

TRUE BELIEVERS



SINCE 1928, HUCKINS YACHT HAS REFLECTED THE
FOUNDER'S COMMITMENT TO QUALITY
AND BUILT ON HIS INNOVATIVE RUNNING SURFACE.

BY JOHN WOOLDRIDGE PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILL DOSTER





Displaying a nicely flared bow, slight tumblehome in the stern and perfect running angle, *Wombat* kicks up her heels on Florida's St. Johns River.

A

With a length overall of 44 feet 10 inches and a beam of 13 feet 9 inches, the 45 Sportfisherman displaces just 23,000 pounds and is comparatively svelte among similar-size sport-fisher designs — facts that contribute to her excellent performance and fuel economy.

AS SHE HAD DONE HUNDREDS, perhaps thousands, of times before, Cindy Purcell advanced the throttles on a custom-built Huckins, this one the new 45 Sportfisherman called *Wombat*. The 45 SF, built for a south Florida angler, is more than a fishing machine — far more. Standing beside Purcell and watching the speed-over-ground figures rise on the multifunction display as the boat came cleanly and smoothly out of the hole sans squatting, I marveled at the sense of power and acceleration delivered by twin 480-horsepower Cummins diesels. We were gliding over a light wind chop on the St. Johns River near Jacksonville, Florida, home to one of the oldest custom boatbuilders in the United States that still produces fine yachts under its founder's name, Frank Pembroke Huckins.

Jon Hall, Huckins' chief designer, was also there, recording that day's performance figures. At 17 knots, the diesels were sipping 17.6 gph, roughly a gallon a mile, a tribute to the light, strong construction techniques at the heart of every Huckins yacht. At this speed, the 415-gallon tankage produces a prodigious 351-nautical-mile cruising range with a 10 percent fuel reserve. Consumption climbed to 27.8 gph at 24 knots, and again to 33 gph at 28 knots. When Purcell pushed the throttles to their stops,

the 45 SF was doing 35 knots and burning 50.5 gph.

"I like to cruise *Wombat* at 28 knots when the conditions allow," Purcell said, "but with a top speed of 35 knots, some owners might like to cruise at an even 30 knots."

Purcell turned the stainless-steel wheel, which is mounted on a raised wooden base to make it easy for the helmsman to use, sitting high for an excellent view of the waters and weed lines that might be ahead. This yacht banked smoothly and steadily into a turn at 28 knots. We ripped through tall wakes without so much as a thump, and Purcell noted that the bottom remains true to the patented Quadraconic hull her grandfather, the company's founder, developed in 1928. That same concept helped the PT boats Huckins built for the U.S. Navy during World War II earn the reputation as the only truly "seagoing" planing design in the fleet. During U.S. Navy sea trials, the Huckins-built PT boat exhibited 60 percent less pounding than other competitive designs. That's enough to make a believer out of most of us, and it's one reason why Huckins owners prize their experiences in open water.

The Huckins' Quadraconic name derives from four conical projections that make up the bottom surface shape. Seen in the slings, the 45 SF has a deep forefoot and well-developed flare above the waterline for good buoyancy and dry running. A single chine rises from the waterline and then descends quickly to optimize spray control. The deep-V shape forward warps to a flat running

RENAISSANCE MAN: HUCKINS CHIEF DESIGNER JON HALL

When Jon Hall begins to draw a design for a customer, he is usually at the drafting table with traditional tools. Hall joined Huckins Yacht in 1980 after beginning his training at the Westlawn Institute of Marine Technology, where so many have entered the profession, and then learned about design stability by helping to pen shrimp boats for a company in Jacksonville, Florida. The New York State native simply had boats in his blood, having grown up boating and water skiing around Oneida Lake in the 1950s. He owned and ran a number of small boats, and he soon became a connoisseur of seakindly shapes. When Buddy and Cindy Purcell hired him, they must have sensed that Hall was the right man to continue the founder's vision, and for 35 years, Hall has studied and grown the legacy that Frank Pembroke Huckins began. Today's builds range from 44 to 60 feet length overall, each with visual cues that are unmistakably Huckins. — *J.W.*



Hands-on best describes Huckins owner and CEO Cindy Purcell (top). Inside and out, the builder's yachts are lovingly made just off Florida's Ortega River.



