

AN AVID ANGLER AND AN ICONIC BUILDER TEAM UP TO CREATE THEIR LEGACIES
BY DANIEL HARDING JR.

A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

Sweat poured from the suntanned 10-year-old, and his calloused hands pulled on the oars as the shoreline of Santiago de Cuba disappeared behind him. In the bow, the rower's cousin leaned over the side of the wooden skiff, a spool of line in his hands, trying to fool a barracuda. Just a couple of kids enjoying time on the water, trying to catch fish.

Fifty-five years later, the rower owns one of the largest road construction companies in South Florida. His business responsibilities and family have grown, as have the size and sophistication of his boats. The Cuban American has moved through a series of vessels, from a small Boston Whaler to a Robalo, Tiara, Riviera and 51 Bertram. Today a 45-foot Huckins Sportfisherman sits at the dock behind his South Florida home; the classic lines of this versatile cruising and sportfishing boat stand in contrast to those of his Bertram. The Huckins has a timeless quality that reflects the owner's evolving taste in boats. The Bertram shouts battlewagon.

The Huckins 45, which debuted at the Palm Beach International Boat Show in March, was a long time coming. The owner started on the path to this build 13 years ago, when he caught a glimpse of a Huckins at the Yacht & Brokerage Show in Miami Beach. That's where he also met Huckins Yacht owners Cindy Purcell — granddaughter of company founder Frank Pembroke Huckins — and her husband, Buddy.

"He met us at a Miami boat show more than 10 years ago and saw one of our 44s," recalls Cindy, the driving force behind the Jacksonville, Florida, company, one of the oldest family-owned custom builders in the country. "Then he and his wife stopped by the yard

on their way to North Carolina while we were building a 44 Atlantic. They got to see the yard and saw our building process. Then they started talking to us about building a 56-footer in 2008. That's when the economy hit the skids."

Timing is everything. The would-be owner decided to hold off and wait for a new boat. It took five years for him to reconnect with Purcell. During those tumultuous years many marine companies closed their doors, but with a full-service yard, a handful of refits and a loyal client base, Huckins weathered the economic storm.

When the owner finally sea-trialed a 44 Atlantic, he knew he had found the right builder for a smooth-riding boat suited to both family cruising and non-tournament fishing. He had fished the tournament circuit in his Bertram with his son-in-law and his friends, but that crew was long gone and that phase was over. Now a grandfather with four future anglers to groom, he was ready to trade in his tournament kites for children's kites, give up the Bertram's massive engines and find a boat for casual fishing, cruising and family fun, one with a table amidships where everyone could gather and play cards.

Yet he still wanted to be able to fish for wahoo, kingfish and dolphin for that table while cruising to Bimini and perhaps as far afield as the Exumas. And Huckins was eager to accept the challenge and start building boats again. "This boat allowed us to build up our crew for a new project," Purcell says. "We are a full-service yard, and now we had a new project. We added at least 10 people to our team."

The Huckins 45 Sportfisherman may possess lines from a bygone era, but a young heart (twin 480-hp Cummins QSM11 diesels), ZF pod drives and a proven hull give it a 35-knot top end and joystick maneuverability.





Craftsmanship: From hand tools to modern core construction, Huckins' legacy of innovation in design and building is evident at its Jacksonville yard.

The 45's owner wanted to be involved in his boat's design, which the Purcells encouraged. They are married to the patented Quadraconic hull but otherwise are flexible about design. The Purcells want owners to be involved to ensure they get what they want. "We're a 100 percent custom yard. If someone comes in and wants a 50-foot sportfisherman, we'll say, 'Let's do it,'" says Purcell. "Because we don't use molds — we use a male jig — we can build any size. It's just a matter of what accommodations they want."

The owner had a clear vision of what he wanted below. Working with 3-D modeling software, he and designer Bill Prince created a handsome, traditional interior that's bright and airy. A double trunk cabin provides room for four oversize windows and two portlights that bathe the soft-colored furnishings and maple sole in light.

"A typical express-style sportfisherman will have no superstructure to speak of, so they have no superstructure windows," explains Prince. "So you're limited to two or three deck hatches or maybe a couple of ports."

A light blue sofa accentuates the vintage look and feel of the 45. Shifting a couple cushions transforms the seat into a berth that will likely be a highly contested spot among the grandkids. The amidships sun lounge converts to a double berth. Peering out at the stars, fresh air wafting through the canvas that's cracked just so — yes, the kids might fight for that spot, too.

Amenities are simple to reflect the way the owner cruises. These include a stove, microwave and fridge with icemaker but no dishwasher, oven, washing machine or satellite TV. The boat feels like a boat, not a condo. The owner wanted it comfortable enough for long weekend trips and for his sons and grandkids to stay aboard, but he and his wife

don't plan to sleep on it for more than a few days at a time.

"This boat is made for cruising, much more than your typical off-the-shelf 45 express fisherman," Prince says. "You get two dedicated staterooms. The forward stateroom is a walkaround queen, and the second cabin is quite generous [with two adult-size bunks]."

