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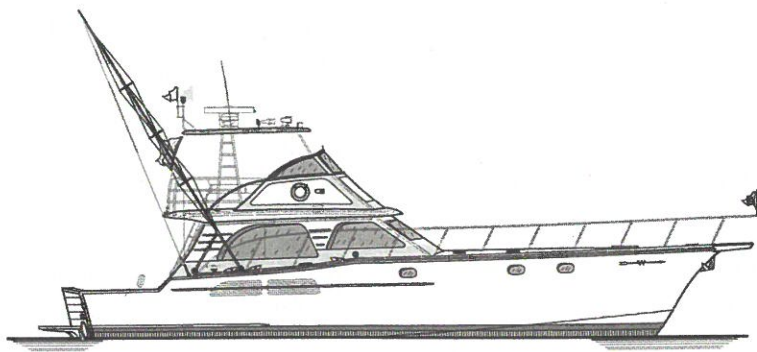
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MARCH 2006

www.yachtingmagazine.com U.S. \$5.00 Can. \$6.00



WHEELER 55 SPORTFISHERMAN

# Hemingway Would Love It

Wheeler resurrects its classic—with modern touches By Dudley Dawson

can remember back to the 1930s, when a company named Wheeler offered 15 wooden sportfishermen from 22 to 47 feet, fast commuters and express cruisers. The most famous was *Pilar*, a 38-foot sportfisherman built for Ernest Hemingway in 1934 at a cost of \$7,455. Hemingway's adventures aboard inspired some of his best work. *Pilar*, though in desperate need of restoration, still sits in Cuba, Wheeler's winged-W logo prominent on her bow.

Yacht designer Tom Fexas is of an age to share my remembrances, and his Midnight Lace yachts reflect his enthusiasm for such timeless designs. It was with much joy, then, that I learned of the reincarnation of Wheeler, and that Fexas is designing the first new model, a 55 Legacy Sedan. Wesley P. Wheeler, a pharmaceutical executive, is the president of the new Wheeler Yacht Company. He's also the son of naval architect Wesley D. Wheeler and great-grandson of Howard Wheeler, who founded the original Wheeler in 1910 and oversaw the construction of some 3,500 hulls before he died in 1961 at 92.

Fexas' design pays homage to the classics with teak decking and trim, but is far from a true reproduction. Though the exterior styling closely mimics earlier Wheelers, construction is solid fiberglass below the chine, with PVC foam core in the vacuum-bagged topsides and superstructure. All tankage is integral fiberglass. The new yacht's proportions are consistent with those of any modern sportfisherman and provide creature comforts undreamed of by sportsmen of the 1930s.

Forward is the owner's stateroom, complete with an island king berth, en suite head with shower and a hanging locker that spans nearly half the yacht's beam. Two additional cabins share a second head, also with a shower, and the guest stateroom lies to starboard and is fitted with a queen. Across the passageway to port is a cabin fitted with upper and lower single berths. The staterooms

and heads are fitted with overhead hatches for light and ventilation, and in the case of the owner's stateroom, for emergency escape.

The arrangement of the saloon is an interesting departure from the norm and reflects a careful consideration of traffic patterns when fishing. The galley, a functional U-shaped arrangement, is located not forward in the deckhouse, but aft, just inside the cockpit door. Opposite it to starboard is a compact day head. This means that the blood and guts of fishing success will intrude as little as possible into the more finely finished portions of the yacht.

The galley is fitted with two large refrigerator drawers, closest to the cockpit door, and two freezer drawers adjacent to them on the aft bulkhead. This orientation, besides being convenient, increases the chances of the drawers staying closed when underway in heavy seas.

A large single bowl sink, three-burner range, microwave and dishwasher are located on the forward island.

Opposite the galley, just forward of the day head, is a dinette that seats four, with five more seats curving around a smaller table. Additional seating for three is beneath the saloon TV, but during the evening, this sofa folds out into a double berth. If you've been keeping track, that's beds for eight or ten.

The business end of the Wheeler has two in-deck fishboxes to either side of the cockpit chair. There's a transom door to port with a hinged section of covering board for boating trophy fish or an optional swim platform for boarding tenders or water toys. Forward, flanking the door to the saloon, are a tackle center, a bait livewell, an optional barbecue, an ice machine and a sink.

On either side of the cockpit are molded steps to the sidedecks, which are wide enough to be functional and are protected by high railings that extend to the bow pulpit. Too many custom sportfishermen are being built without rails in an effort to make them appear sleeker. When vanity triumphs over safety, it's time to rethink things, and Fexas obviously has, to the benefit of the Wheeler's owner, guests and crew.

The open flying bridge has a full-width helm forward with two chairs, well protected by a high windshield. An L-settee is fitted to starboard. While this arrangement is traditional, it impedes the captain's view of the cockpit; therefore a small auxiliary station with engine, gear and thruster controls is adjacent to the port ladder for fighting fish or stern-to docking. □

Contacts: Wheeler Yacht Company, (949) 302-1087, [www.wheeleryachts.com](http://www.wheeleryachts.com); Tom Fexas Yacht Design, (772) 287-6558, [www.tomfexas.com](http://www.tomfexas.com)

LOA: 55'3"
LWL: 48'3"
Beam: 17'11"
Draft: 4'6"
Fuel Capacity: 1,306 gal.
Water Capacity: 200 gal.
Holding Capacity: 150 gal.
Displ.: 65,000 lbs. half load
Power: 2x Caterpillar C32, 1,652 hp each at 2300 rpm (CAT C18s optional)
Speed: 35 knots cruise, 42 knots max. at half load
Design: Tom Fexas Yacht Design
Price: On request

**OLD MAN AND THE SEA:** Designed for serious fishing with plenty of good stowage and thoughtful design, Wheeler's modern classic is a beauty Hemingway would have appreciated.