

MJM Yachts 40z

A lean, green machine. BY TOM RICHARDSON





Those who claim a lack of common ground between sail- and powerboats should get to know Bob Johnstone and the MJM story. Eight years ago, the co-founder of successful sailboat manufacturer J/Boats Inc. saw a niche in the cruising motoryacht market and jumped in with both feet.

The boat Johnstone envisioned was light, fast and strong—attributes shared by high-tech racing sailboats. Being light, it could be powered by small, efficient engines, ultimately burning less fuel. The boat would also be good-looking, low maintenance and easy for a cruising couple to run and maintain. He started by hiring well-known naval architect Doug Zurn, and the two discussed design and construction. Zurn drew up the lines for a slim 34-footer, and MJM Yachts was in business—almost.

The hard part, it turned out, was finding someone to actually build the thing.

“From the beginning, it was clear that epoxy construction was the way to go,” recalls Johnstone. “Doug and I reviewed high-tech builders, [of] which [there]



were very few, particularly when it came to powerboats. Actually, there were none, so we started looking at custom sailboat yards.”

Eventually Johnstone found his builder in Boston Boat Works (BBW) Massachusetts. BBW had a long history of building custom racing sailboats, which require high strength-to-weight ratios for open-ocean crossings in the roughest conditions.

They were the perfect fit for Johnstone’s new company.

To achieve this high strength-to-weight ratio, all four models in the MJM line (ranging from 29 to 40 feet in length) are built using fiberglass that is “wetted out” with two-part epoxy resin, which is 20 to 25 percent stronger than the vinylester or polyester laminates used to build most production boats. The so-called “pre-preg” (short for pre-impregnated) process involves passing the fiberglass through rollers that press the epoxy into the tightly woven material and squeeze out excess resin. Once the epoxy-soaked fiberglass is laid in the mold on either side of the core material, it’s covered in plastic and a vacuum is applied. The vacuum exerts more than 2,000 pounds of pressure per square foot to the laminate “sandwich,” ensuring the epoxy is evenly distributed throughout the fiberglass. The process also creates a secure bond between laminates and eliminates any voids or weak spots.

The resulting hull is lightweight, as it contains a minimal amount of resin to achieve the necessary strength requirements. The use of Core Cell coring material further reduces weight, allowing the boat to be powered by smaller, lighter and more efficient engines that

burn less fuel and, in Johnstone’s words, “leave a smaller carbon footprint.” Another “green” aspect of epoxy construction is the complete elimination of VOC emissions. Polyester and vinylester open-molding construction produce high levels of styrene emissions.

Construction aside, design plays an enormous role in efficiency, and Zurn’s slim, sleek hulls (MJMs have substantially less beam than other cruising boats in their size class), which sport a modified-vee planing surface, help them get up on top quickly and move through the water with minimal power. Naturally, the reduced beam makes for less interior space and fewer amenities, but that’s a trade-off many serious boaters will make in exchange for a better riding, more fuel efficient boat.

I saw it firsthand this summer when I met up with Johnstone and his son Stu (creator of Boats.com and now head of dealer development for MJM in the Midwest) in Newport, Rhode Island, where they had the keys to a new 40z moored in front of the venerable New York Yacht Club. The 40z, introduced in summer 2009, is MJM’s largest boat, yet it weighs 3,000 to 4,000 pounds less than many boats in the 35- to 36-foot range. At a base price of \$795,000, it is also pretty expensive.

Upon taking the club launch out to the boat, I noticed the first of many boating-friendly features on the 40z: A handy swinging door on each side of the cockpit makes boarding easy at deck level. Once aboard, Johnstone pressed a button to raise the large hatch in front of the transom, revealing the twin 6-cylinder Cummins MerCruiser

Axius QSD4.2 350-hp diesels (Axius 320-hp engines are the base option), linked to MerCruiser Bravo IIIx DuoProp sterndrives.

