

# Adding Zeus drives to the new **Mikelson 43** Sportfisher has made a good boat into a great one.

By Chris Caswell

**T**o say they do things differently in California is perhaps a masterpiece of understatement. Take sportfishers, for example. An angler used to chasing Gulf Stream gamefish from a cockpit fighting chair would scratch his head at the rows of sportfishing yachts lining the docks in both Southern California

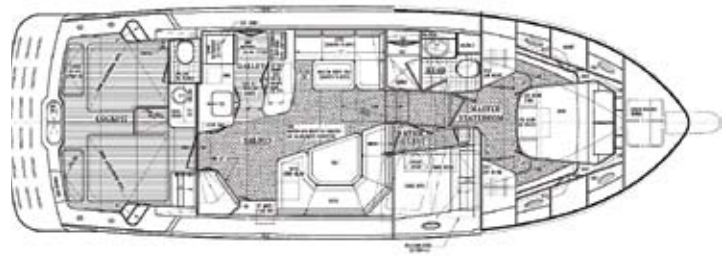
and Cabo San Lucas with bait tanks *on the foredeck!*

Yep, it's a different world out there, where fishermen are as likely to cast Western-style with light tackle from the bow as they are to set the outriggers to troll baits.

This do-it-different attitude isn't just confined to where you stand to fish, and the Mikelson 43 Sportfisher is a fine example of a fresh look at sportfishing yachts.

OK, true enough, the Mikelson 43 isn't exactly new. First introduced a dozen years ago, it's proven to be exceptionally popular, with more than 60 boats launched. The late Tom Fexas rethought the classic warwagon, making it lower, leaner, wider and much more efficient. The early 43s literally sipped fuel and, by mounting the engines well aft with V-drives, Fexas was able to rethink the interior layout as well.

So why are we testing a yacht already halfway to drinking age? Because this is the Mikelson 43 Zeus, featuring a pair of Cummins MerCruiser pod drives that



**CREW CUT:** The clever layout lets you bring along all your fishing buddies.

take a great boat to the next level.

Put a Mikelson 43 alongside a traditional sportfisherman and she looks like a sports car next to an SUV: the long flat sheer leads to the trademark Fexas clipper bow and, while there is a long foredeck, the house fairs into it with low windows.

Aside from tunnels designed in conjunction with Zeus engineers, the hull retains its seaworthy lines. But the handling...oh, man!

The Zeus drive, for those who are still joining the pod generation, combines a 5.9-liter Cummins diesel with a rotating drive pod that incorporates exhaust and automatic trim tabs. You'll still recognize the traditional shift and throttle levers on the bridge, but it's that stubby joystick that makes all the difference.

During our test, the Mikelson crew took great delight in spinning the boat in a narrow fairway, sliding her sideways into a wee space at the fuel dock, and dropping her into a tight slip without using fenders.

And then there's the Zeus "skyhook" which, when activated, links with the GPS to hold the boat in one spot without bothering the skipper. Not more or less in one spot: *precisely* in one spot. Want to hold station over a wreck? No worries! Sit exactly on the edge of a reef while you fish without constantly juggling throttle and shifters? Just push the skyhook button. Brilliant!

Switching to Zeus power allowed several other im-

**LOA:** 44'8"  
**BEAM:** 15'10"  
**DRAFT:** 3'6"  
**DISPL.:** 34,600 lb.  
**FUEL:** 600 gal.  
**WATER:** 200 gal.  
**DEADRISE:** 14.5 deg.  
**ENGINES:** 2 x 480-hp Cummins MerCruiser Zeus diesels  
**BASE PRICE:** \$839,000



RPM	KNOTS	GPH
600	4.1	1.6
1000	6.7	3.6
1500	9.0	7.8
2000	10.9	16.8
2500	18.3	25.8
3000	24.5	35.8
3400	29.6	50.8

**TEST CONDITIONS:**

Speeds were measured by GPS off San Diego in smooth water and moderate winds, with a 33-percent load of fuel and full water, heavily loaded with a marlin tower, a bridge enclosure, outriggers, and a 12-foot tender.

