

# Excerpts from 2004 Boat Tests



## MOTORBOATING

### INNER BEAUTY

**This amazing cruiser has real class with top-of-the-line engineering, equipment and features. It's even patented.** by Dan Fales

Picturesque Somes Sound, which neatly bisects Mt. Desert Island and has a well-protected harbor at its north end, is one of Maine's most coveted cruising destinations. It was in these beautifully granite-and-pine surroundings that I had an opportunity to run hull number one of the new MJM 34z.

Every so often there's a head-turning boat that's so distinctive other's will try to copy it. In the 1970s there was the express cruiser from Trojan, in the 1990's the picnic boat from Hinckley. And now there's this new 34-footer from MJM – the powerboat relative of the amazing J Boat family of sailboats....The striking but not radical style of the Z draws immediate attention, especially to those with an eye for sweet lines, tumblehome and Downeast looks.

What I liked graphically was the cutaway, openness of the profile. In most of today's Downeast boat designs, there's a huge, solid-white expanse of superstructure amidships under the line of side-windows and above the sheerline. Usually the curse of this large area is minimized by some sort of color décor strip often starting as a narrow band below the windshield and broadening as it runs back to the cockpit. In the 34z, this is not the case. That space is replaced by the large opening and a larger-than-normal fixed piloting window. The base line of the window/opening flows aft and downward with the sheer rather than being stepped as separate graphic elements. The artistry of the lines come from the drawing board of yacht designer Doug Zurn (thus the Z). The functional styling and concept are those of MJM's founder (and Mary's husband), Bob Johnstone. They jointly hold the US Patent on the design.

This boat is primarily intended for day trips and weekend cruises but longer vacations are not out of the question. It's targeted for a couple who are downsizing from either power or sail particularly those who want the convenience of a smaller craft that can be single-handed by either by a man or woman (hence Mary J's motorboat) and doesn't take half a day's prep to leave the dock. The layout is perfect for a couple...

In the pilothouse, there's 6'6" of headroom at the helm. What I like most about this area is the design of the side "windows." They are taller than usual, and create an open feel in the pilothouse. The openings are fitted with durable Strataglass curtains that can be rolled up in place when you need more ventilation, or snapped down for protection from spray and rain or cool winds. The area can be heated or cooled with optional air-conditioning systems.

Boarding steps on either side of the cockpit lead to the sidedecks, which are covered with molded-in non-skid. Ample grabrails make it easy for you to go forward. There are no VHF antennas to interrupt your progress because they are mounted up on the hardtop, along with antennas for the radar, GPS and satellite radio...

The layout is perfect for a couple's comfort. "For diversity, I wanted the boat to have three areas in which to socialize," says Bob, "the cockpit that can seat four with two more perched on flat gunwales, the pilothouse where six can be accommodated around a table, and below in the "sports bar" where six can sit around on a nicely bolstered

ultraleather lounge with table to watch a ball game.” He’s not kidding. Even though you wouldn’t in your wildest dreams cruise with 18 people aboard, the accommodations are there to add versatility to onboard life...or to be the center of a raft-up.

Even experts miss the one feature that stands out below compared to other Downeast lobster yachts. No, it’s not the grab rail over the galley or the seven-foot wide lounge/berth. It’s the result of the fairly dramatic bow flare. Large port and starboard hull opening ports allow you to actually see out when seated in the saloon. You can have the ports open even when it’s raining, or dew is dripping off the deck above.

