



BACK TO THE FUTURE

CLASSIC GOOD LOOKS AND HYBRID-ELECTRIC PROPULSION COME TOGETHER IN THE ART DECO-INSPIRED HUCKINS 38 SPORTSMAN.
BY CAPT. BILL PIKE

	RPM	KNOTS	GPH	RANGE	dB(A)
LOA: 38'3"					
Beam: 12'6"	600	5.6	0.6	2,394	68
Draft: 3'	1000	8.0	3.4	604	74
Fuel: 285 gal.	1500	10.1	10.4	249	75
Water: 95 gal.	2000	19.7	18.8	269	79
Power: 2/350-hp Cummins QSB 6.7 diesels;	2500	26.9	27.2	254	83
2/20-hp Elco EP-20 electric motors	3000	32.7	39.4	213	86
Optional Power: 2/350-hp Suzuki outboards					
Price as tested: \$1.3 million					
Seas: calm Fuel: 3/4 full Water: full					



The hardtop stanchions replicate the originals on the Sportsman 36. The accent panels on the cabin sides are removable to facilitate re-varnishing.



The galley offers 1930s-style china stowage and, further forward, a scissors-type V-berth with electrically-actuated hi/lo table.

I've always been interested in new, cutting-edge stuff. So, when Huckins Yachts announced its plans to build a hybrid-electric cruiser with an Art Deco profile directly descended from the old Huckins 36 Sportsman, I was all in. The mix of classical good looks with an undeniably forward-leaning propulsion package (in addition to a more conventional outboard-powered option) was totally intriguing. So much so that I had to pay the folks at Huckins a visit, just to see how things were coming along.

What I saw kept me coming back. I guess I stopped by at least two, maybe three times before I finally got to sea trial the boat. And each visit was just about as enjoyable as the first. After all, the Huckins facility on "Marina Mile" in Jacksonville is a salty old charmer, and the company has always been a top-shelf player with a list of customers stretching back into the fabled, sepia-toned past. David Goodrich, the tire magnate, owned at least three Huckins Fairform Flyers during his lifetime. And none other than John F. Kennedy himself sea trialed and delivered a few of the PT Boats that Huckins built during World War II, periodically running them from Jacksonville down to the Navy's so-called "break-in center" in Miami.

But there was way more to the 38 than her historical antecedents. Sure, she sported a sleek, smart, albeit vintage profile, the handiwork of one of the oldest boatbuilding enterprises in America. But on the other hand,

her hybrid-electric powerplant was thoroughly modern, maybe even postmodern. And what's more, she was being put together using some of the most advanced techniques and materials available—stuff like vinylester resin-infused, Corecell-sandwiched fiberglass, Alexseal two-part polyurethane paint and Countervail vibration and sound dampening panels. When you truly got your mind wrapped around the project, it was actually kinda spellbinding. A wild Hail Mary for Huckins—from the early twentieth century smack dab into the midst of the twenty-first.

Consider the hybrid-electric potential alone. Thanks to a set of 20-hp Elco electric motors and a bank of 18 Lithium Iron Phosphate batteries (with a longer cycle life than Lithium-Ion batts as well as greater thermal and chemical stability and safety), the 38 was projected to cruise in full-electric mode at a top speed of 7 knots for two hours and a half in virtual, canoe-paddling silence. Lower speeds promised increased running times, of course. And if an owner energized the 8-kW Phasor genset, the 7-knot cruise, according to Huckins, could be stretched out for an entire day, perhaps even more.

The internal combustion side of the equation pushed the envelope even further. While the boat's twin 350-hp Cummins QSB 6.7 diesels were specc'd to deliver a rousing top end and an efficient cruise speed, electricity was going to be a byproduct as well. More to the point, the Elcos were engineered to double as 20-kW generators when clutched into the Cummins-

driven propshafts, thereby producing oodles of battery-bank charge-up juice underway.

This last point was a biggie. Imagine, for a moment, cruising the boat 30 or 40 miles to a secluded, late-afternoon anchorage under diesel power alone. For starters, the run would virtually guarantee that upon arrival all of the Lithium Iron Phosphate batteries would be topped off and ready to boogie. Then, because the 38 is designed to take advantage of this happy state of affairs via her powerful Pure Sine inverter and CZone digital switching systems, an almost unheard-of possibility would arise: Captain and crew could spend the entire night on the hook in peaceful, air-conditioned comfort, with a few 12-volt lights flipped on for bed-time reading and a few 110-volt outlets energized for pre-snooze entertainment. And no genset!

