

PCS BOAT REVIEW

BY CAPT. STEVE QUINLAN

SMOOTH OPERATOR

Specifications

L.O.A.: 44' 8"
Beam: 15' 10"
Weight: 34,600 pounds
Draft: 3' 6"
Fuel Capacity: 600 gallons
Water Capacity: 200 gallons
Holding Tank: 60 gallons
Bait Tank Capacity: 100 gallons
Price as Tested: \$950,000

MIKELSON 43 ZEUS SPORTFISHER

Introduced in 1997 in a forward, portside galley configuration, the Tom Fexas-designed M43 is the smallest sport fisher in the Mikelson Yachts fleet. Its sleek design incorporates a long foredeck and subtle sheer that extends from stem to stern. Construction is second-to-none, using BTI fiberglass and a Corecell structural foam core above the waterline. In 2005, Mikelson borrowed a page from its popular 50-footer and began offering the M43 in a galley-aft iteration. This arrangement not only extends the salon, but it places the galley within a few steps of the salon entry.

Fast-forward to 2009. The M43 Sportfisher is still available semi-custom to order, but is now available with Zeus pod drives, which makes docking and tight-quarter maneuvering a breeze – with or without the joystick. Engines are located far aft beneath the cockpit, and the pod drives extend through-hull beneath them. This arrangement makes the propsets' angles of attack perfectly horizontal – rather than angled downward – resulting in improved fuel efficiency and high-speed handling.

The Zeus' aft, tunnel-drive design offers many other advantages, as well, such as reduced noise and vibration, a shallower draft, and easy accessibility. Its underwater-exhaust design also prevents exhaust gases from entering the deckhouse. Several other advantages to the Zeus Drive system as well as its major components and subcomponents include SmartCraft/VesselView, auto trim tabs, trolling valves, and Precision Pilot Sky Hook, which we'll cover in the performance part of our review.

We arranged a sea trial of the very first M43 Sportfisher equipped with Zeus drives through San Diego-based Mikelson

Yachts. Our test boat was powered by twin Cummins MerCruiser 480 hp QSB turbodiesels. Back in 2005, when it was first offered with the aft galley, we tested a M43 Sportfisher with Cummins QSC inboard power (450 hp), so this sea trial would allow us to compare fuel economy, high-speed handling, and other distinctions between the standard inboard and Zeus iterations.

User Friendly

"User friendly" is a term that applies, in the case of the M43, to everything from accessibility to fishing features to ease of operation. Engines and drives couldn't be any more accessible, and the drives couldn't be any simpler to change in the event you damage one. An added convenience of a pass-through window (from galley to cockpit) and a cockpit head/shower allows anglers access to everything they need without tracking up the salon. Access to the flybridge via stairwell (rather than a ladder) is much more secure. Incidentally, its steps are teak to match the beautiful cockpit sole.

Her foredeck sports several high-grade standard features, such as a beneath-deck Maxwell windlass, a 44-pound Bruce-style anchor with 275 feet of 5/16-inch stainless steel hi-test marked chain, an anchor wash-down, and 1-1/4-inch stainless steel foredeck rails that extend all the way to the cockpit. Our test boat was also equipped with dinghy and davit.

In terms of fishing features, the 100-gallon double bait tank in the transom is lighted and fitted with windows and a removable divider, which enables you to take on two types of bait. Abutted to the deckhouse is a tackle center,



The flybridge combines an aft tournament station and forward helm with wrap-around electronics and control console.

complete with a sink with both hot and cold water. Rod lockers and holders abound, including a hidden overhead rod locker and engraved, custom flush-mounted rod holders. The day head doubles as secure, lockable rod storage. A pair of molded drop-in fish boxes are located to port and starboard of the engine room, which is accessible through a pair of hydraulic-assist hatches.

House batteries and engine batteries are automatically charged simultaneously by either the engine alternators or through the shore power/charger inverter system, utilizing a battery combiner. Conveniently located just inside the sliding salon door, the AC/DC electrical panel includes system breakers and volt/amp meters and is as straightforward as they come.

Our test boat was also equipped with an 800-gallon-a-day water maker and a 9-kW Onan QD (Quiet Diesel) electronic diesel generator that is monitored by the VesselView system. The fuel-manifold system enables you to switch both engines over to just one of the two 300-gallon non-integral fuel tanks should you desire, and the tanks are perfectly centered in the hull so as not to affect trim.

Beauty Within

Nothing short of elegant, the salon offers a 360-degree panoramic view, and it is equipped with a U-shaped galley that places the fridge against the cockpit bulkhead, allowing the doors to open forward to prevent items from falling out when underway. All appliances, which include a two-burner stovetop, convection microwave/broiler oven, and double sink, are first-rate. Two settees – each with its own cherry wood table – a 32-inch flat-screen TV, and Sony DVD/CD surround system with TV interface are placed forward in the entertainment area. Cherry with accents of birch are used throughout the salon, the head, and staterooms; granite is



Locating the fridge forward against the bulkhead prevents food from falling out while underway.

used in the bar, bathroom, and galley counters.