And, it’s the deck above where two other surprises unfold. First there’s the elimination of scuppers and the ugly hull stains that form beneath them. The decks are recessed inside the toerail, so water is channeled directly into stainless drains which are connected to internal gray-water pipelines exiting under the swim platform. Second is the use of very elegant & robust megayacht cleats and chocks from England that add a bit of class to the entire presentation. The optional low profile windlass system includes a bright-finished 316 stainless anchor roller and claw anchor which is auto-deploying via a switch near the helm

Though the style of the 34z is definitely eye-catching, and the interior features well thought out, it’s the construction and drive train system that I found most notable. The hull, built by Boston BoatWorks, is a modified-V design with a sharp entry and noticeable bow flare, plus dual lifting strakes, chine flats and an 18-degree deadrise at the transom that’s carried forward 1/3 the length of the hull before warping into the sharp bow. That’s the planning surface. This boat stays level as it accelerates. The prop pocket allows for an 8-degree angle on the shaft, which makes for better efficiency along with excellent 28” shoal draft. The hull is a post-oven-cured, high-tech composite of epoxy-pressure-impregnated E-glass and Kevlar-cored vacuum laminate. It’s one reason the entire boat weighs less than 11,000 pounds will full load. A solid fiberglass centerline keel and chines with structural grid will minimize the effects of grounding.

The 34z is not about top (32 knots) or fast cruise speeds (22-29 knots). It’s about the comfort of cruising. Thanks to a relatively narrow 11-foot beam and low center of gravity, the 34z offers a smooth, stable through-the-water ride...I thought the experience felt more like flying. The response from the stainless destroyer wheel was immediate, and the boat gently banked in turns. On the straightaway, it tracked

true, even when I took my hands off the wheel. Even without a bow-thruster, this single-screw boat will pivot 360 degrees within its own length, and close quarter maneuvering is no problem, as I found out when backing out of the Northeast Harbor Marina. But the best feature of this hull is its dryness. With 20 knot winds charging down the sound from the north, we took no water on board, not even spray in the cockpit seat aft.

The narrow beam and high tech construction assure fuel economies. At 25 knots cruise, the engine burns only 11 gallons per hour. Average fill-ups after using the boat for several weeks are in the 4-5 gallons per hour of use.

The selection of equipment offered with the boat is impressive and of the highest quality: it reflects the builder’s and the designer’s years of cruising experience. With seatrials in Boston harbor of the completed boat, this is truly a turnkey craft with sensational looks. ***MJM’s new 34z is one of the most imaginative and well-thought-out boats I have seen in quite a while. It’s equipment is not only impressive but of the highest quality. The selection and layout have been done based on years of cruising experience. With all options including electronics, painting, towers, etc. done by the builder with sea trials in Boston Harbor before delivery, this is truly a turnkey boat. And the look of the 34z is sensational!***

## **POWER & MOTORYACHT**

May 2004 – Pages 68-70

### **Mary Johnstone’s Motorboat** by Ben Ellison

...The Johnstones’ dreamed up their own fairly audacious notion of a fun 34-footer and then created an all star team to build and market it in volume. ...And while the vessel may be known affectionately in the family as Mary Johnstone’s Motorboat, marketing guru Bob hopes the simple, symmetrical “mjm”, which fits neatly on a cove stripe or boating cap, is destined to become another widely seen J logo...

The MJM 34Z will not be confused with any existing designs. Look how the bow flare and slightly reversed sheer of a Carolina offshore fishing boat twists into the sort of aft tumblehome that’s become a signature of New England lobster yachts. Yet the pilot house, open as a porch with its straight up and down side windows and support post, is pure modern lobster *boat*, not yacht. “Ayuh,” with the Strata Glass side curtain rolled up, you could haul pots from the helm...or pick up a mooring, or—like a solo fisherman—step right from the wheel onto a float to tie up.

Note that alternate soft and hard top express versions, even a sport fish configuration, are available, but all the early buyers have chosen this Downeast model...even a sportfisherman....

That porch-like house is not just practical, it's also a wonderfully open place to drive or hang out. The flare not only results in a dry boat—dry as toast, even sitting on the stern seat at speed through Annapolis outer harbor crazy wakes—but also gives the forepeak table/berth area a very spacious feel. Sit at that table and you'll notice how good sized ports fit just below the sheer at perfect eye level, and can even be left open in rain because of the overhang.