The 40z was designed with relaxing and entertainment top of mind, judging by the open cockpit with cushioned bench along the transom. The cockpit is level with the salon, so conversation and traffic can flow easily between the two areas (Johnstone notes that the 40z can easily accommodate up to 16 people). The cockpit, salon and cabin sole are natural teak and holly, but you won't find exposed wood anywhere else on the boat. It's all in line with Johnstone's philosophy of easy maintenance and keeping things simple to make boating more enjoyable.

The salon is roomy and comfortable, with an L-shaped lounge to port opposite a second lounge along the starboard side. The big Stidd helm and companion seats hold up to 4 people—a definite bonus when the kids or grandkids want to ride up front.

The helm comes standard with Mercury's SmartCraft joystick control for close-quarters handling. The joystick eliminates the need for a bow thruster, especially when combined with the SkyHook feature that uses GPS to automatically hold the boat in position. SkyHook makes mooring approach and dockside maneuvering a snap, even for novice helmsmen. Other standard helm features include Raymarine electronics (radar, GPS, plotter, autopilot, sounder and VHF), an angled chart/laptop surface to port, bi-level instrument panel with glare-resistant finish, Ritchie compass, and triple, fully opening windshields with wipers. Visibility at the helm is excellent.

Two steps (with storage below) lead to the cabin, which features handsome teak cabinetry and trim and 6' 4" headroom. A galley to port has a two-burner cooktop, over-under refrigerator/freezer and plentiful storage. The dinette to starboard seats four, and the dinette table drops down to form a double berth, which can be closed off with a privacy curtain. A breaker panel is located on the aft cabin bulkhead for easy access.

Forward of the galley is a head with VacuFlush toilet and sink. To starboard, opposite the head, is a stand-alone shower—not commonly found on a 40-footer, let alone one with a 12-foot beam. The bow features a queen V-berth with ample natural lighting and ventilation. The 40z sleeps 6, as long as two don't mind spending the night on the salon lounges.

After a look around the boat it was time for a test ride, so we idled out of Newport Harbor, past Fort Adams and Castle Hill and into a flat-calm Block Island Sound. Taking the helm, I was amazed by the boat's agility. The 40z handles more like a 25-foot center console than a 40-foot yacht, especially in tight turns and when responding to throttle and trim adjustments. The boat rises onto plane with no squat, and stays level at slow cruising speeds, affording excellent visibility over the bow. This is particularly important when maneuvering through crowded harbors. Riding the swells down-sea proved easy and smooth, especially with a bit of trim to keep the bow up.

Most remarkable are the 40z's fuel-burn numbers. With the twin 350-hp sterndrive package, the 40z cruises at 20 to 31 knots, with an average fuel burn of 1.29 nautical miles per gallon. The sweet spot is 23 knots (1.4 nmpg). At the top-end of 36 knots,



fuel burn is about 1.03 nmpg. With Volvo Penta IPS drives (twin 300s or 370s are available), company test data shows that fuel efficiency is nearly identical. Top end with twin IPS 370s is 38 knots.

Also noteworthy is how quiet she runs. Johnstone and I were able to hold a conversation at the helm at all speeds. This is made possible by the modern common-rail diesels and soundproofing insulation in the engine room.

The only “downside” to my test of the 40z was the calm conditions. The 40z is strong enough for an ocean crossing and is rated to run at 45 knots through 21-foot seas—not that a person would survive such a beating. Still, it would have been nice to see what the boat could do in a bit of chop. But I think it's safe to trust people like Bob Johnstone, Doug Zurn and the folks at Boston Boat Works. Their record speaks for itself. ⚓

SPECS

LOA.....	43'1"
Beam.....	12'
Draft.....	26-39"
Weight.....	18,800 lbs.
Fuel Capacity.....	350 gals.
Base Power.....	Twin Cummins MerCruiser
Axius 320-hp diesels and Brave IIIx DuoProp sterndrives	
Base Price.....	\$795,000

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