



Island Packet 349

A nimble new take on a rock-solid cruiser
By Adam Cort

After years of quiescence in the wake of the Great Recession, iconic Island Packet is back with its new 349, a re-boot of the old Estero that not only looks great, but takes the Island Packet style of sailing performance to a new level.

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

First among the many changes made to the 349 is the fact that the mast step has been moved aft, which in turn makes it possible for Island Packet to offer a Solent rig option in addition to the standard IP cutter configuration.

The Solent rig features a self-tacking headsail trimmed with a Hoyt jib boom flying on an inner stay up in the bow and a Code Zero tacked to the anchor roller/sprit. The cutter rig dispenses with the Code Zero in favor of a genoa flying from the same stay as the Solent rig's self-tacker, with a staysail set inside it, also on a Hoyt jib boom, as per the Estero. The thinking here is that in spite of Island Packet's offshore bona fides, owners are going to encounter far more calms than they are the storms in which a staysail really shines. More on that later.

Other changes include a scoop transom and a set of hull portlights, which in concert with the plethora of cabintrunk ports and hatches overhead admit a wealth of ambient light belowdecks. Island Packet went with the scoop transom approach, as opposed to a drop-down swim step, in the interest of safety in extreme weather—something that makes sense given the boat is built with bluewater passagemaking in mind.

As always with IP, the 346 carries a sturdy "Full Foil" full keel with at-

tached rudder and encapsulate lead ballast—as safe and sturdy a setup as you'll find anywhere. The hull is hand laminated in solid fiberglass, and the deck is vacuum-bagged with a Divinycell core in the interest of lowering the boat's center of gravity. The keel-stepped, aluminum Sparcraft single-spreader rig is supported by stainless steel wire shrouds.

The main is controlled via a mid-boom sheeting arrangement and a number of sail options are available, including standard Dacron sails, a Quantum performance laminate package and in-mast furling. Overall build quality is outstanding, from the fiberglass work to the caliber of the hardware, which includes Harken winches and furlers. Those rock-solid ports found aboard every Island Packet are not just for show, but speak to the company's overall commitment to excellence. In another fun change, Island Packet is now offering the boat in colors besides the company's signature tan. The boat's PolyClad3 gelcoat provides protection against blisters and comes with a 10-year limited warranty.

ON DECK

Topside, the cockpit is large, deep and equipped with sturdy coamings, large drains, a single Edson wheel, a Raymarine chartplotter and a pair of magnificently burly strong points for clipping on a tether. There is an instrument display spanning the companionway—right where you want it when helming—and recessed LED lighting in the scoop aft for getting on and off a dinghy in the dark. The helm seat hinges up to reveal a propane locker, and the swim step includes an integral telescoping swim ladder. There are also stainless steel handholds in the pair of steps/seats outboard on the swim step, a great idea.

Moving forward, robust combination toerails/bulwarks combine with grippy anti-skid and high double lifelines. Outboard, a stainless steel rubbing strip will undoubtedly prove itself invaluable during tricky approaches to the dock, and the double anchor roller/sprit is vintage IP, with plenty of room for leaning out over the bow pulpit to see what's going on below when retrieving the hook.

Rock-solid stainless steel handrails running the entire length of the cabintrunk should serve as an object lesson for the industry as a whole. The two large Dorades—yes, Dorades, adequately sized even!—come complete with their own stainless steel cages that also serve as fantastic handholds. The list of nice touches aboard the Island Packet 349 goes on and on. This is a true “sailor’s boat” throughout, and it shows.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Belowdecks, the quality of the workmanship is right up there with that on deck. Aboard our test boat, the joinerywork was all in a cedar veneer with an L-shaped galley to starboard of the companionway that included a Force 10 stove and top and bottom front-opening Vitrifrigo fridges. Immediately forward of that were a pair of swiveling bucket seats divided by a small table facing a more conventional settee to port. A breaker panel located alongside the aft-most of the two swiveling seats, makes it a good place to navigate and conduct the ship’s business.