To starboard, the guest stateroom features double pull-down Pullman-style bunks with large storage drawers beneath them, a large hanging-clothes locker, and an opening deck hatch with a hinged screen. An elegantly appointed master stateroom has a queen-size island berth that features a six-inch-thick foam mattress and offers an incredible amount of storage beneath. It's also furnished with two large hanging-clothes lockers, full-length mirror, opening deck hatch, and five stainless oval opening portholes. Remarkably finished in cherry and granite, the head features a large stall shower, Jabsco Quiet Flush freshwater toilet, and an opening deck hatch.

Our test boat's bridge sported a forward helm with a wraparound electronics arrangement that featured twin Garmin GPSmap 5215 display units and a designated chart table, as well as a tourney-style aft helm equipped with a joystick control for ease of docking. Stidd helm seats are adjustable and incredibly comfortable. Aft, a large C-shaped settee with a fixed table converts to a double bed.

Pushing the Envelope

We tested the M43 Zeus Sportfisher in San Diego Bay under favorable sea conditions. Her engines and Zeus drives are controlled and monitored by the SmartCraft/VesselView system, which lays the groundwork for joystick docking/maneuvering without the need for a bow thruster – but it gets better. The SmartCraft system utilizes its own internal GPS and autopilot systems, which are integral components of the Sky Hook feature. Pull up within 30 feet of a kelp paddy or directly over a reef – or two feet from a dock, for that matter – and engage the Sky Hook. GPS, autopilot, engines, and Zeus drives work together as a unit to keep *Please see Mikelson 43 ZEUS on page 93*



Entry is via a sliding door to the salon. Overhead, you'll find a hidden rod locker.



An optional flybridge staircase access (in lieu of a ladder) makes the large flybridge far more accessible and much easier on the knees.

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the boat on that precise position until you disengage the system. So the captain can walk away from the helm and make a few casts on the paddy or cleat off the dock lines. How cool is that?

Turning twin Z7 propsets 1,000 rpm, she trolls at 7.6 mph while burning just 3.1 gph. That translates to 2.45 mpg and a trolling range of 1,323 miles based on 90 percent of her 600-gallon fuel capacity; however, she can troll slower – much slower. Transmissions mounted on each of the Zeus pods incorporate trolling valves and allow her to troll live bait at less than 2 mph while eliminating the hassle – and wear and tear – of having to shift in and out of gear.

Another fuel reading that we took at a very respectable cruising speed of 26.8 knots while turning 3,050 rpm (with the engines working at 85 percent of their maximum thrust) measured a fuel burn of 39.6 gph; that translates to .78 mpg for a range of 420 miles. Referring back to our test notes from the standard inboard-powered M43 sea trial and comparing fuel numbers, we saw an improvement of .25 mpg while cruising nearly 2 knots faster with the Zeus drives. That translates to a remarkable 30 percent improvement in fuel efficiency at high cruising speeds.

In terms of high-speed handling, we noted that the auto trim tabs had little – if any – effect on the bow angle; rather they allowed us to increase rpm and top speed when the throttles were pegged. We reached a top speed of 30.5 knots, turning the M7 propsets 3,400 rpm. And we've got to admit that it was a bit unnerving when Mikelson's Pat Sullivan put the M43 Zeus Sportfisher into a hard turn at better than 25 knots to demonstrate her agility, surefootedness, and impressive turning diameter of less than two boat lengths. Incredibly, there was no pitching or yawing, and no spray – just a very controlled leaning sensation. Such a

tight turning diameter is possible because, unlike standard inboard-powered sport-fishers, the M43 Zeus doesn't depend solely on rudder angle for steering; instead, the drives and trim tabs turn together as a unit – much like stern-drives – and each drive can turn independently.

The Sum of Its Parts

M43 Zeus Sportfisher is exemplary of the continuous strides Mikelson makes to meet the demands of discerning owners. Our test results concluded that this latest Zeus-drive option not only addresses fuel economy, but it also demonstrates (once again) Mikelson's user-friendly approach to boat building.

What's more, the M43 Zeus is as fishing friendly as any sport fisher we've tested. Trolling valves incorporated in her Zeus drives' transmissions not only allow for more precise joystick control to make cake out of docking, but they also make her ideally suited for trolling live bait. A combination of her SmartCraft/VesselView's internal GPS and autopilot allow for pinpoint positioning over structure, next to a paddy, or when waiting your turn at a busy fuel dock – without having to shift in and out of gear – regardless of wind and sea conditions.

And finally, the M43 Zeus Sportfisher is a Mikelson, any way you slice it – beautiful in its design, superb in its craftsmanship, and chock full of luxurious amenities – only this Zeus-drive version makes her 30 percent more fuel efficient, easier to dock, and even easier to fish.

The only way to fully appreciate this refined, more-user-friendly M43 Sportfisher is to take her for a test ride. Call Mikelson Yachts at (619) 222-5007 and ask for Pat Sullivan. And be sure to tell him you read about the M43 Zeus Sportfisher in *Pacific Coast Sportfishing* magazine. ■