## ON BOARD

**ROOMY:** This fishing machine brings along all the comforts of home in its spacious salon and galley.

provements in the Mikelson 43. The Zeus engine package lowered the cockpit floor a full three inches, which, in effect, raises the coamings to a very secure height. There is now walkaround space in the engineroom, which is fully accessible through the two hydraulic hatches in the cockpit. It's such a tidy installation that you can do all the usual chores in your Sunday best without fear.

Besides being more maneuverable, the Zeus-powered 43 is faster (just shy of 30 knots), has a fuel savings over the earlier V-drive diesels of about 10 gallons per hour in the 25-knot range, and the draft has been reduced to just 3 feet, 6 inches.

The cockpit makes good use of the nearly 16-foot beam, with a teak sole, a cleverly designed double baitwell in the transom, and a tackle center against the house. The highlight, keeping in mind this is a 43-footer, is the day-head in the port forward corner. Not only is it convenient (no more tramping through the salon en route to the loo) but it



doubles as lockable rod stowage. It's optional, but don't be silly: You know you want it.

The salon is no less unusual than the rest of the 43. First, it's surrounded by large windows (including forward, which is rare on a sportfisherman) so it's bright and airy. Sec-

ond, the galley is not just up, but aft. Filling the after port corner of the salon with the U-shaped galley is, once again, convenient for passing food and drink to the cockpit or bridge. The after cabin window opens as a pass-through, so the cook doesn't even have

to leave the air-conditioned sanctuary.

The entertaining area of the Mikelson 43 is directly amidships for minimal motion and maximum beam. A settee with table was fitted to port on our test boat and to starboard was another L-shaped settee with a dining table.

Down a few steps are the sleeping accommodations. The master cabin is forward, with an island berth surrounded by louvered lockers and shelves, plus a pair of hanging lockers. Just aft to port (with private entry from the master) is an oversized head with a large stall shower. Opposite is the guest cabin but, if you were expecting a kiddie room with a couple of bunks, you'd be delightfully surprised to find a double berth and room to move around and get dressed. There's also an athwartships Pullman berth that hinges down in case you want to carry two guys or three kids.

The bridge is just as cleverly designed as the rest of the Mikelson 43. First, it combines the best of conventional forward helm and tournament-style after helm. The fiberglass console wraps around the helm and com-

**COMFY:** The master has an island berth, private entry to the head and shower, and lots of lockers.

panion seats with space for an array of properly angled electronics.

To starboard is a long settee. A U-shaped settee wraps around a cocktail table just abaft the helm. A clever design element, the big settee doesn't extend to the after edge of the bridge, so there's room for an optional helm station in the port corner overlooking the cockpit. With a bench seat, it's perfect for keeping an eye on the baits and, on a conventionally powered 43, it would have a steering wheel and throttles/shifters.

Our test boat had a set of D-rings (rated at 12,500 pounds each!) combined with removable chocks and a low-profile davit to handle a large tender on the bow. California boats often run 1,000 miles to and from Cabo San Lucas, and this rig allows them to lash the tender securely rather than towing it long distances.

When it comes to handling, the Mikelson 43 Zeus is nothing if not fun. Crank it hard into a turn at 25 knots and it just peels off like a Blue



Angel. Tom Fexas, who owned a 43, knew how to pen a seaworthy hull and, having been aboard a Mikelson 43 in not-so-nice weather during our sea trial, I can attest to its comfort and solid feel in a seaway. It's a slippery hull, too, and the sophisticated MerCruiser Smart-Craft read-outs showed that she sips just 25 gallons per hour at about 18 knots, which is only 64-percent engine load. Fast cruise is 3200 rpm and about 27 knots. Yee-haw!

Mikelson has already proven itself to be a winning builder—and the 43, which was always a great boat, is even better with Zeus drives. □

*Mikelson Yachts, (619) 222-5007; [www.mikelsonyachts.com](http://www.mikelsonyachts.com)*