



Evolution of a Classic

FROM THE VARNISHED EXTERIOR TO THE BUTTERY SMOOTH DRIVE, THE J CRAFT TORPEDO R TAKES THE CLASSIC MOTOR CRUISER TO THE NEXT LEVEL

On the back deck of his summer house in Shelter Island, New York, I sit with Radenko Milakovic. He's the owner of J Craft Boats, a manufacturer of classically styled motor cruisers based in Gotland, Sweden. Milakovic is animated as he recounts the rich nautical history of Gotland, an island in the Baltic Sea where weather conditions can be grim due to harsh winds, cold temperatures and roaring seas. Gotland was once inhabited by Viking ship builders and remains a focal point of Swedish boatbuilding today.

When my colleagues Dan Harding and John Turner arrive at the house, we all head outside and down to the private dock, where a 42-foot, baby-blue J Craft Torpedo-R bobs in the water. *Natalia*, the product of 9,000 hours of human labor and 19 coats of varnish, is sparkling in the sunlight.

At the 27,000-square-foot J Craft factory in Gotland, constructing a Torpedo is a labor of love, as each boat is crafted using original Viking shipbuilding techniques mixed with modern practices. The Torpedo's

hull is fiberglass, but its transom is made using the ancient Viking steam-bending method. Wood planks are heated over steam to allow the fibers to soften, then bent into an arched shape and left to harden. The method is a modern version of a traditional. That's why Milakovic says J Craft's focus is on "evolution, not revolution."

Evolution can be felt when the Torpedo-R is under power. I take the helm, my hands resting on the Ferrari steering wheel. I stand just 5-feet 2-inches tall, and yet it's easy for me to see over the bow of the boat as we get underway. Powered by twin 650-hp Volvo Penta IPS engines, the Torpedo is responsive as I push the throttle forward until the boat hits a top speed of 42 knots. It carves turns with grace, and I can almost touch the water from the helm as I circle to port. Even at 13 years old, *Natalia* handles like she was built yesterday.

Since she was launched, *Natalia* has cruised for 23 summers in both the Northern and Southern hemispheres. With a range of 280 nautical miles, she has cruised from Ibiza to Sardinia, from

Miami to the Bahamas and from Hong Kong to Hainan.

Aft of the helm is seating for guests plus a table. Standard features include an easy-to-raise Bimini, a small galley with a refrigerator, ice maker and induction grill, as well as enough space to sleep six adults overnight. Belowdecks, a lounge in the main cabin converts to a berth and there's another cabin directly under the helm station. The head is roomy and has a separate standing shower.

That's the basic layout of the Torpedo, which is priced near \$1.56 million, but like every J Craft, this model is customizable. Owners can specify everything from the hull color down to the hardware. Systems can be installed based on owner preference too. *Natalia*, for instance, has a Seakeeper gyro stabilization system.

Milakovic says he wants this boat to enhance an owner's sense of the dolce vita lifestyle and appreciation for time on the water. "It provides a great backdrop for reflection and getting down to what's important in your life," says Milakovic. "It's a place of peace. It's a place of disconnect." —*Lidia Goldberg*

Top: Swedish builder J Craft has been building boats for an elite clientele—that includes royalty—for almost 20 years from its factory on Gotland.