

# FOR ART'S SAKE

Efficiency at cruise is in the eye of the beholder. And when that cruiser only gets



an occasional three-day weekend away, the MJM 50z can change the game.

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*PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILLY BLACK*



*The MJM 50z makes the most of high-tech construction and triple Volvo Penta IPS power to create a formidable cruising package with a nice turn of speed.*

**T**he art of cruising is one that we all try to practice with varying degrees of success. Many look upon the chart and the surface of the sea as the canvas. The boat is the vessel where our hopes and dreams for the next masterpiece become real, and her traits and foibles help limn the final work as our steadying hand guides her through each sequence. The result can frustrate us, or satisfy our needs, or it can inspire us to push through the perceived limitations of our medium to the next level.

The MJM 50z takes that metaphor and turns it on its head. In this composition, the boat is still the medium of the cruising artist, but instead of the chart she sketches her iterations of beauty on the face of the clock, the most precious of resources to all of us.

### *SOUL de FRUGAL*

The 50z is not an ordinary cruising boat by any measure. MJM Yachts is the brainchild of Bob Johnstone of J/Boats sailing fame. Johnstone has always been about performance and getting the most out of every puff of wind on the racecourse. Change that breeze to a combination of horsepower and hull design and you'll have a more complete understanding of MJM. The high-tech

lamination schedule (including E-glass, Corecell, and Kevlar composite) that's employed by forward-thinking builder Boston Boat Works incorporates lightweight strength and stiffness from the get-go, and it doesn't end there. While it's great to think about prepreg techniques and resin infusion and what it all gets you, it's really better to feel what it gets you.

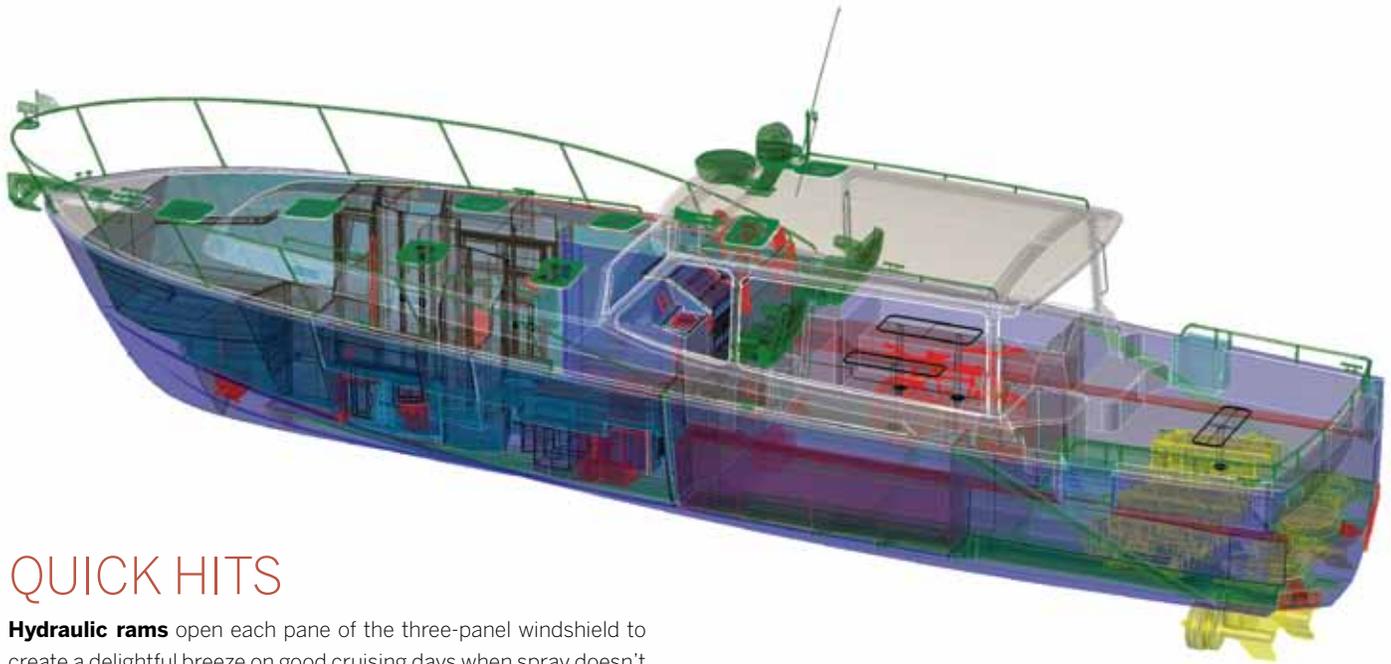
I got a feel for the 50z with company skipper Capt. Mike Hall. He and I had blitzed off the dock at sunup the morning after the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show last November, and made a break for Naples on the Sunshine State's West Coast.

