

WHEELS&WAVES

46th ANNUAL FORT LAUDERDALE INTERNATIONAL BOATSHOW A SEA CHANGE IN MARKETING

Boat shoppers at the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show may find more manufacturers talking up the efficiency of their vessels. The show opens today with a 'prime-time preview' and features \$1.6 billion in boats, yachts, electronics and accessories.

BY MARSHALL BRODIE
Special to The Herald

It is an axiom of business that in order to be successful one must adapt to changing conditions. Case in point, the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show, originally scheduled to open last week until Hurricane Wilma impacted all of South Florida.

Yet somehow, show producers are pulling off the Herculean task of opening what they bill as the world's largest boat show just one week later, despite logistical concerns, labor and equipment issues and extensive power outages that have plagued South Florida. The show runs today through Sunday at five locations.

It can also be said that some of the boat builders that will be at the show are adapting as well – not to post-hurricane conditions but to rising fuel prices that threaten to hurt boat sales and usage. They are adapting by coming up with more fuel-efficient designs.

"This is the first year that I have noticed that there seems to be a beginning trend where boat builders are marketing and producing boats that achieve better fuel economy," says Mary Sudasassi of Haber and Quinn, the public relations firm for the Fort Lauderdale Boat Show. Though admittedly most powerboat manufacturers

have done little so far to increase fuel efficiency, a few have started to engineer their boats with the goal of keeping boating affordable.

Others that already have efficient boats in their lineup have begun to market that aspect of their boats. This is a notable change from previous strategies that pushed horsepower and speed while glossing over the fact that their boat may only get about a mile or less per gallon of fuel.

MJM Yachts of Boston plans to display its New England "Down East" or "lobster" boat called the 34z at the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show. Bob Johnstone, owner of MJM Yachts, says his 34z is designed for economy without giving up speed and comfort.

He says his 34-footer will sip only 11 gallons of diesel fuel per hour while running at 25 knots. For comparison, it is not uncommon for planing cruisers to burn up to three to four times more fuel than the 34z.

LIGHT HULL

What makes the 34z so fuel-efficient? Johnstone says there is no magic; it is simply a matter of combining an efficient design with the lightest possible hull. It takes horsepower (and more fuel) to lift a planing hull on top of the water. The lighter the hull, the less fuel that must be expended to raise it



ECONOMY WITH SPEED: The MJM 34z will sip only 11 gallons of diesel fuel per hour while running at 25 knots. Top speed is 33 knots.

on a plane. But it is something that other builders do not do because of the cost and necessary manufacturing changes.

Johnstone says he sought the help of experts to create a state-of-the-art boat with timeless classic styling. The "z" in 34z gives credit to prominent naval architect, Doug Zurn who designed the efficient hull that is light but strong.

Johnstone says he turned to epoxy "pre-impregnated" fiberglass materials to build the hull. Pre-pregs, as they are called in the industry, are pieces of fiberglass cloth injected with a resin under highly controlled conditions at the factory. This reduces the (fiberglass) resin-to-glass ratio to 38 percent versus the 60 percent common in typical hand-laid fiberglass boats. Excess resin does not add strength, only extra weight.

VACUUM-BAGGED

The hull is then vacuum-bagged to eliminate strength-robbing air bubbles and then it is baked in an oven so it cures properly and evenly.

Johnstone says that the 34z is typically powered with a single Yanmar 440 diesel inboard. Top speed with this engine is around 33 knots, impressive for an economical single engine day cruiser.

As might be expected, the technology and materials used to construct the 34z are not cheap. List price for the standard 34z is \$329,500. Fully-equipped models out the door go for \$450,000 says Johnstone.

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