



HINCKLEY PICNIC BOAT

ILLUSTRATION BY JIM EWING

It came out of a Maine boatyard known for its superb sailboats, and it rocked the boating world as few designs have ever done. Suddenly the terms picnic boat, lobster yacht and Down East were on everyone's lips. The jetdrive — virtually unheard of — was the "hot" new propulsion system. And the easy to use, fun to cruise dayboat was "in."

Hinckley introduced the Picnic Boat in 1994. This low-slung, luxurious 36-footer was powered by a single diesel and cruised at 25 knots. The basic accommodations — open wheelhouse, head, galley, V-berth — were enhanced by superb joinery. Boating writer Oliver Moore called the newly introduced Picnic Boat a "salty, easily driven,

high-tech overnighter" and a "head-turner at any dock." Plenty of people wanted one, and the \$295,000 price tag was no deterrent.

The boat's success was something of a surprise to Shep McKenney, the man who conceived it. Bruce King's Maine workboat-related design was revolutionary, and the boat "flew in the face of all the modern trends," McKenney, a part owner of The Hinckley Co., said later. Still, he maintained that it reflected the way many people primarily used their boats: for day outings. "Ease of operation, shallow draft and beautiful lines — those are things I can get excited about. I believe that other people can, too," he said at the time. Sales figures soon backed him up.

What he didn't predict — what no one predicted — was the instant

popularity of the waterjet propulsion. Standard power was a single Yanmar diesel with a state-of-the-art dual-prop outdrive. The Australian-built Hamilton jetdrive was an afterthought for those who wanted very shallow draft (22 inches). The jetdrives took off. More than 500 Picnic Boats ride with them today, and the technology led to the development of Hinckley's patented JetStick joystick control.

It was just the kind of phenomenon to get McKenney's attention. "What fascinates me in product creation is not giving people something they want," he said, "but giving them something they didn't know they wanted."

— Steve Knauth