

# THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BOATS YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF

BORN ON A SWEDISH ISLAND WITH ROOTS  
DATING BACK TO VIKING LONG BOATS,  
J CRAFT IS LOOKING TO BRING THEIR BOUTIQUE  
BUILDS TO THE AMERICAN MARKET.

**STORY AND PHOTOS BY DANIEL HARDING JR.**

# W

hat kind of boat is that?"

is the most common question Radenko Milakovic gets when poking his 42-foot J Craft into a new marina or harbor. It's a question the 52-year-old company owner, who refers to himself as the brand's temporary custodian, never tires of answering, in fact it's kind of the point.

With a powder-blue hull (made of fiberglass with a wood veneer) emblazoned with the J Craft logo on both sides, the 13-year-old boat was shipped to the United States for the sole purpose of helping to introduce the 24-year old brand to the US market, one boater at a time. At first glance, many guess that the boat is a Riva or maybe even a Chris-Craft; almost no one guesses that the curvaceous boat with 19 coats of varnished mahogany hails from the Swedish island of Gotland, a 1,229 square mile piece of land in the Baltic Sea with roots reaching back to Vikings and the building of long boats.

My first encounter with the 42 Torpedo R occurs while standing on the deck of Milakovic's stunning rental house on Shelter Island, NY—a residence complete with indoor pool, sauna and racquetball court. Even from a distance you can see its aqua hull color and orange J Craft logo. My crew for the day—Digital Director John Turner and Soundings Intern Lidia Goldberg—scamper down a set of narrow stairs, across the street and down to the dock where the 42 tugs at its lines, practically begging to take off across Shelter Island Sound.

Milakovic shows us around his pride and joy. He's particularly proud of a tri-use platform around the U-shaped cockpit seating. In the lowered position, it serves as the cockpit sole, push a button and it raises to a height where a fill cushion turns the space into a larger sunpad. Raised higher still and you can flip out a dinning table. "I didn't want people to have to eat on a surface that other guests had walked on," says Milakovic.



*Radenko Milakovic calls himself the "temporary custodian" of J Craft but the legacy he's helping to build for the Swedish builder is likely to be permanent.*

42 knots, quiet, with smooth banking turns. Yes, the 42 Torpedo R has the moves to go with her good looks.



LOA: 41' 4"  
 Beam: 11' 9"  
 Draft: 3' 2"  
 Fuel: 210 gal.  
 Water: 53 gal.  
 Power: 2/480-hp Volvo Penta IPS 650

RPM	GPH	KNOTS	RANGE
600	.8	4	1,050
1000	2.3	6.4	584
2000	17.6	16.1	192
3000	30.3	33.7	234
3520	42.2	39.6	197



*"Woah!" Even with all my years of testing boats, I don't think I could summarize the performance of the J Craft any better, "Woah" indeed.*

Down below, there's a surprising amount of space for a vessel that otherwise serves as a dayboat. There is a lounge forward with a table that can lower to form a berth; Milakovic says he prefers to use the space as a remote office. Amidships sits a berth that the intrepid owner says he once called home for what he described as a comfortable week. That's saying a lot considering, again, that his rental house has a racquetball court. There's also an adequate-sized head with a stall shower. That shower is a bit unorthodox in that the head is in the shower stall hidden—in this case—by a seat that's a cross between an Adirondack chair and a throne. Milakovic says with a smile that it's a nod to the owner of J Craft hull number one: the King of Sweden.

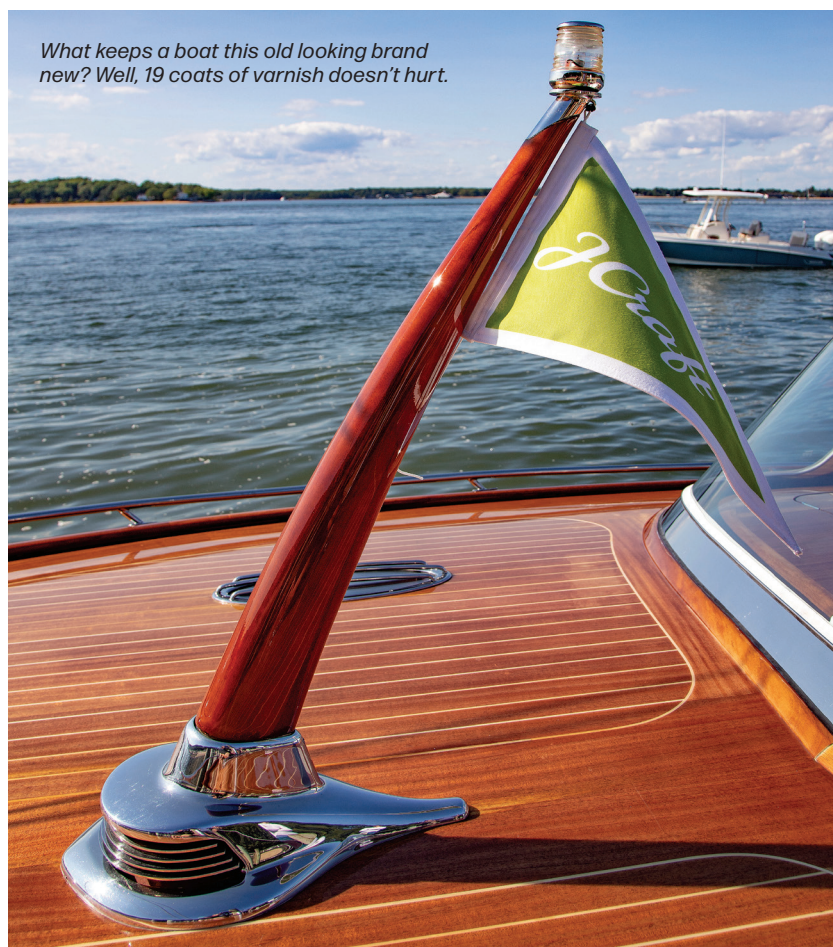
First and foremost a dayboat at heart with entertaining in its DNA,

