

Billy Joel's 'other woman' christened

The singer-songwriter's new yacht is a 57-foot commuter he designed with Doug Zurn



Joel and his wife, Kate, intend to use their new 57-foot commuter yacht for trips into New York.

By Bill Bleyer

When Billy Joel's new 57-foot commuter yacht was launched this summer at Derecktor Shipyards in Mamaroneck, N.Y., the singer-songwriter could barely watch.

As the 120-ton crane began to lift the 21-ton boat off its jackstands in a parking lot at the head of the harbor, Joel grimaced. "This is nerve-wracking," he said. "It's not an airplane; it's not supposed to fly. I'm superstitious." Then he walked rapidly into the shipyard building, saying, "Let me know when it's in."

His wife, Kate, who had been chosen to christen the yacht, was much more relaxed. "I'm really excited about boating," she said at the July launching. "I come from a landlocked state [West Virginia]."

Joel did return to watch his wife don a leather glove and christen Vendetta with a scored bottle of champagne. Before she swung the bottle against the anchor, the boat suspended in slings over the water, she told her spouse, "Give me a kiss first." Joel complied.

"This is my other woman," he told her.

"I don't mind," she replied.

"Don't drop it," Joel said seriously before the commuter was set gently next to the dock as the crowd of about 100 friends and workers applauded.

The performer said that, as he rode up Mamaroneck Harbor and caught the first glimpse of his completed pet project, his reaction was "love at first sight."

Joel arrived at the launch party

from his Centre Island home on New York's Long Island in one of the three boats he already owns. It had taken more than five years to complete Vendetta since Joel first sketched out a rough design on his home drawing board. The boat, which cost around \$2.5 million, is a modern version of the commuter yachts that carried Gold Coast magnates from their North Shore estates to Manhattan before World War II.

Before the launch, Joel walked around Vendetta several times, admiring her black hull, white cabin, and red-and-white stripes along the waterline.

Ever the perfectionist when it comes to his boat projects, Joel was thinking of changes even before Vendetta hit the water. "I see something I may want to change," he said, pointing out a curved eyebrow accent line on the side of the cabin. "These curves seem to be fighting."

"I never leave anything alone," he said. "I always want to improve things."

But overall, he said before the launch, "I'm impressed."

As anxious as he was to trial Vendetta, Joel said he enjoys the design process as much as using the end product. But he said he hasn't started tinkering with any new designs yet.

In the meantime, there were unanswered questions about how the Piano Man will use the boat. "The question a lot of people are asking is: How do you get off the stern?" he said. Vendetta's rounded torpedo stern is modeled after Aphrodite, a well-known vintage commuter yacht in the final stages of a complete restoration at Brooklin (Maine) Boat Yard. "We haven't figured that out yet."

The main components of the commuter came from North End Composites in Rockland, Maine, which shipped the modified-vee hull, deck and cabin top to C.H. Marine on Shelter Island for assembly. But since the yard was busy turning out orders for the previous collaboration between Joel and naval architect Doug Zurn of Marblehead, Mass. — the Shelter Island Runabout — Joel's captain and project manager, Gene Pelland, moved Vendetta to Derecktor last spring for completion.

Yard manager Joe Dayton said Vendetta had been placed in the water three weeks earlier to check its waterline. The stainless steel piece that protects the stem head from the anchor and other final touches were custom-made on-site. He said between 10 and 15 employees worked on the boat during the day shift, with another six at night doing paint and varnish work.

"It was a very exciting and interesting project," said Alex Patricio, Derecktor project manager. "It was a challenge."

The boat's name reflects Joel's fondness for the phrase "living well is the best revenge." The Awlgripped hull has a plumb bow with generous flare, and the distinctive torpedo stern. She is powered by twin 1,300-hp MAN diesels mounted under the cockpit sole and linked to Power-Vent surface drives for an estimated top speed of 60 mph and cruising speed of about 45 mph. Zurn calculates a cruising range of 491 nautical miles at 40 knots, burning roughly 54 gallons of her 660-gallon fuel supply an hour.

The boat is equipped with surface-piercing props, the upper half of which remain out of the water when it's running at speed. With the shaft and strut out of the water, there's a big reduction in drag, and the boat can operate in shallower water. The drives are housed in air tunnels built into the bottom of the hull, which force air from the stern into the space occupied by the propellers to replace the air they push out. The boat has a two-stage rudder, with only the lower, smaller section in the water when the boat is running at speed. A bow thruster will aid maneuvering.

In the cockpit, Raymarine supplied E Series electronics for two navigation stations — one for Joel and one for Pelland. Stidd Systems of Greenport, N.Y., made the four custom seats supplemented by a rear bench seat.

shoes and climbed aboard for a closer look. "We put a lot of '30s aircraft design on the dash," Joel noted. He complimented the Sunoco yellow trim.

In the two weeks after the launch, the engines were aligned and tuned, and Joel and Pelland took several shakedown runs to Manhattan and Oyster Bay.

"Out of the box we went 44 knots full out running heavy, full of water and fuel," Pelland said. "We still have to do some tweaking" to determine the final top speed.

As for Joel, Pelland said he's "tickled pink." "It definitely [exceeded] his expectations," he says. ■



Vendetta is a modern version of the commuter yachts that carried Gold Coast magnates from Long Island to Manhattan.



The helm station combines traditional styling with state-of-the-art Raymarine electronics.

In the cabin there's a private head compartment forward, and the rest of the space is open, with a settee that serves as a bunk on each side just abaft the head compartment. Aft the settees is a small galley, with Corian countertops and a dinette. The interior is painted off-white with yellow trim.

In an earlier interview, Joel explained why he wanted a new version of the classic commuter yacht. "I always thought it was a great tradition during the '20s and '30s that these guys would go in to Wall Street via Long Island Sound and the East River. I think I'll be able to get to Manhattan within half an hour at cruising speed. I go into the city more and more these days because I live closer to the city, [and] my daughter goes to school in the city." And he and his wife bought an apartment in Manhattan.

With Vendetta secure dockside, Joel, Kate, Zurn and Pelland removed their