

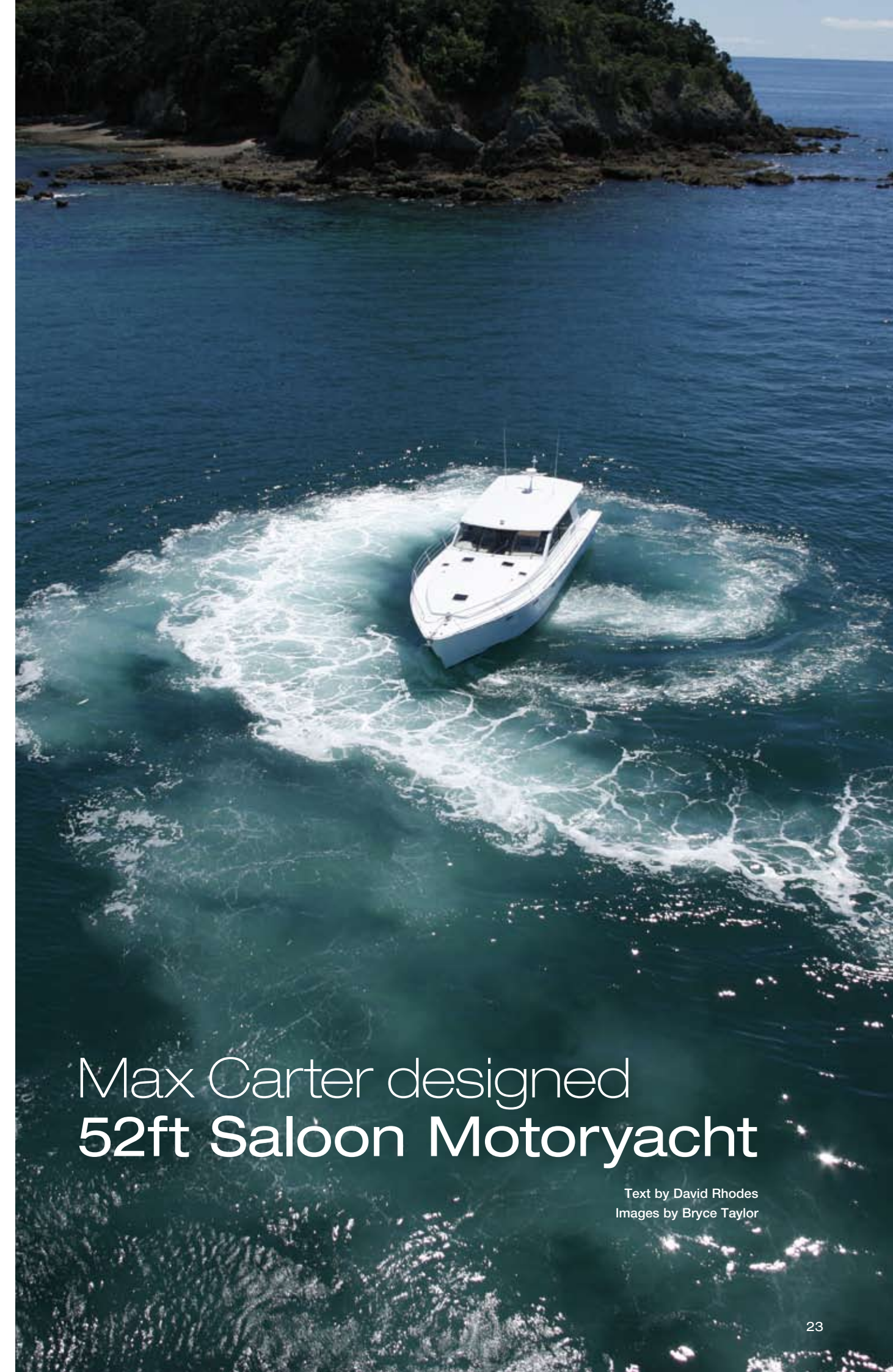
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Max Carter designed 52ft Saloon Motoryacht

Text by David Rhodes
Images by Bryce Taylor



Max Carter may well be in his seventies but the passion and enthusiasm for designing motor and sail yachts has not waned. Over the decades Max has been a prolific designer and builder of all manner of craft. According to the builders, Johnson Yachts International, Max's cumulative wealth of experience is actualised in his latest design – a 16 metre (52ft) saloon style motoryacht.

It was with eager anticipation that I accepted Graham Johnson's invitation to review their latest launching. To top it off, the day was near perfect. Auckland's Waitemata Harbour was a millpond bathed in sun.

With the boat being berthed at Pine Harbour Marina, close to the eastern islands of the Hauraki Gulf, we decided a quick jaunt out to Graham's favourite spot on Motuihe Island (tucked behind Pah Point in Snapper Bay) was the order of the day.

My first impression was of a boat with generous volume and timeless exterior styling. Underlined by the boat's 5.2 metre beam and light tonings used in the interior décor, there is a perception of tremendous spaciousness from the moment you step into the main saloon. "It's as big as a house," I remarked. "And that's exactly what we were attempting to create," retorted Graham. "The concept Max had been to create a vessel with a home away from home aspect. A vessel suited to fast weekend or holiday getaways."

