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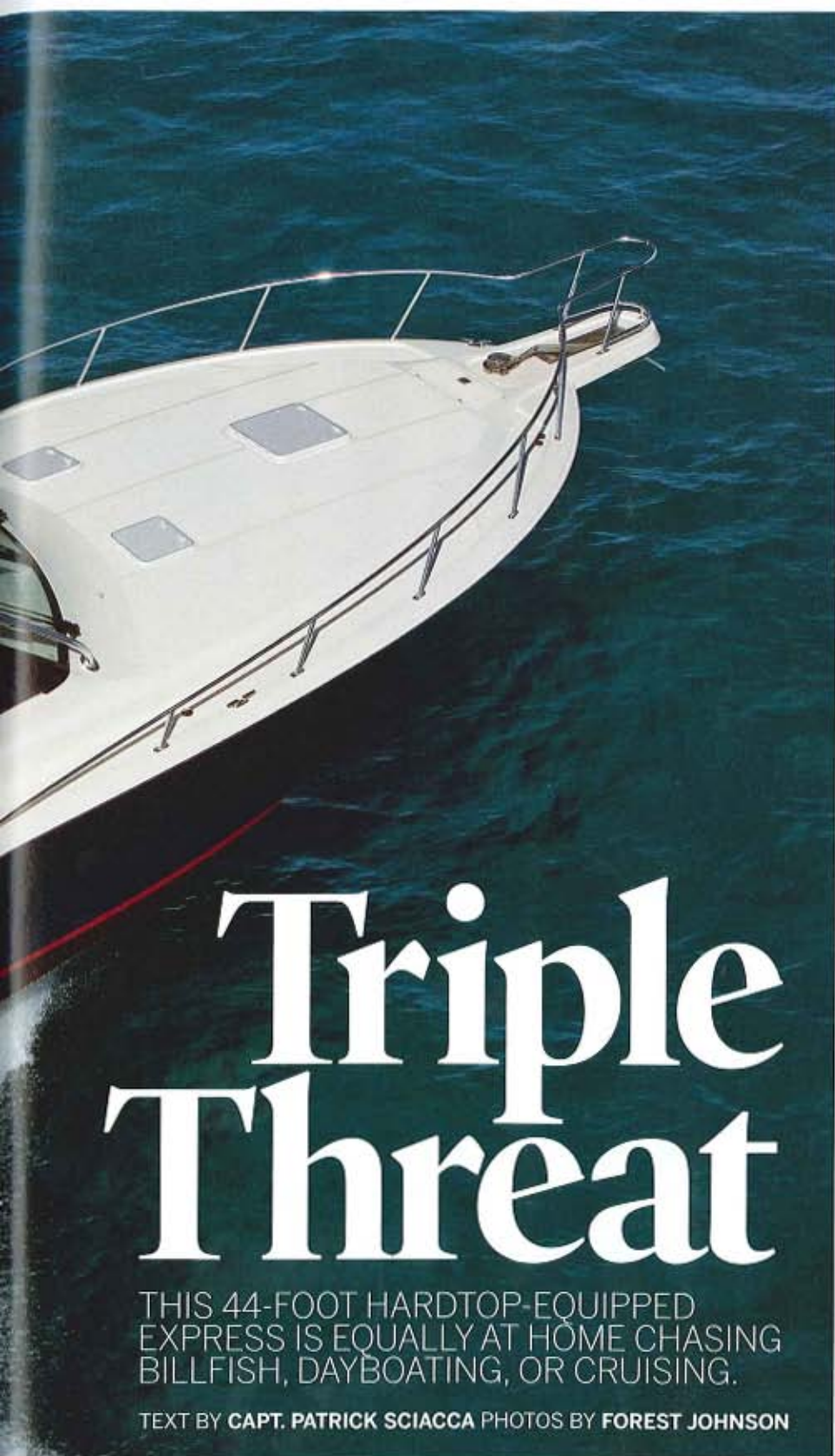
Cabo 44— Fast & Oh So Versatile

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Cabo's 44 Hardtop Express can speed across the water at 43.9 mph when equipped with optional twin 1,015-mhp Cat diesels. The



Triple Threat

THIS 44-FOOT HARDTOP-EQUIPPED EXPRESS IS EQUALLY AT HOME CHASING BILLFISH, DAYBOATING, OR CRUISING.

TEXT BY CAPT. PATRICK SCIACCA PHOTOS BY FOREST JOHNSON

yacht's optional dark blue hull is paint not gelcoat; standard colors are gelcoated.

