



The Heritage of Hinckley

**VALUE AND INNOVATION HAVE MADE THIS
BOATBUILDER A LIVING LEGEND TO BOTH
SAILORS AND POWERBOATERS.**

TEXT BY MARIANNE SCOTT



HENRY R. HINCKLEY IN 1974

The Hinckley Co. has been squarely in the forefront of the yacht-building community for half a century. Although the Hinckley name has brought delight to sailboat lovers since the early 1950s, today, powerboat aficionados can buy the same quality for which the yard has become justly famous. It's an old prejudice that "stinkpots" and "ragbags" – the politically incorrect way of describing powerboats and sailboats – don't get along. There are even sea shanties declaiming that, although both types of vessels love water, they should nevertheless "stick to their own kind." Manufacturing both types of yachts makes Hinckley unusual, but audaciousness is part of its tradition.

And a long tradition it is. Benjamin B. Hinckley founded the company in 1928. Working out of a decrepit boatyard in Southwest Harbor, Maine, he managed to survive the

Depression by fabricating honest, wooden workboats and powerboats capable of braving North Atlantic storms. In 1932, his son, Henry R. Hinckley, took over the company. World War II brought an explosion of commissions and the yard produced more than 500 picket boats, yawls and towboats for the American armed forces. Post-war, Hinckley started building sailboats and by the mid-1950s, began experimenting with fiberglass yachts.

This innovative, intrepid move elicited gales of criticism, with clients protesting, "The company is going to hell." This was, after all, the period when the legendary L. Francis Herreshoff, gazing upon a fiberglass hull, said "It looks like frozen snot." But the new technology was here to stay and in 1959, with his Bill Tripp-designed Bermuda 40, Hinckley launched a line of sailboats that became synonymous with



PICNIC BOAT



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IN THE *WORLD'S BEST SAILBOATS*, FERENC MATÉ DESCRIBES HINCKLEY'S METICULOUS WAY OF FITTING DECK TO HULL AND QUOTES HINCKLEY'S SON BOB AS SAYING, "WE RAISE IT, LOWER IT, RAISE IT, LOWER IT, UP AND DOWN LIKE A WHORE'S DRAWERS, UNTIL ALL THE TOPS OF THE BULKHEADS FIT PERFECTLY."

quality and sea-kindness. Many avid racers and cruisers—from the Rockefellers on down—bought Hinckleys. Perhaps customers liked that the interior was, in essence, a second boat made of wood and fitted inside its fiberglass shell. The successful Sou'wester line was next. Hinckley had a saying before he died in 1980: "We don't get all the customers for fiberglass boats, but we get the best ones."

The Hinckley Co. continued fabricating its traditional sailboats, making almost every part in-house, but always looking for quality improvements. In *The World's Best Sailboats*, Ferenc Maté describes Hinckley's meticulous way of fitting deck to hull and quotes Hinckley's son Bob as saying, "We raise it, lower it, raise it, lower it, up and down like a whore's drawers, until all the tops of the bulkheads fit perfectly." President of Hinckley Yachts, Alexander (Sandy) Spaulding, is proud of the firm's history of innovation. "We introduced a revolutionary process, DualGuard construction, which marries a Kevlar outer skin with carbon fiber," he explained. "And we were an early adopter of the SCRIMP

process, which uses vacuum bagging to create composite structures, a method that increases hull and deck strength while decreasing weight and reducing environmental emissions during production."

In 1994, the company introduced its semi-custom, 36ft Picnic Boat, thereby returning to its powerboat origins. It softens the lines of a New England lobster boat and combines it with a water jet propulsion system—the first time jet drives have propelled pleasure craft. Scores of laudatory reviews made the Picnic Boat so popular even stylish-living authority Martha Stewart bought one. Four years later, Hinckley added "JetStick" to its jet boats, capitalizing on the computerized generation's ability to manipulate a joystick. Amazingly, the boat can be maneuvered with one hand. Another class of jet boats ranging in size from 29 to 55 feet, named "Talaria" after the Greek/Roman god Mercury's winged feet, joined the fleet. Their introduction prompted *Today Show's* Matt Lauer to exclaim, "I want that boat," and the Neiman Marcus 2002 Christmas Book to





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write, “The Talaria 29 is the master boat builder’s newest water-borne work of art.”

The traditions Henry Hinckley created are not only reflected in the yachts but in the firm’s people as well. Now 47, Spaulding uses his Georgetown University education and his background as a resort developer and corporate lawyer to spur the company on to further innovation and growth. After Spaulding, along with partners Ralph Willard and William Bain, bought the boat-building firm in 1997, the company’s bottom line has more than quintupled. But Spaulding has further ties to the company’s heritage: he’s married to Jill Hinckley, daughter of Bob Hinckley, former owner of The Hinckley Company, and granddaughter of Henry Hinckley. With their daughter, Skyler Hinckley Spaulding Henry’s great-grand daughter – the couple lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts.

Spaulding has also been an avid sailor and yachtsman his entire life. Growing up in Manchester-by-the-Sea on the North Shore of Boston, he sailed and cruised the waters off Massachusetts and Maine. He currently owns a Hinckley

Kingfisher built in 1951, a 16ft launch with the original Atomic Four engine. He’s a member of the New York Yacht Club, to which his grandfather belonged back in the days of J.P. Morgan.

Perhaps owning a boat built before he was born, while running a company at the forefront of technological innovation, makes Spaulding an apt leader for Hinckley. Last fall, the firm introduced two more imaginative yachts, the SC38 and SC42 propeller-driven express cruisers. But despite this change and rapid growth, Spaulding emphasizes that Hinckley’s tradition of “legendary quality” will continue. “Each yacht is built to order, almost entirely by hand,” he concludes. “Our craftsmanship is from another time and place, employing skills all but lost in today’s world. Many of our boat builders have been with the company for 20 or more years and several are second- and third-generation Hinckley employees, steeped in both the ‘art and science’ of building a Hinckley.”

For more information, contact Hinckley at 207.244.5531 or www.hinckleyyachts.com. 