

Double Duty

THE MJM 53z BALANCES THE SCALES
BETWEEN SMALL-BOAT EXPLORATION
AND YACHTLIKE COMFORT.

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ONNE VAN DER WAL

‘We came up with 32 solutions to common problems that most boaters wouldn’t even know they have. You never realize the things you’ve been missing until you actually have them.’

—Bob Johnstone, founder of MJM

When it comes to deciding whether or not a boat is right for *Passagemaker*, I generally look for one of two criteria: Could I take my family on this boat across a vast stretch of open water with confidence, or could I see myself enjoying this boat for months at a time around the Great Loop?

In my experience on the MJM 53z, the answer is yes on both counts.

I spent some time on *Breeze*, the builder’s first 53z model, with MJM founder Bob Johnstone. He started the company in 2002 after 25 years at the helm of performance sailboat brand J/Boats. On his crossover to power, Johnstone says, “We got older. I can still enjoy a daysail on the latest J, but quality cruising time is on a motorboat.”

Back in 2002, he says, there was no boat that could be docked single-handedly, seat three couples in an all-weather pilothouse and cruise at 25-plus knots. He created what he wanted and felt confident that others would be like-minded. Johnstone’s wife, Mary, was the inspiration for the brand name MJM (Mary Johnstone’s Motorboat).

Fast-forward to 2020, or approximately 250 MJMs later, and I’m stepping aboard the 53-footer. It is MJM’s third outboard-powered express cruiser model—the largest to date—and, according to Johnstone, it’s as versatile as it is practical.

“We design our models around a simple concept: a strong, lightweight boat with good fuel economy that’s created by the people who use the boat,” Johnstone says. “When you get on one of our boats, everything’s in the right position. Everything’s been thought through with the user in mind. [With the 53z] we came up with 32 solutions to common problems that most boaters wouldn’t even know they have.

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Among those solutions are Mercury Marine’s Skyhook, which holds the boat in place, giving skippers time to set fenders, untangle lines or eat a ham sandwich; and a flush deck with side boarding doors, for moving easily from the helm to the cockpit and onto the dock.

The 53’s layout includes areas where guests can enjoy time away from shore with as much or as little privacy as they choose. The layout is based on the Doug Zurn-designed, inboard-powered 50z hull that was released in 2014, but unlike her predecessor, the 53z has a true dual master-stateroom layout. Both rooms are bright and have ensuite heads with glass walls to separate the showers.

The galley has a Wolf ceramic induction two-burner stove-top, a stainless-steel sink, a Breville microwave, a Vitrifrigo two-drawer fridge and a top-loading Isotherm freezer. The joinery is tight throughout, and the finish—satin natural cherry—adds a touch of elegance.

In another noteworthy departure from the 50z, the “great cabin” has been relocated up top. The essence is that of a fly-bridge on a larger boat, with the flush bridge deck delivering a feeling of openness with large, lushly cushioned settees and modular chairs. Sliding safety glass side windows and powered windshields open fully to the fresh air, or, when closed, allow for a climate-controlled environment.

“And you gain the added convenience of not having to go up and down stairs while underway, which can be a hazard, especially offshore,” Johnstone says.

Cozied up in the port-side companion helm seat, chitchatting with Johnstone, who was at the helm, I had thoughts of tackling the Great Loop with my family. With direct access



The forward of the MJM 53z’s dual master staterooms shows off her sheer volume, with a backdrop of meticulous joinery in satin cherry finish. Above: With the windows open, guests can enjoy an open flybridge effect from deck level. Note the pilot/co-pilot helm seating arrangement.



MJM's concept of luxurious yet practical livability at sea is well balanced with the line's oceangoing performance.

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SPECS

LOA 56.ft. 3in. **Beam** 15ft. **Draft** 2ft. 3in. (engines up) **Displacement** 33,669 lbs. (half load) **Construction** composite
Engines (standard) 4 x 350-hp Mercury Verado **Engines (optional)** 4 x 400-hp Mercury Verado **Fuel** 910 gal.
Water 120 gal. **Price** \$2,005,000 (base) **Info** mjmyachts.com





Complete with side boarding doors, the open, flush-deck design allows guests to move easily around the helm and cockpit areas, and out onto the dock within seconds. Dual command helm seating (below) underscores the couples' cruising concept of the 53z's design.



to the redundant nav display, I envisioned how that kind of shared adventure might have played into the conceptualization of the 53z.

Now, let's talk about those outboards, which, according to Johnstone, account for more than half of MJM's sales—an indicator that, whether you're for or against the propulsion style, it is becoming a thing in cruising circles.

The standard package comes with quad 350-hp Mercury Verados. *Breeze* is outfitted with the optional 400s. Importantly for Loopers, the engine room that housed the triple Volvo Pentas on the 50z is instead used for extra fuel and gear stowage on the 53z.

With your hands on the 24-inch Edson Destroyer wheel, she'll give you a 300-plus-mile range at 38 knots, burning just over 100 gallons an hour, according to MJM. Top speed

is around 49 knots—nice to have if you wake up in Newport with lunch plans in Nantucket. Her hull design has a slippery 3.5-to-1 waterline length-to-beam ratio for stability at those higher speeds, while the optional Seakeeper gyro stabilizer dampens 93 percent of any roll, even at the dock. The 53z also carries the ISO Category A Ocean Certification, suitable for seas up to 23 feet and winds of 47 knots or less.

With this quad MJM 53z, in addition to the twin-outboard MJM 35z and triple-outboard MJM 43z introduced last year, Johnstone has made his vision for an outboard cruising yacht a reality. The 53 offers the benefits of smaller boats: shallow draft, easy maintenance and stress-free handling around the docks. But for me, what stands out is the versatile living space and stable offshore ride. Those are key qualities for the serious cruising crowd. ❁

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