To accentuate the feeling of space in the main saloon, Johnson Yachts decided to move the galley from the proposed aft layout to forward, opposite the starboard side helm station. At the push of a

button the coffee table located portside raises to create a dining table. A 'U' shaped sofa upholstered in soft cream leather complements this area plus another 'L' shaped sofa provides additional comfort. The woodwork throughout the boat is a satin finished Curly Maple. This wood is light in colour with an attractive grain and gives the saloon a restful ambience. Large side screens fill the saloon with natural light. As this is a spec boat Johnson Yachts have left the selection of blinds to the new owner. The windows are so vast that without blinds the black bench tops (finished in a product that looks like granite) absorb the sun's heat.

I found a number of superior features incorporated into the boat by Johnson Yachts, not the least of which is the entry door to the saloon. Custom made, it is a single euro-style glass sliding door with a heavy-duty stainless steel frame - a door that will last forever. Often I see boats with an aluminium-framed door installed. Revisit them in a few years and invariably the door is rendered useless.

The galley has all the home comforts with a host of appliances - electric under bench oven, 4-ring gas hob, under bench fridge, microwave and opposite under the bench helm seat there is a freezer with four drawers. Set into the look-alike granite benchtop of the 'U' shaped galley is a large single stainless sink offset by a stylish chrome faucet. Drawer and cupboard space is not lacking either; there is enough storage space to satisfy even the most discerning of chefs.

The helm station is unobtrusive and has a modern-styled console with an array of electronic equipment. The sliding side screen enables the helmsman to easily access the side decks if necessary.

Centrally located between the galley and helm station is the companionway to the accommodations. The most striking feature here is the width - so wide it would be more appropriate to call it a hallway. The layout of the accommodations is reasonably standard with the master/owners private cabin forward and two private guest cabins aft. Portside is a double guest cabin and a twin bunk cabin is located opposite. Interestingly the lower bunk bed is a double and the upper bunk is almost the same width.

The guest bathroom is starboard side and has the same layout as the master ensuite along with the same generous proportions. The area allocated to the shower stall is large enough to accommodate a standard domestic glass-walled corner unit with bi-fold doors. The matai timber used in the bathroom and galley soles impressed me. A visual focal point, the native timber is flooded with a clear lacquer finish that brings out its rich natural tones.

The master/owners berth has an island double bed with deep under bed drawers and hanging lockers either side of the cabin. There is plenty of natural light and, as with the rest of the boat, light coloured furnishings and timber create a pleasantly restful ambience. Aft of the cabin portside is the ensuite with the same dimensions and layout as the guest bathroom.

Making my way back to the cockpit in preparation for cast off, the ease of moving around the boat is highlighted by the fact that all the liveable area is on one level. The cabin top is cantilevered over three-quarters of the cockpit providing protection from the sun's rays or inclement weather. Here also, Johnson Yachts have allowed for the new owner to finish the cockpit to their liking. The sole is finished in teak and there is a seat either side of the entry door to the main saloon. Provision has been made for glass side screens to be placed either side of the cockpit and outdoor tables/furniture has also been left.

Access to the engines is via two hatches in the cockpit sole. Twin Volvo IPS 500 diesel drive units feature twin forward facing propellers and incorporate underwater exhausts and electronic steering as



standard. One surprise I did discover was the cavernous amount of space located beneath a hatch in the aft section of the main saloon. Although it isn't full head height, the potential storage space is positively huge. There is a step either side of the cockpit leading to the side decks. The swing gates either side of the transom open to the inboard swim platform.

Potentially one of the issues with a boat of such beamy proportions is manoeuvring in and out of the marina berth. Thanks to the technology employed by Volvo with their IPS drives and the additional aid of bow and stern thrusters, it really is as easy as parking a car.

Motoring out the channel we pass through a fleet of small keel yachts jostling for position as they await the race start gun. We weave our way through the anxious sailors and once past open the throttles wide. The boat quickly and effortlessly accelerates to its maximum speed of 29 knots. Several tight figure eight turns and Graham quips, "I feel right at home with this boat, it's like driving my Corvette". An opinion I can't confirm. If this is how a Corvette handles, then I'm busting for a ride.

An opinion I've voiced in numerous reviews of European sports

boats, and one that equally applies to the Carter 52, is "it leans into the corners beautifully like a true European thoroughbred sports car". Another impressive point is the soft riding hull. According to Max, a 20-degree deadrise is the optimum for a monohull of this size – a theory this boat certainly bears witness to.

A high tide and a draught of just 740mm enable us to drop anchor almost within reach of a Pohutukawa branch drooping over the white sands of Snapper Bay. Imagine sipping a drink in the tranquil surroundings of a secluded bay, the warmth of the mid morning sun and the call of birdlife nestled in the Pohutukawas - this is living the dream. Sadly, time requires us to return home. On the way back, could swear the same yachts were duelling for position in much the same spot. An insightful reminder of the concept behind the design – a vessel to take you to your destination and back in comfort and speed.

The 52 saloon is a virtuous Kiwi timber powerboat. A boat exuding heritage, impeccably finished inside and out by master craftsmen and offering immeasurable appeal for those seeking a high quality boat with performance to match

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