

CARRY THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

PAGE 62

# CRUISING WORLD

APRIL 2015

*How to*  
**SURVIVE A  
BOATYARD  
REFIT**

PAGE 34

## SHAKEDOWN FOR AN OCEAN CROSSING

PAGE 38



+

**ICE CUBED:  
A WINTER SPENT IN GREENLAND**

PAGE 44



## Back to the Future

By bringing fresh ideas to existing models, Island Packet and Morris Yachts have proved that evolution also works in boatbuilding. *Story by Mark Pillsbury, photos by Billy Black*

**A**t a time of year when talk often turns to World Series contenders, two longtime American sailboat builders, Morris Yachts and Island Packet, arrived in Annapolis, Maryland, last fall for the U.S. Sailboat Show, not with red-hot rookies but with veteran players tailored to take another swing at the ball.

### Morris OS 48 GT

After a decade of concentrating on its M Series of delightfully elegant daysailers,

Morris introduced a revamped version of the 48-foot Ocean Series cruiser, a blue-water-proven Chuck Paine design. Dubbed the OS 48 GT (the GT stands for Grande Touring), the new boat incorporates several alterations from the original model, including a taller rig (with 100 square feet more sail area), and a new performance rudder and keel foils designed by Jim Taylor. The mast has been moved aft, creating a larger foretriangle, and a pass-through transom makes it easier to board the

boat when Med moored or backed into a slip. Belowdecks, the sole and seats have been raised slightly, making it easier to see out the large cabin ports. As one might expect, Morris craftsmanship and attention to detail are evident throughout the Herreshoff-style interior that consists of cherry woodwork offset by white panels and ceiling.

Though the GT, in theory, is a production boat, a great deal of customization is possible. This particular model was built for one of the company's early M36



*With the new Ocean Series 48 GT, Morris Yachts plans to reprise its line of bluewater cruising sailboats (left). The 48 GT features a mast that's been moved aft, and redesigned keel and rudder foils. The most notable alteration to the Island Packet SP Cruiser is the larger aft cockpit that's a couple of feet longer than on the Mark I version.*

daysailer owners, who plans to cruise the 48 GT in its present configuration for perhaps a season or two, then return it to Morris' Maine boatyard, swap in a deep keel and a new suit of sails, and go off racing. (I'm not sure whether to call the boat a cruiser-racer or racer-cruiser.)

In cruising mode, sailhandling is made easy with a self-tacking jib and electric winches, and a hydraulic traveler, vang and backstay. Belowdecks, the forward owner's cabin, with shower and head, is laden with creature comforts; the galley is well equipped and loaded with storage cubbies; and the aft cabin will pamper

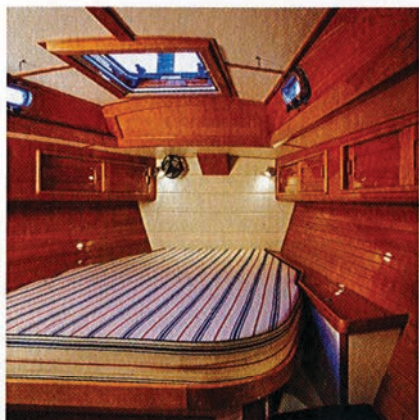
guests and family. The saloon has a raised dining table to port and a long settee to starboard. The overall feel is comfy and snug, the latter perhaps a bit too much so when imagining the boat in race mode with a full crew aboard.

When converted for racing, the extra sheet-lead tracks and deck fittings, which at first seem confusing, will make perfect sense as the trimmers go to work harnessing the power of the triple-spreader, carbon-fiber rig. The oversize cockpit-spanning wheel will allow the helmsman to sit well outboard to see his telltales, and the optional deep 8-foot, 8-inch keel (6-foot, 6-inch draft is

standard) should provide lots of stiffness when the breeze comes on.

The day we sailed the 48 GT, the wind hovered in the 10-knot range and the speedo just above 6. While motoring, our speed topped out at 8.6 knots at 3,600 rpm.

