

SECRET TRIPS



ISSUE 05

We swim with underwater giants in FRENCH POLYNESIA, head to an under-the-radar seaside village in SRI LANKA, discover MARRAKECH'S most beautiful boltholes and strap in for a bumpy road trip across KYRGYZSTAN

UK £12
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A nautical wolf in sheep's clothing

J Craft's Torpedo cruiser looks old school, performs new school

Words ERIC WALKER

Venice is literally awash with boats, as you would expect in a place that has waterways instead of roads. But during the last Homo Faber exhibition – the international craftsmanship show that descends on the Floating City every couple of years – there was a new addition on the water to the manually powered gondolas and steady vaporettos.

This was a striking motor cruiser, and its elegant lines and curves and varnished mahogany spoke of mid-century European or American design; the sort of vessel on which you could happily while away a sunny afternoon on Lake Como or in the Florida Keys. But when it started up its engines and shifted into gear, something unusual happened. Heading out to the more open water between San Marco and Giudecca, this good-looking machine picked up speed, banked and appeared to be entirely capable of handling rough seas as well as rivers, lakes and lagoons.

This was a J Craft Torpedo, one of only 31 built since 1999. A Swedish runabout with a difference, it is certified for seafaring and can handle more than choppy waters. On a calm day with good, flat conditions, it will accelerate to nearly 50 knots, or 55mph. This is not just a pretty dayboat. (Though it is, of course, that too.)

Every J Craft is handbuilt, requiring 8-10,000 manual hours, on the island of Gotland, once home to the Rus Vikings and later the Baltic Sea capital of the Hanseatic League. For centuries, boats here were not recreational objects but instruments of trade, defence and survival in one of the wildest seas on Earth.

A J Craft Torpedo turned heads at the Homo Faber Biennial in Venice





automatic identification system (AIS) automatically identifies and tracks recognised vessels, while a mini-automatic radar plotting aid (MARPA) independently follows unknown objects. And for reduced visibility and night operation, the Torpedo can be equipped with a night vision and thermal/infrared system – another Swedish-developed technology.

Meanwhile, a Seakeeper gyroscopic stabilisation system (GSS) operates continuously to reduce roll both underway and at anchor. This is complemented by a Zipwake dynamic trim control system – a fully automatic solution that fine-tunes trim and balance in real time.

For those lucky enough to get to pilot one of these, the experience is entirely intuitive. The J Craft paradox is that a boat that speaks of the romance of the last century in its looks and spirit, is easy to use. And easy to maintain.

In an era obsessed with visible intelligence, the Torpedo suggests a different future: machines that are powerful, connected and resilient – yet calm enough to let you forget they're there at all. What we have here is a craft that knows when to speak and when to stay silent. One that offers full 21st-century capability without demanding attention. One that treats technology not as spectacle, but as infrastructure: an ultramodern, robust, networked machine – wrapped in timeless elegance and built by hand using logic shaped by a thousand years of Nordic seamanship.

A J Craft Torpedo without custom additions starts at around £1.5 million; j-craftboats.com

This page J Craft's Torpedo cruises Venice's canals; its glossy mahogany and fine fabrics. Opposite discreet tech and a Nardi wooden steering wheel

That legacy lives on in J Craft's boatyard today. Many of the firm's builders come from naval and military backgrounds. In fact, the company's chief master builder, Johan Hallén, is a former naval mine diver – a profession defined by preparation, precision and absolute trust in equipment.

It shows. The Torpedo's hull and deck are built by hand using a vacuum-infused resin composite construction, engineered for extreme loads and long service. The structures are fully recyclable, a modern interpretation of the Nordic "circle of life".

The Torpedo's glass is produced by the same specialists who manufacture glazing for Swedish naval vessels, engineered for impact-resistance and offshore durability. Structural steel components such as the wind-screen frame, for example, are not sourced generically; J Craft develops its own steel, tuned specifically for at-sea performance and fatigue resistance.

The result is a boat certified for conditions most dayboats never see. The Torpedo is open-sea certified for wave heights up to four metres, proven on long offshore passages across the Mediterranean, the North Sea, the Baltic and parts of the Atlantic and the Pacific – including a near 1,000-nautical-mile round trip across the South China Sea.

So, though the Torpedo is indeed a thing of beauty with its varnished mahogany and its fine fabrics from Venetian textile house Fortuny (established 1921), or Loro Piana or Hermès, this is a remarkable feat of naval engineering. And, significantly, it is not remotely the analogue machine it appears to be. A look under the bonnet, so to speak, reveals a different story.

All the systems on a J Craft are managed via a Garmin-based digital platform, which integrates with Volvo Penta's Glass Cockpit tech. In layman's terms, this means radar, navigation, engines, communications, safety functions... you name it, are all run together. They can be accessed from different screens and even a Garmin Quatix Watch, with which you can steer and summon your boat.

The formidable kit is discreetly incorporated. Starlink satellite internet and the Torpedo's dynamic positioning system (DPS) rely on antennae that are fully integrated into the hull structure, there are no external domes, no visual clutter, though the capability is state-of-the-art in terms of precision. An integrated



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