



# PAST, MEET PRESENT

AN IMPROMPTU VISIT TO HUCKINS OFFERS THE EDITORS  
A LOOK BACK IN TIME AND A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE FOR THIS  
STORIED BUILDER. STORY AND PHOTOS BY DANIEL HARDING JR.



Cats saunter and sliver through jack stands. The air is heavy and the sun is strong as Capt. Bill and I crunch atop a gravel and crushed shell driveway towards Jacksonville's marina mile and the Huckins boatyard.

We're not here for a press event; we're not here for a sea trial. No, the good Capt. and I had a few hours to kill before I was to catch a flight and thought, hell, we might as well go explore a boatyard or two.

I don't know if our impromptu drop-in was the most courteous thing to do, but a few moments after walking through the door we spot owner Cindy Purcell, clad in shorts, sandals and a t-shirt. She did a double take. "I thought I recognized you guys," she said with an outstretched hand. After we apologized for our unscheduled visit, Cindy offered us a tour.

Walking through the Huckins yard is a bit like traveling back in time. A handmade sign reads, "A clean shop is everybodies job!!" (sic). Judging by the font, it appears to be from the 50s.

A planer built in the early 1900s by Berlin Machine Works rests, likely, exactly where it has since Huckins moved to this location in 1945. Other ancient-looking machinery is found at every turn.

Of all the ups and downs this company has weathered since its founding in 1928, it was perhaps Hurricane Irma that posed the biggest physical threat. Cindy points to a magic-marker line on a white office door. It looks like the kind of marking that would annotate the height of a child on their birthday. Above the knee-height line reads "Sept 2017 IRMA." It marks how high the water rose during the storm's epic surge. The company—as it always did—pulled on their



Hand-drawn plans for a World War II PT boat rest inside a wood drawer at Huckins.



*Is this the boat that will usher in the next era of Huckins boat-building? Our guess is that it just might be.*

boats, weathered the storm and carried on.

We continue on to the design offices, the space that carries the most weight in yachting lore. Hull cutouts are labeled and stacked atop counters along with wood samples and framed magazine boat reviews. Cindy bends down slightly and pulls open one of the many wide wooden drawers to reveal the original, hand-drawn designs for past models, including their infamous PT boats that served in World War II. I stare for a moment, mesmerized by the PT boat plans. The penmanship is perfect and precise, as if printed from CAD drawings. "BERTHS 6-4 1/4" "RADIO ROOM 6-9 1/2" "NAVY HORN H-5." Hundreds of notes fill the fading, and fraying, paper. No cross outs, no scribbles, no smudges. Just raw history carefully drafted by pen and hand, a bygone relic from an analog world.

I ask if the plans have been preserved digitally. Cindy explains that it's something she's been meaning to get to. She hasn't had the time; she's been looking to the future. She asks if we want to see the

new Sportsman 38. We, of course, do.

Like with any new Huckins, Cindy looked for inspiration from the past. In this case, the Sportsman 36 built by her grandfather, company founder Frank Pembroke Huckins in 1936. Sweeping lines, a curved sheer and rounded hardtop all lend the next generation sportsman a look that says "gentleman cruiser." Those lines, and the company's patented Quadraconic hull, are where the similarities with its predecessor end. This is, in fact, the most advanced Huckins ever built.

Don't believe me? I have two words for you: hybrid power. Diesel propulsion comes courtesy 380-hp Cummins QSB 6.7s and electric via 20-horsepower Elco EP-20s. "We have 18 lithium-iron batteries. Nine to port and nine to starboard. She'll do 40 mph with diesel power and 8 mph with electric and will have a 3 1/2 degree running angle. I dream in numbers," laughs Purcell.

The 38, when finished in the near future, is set to be a stunner, a

real showpiece of what this legacy builder is capable of. After quickly climbing through the hull, Cindy needs to get back to work; we say our good-byes and promise to return to test the 38 when it's finished and joke that next time, we'll call ahead.

Before ambling off to continue our afternoon of boatyard exploring, we look back at the metallic gray hull of the Sportsman 38 tucked behind weathered, slightly cocked and crooked walls. The contrast is severe: Such a modern, forward-looking hull is being built in these hallowed halls. Where does Huckins go from here? Will pressure from modern, high-tech builders finally break the boatbuilding arm of the company, or will the Sportsman 38 usher in a new golden era of construction on marina mile? I suppose, like it always has, only time will tell. □