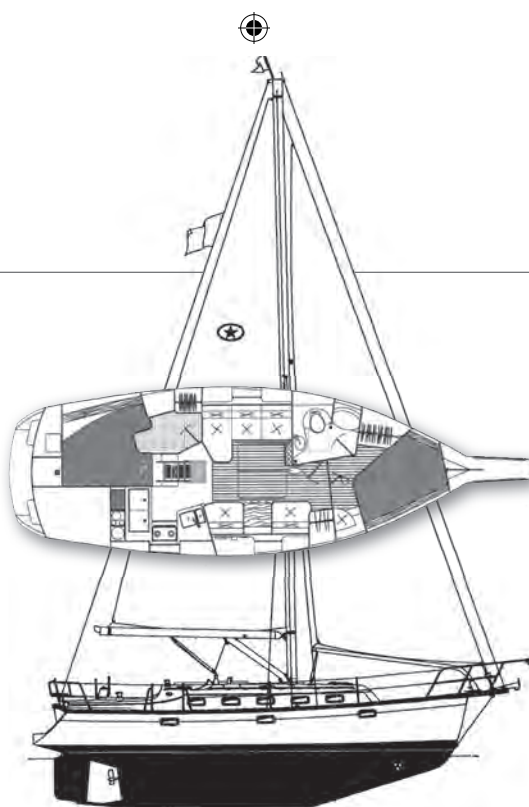
The forepeak cabin aboard our test boat was located just forward of a wonderfully spacious head to port, and included an offset double berth to starboard, with other berth options available. Speaking of options, one of the hallmarks of the new Island Packet business model is that the company regards all of its new builds as being “semi-custom projects.” This means customers can specify everything from the layout to the seats in the saloon to the countertop material.

Two things you get no matter what layout you choose are LED lighting throughout and a plethora of well-placed handholds. Aboard our test boat, there was also a nice big storage area aft of the galley across from the sizeable quarterberth to port—yet another nice touch given how vital storage space is aboard pretty much any cruising boat.

UNDER SAIL

As fate would have it, there was little if any wind on the day of our test sail—perfect conditions for the Island Packet 349. What’s that? you say. Island Packets are not exactly renowned for their light-air performance. Ah, yes. But that was before the advent of the new Solent rig.

The interiors are all semi-custom on the Island Packet 349



Island Packet 349

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA 37ft 10in LWL 31ft 5in BEAM 12ft 4in
DISPLACEMENT 19,300lb
BALLAST 7,500lb
SAIL AREA 763ft² (100% foretriangle)
AIR DRAFT 54ft
FUEL/WATER (GAL) 55/100
ENGINE 45hp Common Rail Yanmar
BALLAST RATIO 39 SA/D RATIO 17 D/L RATIO 278

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DESIGNER Bob Johnson
BUILDER Island Packet Yachts, Largo, FL, ipy.com
PRICE \$279,000 (sailaway)

Hoisting sail—which aboard our test boat consisted of the Quantum laminated performance canvas, complete with full-batten main—we immediately unrolled our Code Zero and were soon doing 3.5 knots at a 50 degree apparent wind angle, generating all of 9 knots of apparent wind out of seemingly nothing. The boat also came about without hesitation, despite our having to roll up the Code Zero in order to get it over to the other side of the boat as we passed through the eye of the wind.

At one point we actually found ourselves drag-racing a similarly sized lightweight European model (whose identity shall remain unknown) and coming out the winner. Granted our competitor was handicapped by an in-mast furling main and blade jib. But hey, that’s exactly why Island Packet decided to go with this new rig in the first place, so that the boat could keep moving in a drifter—one of the more satisfying experiences there is, especially aboard a cruiser with a D/L of 278 and 19,300lb of displacement.

Of course, being an Island Packet, the boat will also not only stand up to a blow, but provide a nice seakindly motion as it does so—the mark of a true seagoing cruiser. Kudos to the folks at IP for making their new 349 a boat that sails equally well in all conditions.

UNDER POWER

Motoring back to the marina, our test boat managed 5 knots into a slight headwind with its Yanmar 45hp common-rail diesel turning over at 1,500 rpm. Revving up to 2,000 rpm brought us up to a nice passage speed of 6 knots, with plenty of engine power to spare.

One of the often overlooked pluses of a heavier-displacement boat is the fact that it can also make for nice, predictable close-quarters maneuvering, since windage is less of a factor. Aboard the Island Packet 349, this close-quarters maneuvering was made easier still thanks to its having a Jet Thruster up in the bow—a variant on a conventional bow thruster that, among other benefits, requires a much smaller aperture.

CONCLUSION

By now, it should come as no surprise that I liked this boat a lot. Belowdecks, topside, on the hook or under sail, the IP 349 is a pleasure to be aboard in every sense of the word. It’s good to see Island Packet back in action again: all the more so, since given the amount of interest the boat generated at last fall’s Annapolis, we’ll likely be seeing a lot more of the company in the years to come. 