



BOATS

BOAT TESTS

Spencer 43 Express

By Capt. Patrick Sciacca photos by Jeremy Frechette



THE INFO

over. He asked if he could come aboard and take a look, and we happily invited him on. After about a half hour of going through the boat, he asked us what we liked and didn't like about her. We shared some ideas, and then he introduced himself: "My name is Paul Spencer, and I'm thinking about building an express boat around this size." I'd known who he was the minute he stepped off the 60-footer bearing his name, but I thought, what would make this successful North Carolina custom big-boat builder want to construct something smaller? I found the answer during a subsequent trip to South Florida: high-tech propulsion technology and good, old-fashioned craftsmanship.

At a side-to berth behind a house in Lighthouse Point, the sharp, bullet-sleek profile and prominent bow flare of Spencer's 43 Express shared a strong resemblance to her larger convertible siblings. Perhaps it's because the 43's fully foam-cored hull (Core-Cell foam is laid over a jig, shaped, and then fiberglassed inside and out) is a scaled-down version of that very 60-footer. As a matter of fact, the bridge deck of the 43 is taken off the mold for the 60. What does this mean for this vessel's owner? How about a behemoth bridge deck that allows the centerline teak helm pod to sit all the way aft, overseeing the cockpit and all trolled lines? A lot of mid-40-foot open boats have their helms far forward to provide large bridge-deck seating spaces. Spencer believes that by having the centerline helm directly overlooking the cockpit, the helmsman can more easily survey baits, spot fish, and communicate with his crew. This setup is especially good for a crew that's short-handed, as the steps flanking the bridge deck and leading to the cockpit enable the captain to instantly help leader and gaff or release a fish.

The 43's fishability is complemented by excellent performance and maneuverability, thanks to Volvo Penta's Inboard Performance System (IPS). This is the first sportfisherman I've come across with this system, and while I'd admittedly been skeptical about the application of IPS on a fishing boat, some real wheel time got me thinking in a new direction.

On a fairly flat Atlantic, I took the single-lever controls and throttled up the standard 435-hp IPS-600 diesels, which easily propelled the 43 to 41.4 mph (WOT) in about 22 seconds, hitting the engines' rated rpm of 3500 spot-on. The Volvo Penta electronic controls automatically synched the engines if I kept their rpm within about ten percent of each other, but I wished I'd had the ability to use a slave and master control and just work with one throttle for straightaways. When I set the controls to a cruise rpm of 3250, the 43 zipped across the water at 37.6 mph while burning only 36 gph. Take note: That's better than a one-mile-to-one-gallon ratio (and a 620-mile range) at nearly 38 mph.

Equally noteworthy is the 43's maneuverability. I put the wheel hard over at both cruise and WOT and noted less than a 20-rpm drop. I've run well-designed, straight-shaft boats that average 100- to 200-rpm drops while making the same type of turns. And she circles tightly—about one and a half boat lengths at cruise speed—while offering a moderate but tolerable inboard heel. I think her optional full Pipewelders tower played a part in that lean, and perhaps her light weight did, too, as displacement is listed at just 25,000 pounds dry.

IPS was seemingly up to the challenge of the sportfisherman application, but the real test was the ability to chase a fish. I turned my back to the bow and throttled the single levers to full reverse, waiting for the water to dump into the 102-square-foot teak cockpit. I anticipated my photographer getting some shots of the ocean pouring over 25 1/2-inch-high gunwales and teak covering boards. So I waited. And waited. And waited. Nothing. Just a clean and smokeless view while the boat boogied backwards. Even when I put the wheel hard to port and starboard while backing down to throw the corners down, no water got into the boat. I thought, this 43 could easily beat down a marlin. To confirm my opinion, Paul's son Daniel Spencer, who accompanied me on the sea trial, informed me that the first fish caught onboard this boat was a white marlin.

Like many IPS-powered boats, my test vessel featured the optional joystick control. While the usual max rpm for the joystick is 1500, the control on this boat had been programmed (by Volvo Penta, at the request of the builder) to produce 2000 rpm at the touch of a button, to give a little more punch should you need it. And I think with some practice, you could chase a fish using the joystick. I tried it and found that while it's great for close-quarters handling, I'm used to having the throttles in my hands for running down a fish. I guess I'm old-fashioned.

The efficient IPS diesels are housed under the cockpit and easily accessed with the flick of a switch under the gunwale. Two Lenco rams lift the cockpit sole to a 45-degree angle, which allowed me to easily slip my 5'7" frame into the compartment and walk around the engines. I needed to duck slightly to access the 7-kW Phasor genset, but I quickly reached the dual Racors under the bridge-deck steps. The engine-room arrangement is efficient for doing routine maintenance and also for any major work that may come down the pike.

Model: 43 Express

Year: 2007

Boat Type: Sportfisherman

LOA: 43'1"

Beam: 14'6"

Draft: 3'6"

Standard Power: 2/435-hp Volvo Penta IPS-600 diesels

Base Price: \$895,000



One drawback to the IPS's location is that the large in-deck fishboxes typical of similar vessels are absent. There is an in-transom livewell/fishbox that can fit approximately 15 30-pound yellowfin tuna. In addition, there is a large stand-up-type cockpit fishbox and/or refrigerated box. The one on my test boat was plumbed with an Eskimo ice maker and had three separate compartments, but meat-fish anglers might want to make this one large killbox for larger yellowfin, bigeye, and swords, while tourney guys may opt to have one section for bait trays. For more cold stowage, the insulated bridge-deck benchseat can be used as a drinkbox or an extra bait box. That's the benefit of working with a custom builder like Spencer: Almost any configuration is possible for an owner.

The Spencer 43 Express is a true sportfisherman that marries hard-earned knowledge with tomorrow's technology. And while she's considered a progressive boat because of her propulsion system and fully foam-core hull, it's her trademark North Carolina flare and solid ride that really set her apart from much of the open-boat crowd. While materials and technology will continue to evolve, what makes this boat special will remain timeless.