Jon Hall, chief designer for Huckins Yacht, employs tools of the trade while explaining how Huckins' design history is reflected in today's builds.

THE QUADRACONIC HULL OF HUCKINS' DESIGN POUNDED 60 PERCENT LESS THAN ITS COMPETITORS DURING U.S. NAVY SEA TRIALS FOR PT BOAT BUILDERS.

surface far aft for efficient planing and excellent roll resistance. You can still see the concave shapes developed by Frank Pembroke Huckins, if you look carefully. The original Huckins wooden hulls had triple-planked bottoms, which gave way to double-diagonally planked Philippine mahogany hulls. Huckins was an early adopter of cold-molded hulls.

Later in the day, I joined Purcell in the upper control station of the Palm Beach-fabricated tower, notable for its smooth, precise welds and outstanding finish. Even from that lofty viewpoint, where I dreamed of peering off to the horizon in search of birds marking fish, the sense of solid build and control was outstanding.

"We have decades of experience building cruising and sport-fishing designs that handle the way they should," Purcell said, "and because we are precise about construction, we've always had an edge when it comes to fuel economy."

Those decades of careful craftsmanship are also obvious in *Wombat's* combination of comfort and fishability. The owner had loads of influence in the choice and placement of cockpit features. He specified three flush-deck insulated fish bins with macerators in their drains, a Dometic ice maker

to keep the catch chilled, two 28-foot Rupp outriggers for a widespread presentation of lures, six rod holders in the gunwales for quick changes of gear, saltwater and freshwater washdowns, and a four-rod rocket launcher in lieu of a fighting chair, in keeping with his fondness for stand-up angling.

The client wanted far more than a superb fishing platform. For his family, he wanted the most comfortable, spacious and luxurious yacht possible — which includes two 12,000 Btu Dometic air-conditioning units for the bridge. Working with Hall, the owner requested a two-stateroom, two-head layout with a well-equipped galley. It includes a Sub-Zero double-drawer refrigerator, an Indel Webasto dual top-loading freezer, a 1.5-cubic-foot convection microwave and a Kenyon Lite-Touch two-burner electric stove. *Wombat's* owners are well situated to spend enjoyable weeks at a time in the Bahamas, or anywhere else they care to cruise next.

The interior is understated, a Huckins trademark. Hand-selected, satin-finished mahogany woodwork joins sumptuous fabrics in a tastefully traditional and contemporary execution. As befits a custom builder, Huckins is willing to use teak, cherry or maple to accommodate an owner's tastes.

The Huckins 45 Sportfisherman is an extraordinary combination of legacy and technology. As a custom build, she may not be for everyone, but if you get a chance to run one, you'll come away with a sense of everything that's right about yacht design. ♣

Huckins Yacht, 904-389-1125; huckinsyacht.com

Wombat is equipped with twin 480-horsepower Cummins diesels and Zeus pod drives for powerful, efficient performance. A joystick at the helm makes close-quarters maneuvering simple, precise and confidence-inspiring. Interestingly, this vessel can also be powered by water jets or with traditional straight-shaft drives.



OFFSHORE ENDURANCE: THE HUCKINS BUILD

Huckins' yachts are laid up over a male mold created with precision frames from Marine Concepts. Inner layers of the hull are hand-laminated to the mold using vinyl ester resin and layers of multidirectional fiberglass cloth. Corecell structural foam of engineering-specific densities is then vacuum-bagged to the layup, followed by the outer layers. When the hull is removed from the mold, all surfaces are hand-faired. Full-length stringers and athwartship ribs are laminated fiberglass over structural foam. — J.W.