

# BOSTON STRONG

THE MJM 43Z IS A TESTAMENT TO FORWARD-THINKING DESIGN AND THE CITY THAT EMBODIES IT.

BY DANIEL HARDING JR. / PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM RAYCROFT

**B**oston in the fall. The leaves glow a brilliant yellow and orange, there's a chill in the air and you can see the breath from early morning joggers climb to the heavens. The city is once again enjoying the happy hangover that comes from a Red Sox World Series victory. School children and tourists from around the world trace the founding of this country down the cobblestone steps of the Freedom Trail. Crew teams glide atop the Charles River like a quiver of arrows released from a bow. Things just feel right.

Just a stone's throw from downtown Boston, under the shade of the Tobin Bridge, lies Boston BoatWorks (BBW). Founded 23 years ago, the company got its start crafting custom racing sailboats. What propelled the builder to prosperity was an unlikely partnership with another sailboat builder from Rhode Island. The competitor approached BBW about the possibility of working together. The brief? To build a one-off powerboat for him and his wife, Mary, to cruise aboard. The rest, as they say, is history.

The customer was, of course, Bob Johnstone. And his little one-off would blossom into one of the largest Down East brands in the country: MJM Yachts.



*Like a badge of honor, many workers at Boston BoatWorks wear their hometown pride on their sleeve—or in this case, on a hat.*

Triple 350-hp Verados lend the 43 a top end of 44.5 knots but when the Beantown skyline is your backdrop, why rush it?



MJM and BBW have partnered to build 260-plus boats at a current pace of about 30 boats a year. This successful, symbiotic relationship has allowed BBW to thrive—the company recently expanded to fill a 60,000-square-foot space staffed by 145 employees.

“What was it that attracted Bob to you guys in the first place?” I ask cofounder and co-owner of BBW Scott Smith as we walk past a worker in a dusty Red Sox ballcap.

“In the powerboat market there’s very little importance placed on building lightweight boats because all the available horsepower compensates for that,” explained Smith. “A chop gun can create a boat in very little time with very little skill. You can push it through the water with sheer horsepower. But Bob went looking for someone who could build a lightweight, high-strength product that really wasn’t available in the motoryacht market. We’ve been doing that for 20 years on the sailing side.”

In the red-brick building that houses the new builds, the assembly line is laid out in a smart, conventional manner. At one end the hull is laid up, cored and vacuum bagged; the farther down the line you get, the more the boat resembles the finished product. Open the enormous garage doors at the tail of the assembly line and there’s the finish line (literally). A Marine Travelift lowers completed MJMs into the Mystic River.

I find Hull No. 6 of the 43z in a slip underneath the Fenway-green Tobin Bridge. Boston beckons. Mercury Joystick Piloting allows the 43 to slide sideways from the dock before pirouetting. I aim the bow at Boston Harbor. The standard triple 350-hp Verados barely get spooled up to cruising rpm before the city skyline comes into view. The proximity to downtown Boston is staggering.

I’ve always been enthralled by the experience of visiting a metropolis by water and Boston has appealed to me since I first cruised here as a kid. Childhood memories of the aquarium, street performers outside Quincy Market, traveling back in time to the ride of Paul Revere and the Old North



BBW Co-founder Scott Smith walks the busy shop floor where nearly a dozen MJMs are in build.

Church remain just as vivid today. I found myself back in the city years later when my girlfriend (now my wife) lived just outside Boston. Those years would offer an entirely different set of memories.

I've been to Boston in the summer and sampled flavors at Harpoon Brewery under a bluebird sky. I've seen the quiet beauty (and hellacious parking) of Beantown in the winter and I've observed the town bounce back to life in the spring. Boston enjoys each season in its full glory, but nothing compares to Boston in the fall.

Maybe it has to do with the city's abundance of higher education; Boston is great when school is back in session. Maybe it's that crisp air that puts you in the mood for a hot dog at a ball game. Whatever the reason, there was a lot to enjoy as the 43 skirted the cityscape at 44.5 knots and headed for open water.

She pops out of the hole and onto plane

like a fighter jet. Her 18-degree transom deadrise that flares out to form an incredibly sharp bow allows her to track as if she's on rails while also cutting waves like a bully in the cafeteria lunch line.

"Her LCG [Longitudinal Center of Gravity] is 59 percent aft," explains Smith. "This allows for reserved buoyancy in the bow. Our bow is like a balloon that's being held under water."

We ran around half a dozen of the islands that make up the Boston Harbor Islands National Park area. Sightlines all around the MJM were excellent, which allowed me to easily keep tabs on a 35z chase boat with a photographer aboard that was following us like a persistent younger sibling. Together the boats slomed through the islands. I didn't want to give up the helm. This boat is that fun to drive.

The only thing that pried my attention away from the 43's drivability were the picturesque islands surrounding us. Every so often we'd

get behind an island and the city skyline would disappear altogether from view. It gave the illusion that we were cruising in Down East Maine and not Boston Harbor.

"The islands get a fair amount of use," said Smith. "People come out to hike, fish, hang out and chill on the beach. People can find little coves completely isolated and not be able to see the city. You could be anywhere."

Of the 34 islands that make up the national park, 19 of them can only be accessed via private boat. I had a sudden urge to explore them all, and the 43 would be just the boat for that kind of mission. With her engines up, she has a 24-inch draft and just a 38-inch draft with them down. She could easily nose close to one of the islands and a tender or kayak could get you the rest of the way. (The largest MJM to date, a 53z, is due to launch late this spring so I'm hoping that I'll get the chance to explore those islands in the warm weather.)

As our photographer fired off shots of the 43 beside the Boston Harbor lighthouse, I took the opportunity to dodge his lens and step below. The passion of Johnstone and BBW—as well as designer Doug Zurn—for sailboats is obvious. From the teak-and-holly sole to the handrails and modest (by today’s standards) ports you feel like you’re aboard an inviting, modern sailboat. The master forward is the obvious accommodation of choice, but I’d welcome the chance to be a guest in the salon where seating to starboard converts to a double berth, complete with privacy curtain.

Back at the factory, a crew of employees, 50 percent of whom live in or just outside Boston, hustle about. The workers move swiftly from task to task yet maintain a calm demeanor. The yard is working on between 11 and 13 new builds at one time, with each boat taking a total of 20 weeks to produce. To keep that schedule they must work hard, yet Smith says they’re able to maintain one of the best work-life balances in the industry, putting in five-day, 40-hour weeks.

“This is a real job that allows our workers to have real families and real lives. When you build a boat that’s best in class you know it. People are happy here, but a prerequisite to working here is that you have to like winning,” says Smith. “We’ve grown our business by word of mouth. We’re training people upon arrival. What we really look for in employees is people who have the attitude of wanting to be the best and wanting to work as a team. We build something that’s really rewarding.”

From sailboats to inboard-powered Down East cruisers, to outboard-powered express boats both MJM and BBW have evolved over the years. The 43z is a testament to the strength of a successful partnership. The boat is fast, dry and sporty underway; the accommodations are comfortable; and there’s impressive craftsmanship everywhere you look.

MJM and BBW are proud of the product they put out on the water. There’s passion and heritage. When I think about it, that’s what both companies—and the city where their boats are built—have in common. ♣

