

Brian M. Fagan's Review of the J40 in the June 1986 Issue of Sea Magazine,

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Performance cruising boats. The label covers a multitude of design sins and generates controversy wherever cruising sailors congregate. A generation ago, most mariners were content to cruise in docile vessels that may have been comfortable in port, but were veritable cows upwind. Today, a growing number of serious cruisers want a large yacht that holds its own on the club race course and carries them quickly and safely across open water. The new J40 is aimed at such a clientele - people who want speed, ease of handling and discreet comfort below. Add shoal draft, two private cabins and a large, sinfully comfortable cockpit and you have an exciting concept in cruising boats.

At first sight, the J40 looks long, sleek and definitely competitive. Closer inspection reveals a performance wolf in very carefully thought out cruising clothing. J Boats has an international reputation for its racing yachts. The pedigree of its new cruising 40 footer belongs among such racing thoroughbreds as the J35 and SORC-winning J41.

Shallow draft yachts need speed to allow for their spare underbodies, an essential in congested harbors and anchorages. The J40 comes with various keel options, among them an elliptical design and the shallow draft version, which allows the cruiser to carry its five foot draft into shallow anchorages. It is built of end-grain balsa core, about the strongest material for its weight that can be used for boat hulls. The 15,500 lb. hull is fairly flat aft, like most J boats. It is a very fast shape with a full forward section which prevents the bow diving in rough water. The same hull design makes the boat track precisely, remaining exceptionally last and stable downwind. Speeds of 15 to 20 knots when surfing and racing downwind are said to be not uncommon, although shorthanded cruising crews are unlikely to be bold enough to find out. The J40 may be intended as a last cruising boat, but is definitely high tech and performance-oriented. The yacht bristles with innovative, ingenious ideas which put performance, comfort and safety on an equal footing.

The large cockpit sums up the concept. The helmsman sits on a high, padded seat which is also the man overboard ring. The destroyer-type wheel turns the Harken ball-bearing mounted rudder as precisely as tiller steering. The Navtec hydraulic panel for backstay and boom vang lies close to hand (yes, Josephine, this "cruising boat" has hydraulics!), as do the engine controls. Two Barient 24 self-tailers control a 2:1 mainsheet system on a ball-bearing racing traveler. This allows the helmsman to trim the mainsheet with one hand.

Two comfortable cockpit seats allow the crew to lounge comfortably against the angled coamings. Or, they can sit, not perch, on the wide winch islands. In fact, the J40 has got to be about the most comfortable cockpit in which I have sailed.

Safety is carefully considered, too. The jib and spinnaker winches are of more-than-ample size, correctly angled, and easy to crank from the cockpit. Both the clew and tack reefing lines and the main halyard are led aft through color-coded stoppers to either side of the main hatch. You can engage two reels from the cockpit, either separately, or at one time. Another innovative safety feature: the builder supplies the Ronstan latchway continuous harness tether systems, enabling one to secure himself at the wheel or move all the way forward and aft with both hands free, a real bonus when shorthanded at night or sailing with children.

The J40's promise of speed and ease of handling was amply confirmed in an afternoon sail aboard hull number 3 in Channel Islands Harbor; thanks to the courtesy of the owner; Dr. Richard McCune, and Bob Kieding, president of Santa Barbara's Coast Chandlery. The 43 h.p. Volvo turbo diesel was so quiet one could barely hear it from the cockpit. Within seconds of backing out of the slip we were purring along at four knots and 2500 revs produced a comfortable cruising speed of at least 7.5 knots.

A finger on the wheel brought instant control. When we went head-to-wind to raise the mainsail, one could keep the boat headed into the 15 knot breeze and stay in one place with minimal use of helm and throttle. The Martec folding propeller provided ample stopping for for a crash stop, should one ever be necessary. Above all, the boat was precise under power in confined quarters, an essential for any yacht that will be maneuvered in strange harbors and small anchorages.

A gusty 15 to 20 knot breeze was blowing through the Channel Islands as we hoisted the main. Instantly the J 40 came alive. When a puff came, she heeled slightly, stabilized and went like a train. The tracking was remarkable. Perched on the comfortable stern seat, one could steer with one finger on the wheel, enjoy superb visibility and watch the world go by.

J Boats claims that a short-handed crew can sail this boat under main alone and get away from most similar-sized cruising boats. They are right. We tacked in the narrow harbor channel. The yacht came over in a tight circle that had us going in the opposite direction and picking up speed when a normal cruising boat would still be in stays.

The large main on the J40 reminds one of the old Cal 40s. It provides power where you need it, giving the shorthanded crew a smaller foretriangle to cope with. McCune's boat has a Harken roller-furler, an optional extra, but a typical inventory of conventional sails would probably include a 150, 130 and 110 genoa, which could be changed quickly and easily.

