

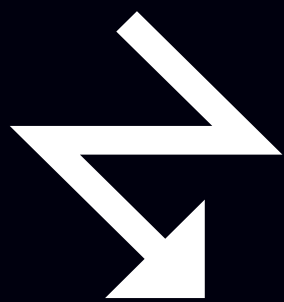


# MAD DASH

**"I was in the oil business for 37 years,"** said Murray Dallas, owner of a new Mikelson 75 Sportfisher. "So when people find out my boat's name is *Redneck*, they say, 'It kinda suits ya.'" These days, you can find *Redneck* in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, entertaining Dallas's friends, family and clients. But only a few months ago, it arrived in San Diego "fresh off the boat," so to speak, as it was lifted off the delivery ship from Taiwan.

STORY BY ZUZANA PROCHAZKA PHOTOS BY DAVID J. SHULER

THE QUICK COMMISSIONING OF A MIKELSON 75 HIGHLIGHTS THE NEED FOR ORGANIZATION, COMMUNICATION AND FLEXIBILITY.



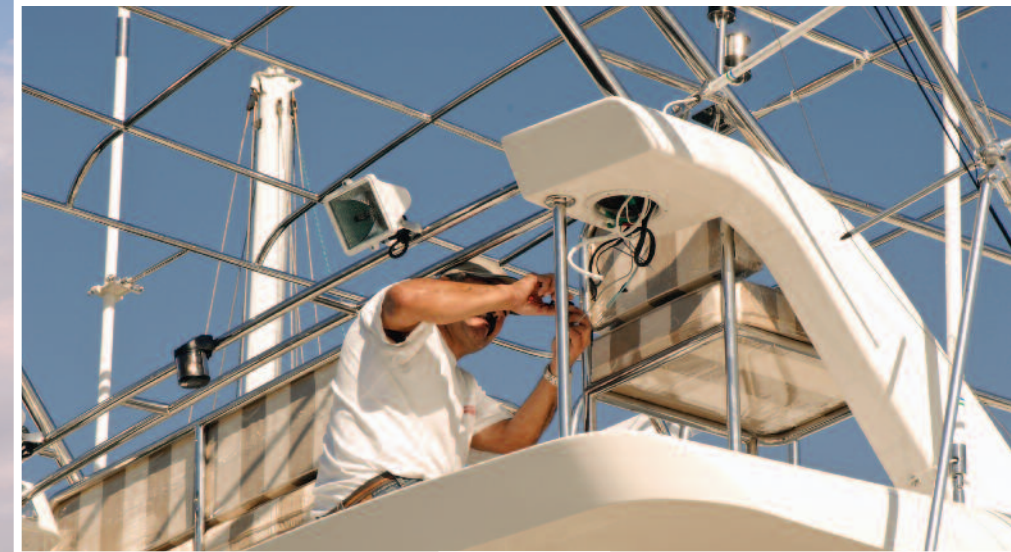
# TO MEXICO



**Despite the year it took to build the boat in Taipei, its birthing process was about to begin in the form of an involved commissioning that delivered a bouncing baby Mikelson, coming in at almost 76 feet and 110,000 pounds.**

**Above from left:** When a boat such as the Mikelson 75 comes off the transport ship, it still needs a lot of work, such as running the electrical wiring and installing the electronics.

**Below:** A worker installs a new pole to raise the hardtop roof 2 inches.



Dallas was anxious to have his baby in Mexico for Christmas, so the project, headed up by commissioning manager Paul Fecteau, was done in record time. In just 45 days, hull #15 was transformed from a semi-custom boat into a highly personalized fishing machine.

“My advice to anyone going through a commissioning is to keep an open mind and work with the builder,” Dallas said.

### FISHING FANTASY

There was no way *Redneck* wasn't going to be a fisherman's fantasy. “I'm not a fishing fanatic,” Dallas said laughing. “But the guys I fish with certainly are.” As the previous owner of a pre-owned Mikelson Nomad 60, Dallas had definite ideas about what he wanted on his new boat. There

were factory-added options such as the fully hard-enclosed flybridge, extra-large hull portholes in the master and guest staterooms, and twin wing controls aft so the captain can monitor the action on either side of the boat, especially when kite fishing. But the scope of the outfitting that was undertaken stateside, which included approximately 3,000 man-hours, is what really morphed the boat into Dallas's vision.

The Mikelson 75 is a stretched version of the Tom Fexas-designed 70. The base model is renowned for its sleek lines, a slippery hull for good fuel efficiency and a stable platform for fishing. But it's also known for its potential to be highly personalized, so it was a good choice for this owner's project.

The boat arrived in Southern California a bit salty from sea spray and grimy from the ship's stacks but otherwise in good order. Because vessels arrive fairly bare-bones, the usual commissioning time is slated for 60 to 90 days. Due to the upcoming holidays, however, *Redneck*'s extensive work took just over half that time. Mikelson's crew added Wesmar stabilizers, four custom tuna tubes, 60

rod holders and specialized tackle drawers under the settee on the lanai, aka upper aft cockpit. The ice machine was plumbed to the cockpit fishbox, but it was also configured so it could fill 5-gallon buckets to distribute ice to multiple Yeti coolers installed on custom cradles around the boat.

