

J/92s Sailing Report

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J/92S Sailing Report: As mentioned above, Jeff Johnstone, Morgan Paxhia and I went sailing on July 4th in Newport on hull #35, Polar Express, the J/boats demonstrator. This boat is as close to stock as you can get. Jeff apologized for the fact that the boat was essentially the way it came from the factory, he hadn't had time to do any tweaking to it. I can sure relate to that problem, customer's boats always come first! I was pleased that this was the case, however, as I wanted to see just how our boats would be coming to us. Jeff had installed a couple of padded lifeline covers, Windex, bottom paint, safety gear and TackTick wireless electronics. That was it, and that is all the boat needed. This boat is truly ready to race out of the box, the running rigging and hardware are terrific.

Jeff let me take the helm from the start. We motored away from the mooring only briefly, just enough for me to see that the two-cylinder Yanmar diesel pushed the boat along beautifully. Because there was almost no fuel in the tank, we quickly got the sails up and took off out of the mooring area. The 110% jib is on a Harken furler, so you know how easy that is to deal with. The main has slugs in the mast and therefore lends itself to single-handing. The air was very light when we started, and as I told Jeff, that was good because it mimics our local conditions. I could tell that the boat was lively, and despite the light breeze and the relatively small headsail, the boat did not seem underpowered at all. I had heard enough about how good the boat is in a breeze that I had no concern about those conditions, but I needed to see for myself that the 92S could handle the light stuff. It did not disappoint.

Once we were out in the channel we encountered a lot of chop from the heavy boat traffic. I liked the way the boat handled through the waves, it was very responsive and had enough "get up and go" to work through it all, even in the light air. The breeze gradually picked up as we worked to weather toward Castle Hill, to the point where we had 12-15 knots. With only three aboard it was obvious that the 92S has plenty of stability from the new deeper keel with the ballast concentrated at the bottom. The Sparcraft tapered mast responded to the backstay so that we could blade out the mainsail as needed. I was not sailing the boat very well, because I was so busy looking at everything on the boat trying to take it all in. The backstay and traveler controls are right at hand for the driver to reach without moving, and when I did manage to get things right the boat felt really sweet and took off. Our speedo was inoperative so I cannot give you any numbers, but based on other boats we passed in the channel we were moving very well.

When we reached Castle Hill we bore off and set the kite. We had it rigged up before we left the mooring, with all the lines attached. The halyard was connected to the head and just taped off to the leeward shroud, so it would release when the hoist was started. The sheets and tack line were similarly all set to go. Jeff went forward and flipped the forward hatch open, feeding the tack out as Morgan pulled the tack line. He then fed the head of the chute under the jib as Morgan hoisted. All I had to do was steer and ease the main out. Once the kite was up, the jib was rolled in on the furler and we were off. The hatch folds forward on the J/92S so all of the lines can be kept attached without fear of filling the bow with water as you sail uphill. The hatch has a "vent" position so you can close it with the lines attached and it will still be secured.

The spinnaker is a high aspect asymmetrical set from the bowsprit and it hoists to the masthead. Once the chute was drawing we accelerated immediately. Jeff pointed out that the 92S can sail lower downwind than some other boats, for example the J/105. I also liked the fact that it had less overlap so that it was easier to jibe. The sheet was held down by the boom so no tweaker is needed.

We headed up to a tight reach so I could test the stability and rudder control when over-pressed. We went to the point where we collapsed the chute but we never rounded up, and I could always bear off without a problem. Rudder control was excellent.

Speaking of the rudder, I should add that the bearings are very well done, there is no slop in the rudder when you work it back and forth. The first time I tacked I stepped in front of the tiller as I do on the J/100, before I realized that on the 92S you can step over and behind it. The 100 has a higher tiller that comes off the aft deck and you need to cross in front of it. The 92S has a curved tiller that is low at the aft end where it comes through the cockpit sole. You can thus easily step over it when tacking or jibing, always keeping your eyes ahead. Very nice!

I sailed various angles downwind, and yes, the chute will rock to weather nicely and you can go deep if need be. Without any prior experience with this boat and without a functioning speedo I can't say what angles you should sail, but the boat seemed happy over a range of steering angles. The helm was balanced, the response was quick and firm, and she accelerated nicely.

Dousing the kite was just as easy as the set. We unrolled the jib. One crew then goes forward and pulls the weather spinnaker sheet around the headstay and collects the chute as it goes down the forward hatch. The cockpit crewmember releases the tack line and the spinnaker halyard. The helm just steers and trims in the mainsheet. Three people is all it takes. The chute lays on the v-berth platform, still connected and all set to go back up again.

