



Mikelson 43

REMARKABLE PODS TRUMP CURB APPEAL

BY CAPT. PAT RAINS

NORMALLY, WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER A NEW YACHT at a boat show, you're attracted to its gleam, gloss and glamour. It's the curb appeal at the dock that entices you to step aboard for a closer look.

Not so with my first glimpse of this new Mikelson 43 sportfisher. I happened to be zig-zagging through a busy boatyard on Shelter Island in San Diego, in a hurry to get to some boat or another. What stopped me in my tracks was the stern of a boat – two big oval holes in the bottom. Not glamorous, but it was remarkable.

Both oval holes were recessed into wide tunnels molded into the bottom of the hull. And both holes were ringed by beefy gasket sockets also molded into the hull. Directly below the two holes sat twin Zeus transmissions, which sat atop two big thick plates of bronze that were cast in the same oval shape. You could almost see dotted lines showing

how these things fit together. Prop units were skegged from the bottom of the oval bronze plates. Hmm, is this drivetrain horizontal or vertical?

The Mikelson representative called them Zeus drive pods. The pods were about to be raised into position, silicone sealed into the hull, torqued down and bolted to the back of twin Cummins MerCruiser diesel engines. I'd never seen this, so I couldn't resist snapping a few photos before I stepped aboard.

SEA TRIAL

The same 43-foot sportfisher has become the demonstrator vessel for the new Mikelson 43 Zeus with pod drives. Dick Peterson, Patrick Sullivan and Paul

Fecteau of Mikelson are waiting for us at the dock on Shelter Island, San Diego, below the Mikelson office.

As we step aboard, this 43-footer displays all the gleam, gloss and glamour of Mikelson's vast fleet of Tom Fexas-designed semi-custom sportfishers and motoryachts. It's a pretty boat, but I thought I had already seen its best secret when it was hauled out.

ZEUS DRIVES

Zeus drives were introduced to the U.S. at the Miami boat show in 2006, and no doubt they were developed to satisfy the growing demand for better fuel economy in high-performance vessels. Mikelson's Zeus drives are manufactured to team up with Cummins MerCruiser 480 horsepower 5.9 liter diesels, matching the engines to the transmissions.

With the cockpit hatches wide open, it's obvious the MerCruiser-Zeus configuration opens up a lot more space in the engine room, which has the Onan genset and lots of storage. Peterson and Sullivan explain the Zeus drives allowed them to build the deck of the fishing

cockpit about 3 inches lower than the previous 43, and the cockpit combings a few inches higher.

LIGHT 'EM OFF

The Mikelson 43 Zeus has an electronic start, lighting off both engines simultaneously. Up on the flybridge, Paul Fecteau demonstrated the first of many things I didn't know – about the Zeus being an extensive package, not just a nifty compact transmission. From the boat's very narrow slip well inside a crowded marina, Fecteau backed the boat out through three turns into the fairway using only two digits – thumb and index finger. So much for my shopping cart method. “Ha!” Fecteau said, “wait until you see the sky hook.” We'll get to that soon.

The steering knob (jog stick control knob) turns the boat with a twist of the wrist. What's happening is the Zeus's whole prop, trim tab and exhaust assembly are turning as we twist the knob. By twisting the knob, you can come ahead with one engine and back with the other, twisting the boat without a bow thruster. Push the knob forward to apply more thrust to whichever side or engine the knob is on, or pull back to reverse that side of the boat. Even though we're loaded with a lot of power, the movement and shifting at slow speeds is smooth and agile.

The round knob has a rubber gripping surface, good for wet hands. Mikelson is still perfecting the mount, so the knob on our test vessel was still mounted on a chunk of hardwood for temporary positioning. Sullivan said he is adding another knob to the second steering station, which is located at the port aft corner of the flybridge for tournament fishing and easy parking alongside a dock.

“It takes a few minutes to get a sense of what it can do,” Fecteau said. Once we got clear of the marina, it took my husband, John, a few tries but he soon got the knack. It's similar to some Kamewa drives he's skippered, but not exactly. It combines power steering and power transmission in one.

“Of course,” Fecteau explained, “you can always just grab the standard throttle levers and drive the old way.”

An Inside Look



(above) The salon boasts seating that has 360-degree visibility. While the U-shaped teak-sole galley located aft is easy to reach from the cockpit and you can have a pass through at the aft-facing window.

TESTER'S OPINION:

“The hull construction, woodworking and finishes are excellent, and the craftsmanship is superior to that of many similarly priced custom constructions we've spent time aboard at sea.”



KNOB AHEAD

Out on San Diego Bay, we pushed the Mikelson jog stick to about 1100 rpm, then full throttle with the levers. We ran Harbor Island's measured mile a few times at various rpm, with the incoming current and against it.

Fecteau said the Mikelson crew was still fine-tuning the props. The Zeus package has two counter-rotating props, and the underwater exhaust exits through tubes in the prop hubs. The hull's underbody contains twin tunnels, not very deep, where the lower section is recessed. Below the props, a sacrificial skeg would hit the bottom first. The trim tabs automatically bring the hull up on plane.

It's a fast boat. We topped out at 29 and 31 knots, with and against the cur-

rent respectively, while carrying a full load of diesel (300 gallons distributed evenly in twin side tanks) and half its full load of 185 gallons of water.