I was anxious to get the 42 underway. My first impression as we cruised atop the glistening Sound for open water was just how quiet the boat was. Even with twin 480-hp Volvo Penta IPS engines, the wind and the sound of splashing water, everyone aboard could converse as if we were sitting around the dinner table. When testing any boat, I like to do the two-way speed run to garner performance measurements first for two reasons, one: so I don't forget and two: so I can get the homework out of the way and then go play. I had Lidia standing beside me to observe as I recorded the fuel burn and speed through the rpm range. To this point, Lidia was exceptionally polite and somewhat soft-spoken, studiously taking in her first official sea trial for a magazine. She broke character just for a second when



The author enjoys the best "seat" in the house, the one behind the helm.

PHOTO BY JOHN V TURNER



What keeps a boat this old looking brand new? Well, 19 coats of varnish doesn't hurt.

the captain carved a somewhat unexpected hard-over turn at speed. The Torpedo lived up to its name as it silently banked hard to starboard and Lidia let out a "Woah!" Even with all my years of testing boats, I don't think I could summarize the performance of the J Craft any better, "Woah" indeed.

After a truly impressive sea trial I found Milakovic back on the balcony. He asked how our time on board was, but in his mind he already knew, she had the moves to compliment her beauty.

Ever an entertainer himself, he offered us a Bosnian beer called Nektar. Light and flavorful, I also gave it a positive review, which was lucky, since Milakovic then told me that he was part owner of that brewery. It felt like a fitting beverage to sip while learning about how, when the entrepreneur likes something, he goes all in.

Milakovic explained that unlike most boaters, he was born in the mountains and wasn't really exposed to boating until his mid-30s. His relationship with J Craft was a fast and furious love affair. He first saw a

J Craft 38 when visiting Port Hercules in Monaco. It was the curvaceous beauty that first caught his attention. A conversation with the captain turned into a week-long charter. That week turned into a month, and that month turned into three.

He approached company founder Bjorn Jansson and told him he'd like to buy one but with IPS propulsion. Bjorn, who was only building a couple boats a year at the time rejected the idea. As persistent as he is passionate, Milakovic built a relationship with Bjorn, whom he would learn was facing a terminal illness. Milakovic quietly acquired the company from him with a pledge to preserve the look, feel and legacy that the founder was creating—just with IPS, of course.

Milakovic, a former hedge fund manager was now a full-fledged boatbuilder. Backed by the dozen or so employees in Gotland, the company went to work replacing the 38 he first fell in love with the 42 we had just stepped off of. Milakovic says that Jansson saw the new 42 on a couple occasions and expressed his approval. "Bjorn was a larger-than-life character. He was in the hotel and nightclub business in Sweden, and he was the premier provider of hotel and nightclub services. He was a very vibrant, very big character who could reach anybody."

When starting J Craft, Jansson was told he needed to sell five boats first to justify the costs of the mold etc. "Bjorn walked away and a week later had five orders, the first one of which was for the King of Sweden," Milakovic says.

I ask Milakovic the perhaps obvious question of whether he plans

to expand his workforce and increase production. He reminds me of the often-told joke in the marine industry: "How do you make a million dollars in boatbuilding?"

"You start with a billion," I reply.

Milakovic laughs, "Yes, precisely."

He hints at the fact that he could see ramping up from three and four boats a year to maybe as many as six, but more important to him is maintaining the hand-built quality that his company is known for. "Each boat takes roughly a year to build, each boat takes between 8,000 and 9,000 hours," he says. "We take great pride in the fact that we build almost everything in-house. Obviously, the propulsion is from Volvo Penta and we don't rear our own cows for leather, but beyond that and the steering wheel and fabrics, everything else is Swedish. And we build with a high amount of customization."

As of the day of our meeting there are only two J Crafts in the United States, the one sitting on the dock across the street from us and one in the Great Lakes. But soon, Milakovic says, they'll be joined by a third, a brand new 42 that he hopes will be on display at the Palm Beach show in 2024.

I'm personally looking forward to seeing the new model at the show, but what I think I'll enjoy most is eavesdropping on other (non-*Power & Motoryacht* reading) boaters as they encounter the boat. I imagine I'll hear two things: What kind of boat is that? And ... "Woah." □