

J/80 Review: Sailing World Magazine

At 2,900 pounds the J/80 was the heaviest boat in this test by over 1000 pounds. It was also longer, and rigged conservatively, with a sail area/displacement ratio of "only" 26, although with its huge spinnaker it has far more power downwind than most sailors are used to harnessing.

When test pilots came aboard after sailing one of the other boats, they noted that after tacking, or in shifty conditions, the helmsperson had to foot to build speed, then gradually work to weather, coordinating closely with the trimmer of the relatively small, stock roller-furled jib. All the pilots commented on the sensitive, balanced steering, with the right touch of weather helm upwind, and the only problem being a tendency toward neutral or lee helm in very light air with the big chute projected so far forward.

In the light going, Carl Schumacher found the J/80 "difficult to optimize...it was the easiest of the three for me to tack and maneuver, but once I was going in a direction it was the hardest to get up to speed."

Still, none of the pilots confused the overall purposes of the J/80 with those of the other two boats. As Phill Steggall said, "the J/80 will unfortunately be compared to the M24. to me, they are quite different boats, capable in different areas. the J/80 has more of a big-boat feel in a little package."

Steggall's thoughts were echoed by the other test pilots. "this boat is fun to sail," said Scott Graham, "top-rank performance, without being intimidating. A strong, safe, conservative boat that should stand up to a lot of use without getting soft or breaking down."

And Ed Adams: "The J/80 bridges the gap between a traditional keelboat feel and the dinghy feel of the Melges...it may be a more comfortable transition to the world of sport boats for the keelboat sailor. The Melges will attract dinghy sailors looking to move up. (the J/80) is a safer offshore boat."

Carl Schumacher expanded on the safety theme after sailing: "This boat has slug slides, real chocks on the bow, a real companionway – you could actually think about taking it in a race offshore. Not so with the others." Phil Steggall agreed, pointing out the sealed buoyancy compartment forward and the closed transom with large scuppers.

The J/80's cockpit was universally admired for its size and layout. The high boom, like the closed transom, contributes to safety (if not performance); the mainsheet is led to a cam cleat aft of the traveler where it's accessible to the helmsman and the forward crew; winches and leads are well-placed, and it's very easy to move around in concert with fellow crewmembers.

The J/80's spinnaker was simple to set, trim and douse, with all related systems and leads well laid-out. The bow pole was particularly easy to launch and retrieve. Even in the light air

of the test day the chute pulled powerfully, completely erasing from memory any excess poundage that might have been felt going to windward. This prompted Adams and Lindsay to think that the big sail might stretch the capabilities of the normal family crew in heavier air. Lindsay suggested possibly using a sock/snuffer. on the other hand, the panelists thought a normal family crew might enjoy this boat for other reasons: With a little extra padding, a singleburner stove, a jug of water, and an ice chest, a small family could rough it for a weekend. or part of a crew could sleep aboard during a regatta.

Summary: In the test's light airs, the J/80 could often sail at or close to windspeed, and in several instances recorded the best leg times. While hard to define as a "conservative" boat, this Rod Johnstone creation doesn't go to the max in sailplan and (lack of) stability, and employs the proven construction materials used in thousands of earlier J/Boats. This might cost a bit of speed in light air with chop, but should broaden the boat's user-friendliness in stronger winds. If the J/Boats' track record at creating lasting one-design classes is any measure, along with the 80 boats J/Boats says they have sold, this design should have a bright future and good resale value.

- Doug Logan

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