I'd call those ports a cherry-on-top feature, one of many, except that the real cherry is in the light, lustrous joiner work that surrounds this lovely cabin, suitable to cocktails for six or a long weekend for two. The cockpit and pilot house are equally flexible people places, and moving anywhere, including the bow, you'll find a well thought out path. It's easy to imagine the Johnstones—after all those years of tight sailboat cockpits and spider webbed decks—gleefully maximizing ergonomics on the 34Z. They also detailed the topside areas in a more utilitarian, low maintenance, style than some might like, but teak soles and pilot house table are available options. Otherwise, the list of standard gear is remarkably complete and well chosen.

I also see Johnstone boating experience behind details like these: stainless handholds in all the right places; huge pilothouse lockers with room enough for bikes, but also with mesh pockets for organizing small gear; and deck drains so that rain won't stain the topsides. And notice the mate's station with its own Stidd chair and a place for paper or laptop charting, power and GPS hookups built in; there's plenty of electronics power at the helm for single handing, but sharing the navigation can be really fun in explorer mode, extra safe in fog mode.

The MJM's combination of hull form—the flare, relatively narrow beam, and a long run of constant 18° planing surface—plus a super light and strong construction program promise high performance, even with modest power (and fuel consumption). The hull certainly *seems* bullet proof, its epoxy/Kevlar/core laminates vacuum bagged and oven cured at high tech Boston BoatWorks. And the test numbers indicate an efficient, nimble craft...The 34Z did pop onto a plane very quickly, assuming an almost constant running trim that felt just right, with excellent visibility at the helm. The noise, even standing nearly atop the diesel, was not bad. Handling was tight, light, and sporty...and I sensed that the boat would continue to behave well even in serious sea conditions.

Altogether, the MJM 34Z asks for, and deserves, a second look. Just don't be shocked when you seek out your local dealer and find yourself in a forest of J Boat masts; this powerboat's parents are sailors.

## BOATING

March 2004 – Pages 98-100

### **Yankee Tradition** Retro meets techno by Kevin Falvey

When you spot deck drains that have been designed to carry rainwater to a sump, so it doesn't dribble over the topsides and leave the hull streaked with black, nod your head and quietly acknowledge that you're aboard a boat designed with care...But, this Doug Zurn-designed Downeaster stands apart by more than its salty good looks. It serves swimmingly as a family dayboat, and it's equally suited to the cruising couple.

...Standard power is a single 440-bhp Yanmar diesel inboard swinging a large prop, the wash of which flows across a big leveraging rudder for precise control whether running or docking. Put it in gear, nudge the throttle lever, and you're rewarded with a gratifying sense of power: It doesn't lurch forward because the controls are rigged with precision. I could increase or decrease engine output by as little as 50 rpm. There are no dead spots in the arc traveled by the 34z's throttle lever.

Steering was equally precise, thanks to an oversized, teak and stainless steel wheel...This provided fingertip control as I spun the 34z hard over first at 20 mph, then at 30 mph. The boat tracked precisely, and there was no drop in rpm as it sliced through the turns. Single inboard boats carry the prop deeper than twin engine boats, ensuring constant thrust whether turning or running in following seas. That, and lower cost, are why lobstermen love them.

The Chesapeake was calm during my test, so I trounced through tugboat wakes to check out the 34z's seakindliness. It felt solid underfoot. There was no undue slamming and hardly a creak or groan. With construction comprising vacuum-bagged Kevlar and epoxy resin, it's built to take you offshore. Even the hard-top is high tech. It's entirely fiberglass, including the pillars and mullions. Most other tops feature less expensive and less labor-intensive powder-coated aluminum, which works until the powder coating chips or blisters. The 34z's top is oven cured in a two-piece mold. It never wracked or rattled during my test.

