

By John Kretschmer with photography by Michael Wootton

Island Packet 370

This spacious cruiser comes with bright ideas and sound engineering

Island Packet owners are famously devoted to their boats and the company that builds them. And with good reason. Island Packet Yachts works hard to keep owners happy, from sponsoring rendezvous around the country to extending exceptional customer service long after the sale is completed. Not surprisingly the company thrives on repeat buyers, and to meet the needs of its owners company founder and president Bob Johnson and his savvy crew have gradually shifted their emphasis toward building bigger boats. Today, the Florida-based firm produces five models, ranging from 35 to 48 feet. While it is not a stretch to consider the new 370 an entry-level Island Packet, it's more accurate to think of it as another capable cruiser from one of America's most consistent builders.

Like all Island Packets, the 370 was designed by Bob Johnson. The

boat is targeted to cruising sailors who list comfort and quality among their top priorities. Although sailors of all ages will appreciate the user-friendly 370, in many ways it speaks directly to the couple on the back nine of middle age, with most family commitments behind them and their sights set on new horizons. The 370 might be the capstone of many boats owned or sailed, or it might represent sensible downsizing for easier cruising. More likely these days, it's a first boat. That's the new dynamic in cruising, you don't have to be an old salt to go cruising and the 370, can take you as far as you dare to dream.

We recently test sailed hull No. 2, a striking navy blue 370, on the Chesapeake Bay. The sky was overcast and the southwest winds ranged from 12 to 18 knots as we sailed out of Annapolis Harbor toward the Eastern Shore. We

dialled up a typical bay chop just to see how the 370's full keel hull shape, cutter rig and Hoyt boom would handle in lumpy conditions.

The details

Johnson has been tweaking his keel design for 25 years. At first glance it looks like a typical long keel, however, a closer look reveals a more sophisticated airfoil shape. The 370 has a nicely raked entry that trails into a moderate forefoot and gentle keel slope. This shape is designed to minimize snags and soften impacts. The rudder is, in essence, free-standing and placed well aft for good steering control. It is joined to the bottom of the keel by a stout stainless channel primarily to protect the propeller. All of Johnson's designs have traces of his early appreciation for catboats, and the 370 has a full 13-foot, 1-inch beam coupled with a shoal draft of just 4 feet, 3 inches. Island Packets sail better than some suspect, and the cutter-rigged 370 checks in with a respectable 17.1 sail area-to-displacement ratio. The 370 is no lightweight, displacing 21,000 pounds, while 8,400 pounds of ballast translates into a 40-percent ballast-to-displacement ratio.

Island Packet does an excellent job of marrying time-honored construction techniques with innovative material development. The one-piece hull is 100 percent high-modulus fiberglass. While the hull is completely hand laid, the gelcoat application includes a proprietary pressure-feed system that assures proper chemical ratios while limiting the release of potential pollutants through overspraying. Two different gelcoats are used; one below the water and one topsides. PolyClad 2 is an IP exclusive gelcoat, backed with vinylester laminate, which has proven so successful at preventing osmotic blistering the company offers a 10-year



Island Packet 370

LOA 37'10"; LWL 31'; Beam 13'1";
Draft 4'3"; Displacement 21,000 lbs.;
Ballast 8,400 lbs.; Sail Area Cutter Rig 814 sq. ft.

Base boat price \$244,950

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limited hull warranty. Another proprietary product, Durashield gelcoat, works to maintain the high gloss and resists fading and crazing. I have always been impressed with the sheen of 10- and 15-year-old Island Packet hulls. Apparently Durashield works.

The internal ballast is a combination of lead and iron encapsulated in the keel cavity and covered with a thick layer of laminate, which in effect creates a double bottom—a reassuring feature for any cruising boat. An interior grid and molded structural liner support the hull. As readers know, I have never been a



The wheel steering features Whitlock's Premier XL rack-and-pinion direct drive system, a bullet-proof arrangement ideal for long-range cruising.

The Island Packet is put through its paces on the Chesapeake Bay, often hitting more than 7 knots.



