

# J CRAFT

## AND THE ART OF EXCLUSIVITY

*Looking for something virtually no-one else in the world has?*

*Welcome to the J-Craft Torpedo...*



WORDS & PHOTOS  
Alex Smith

RIGHT: That hand-curved tumblehome transom is a truly gorgeous thing



In this boat, even a casual trip feels like a public appearance on the world's most attentive catwalk

aving enjoyed a breakfast of tar-strong coffee and pains au chocolat, I'm sitting next to Radenko Milakovic on a boat built by the company he owns. We're slipping quietly through the waters off Port Grimaud, as the King of Sweden glides past in his original J Craft 38 Cabrio Cruiser. As the first boat to emerge from the Gotland factory in 1999, it's an easy boat to spot, but

having built just

27 more in the 23 years since, each and every J Craft is intimately known to the craftsmen responsible for conjuring it into existence.

It's little wonder then that we've been attracting such attention this morning. Whether from passing superyachts or prestigious Riviera dockside, people have been craning their necks to check us out. Some have asked for information on the boat. Others have gone as far as to request a formal meeting with Radenko. But no one seems capable of ignoring us, and that fully validates Radenko's contention that, for a boat like the Torpedo in a place like the French Riviera, even a casual trip from A to B feels like a public appearance on the world's most attentive custom boating catwalk.

When you witness the Torpedo from everyone else's vantage point, it's easy to see the appeal. With its classically fulsome midships swelling, its finely tapering aft end

and its impeccable eggshell-blue finish, it really couldn't look prettier. The richly curved mahogany of that tumblehome transom, glistening in the Côte d'Azur sun, is a joy to behold. The low-slung leather-lined cockpit, nestling Riva-style beneath a wraparound glass screen, is equally evocative. And then there's the classically flared foredeck, inlaid with richly polished timber and topped with a dramatic stainless steel flag holder that looks more like a proud Victorian hunting trophy than a bracket.

But of course, arresting though this boat might look, a major part of the Torpedo's appeal (and of any unapologetically high-end product) is embedded as much in its story as in its physical attributes. J Craft's tight-knit team builds its boats in the north of Gotland, between the east coast of Sweden and the west coast of Latvia. The company's in-house craftsmen are all seafarers in their own right. They're well accustomed to long, exposed

passages in the Baltic, so as much as the Torpedo might look like a premium pastiche of the classical Med runabout, building solid, seaworthy boats is very much a matter of ingrained principle at J Craft. And so is the distinctive fusion of old and new...

For instance, on the one hand, the Torpedo uses vinylester resin in its hull and a pair of IPS drives to put the power down. On the other, it uses West African mahogany, which is bent into shape by hand, using little more than steam and clamps – a technique that hasn't altered substantially since Viking times. It's a fantastically labour-intensive process too. Each boat takes between 8,000 and 8,500 hours to create and while Radenko is a man with a very firm grasp of spreadsheets and production efficiencies, it's clear that he has no wish to inflict such bothersome distractions upon his workforce.

He believes (at least in principle) that it would be possible to ramp up production to around three boats per year but he seems to have no real interest in doing so. When pushed to expand on that, he smiles wryly as he tells me a story about watching his workforce spend hours tweaking and finessing a panel that, to him, looked entirely perfect. Rather than step in to help streamline that process, he resolved to step back and preserve it – and the reason is simple. He takes tremendous pride (even a perverse pleasure) in knowing that, while the man hours continue to mount up, each J Craft boat that emerges from its unlikely cradle in the Swedish wilderness retains a degree of unhurried hands-on care that will always set it apart. ▶

The deck layout is very much in the classical Riva style



J Craft describes the Torpedo as "infinitely customisable"

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RIGHT: J Craft's curved mahogany is just as attractive on the inside

RIGHT: A forward dinette and fixed mid cabin offer decent weekending potential

## When you nestle in at the helm, behind that beautiful Nardi wheel, the Torpedo could hardly feel more unique

### A SINGULAR EXPERIENCE

Viewed in its simplest terms, the Torpedo is a 42ft luxury day cruiser. It comes with an aft sunpad and a deep wraparound cockpit in the classical style, plus a convertible forward double, a permanent (if rather simple) mid cabin beneath the helm and a port heads compartment with separate shower. And like the various Rivas, Colombos and Chris-Craft that adopt a similar style, it retains all the flaws endemic to the type. The accommodation is limited, the natural light on the lower decks is moderate and, in the absence of hull windows, the views down below are non-existent. With that glossy mahogany foredeck and that fixed cockpit furniture, there's not a great deal of day boating flexibility here either. And great though they look and feel, those elegant aft 'wings' do little to help your berthing manoeuvres.