Minimum planning speed, which I use to determine both lift and worst-case scenario running qualities, clocked in at

10.6 mph. That's wonderfully slow for a five-ton boat to be on top and running, and so I'd say its hull form is efficient. Should you get caught in a storm, that slow minimum plane will provide you with steerage and control long after other bots are forced to troll and wallow.

At the dock, the 34z's big prop proved a positive and predictable kick to port when in reverse. Put the big rudder hard over then add a burst of forward throttle to get a positive kick to starboard. Both maneuvers occur with little forward or backward motion—provided you use only short bursts of throttle. This makes docking easy. If you're concerned, MJM Yachts will install a bow thruster.

The hardtop incorporates twin opening windshields and short glass side wings. Visibility was excellent...Also, look closely at the wing glass. Its bottom edge—indeed, the lower edge of the entire frame from the forward mullion to the aft one near the cockpit—is a reverse curve. This provides a distinctive look and makes it easy to go directly from the helm seat to the sidedeck for grabbing a line. *I love a design that works as good as it looks.*

...The 34z's layout is practical and tasteful. Topside, the cockpit sports an Adirondack-style bench made of glossy, slatted teak. Tan non-slip is underfoot, and there's a deep toe-kick beneath the gunwales. Large oval scuppers, which I measured at 6" above the waterline, provide excellent self-bailing....

One step up puts you on the helm deck. The sole here is teak (an option) and is protected from the sun. Facing lounges seat six and convert to twin berths. A teak table (option) ...is for topside dining. Helm and companion chairs are pedestal models by Stidd. The helm console provides plenty of room for electronics. In fact there's a standard 10" chartplotter. The portside console incorporates a deep chart flat.

The entire helm deck lifts to provide engine access. I was impressed with the wiring and rigging of the Yanmar. Plus, there are easily removable panels on either side that when in place, provide huge stowage outboard. The rudder post is under a hatch aft. Access is excellent....

Belowdecks, a dark teak sole contrasts nicely with the light cherry used for the cabinets, table and battened paneling...What impressed me most was the depth of the oversize hanging locker and several galley features. One of these is the use of a top-loading refrigerator. It's more efficient and you won't find its contents scattered on the sole after a rough crossing, as happens with front-opening models. At 5 cu ft., it's larger than most found on bots this size, too.

Extra Point: Stowage beneath the helm lounges is large enough for a mountain bike, golf clubs, or a roll-up RIB.

## **NOR'WESTING**

March/April 2004 – Pages 26-33

### **Water Rocket: The MJM 34z**

... Johnstone concluded that it would be pointless to enter the powerboat side of the industry unless he produced a boat that was uniquely designed and engineered to a very high standard. *...The MJM 34z demonstrates what can happen when innovative professionals begin with many decades of experience but without preconceived limitations.*

The MJM 34z breaks a few old rules, with such notable results that the vessel is likely to write some new ones. The 34z is built to exceed ISO 2003 "Ocean" standards, the most stringent small-craft category. Vessels in this class must be proven suitable for seas up to 23 feet and in winds of up to 47 knots...Traditional design would dictate a heavy displacement, deep-draft vessel for such conditions. The 34z displaces (less than 11,000 lbs) and draws only 28 inches

ISO standards specify material properties based on E-glass fabric saturated with polyester resin, the most common approach to fiberglass hull construction. The MJM does not use polyester resin, but rather a more expensive epoxy resin to create a layup that offers superior adhesion, improved resistance to fatigue, and 20% greater overall strength. The (outer) layers of the laminate contain Kevlar...to provide greater strength and abrasion resistance. The hull is laid up over a closed-cell Core-cell foam. Core-Cell is reputed to be impervious to water and is more tolerant to collision than other types of core materials. ISO "ocean" standards call for a minimum glass/resin ratio of 50 percent, and the 34z incorporates a ratio that exceeds 60 percent for additional strength.

Structural integrity is enhanced by the use of a solid, laminated network of stringers and ribs. There is no wood used in the hull. A solid fiberglass keel and chines ...provide additional hull stiffening and protection against grounding.