The 45 is powered by twin 480-hp Cummins QSM11 diesels with ZF pod drives. The boat may seem a little underpowered by today's standards for production sportfishermen, but with a light displacement of 27,000 pounds, the Huckins ran at 32.7 knots in calm seas from Miami to Palm Beach, and has topped out at 35.

Prince says pod drives finally are gaining traction among sport anglers, who had been slow to accept them. One benefit is joystick maneuvering, which helps whether you're docking or keeping stern-to with a dancing billfish. Bottom fishing, which the owner enjoys with his kids and grandkids, is simplified with pods, too. With the pods' dynamic positioning feature, there is no need to drop the anchor to stay over a structure. And the low deadrise aft gives the boat more stability at rest, which makes bottom fishing more comfortable.

One trade-off that often comes with pods is more freeboard, which was unacceptable to Prince. "We worked very hard to keep a very low cockpit sole," he says. "The pods the owner wanted were the most compact ones you could get, so we were able to keep the cockpit sole within an inch or two of where it would be on a boat with traditional inboards."

The engines are accessed through a centerline hatch that's easily opened with one hand. The owner, who stands about 6 feet



The 45 rides a time-tested Quadraconic hull; Frank Pembroke Huckins (right).

tall, can open the hatch and walk right in — unusual for a 45-footer. Not only is there stand-up headroom, but access to inspection points around both engines is excellent, as well. That headroom comes back to the double trunk cabin, which allows the helm deck to be up a few steps from the cockpit.

The boat's fishing features required the most compromise and negotiation among the owner, Prince and Huckins. From his time fishing the Bertram, the owner knew he wanted Rupp outriggers, 20 rod holders, a custom rod-and-tackle station on centerline, a live well and a freezer for chipped ice. The live well and freezer double as aft-facing seating, an ideal spot for the family to watch the action while staying out of the way. The boat also has a marlin tower with a second helm station and electronics.

The designer and builder discouraged weighing the boat down and compromising efficiency, a tenet of Huckins design. The 45 burns 29.6 gph at 15 knots (2,500 rpm), for a range of about 481 miles — Miami to Bimini and back four times. Perhaps the one thing that's more appealing than its efficiency is the boat's classic look. Bare teak, a graceful sheer and a low express profile trick the eye into thinking that you're looking at a boat built in the 1960s.

Huckins' exterior styling has been both a blessing and a curse because it suggests the boats are old-fashioned, Purcell says. "It came up today when someone said, 'Geez, I didn't know you were still building boats.' Then they ask, 'Are you still building wooden boats?'" she says, laughing. "They actually think we're still building wooden boats. And we're the oldest fiberglass-core construction company in the country. We started in 1975. Not solid fiberglass under the water, either. We use coring below the waterline — people are just starting to do that — but because of the style, they think we're old-fashioned."

Another misconception people have about the boat is that it is slow. "It's not a trawler. It's a 35-knot boat," Purcell says. "We're a wolf in sheep's clothing. The 45 can blow the doors off most sportfishermen out there."

The 45 has a lot of qualities to attract anglers, but what it does not have also will attract some people. There's no gyro stabilizer, no hard enclosures. It's not inundated with flat-screens, and there's no iPad app that turns on underwater LEDs. But as a 10-year-old with a rowboat will tell you, some of the best memories are caught from a simple boat, with a good friend and a handful of line. 🐟



Proven Performer

The Quadraconic hull on which the Huckins 45 Sportfisherman rides dates from World War II, when Frank Pembroke Huckins was awarded a contract to build PT boats for the Navy. His 72-foot PT design demonstrated "very little tendency to pound in a seaway," according to notes from the Navy. This resulted in contracts to not only build two fleets (12 vessels) of Huckins PT boats, but his hull design also was used for other builders' PT boats.

"[The Quadraconic hull] is unique because it has concave transverse sections, as opposed to transvex, meaning the hull bottom has a gentle inward curvature in the forward sections," explains designer Bill Prince. "This provides a softer ride and very good performance."

For this type of hull to perform at its best, the boat must be light, which is why, as legend has it, Huckins would yell through a megaphone at owners who were filling his boats with unnecessary items. The megaphone is long gone, but Huckins still builds lightweight boats for that very reason. "The 45 weighs in the ballpark of 27,000 pounds and can do 35 knots. A typical production Hatteras 45-foot convertible might weigh closer to 45,000 or 50,000 pounds," Prince says.

In addition to getting you to the fishing grounds quickly, it does so in comfort. The boat pounds little in head or quartering seas, thanks to the shock-mitigating characteristics of the hull form, according to Prince. And the Quadraconic hull gives anglers a comfortable trolling platform. "The low aft deadrise makes it stable in a beam sea. The low-deadrise hull form, combined with lightweight construction and efficient pod propulsion, is a great mix of three positive attributes," says Prince.