Judging from our sea trial and other performance tests run earlier that week on the same boat, under similar conditions, the sweet spot for cruising comfort and range is about 25 knots. At those rpm, Mikelson rates this Cummins MerCruiser Zeus package with a 10 gallon per hour savings over its previous Mikelson 43. The Mikelson 43-Z, as it's being called, uses 100 percent of the thrust to move the boat, unlike standard straight inboard drives. So, 100 percent of the thrust propels the boat horizontally through the water; none wasted by deflecting off rudders or by hitting the water at an angle.

Mikelson 43

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	43 ft., 10 in.
Beam	15 ft., 10 in.
Draft	3 ft., 6 in.
Weight	34,600 lbs.
Fuel capacity	600 gals.
Water capacity	200 gals.

PERFORMANCE SPECS

Top speed	30 knots plus
MPG @ 27 mph cruise	0.8 mile per gallon
Range @ 27 mph cruise	440 mile range

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

All Mikelsons are Tom Fexas designed and custom built per each buyer's specific order. Every new Mikelson 43SF Zeus comes standard with the buyer's choice of layout, fabrics and materials and is offered in either a forward or aft galley, two-stateroom configuration. Standard equipment includes but is not limited to a complete interior décor package, galley appliances, stereos, televisions, surround sound systems and air conditioning and heat, to name a few items.

OPTIONAL FEATURES

Optional features on a Mikelson 43SF Zeus can include, but are not limited to, marlin towers, stairs from cockpit to flybridge, cockpit day head, multiple stations with helm and engine controls, tournament outfitting for offshore anglers, water-makers, dinghies, davits, outboards and navigational and communications electronics.

CONSTRUCTION

Mikelson Yachts are built and sold factory direct to discriminating offshore anglers and yachtsmen, using only the finest materials available worldwide, affording buyers significant savings over competitors' yachts. Each M43 is solid, hand-laid, multidirectional fiberglass hull, using BTI and Hexcell fiberglass materials below the waterline and Corecell foam coring above the waterline.

COMPANY PROFILE

Years in business	24
Boat lines	Mikelson Yachts 43 ft. to 75 ft.

BUILDER

MIKELSON YACHTS INC., San Diego, CA;
(619) 222-5007; www.mikelsonyachts.com

WEST COAST DEALERS

Factory Direct

Testing identical 45-foot hulls, Cummins engineers reported getting 30 percent better fuel efficiency at cruise speeds (plus 4 mph) from 42 hp engines with Zeus drives than from 500 hp diesels with standard V-drives, according to tests published last year.

Volvo Penta IPS is a similar package, also with counter-rotating props, but its props face forward. So far, the Mikelson 43-Z is the only sportfisher available with this package. One of several exciting moments of this sea trial was the high-speed turns.

URNS ON A DIME

Thanks in part to the late Tom Fexas and his low center of gravity designs, the Mikelson 43-Z stays incredibly stable at very tight 25- and 30-knot turns, in flat water. Many other designs we've delivered would have tossed the refrigerator through the cabin side in the turns we made. This standard Mikelson attribute has always won converts on board during the hot action of billfishing; now it is combined with the maneuverability of the Zeus drives.

Moving around on deck, I like how the stairs from the cockpit up to the flybridge begin as open treads and then become an enclosed stairwell—good for safety. The bridge has twin helm chairs and plenty of guest seating. The side walkways are ample and well railed. The anchor windlass is smartly recess into the deck of the bow, and you can access the chain locker from the forward stateroom.

The noise level was low enough for normal conversation throughout the boat at high speeds, and the stability level was good in the bow and stern during fast turns and fast-slow moves. I didn't get up to the crow's nest.

SKY HOOK

The most thrilling moments came when we deployed the optional sky hook, also called an anchorless anchoring system—another part of the Zeus package. Simple GPS technology combined with this ultra-responsive autopilot kept us aligned with the sea buoy exactly 20 degrees off our starboard bow, exactly 20 feet off, despite a knot of current flowing against our port side amidships.

Again, with zero current, the sky hook kept us aligned with the fuel dock

but standing perfectly steady 12 inches off.

Fishing the edge of a kelp bed, we would sky-hook the boat in the right spot and concentrate on pulling them in, because the boat wouldn't constantly be drifting off and we wouldn't have to keep jumping up to reposition it. I've found that billfish are attracted to the low-vibe rumble of underwater exhaust.

Single-handing skippers should see this sky-hook option as a huge safety factor, because once you stop the boat and lock in your desired position, you can safely leave the helm to run down to check the engine room or tie up the boat.

INTERIOR

This 43 is the smallest boat in the Mikelson fleet, but it has most of the features we recently saw in the 75.

The layout for this boat features a U-shaped teak-soled galley located aft, where it's easy to reach from the cockpit and you can have a pass-through at the aft-facing window. This layout will keep the salon and carpet much cleaner, but it's also available with the galley forward. All the appliances are first rate.

The TV screen in the salon takes up no room over the main switch panel, also easily reached from the cockpit. Salon seating has 360-degree visibility. The staterooms gain spaciousness by placing the hallway along the starboard side forward of the main salon. The master stateroom has a clever access hatch to the engine room, hidden inside the master closet.

The only gripe might come from someone who needs two fighting chairs in the cockpit instead of one on the centerline.

Mikelson is a well-respected commodity, specializing for many years in intelligently designed semicustom and custom sportfishing boats with lots of practicality and beauty. The hull construction, woodworking and finishes are excellent, and the craftsmanship is superior to that of many similarly priced custom constructions we've spent time aboard at sea.

Only a builder like Mikelson— that can spend time on each hull— would take advantage of the many obvious benefits from incorporating the Zeus drives. Thumbs up. 🍷