All this modernity addresses only half of the 38's story, however. The other half ventures back to details, technologies and formats that Huckins has honed over the years. For example, the boat rides on virtually the same Quadraconic running surface as the aforementioned Huckins 36 Sportsman, a vessel designed and marketed by Huckins founder Frank Pembroke Huckins in 1936. She also offers the same Huckins-style cleats, hardtop stanchions and other signature hardware found on her progenitor as well as an interior arrangement that tips its fashionable hat to the practical conventions of yesteryear.

Indeed, when I got the chance to sea trial

the 38 on Jacksonville's St. Johns River with Huckins President Cindy Purcell, the first thing I picked up on was the comfortable simplicity of the interior layout. Belowdecks, I saw little more than a sleeping area up forward with a scissors-type V-berth/lounge and an electrically actuated hi/lo table; a head (with separate stall shower) just abaft the sleeping area to starboard; and, opposite the head, a galley with single-burner cooktop and an attractive stretch of 1930s-era open shelving for plates and glasses.

Topside, things were equally straightforward. There was a helm station to starboard (with a double Stidd helm chair); a single, extra-wide Stidd companion to port; and, behind the helm area, an air-conditioned, Strataglass-enclosed salon with L-shaped lounge (convertible to a double berth) and pop-up TV. All the way aft, the cockpit was fitted out with a nicely upholstered lounge with another hi/lo table. Several peripheral niceties, including a wine cooler, electric grill, icemaker and SureShade, were subtly present and easy to deploy or access.

The St. Johns was virtually flat during the sea trial. The average top hop I recorded in diesel-only mode was 32.7 knots, a speed that consumed 39.4 gph and engendered a range of 213 nautical miles. The average top end I recorded in electric-only mode was 7 knots, a speed that registered a measly 62 decibels on my sound meter. Operating both diesel and electric modes at the same time was not an option.

Switching from one mode to the other,

though, was fairly easy. To go from diesel to electric, I first slowed the boat to a dead-idle and then pulled the single-lever Glendinning sticks out of gear, clicked two dashboard switches to ELCO, rotated two inwale-mounted automotive type keys near my right knee, hit the shutdowns for the diesels and, at length, eased the sticks out of neutral. Switching from electric back to diesel entailed following the same procedure in reverse, more or less. I was able to maneuver the boat—backing her down and rotating her within her own length—in either mode, by the way, using either the sticks or the Glendinning ProPilot joystick control, a device that added a bow thruster to the mix.

Driving was flat-out fun. Although the 38 boasts a multitude of modern technologies squeezed into a comparatively small, rather cramped engine room (and a slightly less cramped lazarette), she's basically a straight-shot, twin-engine inboard and performs like any other nicely proportioned, sweetly balanced member of her species. The turning radius (I'd estimate a tactical diameter of two boat lengths) was surprisingly and excitingly tight. The running attitude peaked at an optimal four degrees and stayed that way and, as a result, sightlines from the helm were excellent all the way around, even when coming out of the hole.

If you've ever visited the Huckins Yachts facility, you know it's located on the banks of Jacksonville's Ortega River, a picturesque ribbon of dark water that flows under the

ornate Ortega River Bridge and out into the broad St. Johns. After we'd cleared the bridge inbound, heading back to the barn, Purcell and I fell into an unusual sort of conversation at the helm, wholly prompted by the fact that we were both wearing masks and sea-trialing a pretty, post-modern yacht in the midst of a global pandemic.

"A very interesting boat, the 38," I began. "Quiet, electric, environmentally correct cruising. Plenty of diesel speed if you need it, comfortable accommodations and classic, head-turning good looks."

"Yes," Purcell replied, "but it's pretty hard selling a boat like this with no boat shows to give her exposure. As you know, Palm Beach was canceled—we were hoping she'd debut there. Then we were hoping for Newport. And now that's not happening. And then, of course, you have the pandemic."

"Yeah," I agreed. "But maybe prospective buyers can come to Jacksonville for sea trials?"

"Maybe," Purcell replied. "Anyway, we hope they will."

I thought this over for a moment. I mean, how often does even a top-of-the-heap boat-buyer get the chance to interact with some of today's most advanced marine technology, while speedily charging across the waves within a historical boatbuilding context that's become darn-near hallowed over the past 92 years?

A very interesting boat, the 38? Oh yeah, but also a very interesting invitation. □