The hardtop on the tower was raised 2 inches for better headroom, and a tournament steering station was added. A large stainless steel barbecue was built into the tackle center in the cockpit, a helium tank for kite fishing was installed, the bow railing was raised to protect people who lean over it while fishing and 37-foot triple spreader outriggers were added. Extra underwater SeaView lights were specified to make the boat glow at night, and a side-scanning sonar was added to provide a peek at what's below the waterline. Just the wiring that had to be strung through all the custom stainless work was intimidating. The list of additions, changes and tweaks filled a two-page spreadsheet with a font so small it required a magnifying glass to read.

As Mikelson's PJ Sullivan said, “Some of the changes our owners come up with are really good ideas. This boat's

large portholes bring in extra natural light below and can act as escape hatches, and the cool wing controls will probably stick for future builds.”

### KNOW YOUR OWNER, LOVE YOUR OWNER

“The most surprising thing about boat building in general and the commissioning process specifically is how hands-on it is and the amount of owner involvement before the boat is even built,” Fecteau said. “You have to form a really close relationship with your owner.”

One of the most important elements for Dallas was system redundancy and backup. He wanted to go out fishing for four days at a time and not have to come back in — no matter what. For example, instead of one large watermaker, he ordered two smaller Village Marine 800 gallon-per-day units in case one malfunctions. There are also two Winslow 10-man life rafts aboard, although it's unlikely there will be 20 people in an offshore party.

The focus on redundancy and safety is most visible in Dallas's choice of electronics. *Redneck* carries a full

Furuno NavNet system shown on two large Nauticomp multifunction displays. There are two VHF radios, two AIS systems and a completely stand-alone backup for charting and radar from Garmin. The system is wired so that you can watch a movie on the marine electronics screen or see the charts on one of the flat-screen LCD TVs. With two TV satellite domes, closed-circuit cameras all around the vessel and a FLIR night-vision thermal-imaging camera, the electronics alone came in around \$200,000.

The closeness between owners, boat builders, commissioning managers and captains has time to develop over the 15 months or so that it takes to launch a new boat. Part of the magic of a well-run commissioning is anticipating the owner's needs. Sometimes what is requested is not exactly what is needed. Understanding exactly how the owner expects to use the boat and eliciting the right information is key.

“These boats are highly sophisticated pieces of equipment. The owners don't just say ‘I'd like the Tommy Bahama interior and see you in a month,’ Fecteau said. “I've been



**From top left:** *Redneck* is ready to test, but not before the helm station and salon have been completely outfitted.



doing this for 22 years, so I've learned how to ask the questions the right way to get to the best solution in the shortest amount of time."

## MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Mikelson commissions as many as 16, or as few as six, boats per year, depending on the economy. Its models range from 43 to 75 feet, but the commissioning process is not necessarily scalable with the size of the boat. Although a 75-footer will generally take more hours, other projects on smaller boats — such as engine and drive system installations on the 43 — can take almost as much time. Half the battle is just in keeping things

clean and organized as multiple projects go on simultaneously.

"Many people might underestimate the focus on detail," Sullivan said. "It starts even before the boat is laid up and doesn't end until after the sea trial, when there is usually a bit more tweaking." There are defined processes, checklists and checklists of checklists. The coordination of a lot of equipment is a symphony with all the parts working in harmony. Nothing gets more detailed than the commissioning work that is a project manager's dream, or nightmare, depending on how it's going.

Since it takes a year to build a boat, accessories such as electronics might become obsolete, and dinghy and davit options change models and prices. "Our goal is to manage expectations from the beginning, so we encourage some of the choices to be made later," Fecteau said. "That way there are few major changes."

Commissioning time is also used to train the owner or his representa-

tives on the vessel's systems and management. With a high level of complexity, education cannot be underestimated. "The commissioning kind of continued on into the delivery," Dallas said. "I would have wanted more hours on the boat before departure for Mexico, but we ran out of time. So Paul [Fecteau] came with us on the trip, and that was great."

Finally, there is the issue of cost. Including a substantial investment in electronics, *Redneck's* outfitting ran approximately \$800,000, which is about 20 percent of the boat's base price, and that's roughly in the ballpark for most new-boat outfitting, according to Sullivan. Clear communications can really keep the lid on costs.

## HANDS-ON TO THE END

*Redneck* was delivered 1,100 miles south to Mexico in about eight days with time enough to fish off Magdalena Bay and Cabo. With 2,800 gallons of fuel, they did not refuel along the way.

"The boat performed perfectly, and there was no real difference between how it ran before and after all the work was done," Fecteau said. "About 50 miles off Puerto Vallarta, we fished for a while, and then Murray wanted to go to a small beachside restaurant that would cook the fish, so we cruised at about 25 knots for a couple of hours and had a great meal."

That's the kind of flexibility Dallas was looking for in his new vessel. The ability to get to the fish and then to get home fast was the reason he upgraded to twin CAT C-32s with 1,825 hp. "With his old boat that cruised at 10 knots, we wouldn't have been able to do that," Fecteau added.

*Redneck* has logged about 500 hours already, which is three times what is typical in the same amount of time on most other recreational boats. That speaks to how much Dallas uses and enjoys the boat and how well the project went. "I love the boat. We were very hands-on with Mikelson, and it turned out great." 🍷