



Sailing the Shallows

J Boats launches an innovative new 31-foot, centerboard cruiser-racer that is offshore capable and has the draft of a Sunfish

The day *BWS* test sailed the new J/95 the stars were not aligned for a proper and in-depth trial. First, the Coast Guard pulled us over for a safety check—we passed—then the spinaker shackle popped while screaming along behind the asymmetrical kite on the way back to the marina, which dumped the sail into the drink right ahead of us. Oops. No one's fault, just another day at the office

for boat builders and boat reviewers.

Nevertheless, we came away from the new J/95 exhilarated by the design, the execution of the concept, the build quality and the boat's all around performance.

The design brief for the new 95 was to take the J Boat performance concept and adapt it to a shoal draft centerboard design. The reason is simple. Many of this country's and Northern Europe's best cruising areas have fairly shoal waters yet offer great coastal cruising.

J Boats has had a lot of success with their weekend cruiser and day-sailer models—the new J/100, J/105, J/109 and the J/80—so they know that many of their potential owners are looking for a boat that can race efficiently, sail well when cruising, accommodate a family and friends in the cockpit, and provide an enclosed head with berths and a small galley for weekending. Sounds like a tall order.

It is. Especially when you throw

in the wrinkle of making the boat shoal draft. This design element and how designer Rod Johnstone solved the inherent problems are what make the new J/95 so interesting and unique since he manages to combine some of the traditional benefits of a center boarder with a modern bulb keel and twin rudders.

For the uninitiated, there is nothing new about cruising, racing or for that matter commercial boats fitted with centerboards. Fishing smacks along the East Coast used to be fitted with centerboards, as did such offshore-capable crafts as the Baltimore Clipper. In the 1950s and 60s, when offshore sailing was dominated in the U.S. by the CCA rating rule, many centerboard designs came into favor. Carlton Mitchell's *Finisterre*, with a centerboard, won the Newport-to-Bermuda Race three times and many Ted Hood designs of the era with centerboards were capable and successful ocean racers

and cruisers.

Only recently, with the advent of mega performance sailing yachts, have we seen a rebirth of centerboards and drop keels and an improvement in the old design concept. What Johnstone has accomplished is to build a very shoal bulb fin keel, similar to the keel on a J/105 but much shallower, and then created inside the keel a slot and mechanism to lower and raise a bronze board. With the board up the keel has plenty of lift but with the board dropped to its full depth of five feet, five inches, the 95's upwind ability increases noticeably and leeway decreases commensurately. Note that the sail drive for the 14-horsepower tucks in really neatly aft of the keel.

Having grown up sailing cat boats and gaff-headed, centerboard 25-footers in the Herreshoff style, BWS knows that centerboard designs with small or single rudders can suffer from weather helm, sometimes enough so to make them hard to sail and trim upwind. Plus, when heeled hard, such single rudders can cavitate, lose their grip and cause the hull to round up uncontrollably.

Johnstone's solution takes a page from the leading edge of sailboat design, the IMOCA Open Classes that are so popular in Europe—Mini 6.5, Class 40, Open 60 and others. In fact Johnstone designed a modern Mini 6.5 for American Clay Burkhalter for the 2007 MiniTransat from France to Brazil. At 21 feet these little boats are extreme ocean-racing machines. Also, Open Class designs are so beamy they require twin or tandem rudders.

Tandem rudders have the amazing affect of putting the boat on rails, like a sports car with advanced traction stabilization or more prosaically like an arrow with feathers at its tail. The boat just wants to go straight



and when you ask it to turn it turns as surely and steadily as you could imagine. Plus, you never suffer from intense weather helm.

In the 95, the tandem rudder solution works well because the rudder(s) need to have less depth than the keel, which would make a single rudder too small for the boat.

The hull design of the new 95 is an evolution of the J line, and you can see a bit of the 109's deck line and cabin profile and a lot of the 100's bow, stern and overall modern charm. Because the Johnstones are

not hell-bent on constructing condo style interiors in their smaller racercruisers, boats like the 95 do not require high topsides, high cabin tops and vast hull volumes in the aft and forward sections. Instead, the 95 has a purposeful low profile, an appropriate cabin and both bow and stern sections in complete balance with the concept and the whole boat. In our view, the bow of the 95 says a lot about the design concept—completely modern and proportionally perfect without being faddish or trendy.

The fractional sloop rig is both





The 95 is designed to accommodate an optional sprit. If you add only one option, this should be it.

simple and powerful. The standard Hall aluminum spar and boom are set up for easy sailing and handling but fairly sophisticated trim with a rigid boom vang, backstay adjuster, two built-in slab reef point lines and a cockpit-wide traveler on the main sheet. The headsail is a slightly overlapping genoa fitted on a Harken roller furling unit. The mast shrouds

are well inboard, which give close sheeting angles on the genoa. In sail trials the boat tacked easily inside 90 degrees. The optional Hall carbon-fiber mast and boom will decrease weight aloft and improve performance on all angles of sail.

The 95 is designed to accommodate an optional bowsprit pole from which you can fly an asymmetrical

spinnaker. If you add only one option, this should be it. With the “asym” flying, the 95 really scoots. And, once you get it going, you will see the benefit of the tandem rudders since the helmsman will feel in complete control.

The 95 is being built in Rhode Island and the build process incorporates the best and latest thinking in



production boat techniques. The hull and deck are infused with vinylester composites with end-grain balsa cores. The infusion process maximizes the glass-to-resin ratios while providing as strong and light hull and deck panels as possible in a production line process. The infusion process also controls toxic emissions and is a green building technique.

J Boats is an international company with a very strong presence in Europe and a growing footprint in Asia and Austral-Asia. Under that broad umbrella, the company builds its boats to the international standards supervised and inspected by the ISO. The 95 has been built to ISO CE Mark Category "A" standards, which is defined as a vessel capable of crossing oceans and sailing in 23-foot waves and Force 10 winds. Also, the 95 is ORC lifeline-equipped, which is a higher standard than met by almost all other boats in the under 32-foot category.

The combination of the design concept, the rig and build execution adds up to an interesting and versatile package. The 95 will be a great daysailer that will acquit itself well in beer-can and PHRF races. It will perform nicely as a family picnic boat that can accommodate five or six adults and several children for an afternoon of sailing, swimming and cavorting off the beach.

But it also can carry a couple off for pleasant short cruises to areas that are off limits to larger and deeper craft, whether that be the upper bays of Nantucket Harbor, the shallows of Barnegat Bay, the tidewaters of the Chesapeake, the extensive shallows of the Bahamas or the upper tidal reaches of San Francisco Bay.

You can feel confident taking the 95 offshore to the Bahamas or simply sticking your head out of

your harbor for a long coastal run from one cruising ground to the next. With the small 14-horsepower engine, you will be able to get home when the wind dies.

Like most of the J Boats that have preceded it, the new 95 is a pure sailor's sailboat that embodies a refined balance between traditional boat style and qualities with the latest thinking in performance, build technique and hardware. And with the shoal draft centerboard configuration, the new 95 will set you free to explore places you may have dreamed of from the deeper waters offshore. ~

J/95

LOA	31'2"
LWL	28'4"
Beam	10'0"
Draft	3'0" / 5'5"
Displ.	6,000 lbs.
Ballast (lead)	2,450 lbs.
Sail area (100%)	450 sq. ft

J Boats
Newport, RI
401-846-8410
www.jboats.com

