

Formula 45 Yacht

Wired for the electronics-lover, this boat is the ultimate technology powerhouse. by Tom Thompson



Want the ultimate iPod accessory? How about a Formula 45 Yacht? This boat has not one but two places to plug and play. There's a docking station inside one of the salon cabinets that will connect your iPod to a Bose surround-sound audio system as well as recharge it. And a jack at the helm lets you play your iTunes through the Kenwood stereo's six cockpit speakers and a sub-woofer. The Kenwood, incidentally, is Sirius Satellite Radio-capable and comes with a six-month subscription. Want more connectivity? You can even plug your laptop computer into the 45 Yacht's 37-inch widescreen LCD TV. This boat is wired.



for the hardtop is behind you when you're at the wheel and the large expanse of glass has few vertical supports. Construction is solid. Underway, there were no squeaks or creaks. The helm is well-designed—all controls are in easy reach. The center panel on our test boat, directly above the wheel, held a pair of Raymarine E-120 displays.

The way the 45 Yacht rides is impressive. Although it's just over 48 feet long, the handling is that of a boat half the size. The pair of Volvo Penta D9 diesels put the vessel on plane in just under 16 seconds, with minimal bow rise. At wide-open throttle, we hit 36.9 mph, measured by GPS. All this power doesn't come with a fuel penalty, though. At a 26-mph cruising speed, total fuel burn for both engines was 39.2 gph.

The helm responds superbly. Just touch the wheel and you immediately feel it start to turn. I performed a slalom maneuver I wouldn't even think of trying on many motoryachts. There was a stiff breeze creating some short-period chop the day we tested—but that didn't seem to bother this Formula. It was smooth cruising all the way, even while crossing a couple of substantial wakes.

The 45 Yacht's interior is warm and inviting. Our test boat was decorated with the optional Ralph Lauren fabric package. It contrasted nicely with the cherrywood cabinetry that is a standard feature. One of the drawbacks of an express-style boat is scarcity of natural light sources. Formula overcame this by putting two large, rectangular skylights in the salon, as well as oversized portlights on each side. Outside, the skylights are located just forward of the windshield, but from a distance you'd never know they were there. The

But wiring isn't the only thing noteworthy about this yacht. This is Formula's first go at a coupe-style, enclosed-bridge configuration—and it looks as though they got it right. The 45 Yacht's hardtop has curved glass windows on three sides and a clear drop curtain aft. There's also a large power sunroof. The center section of the windshield opens as a walk-through to the foredeck as well as provides ventilation. Opening side vents scoop air inward while

underway. An optional air-conditioning unit is available to cool the bridge deck. Formula offers optional Ultraleather upholstery for the forward cockpit seating. There are two separately adjustable seats at the helm and a curved bench along the port side. A wetbar is located behind the helm seats and includes a standard refrigerator. On the lower cockpit deck, a U-shaped sofa has a removable table at its center.

I was impressed by the excellent sightlines from the driving position. The major bracing



translucent white plexiglass blends almost invisibly with the deck gelcoat.

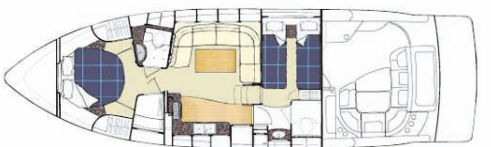
There's a fully equipped galley to port built around a Corian countertop and accented with teak and holly flooring. A lighted showcase with a wine rack includes tempered starware and tumblers. The U-shaped sofa to starboard has an inlaid solid cherry dining table.

The master stateroom lies forward and has an en suite split head. It features a queen berth with custom bedspread, shams and linens. There are two hanging lockers, four drawers and an under-bed storage compartment. A 15-inch LCD TV with DVD player comes standard.

The aft stateroom has twin berths that can be made into a queen with a filler cushion. The toilet and shower are enclosed, and a separate vanity sink with a Corian countertop runs along the port side of the compartment. Another 15-inch LCD TV with DVD player is standard here, as well.

Getting back to being connected, there's an option that will set you free. It's a wireless LCD TV that interfaces with the onboard DVD player. You can take it anywhere on the boat and enjoy your favorite shows on a bright, sunlight-viewable screen. This is one more accessory to show that the Formula 45 Yacht is more than just a boat: It's the ultimate electronic base station. ⚓

Specs	
LOA	48'2"
Beam	13'11"
Draft	3'5"
Weight	30,500 lbs.
Fuel capacity	350 gals.
Sleeps	6
Base power	T/Cummins QSM 540 diesels
Base price	\$777,660
Power as tested	T/Volvo Penta D9 DPH diesels
Price as tested	\$873,825



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The Formula for Success

There aren't too many companies that make it to the half-century mark—especially given the way corporations tend to gobble each other up. What's even rarer is to have the same people involved over such a long span of time. Thunderbird Products, the company that builds Formula boats in Decatur, Indiana, fits the bill, though. The foundation of its longevity? Solid Midwestern values.

The company as it's known today came about from a blending of several others over time. The original Thunderbird Products was founded in 1956 in Miami by Woodie Woodson. He built an 18-foot boat that made the first successful sterndrive crossing from Miami to Nassau in the Bahamas. In 1958, Vic Porter began selling small fiberglass runabouts in the Midwest and Northeast under the Duo Incorporated name. Formula Boats came into being in '62, when offshore racing legend Don Aronow (below) began to commercially produce his winning designs. Through a series of corporate mergers and acquisitions, the three companies became one in the early 1970s under the leadership of Vic Porter.

Porter bought the Thunderbird and Formula brands in '76 and eventually moved all operations to Decatur. Around that time, the second generation of Porters began to join the management team.

"When I was a kid, I had posters of Formula boats on the walls in my room," said

Scott Porter, Vic's oldest son and now the president of Thunderbird Products. "Little did I know that I was going to be involved in the company."

Formula Boats strives for quality. "My dad always had a passion for wanting to offer a better product," Scott explained. Vic is now semi-retired.

"To build a quality product, you need to have a great work environment," Scott said. Through the years, Formula Boats' manufacturing facility has expanded to over a half-million square feet of state-of-the-art boatbuilding technology.

"It's the people who make it happen," Scott continued. "The environment is one thing, but the building doesn't build the boats—the people do."

Formula has a committed workforce. "We've been able to bring in generations of families," Scott pointed out with pride. "We now have third-generation team members in the factory as well as third-generation Porters." Chief designer John Adams has been with the company since 1970, maintaining a consistency in design and

style that has been a Formula trademark.

Commitment and longevity could be the "secret formula" to the company's success. "We're always working on delivering the ultimate fun and safe boating experience by bringing family and friends together," Scott said. "That's our mission." —T.T.

