infused composite of Kevlar, E-glass and carbon fiber, making it light, stiff and strong.

Then there's the Hinckley-patented JetStick, which was added to the original boat 10 years ago. This is a fingertip joystick control that makes for easy low-speed maneuvering in its docking mode. Just point or twist in the direction you want the boat to go, and it happens (very similar to Volvo Penta's IPS system or Cummins MerCruiser Diesel's new Zeus, both of which were developed after the JetStick). When we brought the boat back to the dock next to the Annapolis City Marina, Ed simply slid it in sideways between two other Hinckleys — no problem at all. As I was hanging the fenders, I realized Hinckley was making things very easy for its owners. There are small stainless clips in the appropriate spots along the side of the boat so that you clip the fenders in place. You don't have to make any adjustments or guess where they belong. It's foolproof docking with the JetStick; foolproof tying up with the nifty little clips.

Another Hinckley touch, which took me a while to figure out, was the teak step that folds down from inside the cockpit coaming (one per side) to help you climb on or off the boat. When not in use, it folds flat so you don't notice it. You also can get on the boat through a large outward-opening transom door, secured with a super-size stainless lock, leading from the swim platform to the cockpit.

The cockpit has a large settee (larger than the original) aft, against the transom, plus two matching aft-facing seats forward, creating an inviting socializing area. There's one step up to the bridge deck. Two matching settees on the sides face each other, separated, if you want, by a gorgeous drop-leaf teak table. Needless to say, the teak, finish and joinerwork throughout the boat are superb. There are matching Stidd chairs in soft cream Ultraleather at the helm station, plus an all-teak wheel and dash. Looking forward from the helm, you see the clean, elegant bow without any railings to spoil the lines — just the teak toe rail and the two teak handrails on the trunk cabin top. The bridge deck headroom has been raised two inches for better visibility for the captain and passengers. Actually, visibility is terrific in every direction, particularly from the two large (electric-powered) side windows. There's even

more natural light from the two large overhead hatches (also electric-powered). They're sturdy enough that you can run with them open. And there's a teak handrail running the length of the hardtop for safety.

A louvered teak door leads below, down two teak steps. The cabin has standing headroom (and I'm about 6 feet 2 inches tall), with a V-berth forward with the usual filler and a very nice touch — a comfortable seat in front of the V-berth so you can put on your shoes or whatever. There's a good-size hanging locker and sensible storage. The galley to port has the usual two-burner electric stove, microwave and large icebox. On the starboard side is the head, where I could stand comfortably, with Hinckley's usual varnished cherry counter, an opening port for light and ventilation and a shower head that pulls out of the sink. A couple could easily spend a long weekend or more on board comfortably.

Most often, though, I think the new Picnic Boat would be used, just as the name implies, as an elegant day boat, an updated American icon that is as fun to drive as it is to look at. It also makes a major statement about pride of ownership. In the new Picnic Boat, wherever you go, you know you've arrived. ❖

The new 37 Picnic Boat is an American icon that is as much fun to drive as it is to look at.



SPEND THE NIGHT. Even the forward V-berth area is lined with traditional teak. Note the teak hanging locker and the seat at the foot of the bed.