The solidity of this build and the speed at which we cruised away from the boat-show madness and into the calm of the Keys is really the payoff. Taking the wheel along the way on our half-day delivery, I weaved through crab pot buoys in flat-calm conditions at a consistent 34 knots, enjoying the responsive steering and not needing to touch the throttles.

After our sea-trial speed runs, during which a squall greeted us off Naples at the entrance to Gordon Pass near Keewaydin Island, I put her through a few sharp turns and maneuvers and enjoyed the bite of that hull as she tracked through the curves without a suggestion of anything but complete control. It's good to know the rough-water capabilities are there, but this boat has the

**Below:** The saloon has a distinct sailboat feel, which stands to reason when you consider J/Boats' Bob Johnstone is the driving force in the design of the entire MJM line. **Opposite:** The forepeak master stateroom has a fixed easy chair that really makes sense the first time you try it.





## QUICK HITS

**Hydraulic rams** open each pane of the three-panel windshield to create a delightful breeze on good cruising days when spray doesn't present a problem.

Bob Johnstone considers this **helm area and bridgedeck** to be an apt replacement for a flying bridge. Everyone can congregate there, lines of sight are excellent, access to galley and refreshments is simple, and the handling and performance benefits of one fewer deck are priceless.

Some say the **Seakeeper gyro-stabilization system** actually affects running efficiency for the better. While our test showed very minor improvement, the flat-calm conditions may have made the stabilization effect negligible.

**The range of the boat**, with a 10 percent safety reserve, is about 270 nautical miles at nearly 38 knots with a 520-gallon fuel capacity. Draw a range circle on your chart, then calculate how much time you get at your destination before you need to leave to get back in time. The question this raises is: Will I use my boat more if I can go more places in less time?

**The single forward stateroom** is a true master on the 50z. The optional guest cabin requires a bulkhead that changes the whole feel of the saloon below. Our take: Guests are optional too. But when they're along, they'll be very comfortable on the convertible dinette.

performance to slip through tight weather windows and outrun storms. She gives you range and speed in a combination that works quite nicely with the busy lives many of us lead today. So while cruisers often arrive at their destinations at dusk or shorten their cruising legs to have time ashore in daylight, the 50z will let you pretty much pay a visit wherever you want, when you wish, and the fuel-for-fun transaction doesn't seem to be a bad equation at all.

### BIGGER BROTHER

This boat is the largest MJM yet, coming on the heels of the 40z and the 36z (past models also included the 34z and the 29z). The 50z may be the largest boat the company ever builds, but when you look at the spec list you realize what Johnstone is trying to do with each successive model.

Johnstone learned long ago that the latest technology can allow him to get the combination of efficiency and capability he's

after. So on the boat we tested, MJM incorporated three Volvo Penta IPS600s, matching them to Volvo Penta's interceptor-style tabs. The engines' low profile allows the deck on the boat to stay at a manageable height, and, with the diesels positioned beneath the cockpit, the longitudinal center of gravity ends up where Johnstone wants it and the bridgedeck stays quieter. Under the hull, the triple IPS pods give you a draft of 3 feet, 10 inches (the standard twins draw just 3 feet), and they also eliminate the need for a bow thruster. Volvo Penta's built-in dynamic positioning system also gives the owner the freedom that Johnstone has stipulated as a core tenet of the company's design mantra: build a cruising yacht that either he or his wife, Mary, could operate the boat solo, comfortably.

Johnstone plays a very active role in model development and works closely with his partners at Boston Boat Works and Zurn Yacht Design to get the boat built. "We're essentially their in-house design staff—actually, I guess we're their outhouse designers," laughs firm principal Doug Zurn. "It's a more direct result if a designer is working with the builder on building a boat