Boats & Gear

big fan of molded liners, however, Island Packet's record speaks for itself—the company's boats have sailed all over the world without structural problems. Liners do, however, limit interior options and to some degree, hull access, although the 370 has many well-placed hull access points. The deck is joined to the hull on a flange and secured with bolts and lock nuts as well as urethane adhesive. The deck is cored with PolyCore, yet another exclusive IP product and one that makes very good sense. A matrix of micro-balloons and resin, PolyCore is applied with a low-pressure spray gun. It looks like shaving cream when applied, conforms and adheres to both deck surfaces, and is highly resistant to moisture. Island Packet offers an unmatched 10-year warranty against deck delamination and deterioration.

On deck

The cockpit of the 370 is well designed for both offshore sailing and for socializing dockside or at anchor. That's not a small accomplishment. On the offshore side, there is a decent-sized bridgedeck between the cockpit sole and companionway to prevent water from sloshing below. Four hinged padeyes are well placed for securing harness lanyards and a pair of two-inch scuppers should keep your feet dry. There are large lockers with secure push-button latches to port and starboard. Most sail controls are led aft and halyard and sheet tails are stowed in clever coaming storage bins. The wheel steering features Whitlock's Premier XL rack-and-pinion direct drive system, a bulletproof arrangement ideal for long-range cruising.

On the social front, the cockpit seats are 7 feet long and the backrests are ergonomically sloped for excellent lower back support. The molded pedestal includes a large hinged table. The molded stern platform with teak-covered steps provides easy boarding from a dinghy or the water and includes a cold water shower. Twin backstays make it easy to step into the cockpit and also offer unobstructed helm seating. The cockpit is designed with a full bimini enclosure in mind.

The keel-stepped spar has an air draft of 54 feet, 3 inches. A roller-furling mainsail is standard, as is a high-cut 110-percent genoa with a Harken headsail furling system. The robust chainplates are a prime



The spacious interior of the 370 features a U-shaped galley, top, perfect for cooking underway. The large cockpit is also well designed for offshore sailing, and the molded swim platform is large enough for easy access to and from a dinghy, middle. Island Packet innovation and quality is also evident in the SeaSafe patented stainless steel hinged anchor rollers and deck pipes, all finished to a mirror polish, above left. The nav station, above right, is located in the aft cabin with a removable panel in the bulkhead that opens up into the saloon.

example of Island Packet's engineering overkill. The three chainplates run through the caprail and are welded to a T-bar to form one massive unit. The entire assembly is then laminated in a V-shape that effectively displaces the rig loads throughout the hull. Outboard chainplates, however, eliminate tight

sheeting angles for efficient windward sailing. Of course they also make navigating the wide side decks easy and safe, and don't require tie rods that interfere with interior space. What's that old line about all boats being a compromise?

The 370 comes prepped for a staysail, although the complete

package is an option. Our test boat was set up with the Hoyt Boom, a simple but ingenious radius spar that maintains staysail shape on and off the wind, it's essentially self-vanging and it's also self-tacking. The optional staysail package also includes Harken furling gear, all necessary hardware and the sail. Midboom sheeting is standard, with the traveler positioned just forward of the companionway. This not only frees up the cockpit but allows for a full cockpit dodger that does not interfere with the mainsheet or sail controls and winches on the aft end of the coachroof.

Deck hardware is first rate, ranging from 12-inch mooring cleats to a stainless grabrail that runs the length of the coachroof. The anchoring system is another example of Island Packet innovation and quality. The 370 comes standard with two SeaSafe patented stainless steel hinged anchor rollers and deck pipes, all finished to a mirror polish. Three dorade vents are standard, and they not only let in air, but light as well. The molded nonskid provides excellent footing, even when wet. Overall, Island Packet's fiberglass work is simply exceptional.