However, practicalities like these are far and away the least relevant part of the story, because when you nestle in at the helm, behind that beautiful Nardi wheel, the Torpedo could hardly feel more unique. The turned steel dash plate, with its inset analogue dials and toggle switches, glitters in the sun.

There's a leather-lined joystick on the port shelf and above that a vast dashtop compass, which looks like it's been lifted directly from the bridge of an 18th-century galleon. The chartplotter solution is even more unusual. Rather than occupying a permanent space on

your dash, it pops up like a saloon TV before disappearing with all the polished discretion of a well-groomed valet when its job is complete.

Get under way and the Torpedo's heavyweight and imperious drive feels equally idiosyncratic. The keenness of the heel, the surge of power, the solidity of the build, the protection behind that screen, the whisper-quiet rumble of those engines, the delicious materials that envelop you at the helm. Even at 40 knots, we're seeing noise levels below 80dB and with those extended fibreglass wings at the aft end, neatly counterbalancing the hull's forward flare, it carves through a turn with all the unflustered grip and stability you could want. J Craft has suggested that its Torpedo is "the Rolls-Royce of boats" – but for my money it feels far more individual than that.

### CONFIDENTLY ANTI-CUSTOM?

As a boat that naturally appeals to superyacht owners in search of a better class of tender, the Torpedo can be specced in any colour, with any fabrics and with any kind of equipment you favour. In addition to the R and RS variants, past customers have worked with the in-house team to create their own luggage sets, dinner services and clothes, matching the materials and colours to their cars or homes for a unique (and easily identifiable) boat. But in other ways, I feel like the Torpedo is a suave rebuttal of the custom approach; a self-assured dismissal of client whim.

For instance, there is only one model in the J Craft fleet because they deem that to be enough. That boat comes with



ABOVE: A mahogany 'throne' takes pride of place in the port heads and shower room



RIGHT: Thanks to its heavyweight build and aft wings, the Torpedo heels and carves with lovely composure



ABOVE: In spite of its gentlemanly looks, this is a proper 40-knot sportsboat

a welcoming lower lounge rather than a permanent forward cabin because that is what Radenko loves. It also comes with a traditional cockpit and a fixed aft sunbed because that is where the heritage of the company lies. The firm has no serious interest in changing working practices to ramp up production efficiency because J Craft is as much a love letter to a lifestyle as a commercial enterprise. And believe it or not, that lifestyle is not just about the people who are lucky enough to own one of these rare and exclusive boats. It's about the slow alchemy of the Swedish craftsmen who build them.

Everything, from the cabinetry to the stainless steel, is sourced locally and built as close to the Swedish HQ as possible. True, the steering wheels and fabrics come from A-list Italian producers, but on a boat designed to evoke the halcyon age of Côte d'Azur glamour, perhaps it makes sense that the key touch points should feel as Mediterranean as possible. And if the Torpedo's distinctive style, layout and finish lead you to view this boat as a premium pastiche; as a fond repackaging of a southern European concept that has no natural place in Sweden, well you might just have a point. But that in no way diminishes the calibre of the build, the rarity of the boat or the integrity of the people behind it.

### PRICE TAG IN PERSPECTIVE

With base prices from around €1,335,000 plus tax and the test boat adding an extra €200,000 to that, the J Craft Torpedo is undoubtedly a very expensive boat. But when you think about it, that makes perfect sense. If you want one, you need to pay for each of those Swedish man hours, along with the associated taxes and factory overheads, and that inevitably costs a great deal more than an industrial process at a large-scale Polish manufacturing plant. And in spite of a price that could feasibly buy you a 48ft cruiser, plus a house, a car and a holiday, the J Craft does provide its own unique form of value for money.

After all, even though it made its debut appearance back in 2009, there are still only 21 of these boats in the world. More to the point, as long as the J Craft way of doing things is safeguarded by people with more respect for quality than commerce, both its peerless exclusivity and its astounding resale values will remain firmly intact. In short, if you can afford the initial purchase price – and you're happy to spend your life on the end of covetous looks from bystanders – La Dolce Vita (or Det Goda Livet) might make a lot more sense than you think.

CONTACT: [www.j-craftboats.com](http://www.j-craftboats.com)

LOA 41ft 6in (12.63m) Beam 11ft 9in (3.63m) Draft 3ft 1in (0.95m) Displacement 10 tonnes  
Fuel capacity 800 litres Water capacity 200 litres Designer J Craft Boats