I was having too much fun, but decided that I could no longer hog the helm and turned it over to Morgan to head us upwind again, still in 12-15 knots. I took my place on the rail amidships and what a treat....a totally flat deck with no toerail, no cleats, just comfortable flat seating. Nonskid is excellent. Lifeline stanchions are all braced and very sturdy. I sighted up the mast, and it had a very slight hook because the intermediates (diagonals, D2s, whatever you want to call them) on the double-spreader rig were a bit slack. This is easily adjusted since all shrouds are continuous with deck-level turnbuckles.

For the first time I was able to check out the hardware details up close, since our own 92S in Buffalo has yet to be rigged. The outhaul has plenty of power from an internal tackle. Vang is a Bantos (not sure I have this spelled correctly) rod model, from Brazil, seemed to work well. Cunningham tackle leads aft to cockpit, as does the single-line reefing. The running rigging appeared to be of excellent quality, all color-coded, and I did not notice any stretch in the main halyard. I especially liked the backstay and traveler controls led J/22-style right to the helm. Mainsheet coarse and fine tune blocks were mounted to the cockpit sole just aft of the traveler. Sitting astride the traveler you have a view of more of the jib than you are used to, since the mast is not jammed quite so far forward, and there is adequate beam here to get the driver out far enough to see. The driving position is very comfortable.

The J/92S is derived from the J/92, but it is more new boat than old. While the hull is almost the same (bow profile is more vertical), almost everything else is new. Deck is all-new, with a longer cockpit that is the absolute best part of this boat. There is plenty of room to move about during maneuvers. The side deck has a low but wide coaming that is very comfortable to sit on. When you reach a certain angle of heel you slide your fanny back a couple of inches and it drops over the low coaming onto the side deck. The lifelines are far enough outboard to provide a very comfortable upwind backrest, while your butt cheeks are securely held by the coaming, and your feet and rested against the molded-in cockpit sole footrests. About as perfect as it can be! I first saw this coaming arrangement on the J/124 and it is the best.

Other changes to the 92S from the 92: taller mast with full-length swept back spreaders with chainplates at the rail; 110% fractional headsail; taller masthead higher aspect asymmetrical spinnaker on carbon fiber bowsprit; deeper keel with more modern profile and much lower vertical center of gravity for increased stability; and deeper rudder with less balance. There are more details of course, but the sum of all the parts comes together beautifully. I really, really like this boat!

We haven't even touched on the interior, which is nicely done for a 30 foot sportboat. There are four opening ports, two large settee berths, a large v-berth, a real head with solid door that shares the forward compartment with the v-berth, a galley, chart area, and loads of stowage aft of the settees under the cockpit. The companionway steps are very solid, a molded FRP unit that is sturdy and easy to clean. You could easily sleep four aboard for regattas, and four is all you will need to sail this boat...actually three is all the bodies you need for racing. I was impressed by the quality of the workmanship and the hardware.

What didn't I like? The backstay needs some minor modification to increase the throw, which would be very easy to do. Jeff noted this and I am sure he will make the change on future boats. We could probably fix this in about 2 hours anyway. The first boats came without a waterline stripe, making it a pain to do the bottom paint. Future boats will have a waterline stripe as standard instead of the cove stripe. The low freeboard makes striping unnecessary from an appearance standpoint, but it sure helps when painting the bottom. I am struggling to think of other defects or things I would change.

What is the target market for the J/92S? I can think of several types of sailor who would be attracted to this boat. It is lively and exciting enough for those moving up from smaller J's such as the 22, 24, 80 and 27. They will not be disappointed in the feel and performance of the boat. Those who are looking for a modern PHRF racer that is easy on the budget, has sub-100 PHRF boatspeed (PHRF-NB rating of 90), and comes fully-equipped. Those who struggle to find crew will love it. No foredeck hotshot is required, and you can race it just fine with three people. It will be a terrific single-handed and short-handed racer, as well as a daysailer that is fast and stable. With only three sails needed in the inventory, the J/92S will be affordable for more race programs. It is in one of the most popular size ranges, 30 feet will fit in just about any marina or club, and the draft is ample but not excessive.

Next week I will contrast the J/92S with the J/100. I love them both and they share many positive traits, but they are enough different that they will attract different types of sailors.

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