**LOA:** 55' 3"

**BEAM:** 15' 0"

**DRAFT:** 3' 10"

**DISPL.:** 32,850 lb.

**FUEL:** 520 gallons

**WATER:** 170 gallons

**TEST POWER:** 435-hp Volvo Penta IPS600s (x3)

**CRUISE SPEED:** 34 knots

**RANGE:** 309 nm\*

**PRICE:** \$2,075,000 as tested

**CONTACT:** (401) 862-4367, [www.mjmyachts.com](http://www.mjmyachts.com)

\*Assumes 10 percent reserve

<b>RPM</b>	<b>Knots</b>	<b>GPH</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>dB(A)</b>
<b>600</b>	4.1	1.1	1,744	69
<b>1000</b>	7.2	3.3	1,021	77
<b>1500</b>	11.1	9.9	525	75
<b>2000</b>	17.5	19.4	422	77
<b>2500</b>	25.3	30.1	393	79
<b>3000</b>	32.4	46.8	324	82
<b>3400</b>	37.6	65.0	271	86

**TEST CONDITIONS:** Air temperature: 85°F; humidity: 75%; seas: 1-2'; wind: 7 knots; load: 265 gal. fuel, 130 gal. water, 2 persons, 200 lb. gear. Fuel burn were measured by the Volvo Penta engine-monitoring system. Speeds were measured in two directions with Raymarine GPS. Range is based on 90% of advertised fuel capacity. Sound levels were measured at the helm. 65 dB(A) is the level of normal conversation.

**NOTEWORTHY OPTIONS:** Guest cabin with wet head (\$49,500); cockpit bimini (\$9,950); KVH M3 DirecTV satellite TV receiver (\$9,800); additional Raymarine display (\$9,249); Raymarine T303 thermal-imaging system (\$13,725); side-by-side Miele washer/dryer (\$12,920); Sealift hydraulic swim platform (\$49,950).





**Opposite:** The helm deck can be enclosed in huge Strataglass curtains that keep wind and spray at bay when conditions get sporty. **Above:** A shippy wheel, Volvo Penta IPS joystick, a pair of Raymarine screens, and a Stidd helm bench seat mean you won't be wanting for anything.

versus the designer just passing the design off and the builder has his staff interpret the designers' stuff—things get lost and the boat gets muddy. MJMs aren't like that. They're very crisp and clean. The signal that comes from Bob through us to the builder is a very, very straight path—a very clear path."

Here's more detail about the path Johnstone blazes: MJM will not just add a flying bridge to an existing design. And with a Marine Air Systems air-conditioned helm deck under cover of a hardtop and enclosed with enormous crystal-clear Strataglass curtains that roll out of the way on nice days (I'm curious to see how they hold up in the relentless UV exposure and salt), you can get the flying-bridge feel at this helm station, surrounded by your guests. The cockpit can be shaded by an optional bimini that folds aft and stows above the transom, but I don't think I'd even want it, to be truthful, as the hardtop covers plenty of deck space. The Sealift hydraulic swim platform simplifies water access and will launch and retrieve a tender weighing up to 2,500 pounds. Lockers beneath the bridgedeck side seating open to gaping stowage areas, with fuel tanks outboard and accessible.

There's also a Seakeeper gyro stabilizer on board, positioned in a machinery space forward of the engine room. The 50z offers the Seakeeper gyro stabilizer as standard equipment (not many other builders do that). Admittedly I thought it odd that a builder that's so conscious of weight would include such an add-on—according to Seakeeper, the unit weighs 1,210 pounds in a bolt-on installation.

"The Seakeeper gyro stabilizer is like joystick docking was seven years ago—it's just getting started," Johnstone says. "Over

the next five years it will become a 'must-have' item and very important for resale." It could be said the 50z is built to reap the benefits of the gyro stabilization system, since her rigid, lightweight construction is sturdy enough both to withstand the forces exerted by the unit and to react to them quickly. And by making it standard, MJM gains better control over that center of gravity.

### *CRUISING FIT*

If you're a cruising couple with occasional guests, the single stateroom forward will be all you need. MJM also offers a second stateroom option, but you give up the saloon dinette and the open deckplan below.

The galley and saloon area is pleasant, with a dinette that converts to a guest berth with hi-lo table. A gently curving overhead and polished steel vertical pole for a handhold at the companionway give it a real sailboat feel, another nod to Johnstone's sailing-past. That's one thing about the MJM interior spaces—you know you're on a boat.

The master is en suite, with hanging lockers, a desk, and a fixed, upholstered chair that struck me as odd until I heard Johnstone explain it. "It adds greatly to livability, whether more privacy at night, putting on shoes, reading, being 'at the office,' or making private phone calls," Johnstone says.

That chair is an excellent summation of the whole design brief—it's what one man thinks will work for him, and he happens to think you may see it his way. And when said man has the boatbuilding chops Johnstone has, he may be right. ■