Three out of four live ballyhoo-rigged circle hooks went down as three sailfish took to dancing across the waters just offshore of Key Largo, Florida's Ocean Reef Club. Shortly after the hookup, I developed a strong appreciation for the agility of Cabo's prototype 44 Hardtop Express.

Don Smith, Cabo's vice president of sales, was battling a Bimini-bound, tailwalking spindlebeak off the starboard corner while I walked my torpedo-fast fish up the 11-inch-wide nonskid-equipped side decks. Capt. Joe Connell concentrated on getting the 44 set to beat down Smith's fish while I maintained steady pressure on mine with some help from the optional waist-high East Coast-style bowrail. (There's a taller, longer version called a West Coast rail for hard-core, live-bait, fore-deck-fishing anglers.)

While I watched the line on my Penn reel empty out as if it were in freespool, Connell engaged the optional and torquey 1,015-hp Caterpillar C18 diesels and engaged the ZF tranny with 1.774:1 gear reduction. The five-blade nibrals wheels spun instantly, driving the 44's transom into the three-foot chop created by the day's 20-knot-plus winds. Water shot up at us as Smith and our guide for the day, Capt. Dana Jenkins of Ocean Reef's Warbird Sportfishing, enjoyed a saltwater washdown. I gazed back through the raked superstructure-spanning windows of the hardtop and could see they were making up ground in a hurry. A quick release, and it was my turn.

I pointed my arm toward 11 o'clock, and Connell quickly engaged the Cats to push the 44 at my fish. In short order, I gained line as my test boat's fine entry cut the chop, and we were soon two for three on our triple-header hookup. Our third fish broke off after becoming tailwrapped in the main line.

In addition to her ability to run down pelagics, the 44's cockpit is well rigged for this type of angling. It features an in-transom livewell, but dead-bait and lure-fishing aficionados who want a little more floor space can order the boat without it. Under the standard mezzanine seating is a bait freezer as well as a couple of insulated boxes. Two big-eye-capable in-deck fishboxes round out the amenities here, and though I'm more of an ice maker fan, my test boat's starboard-side box

was equipped with refrigeration plates for keeping the catch of the day fresh. This 44 was sans fighting chair; however the cockpit can accommodate one in the 130-pound class for an owner who likes to chase grander blue marlin or giant tuna (or who just wants to catch some rays while trolling).

With the wind blowing hard and steady from the north, it was a cool December day by Florida Keys' standards (40°F in the morning), which offered a real-world chance to understand the benefits of a full hardtop express. Until this vessel, Cabo built more traditional open-type boats with a hardtop, some glass, and an isinglass-style enclosure around the top of the hardtop. This new and leak-free, all-composite structure

ensures that wind, spray, and rain stay outside of the bridge deck at all times. It also provides a great retreat from a blazing sun. For those hot days, my 44 featured 16,000-Btus of optional bridge-deck air conditioning. I think the comfort equation could be taken a step further by adding a few vents to blow down onto the mezzanine seating. Smith told me that Cabo will be cutting back the hardtop's rod stowage on centerline above the seating aft of the helm to make room for an enclosure to completely protect the bridge deck from wind and water. If the builder does this, there could be room to add cutouts in the top.

Other than this suggestion, this spacious area's three Stidd helm seats and L-shape seating is the hot setup for a crew hanging out together on

a long run or enjoying an adult beverage at the end of a hot day. (I did test out the latter, and it is absolutely the place for sharing cocktails and lies after a day on the hunt.) And a couple of billfish releases like we had always make those beverages taste just a little better—that and the fact that our drinks were super cold thanks to the galley's standard under-counter U-line refrigerator.

That below-decks combination galley-saloon space—which also features a Tappan microwave (soon to be moved from below the countertop to above it for easier access on future boats), a two-burner Kenyon cooktop, and a teak-and-holly sole—feels spacious, too. This is due, in part, to the average 6'5" headroom but also thanks to the brightness offered by three overhead mini skylights that sit just forward of the helm's dash. Overhead LED lighting helps, too.

My test boat's standard two-stateroom, single-head layout, with a forepeak master and a two-bunk guest space aft and to starboard is fairly traditional in this style and size vessel. One option allows the guest stateroom to be turned into a rod room, complete with a countertop working area. When this is done, the guest stateroom's fore-to-aft running bulkhead is removed, opening the area further. For the dayboater, this may be a nice layout.

The 44 has a wide 16'6" beam, which combined with her modified deep-V hull form (16 degrees transom deadrise), gives her a stable ride whether she's cruising at 38 mph like she did on our test day or speeding across the sea at 43.9 mph at WOT. But for all her girth and volume, I found the engine space to be a work in progress.