Morris CEO Doug Metchick says that with the 48 GT, the company is returning to its performance-cruising roots. The 48 GT will sit smack in the middle of a lineup that includes both a longer and a shorter sibling. And as a semi-custom sailboat should, this particular one will allow her new owners to sail where and in what style they wish.



*Rich cherry joinery gives the owner's cabin aboard the Ocean Series 48 GT a warm, elegant feel. The sole and seats in the saloon have been raised to improve the sightlines through the numerous ports in the cabin house.*

#### Island Packet SP Cruiser

Florida-based Island Packet, meantime, gussied up the lines of its SP Cruiser motorsailer and delivered what turned out to be a very intriguing Mark II version to the Annapolis show. Among many changes, the most noticeable is that the original small aft cockpit was



extended over the molded swim platform, adding just over 2 feet to the deck length and creating a quite usable back porch, complete with a small portable table that would make an oh-so-pleasant space for a morning cup of coffee, out of the wind, in some sun-splashed anchorage.

The afternoon that the Boat of the Year judges and I clambered aboard the SP, Mother Nature served up a decent breeze of 8 to 10 knots, and since the sails were already up when we arrived, we quickly settled in and, well, went for a sail. We weren't disappointed.

The helm station is located forward, inside the cabin, behind three large front windows (the center one opens) and more along each side, which provide good all-around visibility. When steering, you sit on an adjustable bench seat just forward of the dining table. There, you have fingertip control of the electrically powered reversible sheet winches that allow you to trim and ease the mainsail and the 100 percent jib, set on a Hoyt Jib Boom (or an optional 130 percent genoa, set on a solent stay), at the touch of a button.

Close hauled, we saw speeds of 5-plus knots, and as the wind eased to under 8 knots, we still made way at 3 knots or better.

The motoring side of the equation was just as satisfying. The 110-horsepower

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Yanmar pushed us effortlessly along at just over 7 knots at 2,400 rpm; wide open (3,000 rpm), we gained nearly a full knot more.

Interior volume in the SP is impressive. Stepping forward and down into the cabins below the raised deckhouse, a roomy galley sits amidships, with lots of counter space to whip up meals for the hungry crew. Far forward is a spacious owner's cabin. Aft and to starboard of the galley area is another cabin with not-quite-standing headroom and twin berths, a perfect place to stash friends or grandkids.

As with all Island Packets, the fit and finish in the SP Cruiser appeared to be top-notch. The hull and deck are a composite sandwich of gelcoat, resin (vinylester on the first layer to prevent blistering, then polyester), glass and PolyCore coring. The builder has enough faith in the workmanship and materials to offer a 10-year warranty.

With a 3-foot, 8-inch draft and a mast height of 55 feet, the SP Cruiser was born for the like's of the Intracoastal



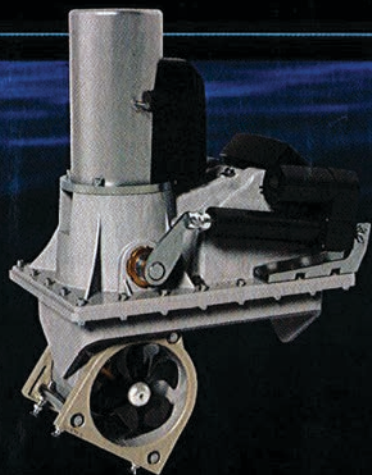
*Storage and room abound in the owner's cabin on the Island Packet SP Cruiser Mark II. In the wheelhouse, a hinged backrest can be folded forward to create a seat at the dining table, or aft to make a comfortable steering station.*



Waterway, though if it were my boat, I'd widen that range to consider the Canadian Maritimes, Pacific Northwest, Baja Mexico, the shallows of the Bahamas or even a dash to the Caribbean. Sitting in the sunken cockpit forward of the deck house with autopilot control in hand and able to reach back through the open

window to trim the sails, I think that I'd be quite content to let the boat do what designer Bob Johnson intended her to do: go off cruising, no matter what the season.

*Mark Pillsbury is Cruising World's editor.*



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