The merits of the deck plan became apparent while sailing. The J Boats design team sailed a prototype for many weeks before finalizing the layout. It is hard to fault it. The low cabin top and foredeck combined with the Ronstan system allow you to go forward in safety in a hurry. The flexible rig eliminates running backstays, the genoa track and aluminum perforated toe rail allow an infinite variety of headstay and spinnaker adjustments.

The standard Dorade ventilators are well-placed on the cabin top, out of action's way. The jib halyard and spinnaker winches are to starboard, aft of the mast, just where they are in a racing boat. One negative note: Even tall men have to climb a little way up the mast to detach the main halyard from the headboard. McCune has wisely added a folding step to his mast. I would recommend at least two, especially if women crew members are sailing. The bow and stern mooring fairleads are well placed and chafe-free. It was good to see provision for cleating spring lines amidships. How often has one wrestled with winches and mast cleats for this purpose?

One has the impression that providing for anchors aboard the prototype was an afterthought. A Danforth anchor perches in a stainless steel single roller that projects awkwardly over the bow, although it is an integral part of the forestay fitting. This is inadequate for serious anchor drills. Double bronze rollers, well designed for flanges and strong pins are essential even for coastal cruising. It is amazing that the designers did not incorporate an anchor well into the foredeck and did not carefully design the chain locker.

Some of the most ingenious deck features lie astern. Two gas bottles are neatly stowed and vented in a cozy locker on the starboard quarter. The bilge pump is close to the helmsman, while a beautifully designed stern anchor locker combined with a hot and cold freshwater deck shower hides under a hatch lid just astern of the starboard winch pod.

All this is good go-fast stuff, with the added dimensions of safety and ease of handling. Even the companionway and bridge protect crew coming on deck in rough conditions. They lead to a comfortable interior; based on the notion that two couples may want to live aboard for long

periods of time. Under these circumstances privacy is a prized commodity, obtained by placing two private cabins at each end of the boat, each with its own head. The aft cabin under the cockpit to starboard has a separate head that does not open to port. The aft head doubles ingeniously as a hanging locker; so one coming off watch can dump his wet gear into the large "slot" outboard. In both heads, the working surfaces are fiberglass, easily kept clean. Typical of the detail are soap dishes molded into the counters, and carefully masked toilet paper holders. Hot and cold pressure water is provided.

The galley comes with a standard three burner propane stove and oven, and a large icebox with cutting board surface. Double sinks lie amidships opposite the companionway. Stowage space in the galley is somewhat limited for a yacht of this size, but there is plenty of room for provisions under the bunks and elsewhere.

The chart table is to starboard. This particular hull design had a fore-and aft table, with a particularly well-designed main electrical panel outboard. Electronics could be placed on the aft bulkhead. The panel has been moved down so one can place electronics behind the table. The main saloon is large and comfortable, with folding table that stows up on the main bulkhead. The Volvo lies under the sink and is covered by a convenient vanity table that forms the end of the port settee. You can reach all essential components in a few seconds by removing the table. The engine lies immediately below a large hatch, so you can hoist out the engine in short order with the main halyard - a nice plus. The saloon berths are of ample length and comfort to be used as passage making berths at sea, unlike a surprising number of cruising boats, which have excruciatingly uncomfortable saloon berths and fancy but useless staterooms. Maybe they never go offshore.

The forward cabin has a V-berth layout with central filler cushion. It is large, comfortable and has ample light and hanging locker space. The head is on the port side, designed so that cabin occupants have complete privacy. The J40's interior is far from spartan and has been carefully thought-out. Lewmar hatches and ports provide more than adequate ventilation. A clever trash compartment is squirreled away behind the main companionway. A small dust carrier in the deck sole by the galley makes sweeping the cabin sole a breeze. The cabin lights have both clear and red lights, a luxury any cruising sailor on watch late at night will appreciate. There are even night lights at floor level.

There are some negatives, too. The main saloon is somewhat lacking in handholds. A pole by the sink, or at any rate a grab handle, would have been a nice addition. Overhead handrails on

the deckhead would make moving fore and aft much easier at sea. Water storage capacity is limited to 60 gallons, hardly adequate for ocean crossings. However; you can add up to 200 gallons as an option. These deficiencies are easily corrected. The J40 gives an overall impression of being a meticulously thought-out performance cruising boat.

Not every cruising sailor will make a beeline for this high tech 40-footer, but J Boats is on to a winner here. Apart from its impressive roster of loyal clients, many enthusiastic club racers are bound to be seduced by the endless possibilities for fast cruising the J40 offers. As for diehard cruising men like myself, well... Let's just say if I had the money, I'd be jumping aboard tomorrow. With some careful modification, you could take this boat anywhere, comfortably and safely. And what more can any cruising sailor want than a fast yacht that makes full use of all the technical advances bred on the racing circuit?