At 57", I fit most anywhere on any boat without issue, but while crabbing my way



The Basics

Standard equipment: hydraulic power-assist steering; Cat electronic controls; recessed trim tabs; aluminum bowrail; bait-and-tackle center; 56-gal. in-transom livewell; Stidd helm and companion seats; hardtop w/ three-side enclosure; tri-color LED lighting in hardtop; electric teaser reel mounts; Palm Beach-helm pod; 11-gal. water heater; 11.5-kW genset; Glendinning Cablemaster; flat-panel

TV in saloon; satin-finish teak interior; two-burner electric cooktop; solid-surface galley counter-tops

Optional power: 2/1,015-mhp or 2/1,150-mhp Caterpillar C18 diesel inboards

Optional equipment on test boat: 2/1,015-mhp Caterpillar C18 diesel inboards; second under-counter U-Line refrigerator and freezer; helm-

deck fridge, A/C; third port-side companion Stidd helm seat; teak helm; Kenyon electric cockpit grill; bait freezer in mezzanine; livewell window; refrigeration plates for starboard-side in-deck fishbox; upgrade to 17-kW Onan genset; blue hull color; Pipewelders tower; 2/Sea Vision underwater lights; Furuno RD30; Icom VHF

Base price: \$949,000

Above: That second stateroom can be converted into a large tackle stowage space.



around the outside of the 44's port-side Cat I noted that the oversize airboxes and Glendinning Cablemaster bin prevented clean access to two through-hull valves aft of them. Cabo is aware of those issues, and Connell was quick to note that the builder has reduced the size of the airboxes by almost half on future 44s, which will provide less-restricted access to these vital valves. In addition, one air conditioning compressor will likely be moved forward for easier servicing. If it's possible to switch the shore power to the starboard side, I think the starboard engine outboard space may be better suited to host the Cablemaster.

The Cat C18s offer the same footprint as the optional 1,150-mhp ones and are otherwise easily serviceable on the inboard sides and tops of the motors. My 44's optional 17-kW Onan genset, which sat aft of the powerplants, was also easy to access. With safety always at the forefront of this builder's mind, engine-driven crash pumps are found at the foot of the steps leading into the engine room.

Cabo has always been synonymous with hardcore sportfishing boats, and this 44 Hardtop Express offers all the builder's skill in delivering a vessel in that genre. However, this boat is also a solid fit for the gentleman angler or even the cruise-only boater searching for something sporty in appearance but that also offers great performance and accommodations for the family. Whether you plan to back down on billfish all day long or just into a slip after a cruise, the Cabo 44 can wear either hat. Make that hardtop. PMY

■ CABO YACHTS

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Top: Note the molded-in teaser-reel mounts above the helm. **Above:** Cat displays provide vital engine data at the Palm Beach helm.



PMY's Numbers | Cabo 44 Hardtop Express

rpm	mph	knots	gph	mpg	nmpg	range	nm range	db	angle
1000	12.0	10.5	23.0	0.52	0.46	376	329	84	3.5
1250	14.5	12.6	37.2	0.39	0.34	281	244	86	6.5
1500	23.5	20.4	50.0	0.47	0.41	338	294	87	6.0
1750	32.5	28.3	63.4	0.51	0.45	369	321	88	5.0
2000	38.0	33.0	78.0	0.49	0.42	351	305	92	4.5
2250	43.3	37.7	100.0	0.43	0.38	312	271	94	4.0
2350	43.9	38.1	107.4	0.41	0.36	294	256	94	4.0

vitals

Propulsion:

2/1,015-mhp Caterpillar C18 diesels; 30x43 five-blade nibrals props; ZF gears w/ 1.774:1 ratio

LOA x Beam:

47'7"x16'6"

Weight (light

load): 43,200 lbs.

Fuel: 800 gal.

Water: 100 gal.

Draft: 3'7"

Std. power:

2/715-hp Cummins QSM 11 diesels

Cabins: master, 1 guest

Price as tested:

Upon request

Conditions:

temp: 70°F;

humidity: 60%;

wind: 20-25 mph;

seas: 0'-3'; **load:**

650 gal. fuel,

50 gal. water,

4 persons, 100

lbs. of gear.

Speeds are two-

way averages

measured w/ Stalker radar gun.

GPH taken from

MAN displays

Range 90% of advertised fuel capacity. **Decibels**

measured on A scale. 65 dB-A is

the level of normal conversation.



Above: Those optional Cat diesels eat up engine room real estate, but getting outboard is doable.