In an era when many boatbuilders are emphasizing exaggerated beams, the MJM 34z is relatively slim at only 11 feet. The narrow beam reduces both weight and drag, improving the vessel's performance. An 11-foot beam doesn't allow a sloppy approach to interior design if a vessel is going to become a workable and inviting

environment. Well-considered and skillful use of proportion is required. *The MJM 34z succeeds in accomplishing what many express cruisers have failed to do: creating an interior where boaters will spend time because they want to, rather than have to.*

The 34z joinery is crafted by East Coast Interiors, the company that builds interiors for the Cessna Citation business jet. Cherry battens, lockers, forward bulkhead, and adjustable hi-lo table contrast smartly with dark blue Ultraleather settee cushions and a teak/holly sole. The effect is impressive....The enormous settee just aft of the forward bulkhead is a dining and social center by day, and converts quickly to a 6'6" x 7' double bunk....The five-cubic-foot refrigerator/freezer is one of the largest standard systems in a vessel of this size.

The helmsperson and the navigator share matching Stidd chairs. These high-quality, infinitely adjustable, Ultraleather seats are state-of-the-art accessories. There are port and starboard pilothouse settees with Ultraleather seat cushions. The settees can be pressed into service as single berths, expanding the practical sleeping capacity to four. Each settee can be lifted to provide access to a huge storage space...Stainless handrails on the cabin trunk, the pilothouse roof, and on the aft hardtop supports provide plenty of confidence-boosting grab points when going forward to handle lines and fenders...An Adirondack-style slat-back bench functions as a full width transom seat. The Ultraleather cushions and glossy brightwork make a traditional and classy statement.

MJM 34z owners will enjoy one of the best engine access systems ever devised. A switch in the cockpit tilts up the entire pilothouse deck, allowing full stand-up working room on both sides of the engine....

Our test boat did not have a bow thruster, but reversed smoothly and predictably to port. We backed away to clear a crowded dock from a starboard side tie without any drama, and the 34z proved to be very responsive to the wheel during close-quarter maneuvers. Some lightweight shallow-draft boats seem "skittish" at low speed, but the 34z does not...at slow speeds, one of the most pleasant aspects of the 34z design becomes apparent. There is the happy sound of water gurgling past the hull; a sound one expects to hear in a dinghy or on a sailboat but less predictably part of the experience in a 34-foot cruiser. Being close to the water rather than isolated from it must have been a major design goal in the 34z. There is no "floating condo" sensation about the MJM.

Acceleration was lightning quick....a very modest application of trim tab achieved a running attitude that

provided excellent forward visibility. The MJM 34z is on plane at surprisingly low speeds, with less mass to drag over the bow wake. At any speed at all, the 34z is skimming the surface and leaves only a very slight, exceptionally flat wake astern. Although the 440-hp Yanmar is almost immediately underfoot, engine noise is well within acceptable levels even at WOT.

The MJM 34z is fast and fun! We had to search diligently for wakes and swells to try to simulate how the 34z would respond in snotty conditions, and we were impressed by the extreme solidity of the hull. It is almost difficult to believe that a vessel of such light weight can seem so heavily built. One of the features that MJM prioritized during the design was a "dry ride," and our experience would suggest that was well accomplished.

The 34z is a water rocket....Speed and fuel efficiency are rare bedfellows, but the lighter displacement, shallow draft, and narrow beam of the MJM 34z permit some relatively impressive numbers. When cruising at 2500 rpm, the 34z will burn 9 gallons per hour. Based on our observations, that's about 2.4 nmpg. There are any number of cruisers in the same general size category that struggle to reach one nmpg efficiency at similar speeds. Breakfast at Shilshole, early lunch at Friday Harbor, and dinner at Chemainus would be easily accomplished in a 34z, and without a wallet-walloping, disastrous fuel bill.