Down below

For all of the quality and clever features on deck, I suspect it's the spacious, handsomely appointed interior that finally convinces boat show attendees to stop shopping and start sailing, or at least to write the deposit check. By the way, the approximate wait for a new 370 is around eight months. Dropping below, it is hard to believe that the 370 has an LOD of just 35 feet, 5 inches, it feels like a much larger boat. The galley is immediately to starboard of the companionway steps. U-shaped with offset double sinks, the galley is well-designed for cooking at sea. Our test boat was fitted with optional Corian countertops and they lend a sense of elegance. The double sinks face forward, I like that Island Packet still includes a backup manual pump as standard. The three-burner Force 10 stove and oven is located outboard with the ice box/refrigeration unit aft. A clever refrigerated drawer gives quick access to the popular foods and drinks, without letting the cold out. A flip-up counter extension increases counter space.

The Corian counters are part of the optional Plus Package that also includes a satin varnish finish

throughout, a solid bevel-planked teak and oak cabin sole, polished stainless handrails and light fixtures, and finally, overhead hatch screens and shades. The aft cabin is opposite the galley to port. The offset double is set up island style, to allow access from either side. This cabin also includes the nav station that doubles as an office or vanity, the back side of the desk surface supports a mirror. The seat is electric, and swivels in or out at the flick of a switch. If you're feeling closed in, a hinged removable panel in the bulkhead opens the aft cabin up to the rest of boat.

The saloon feels larger than it is because the table folds up and out of the way against the main bulkhead. This is a very practical design feature for any boat under 40 feet. A smaller coffee table, which can be stowed forward when under way, means that you don't have to lower the table unless you are entertaining. Both port and starboard settees make good sea berths and the port side settee can be extended to form a double. The boat is loaded with useful storage areas. In fact, Island Packet claims there is 300 cubic feet of storage. The head is forward to port and includes a separate shower stall with folding acrylic doors. You can access the head from both the saloon and the forward cabin. The 370 has a 60-gallon holding tank, which is a feature that live-aboard sailors will truly appreciate.

The forward stateroom also features an island berth, making the 370 the only boat under 40 feet that I know of with two island berths. Normally, I would lament that island berths make poor sea berths but the 370 has two excellent underway berths in the saloon. The forward cabin has small shelves above the berth and a large, cedar-lined hanging locker to starboard. The aft end of the bunk opens with gas assisted struts, revealing more storage area. This sure beats wrestling with cushions and bunk



The test boat was fitted with optional Corian countertops in the galley, above left, which also features a Force 10 stove and oven and a clever refrigerated drawer for quick access to often used items. The island berth in the forward cabins has storage underneath that opens with gas-assisted struts, above right. The 370 scooted along averaging 6-plus knots, and tacking was a breeze with the self-tacking Hoyt boom on the staysail, below.

boards. An overhead hatch and opposing portlights will keep the air flowing, indeed, the overall ventilation is excellent with 11 opening ports and six deck hatches.

A 56-horsepower, four-cylinder Yanmar and standard three-bladed propeller provides plenty of power. It is also amazingly quiet. As we motored away from the dock at the Annapolis Yacht Club you could barely hear the engine running in the cockpit. The 370 is fitted out for serious cruising, from the standard 110-amp alternator to the four

AGM batteries held securely in place by a stainless steel bar.

Under way

Back on the bay, we turned off the engine and set sail. We eased along on a reach and watched the speedo climb past 5, 6 and close to 7 knots. When the breeze gusted above 15 knots we topped 7 knots. The helm was light, although I would have preferred a larger wheel for better feel. Steering a full-keel boat takes a bit of adjustment, you don't need to make quick changes. Once you find the groove the boat tends to stay in the groove. Bringing the boat hard up on the wind, I was impressed by the soft motion. The 370 is set up to be easily handled by a couple. The headsail sheets can be easily trimmed by the helmsman and all other sail controls are managed from the aft end of the coachroof. Coming through the wind, I appreciated the self-tacking staysail. Off the wind, the staysail tended to blanket the genoa.

Efficient downwind passagemaking would require rolling in the staysail and poling out a larger headsail, or if the wind was lighter, flying a cruising chute. Of course, when the winds pipe up, the staysail makes a very handy storm jib.

The 370 is a comfortable and innovative cruising boat built with the integrity that we have come to expect from Island Packet. It won't be long before the 370 becomes a common sight bobbing at anchor at the cruising crossroads.