J/Boat's Bob Johnstone felt there would be no reason to bring another powerboat to market unless the vessel was very well done and offered an alternative to the vast fleet of "me too!" products currently available. Johnstone obviously realized his goal with the development of the 34z. It appears to be a natural fit for weekend and vacation cruising in the Pacific NW, with a good turn of speed expanding the number of practical "overnight" destinations.

Prospective boat-buyers will want to take a close look at the MJM. Many will be impressed (as we were) that the boat fills a unique niche that isn't ordinarily addressed by other manufacturers.

## **CHESAPEAKE BAY MAGAZINE**

February 2004

### **34z Downeast Dayrunner** by Jeff Holland

It was on a foggy morning in early autumn that I got my first glimpse of the new 34z ...at the docks of J/Port Annapolis. The sleek navy blue hull sported the name GRACE across the transom, and that name aptly describes the clean lines and appealing simplicity of the hull as laid

out by Doug Zurn, the exceptionally talented yacht designer. The “Z” in Zurn is the same “z” in 34z, but the germ of the concept comes from the experience of Bob Johnstone, the marketing genius who in 1977 launched the J/Boat phenomena.

The high-tech hull is ...rated strong enough to tackle Force 9 storm conditions, but light enough to tow. “The fuel efficiency is another big payback,” Johnstone stated. “We’re getting about 5.5 gallons per hour average usage and about 2.5 nautical miles per gallon when cruising.”

And not just a fuel-efficient ride, but a fun ride as well. It was interesting, running a Maine style boat in Maine style fog there on the Chesapeake... Running out the mouth of the Severn River, there were no landmarks to be seen, just a couple of workboats, dredging for clams and an odd sportfisherman or two. Oddly, the wind was blowing out of the east at 10-12 knots and the chop was a good 2 feet with occasional higher swells. In short, a great day for a boat ride...

The single 440 hp Yanmar diesel provided plenty of power. Despite the sea conditions, we found a comfortable cruising speed at 2500 rpm, which gave us a solid 25 knots. We topped out at 31.1 knots at just a notch over 3000 rpm.

And the ride was amazingly dry. The modified deep-V hull provides a sharp entry, while dual lifting strakes, hard chines and the 18-degree deadrise aft provide stability. The propeller is partially recessed in a pocket....

The bridge is enclosed in a most ingenious fashion: The aft end has a traditional canvas-and-vinyl zip-up door, but each side has a single large sheet of vinyl snapped in place, designed to roll up to the hard top, providing good protection for extended-season running when in place, but a wide-open feel when rolled up. Both of the large panes of the windshield open up for additional ventilation. The helm has an expansive dash for mounting electronic displays...and an exceedingly comfy Stidd adjustable chair. Visibility from here, either sitting or standing, is exceptional all-round. The copilot seat-a matching Stidd chair-has a small chart table. Aft of the helm, comfortable bench seats, upholstered in faux leather, face each other with an adjustable folding table, finished in brightwork teak, centered in between.

Underneath each of these benches, there’s an astonishingly cavernous locker measuring nearly 4 feet deep, about 5 feet long, and a 1 ½ feet wide. The entire helm deck lifts up with the aid of hydraulic pistons to reveal the engine compartment. This is separated from the adjacent storage lockers by insulated bulkheads, but separated in such a way that when empty, the lockers

provide plenty of room to maneuver to access the engine from each side. *Just a brilliant use of space!*

## **A PROSPECTIVE BUYER** May 2004

“I’d just like to say that I am very, very impressed by the 34z. What impresses me most is just how completely integrated and \*right\* everything is. I have never seen a boat so thoughtfully & practically designed while at the same time being so aesthetically harmonized. There’s just nothing about the 34z that I find fault with; from design to practicality to power to craftsmanship to seaworthiness. It is as gorgeously complete a package as I have ever found. All I can say is congratulations...and I’ll be saving my pennies!”