

Classic Boats: Pocket Rocket 22 Comes Of Age

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IMS Race is difficult to define at best, yet comparing modern day IMS races to other similar design traits — plumb bows, huge beams carried far aft, wide open transoms, huge cockpits, powerful multi-spreader fractional rigs, well laid out flat decks — and the list continues. On the race course we marvel at the sky-high pointing ability, combined with big wind-surfing ability, that make the modern day IMS boat a true upwind/downwind demon, especially in PHRF.

Here in B.C. when asked to define such a boat, most would consider the ILC 40 as a prime local example of the IMS type species. However there is another boat in B.C. with these very same characteristics: the Gary Mull-designed Pocket Rocket 22. How is this possible? How can a 17-year-old design have such cutting-edge features. Can a boat be not only ten years, but seventeen years ahead of its time? The answer is yes, and the Pocket Rocket 22 is proof.

Designer Gary Mull, who in the early '80s was Chair of the Offshore Racing Council ITC (International Technical Committee) faced the approaching demise of the IOR rule. Gary was responsible for creating a new rule, which was first known as the American IMS rule. The Pocket Rocket was one of his first designs drawn to this new rule, which was later renamed to — the International Measurement Rule (IMS). As an added feature the Pocket Rocket was also designed to fit into the then newly created MORC 22-foot restricted class. As a result, the Pocket Rocket is quite possibly one of the first boats ever designed with the IMS rule in mind.

The result? A rather odd-looking (by 1980s standards) 22' keelboat, that has become perhaps the best kept secret in small keelboat sailing. Pockets were discovered early by a hardcore group of Okanagan sailors, led by former Laser national champion Alan Barnes, who were quick to jump onto the boat's outstanding performance and sailing characteristics. The

style, the double spreader frac rig allowing for narrow sheeting angles. And with the 5' draft, very few boats can point with a Pocket. The runnetless rig allows for very speedy tacking, and the light 2100 lbs disp. accelerates very, very quickly. Off the wind, 12-13 knots surfing is a common experience, all with complete control, due to the powerful hull shape. All this

always tough B.C. economy, and a saturated small keelboat market, made up of formidable boats such as the Martin 242, Kirby 25 and J24, to name a few. In addition, few people could accept the bizarre appearance of the Pocket Rocket (back then the San Jun 24 was considered a pretty boat in comparison). On a PHRF level, successful racers such as the J24, Kirby 25, and Capri 25, all are owed time by the Pocket! Not bad for a 22' footer.

Aside from the Okanagan, Pocket Rockets are very hard to come by, the remaining boats having been scattered throughout the Northwest, with some going as far South as California, and others migrating back east to the Great Lakes. But there are few better, more competitive boats. Considering the modern trends of today's IMS-style race boats, the Pocket Rocket 22 has finally come of age.

Of Pockets And Rockets

Pocket Rocket and Rocket: describing the differences. The Rocket is a very different, and yet similar machine, although PHRF considers the Rocket to be some 63 sec/mile quicker. In the early 90s, watching the rapid race of the then newly launched Melges 24, a small group of dedicated sailors got together with an idea — to convert the Pocket Rocket into a high performance 22' sportboat (hence the name Rocket 22). Under the supervision of original designer Gary Mull (and later Jim Antrim of the Ultimate 20 and Antrim 27 line), a new, lightweight, high-strength laminate schedule was developed. The result, a much stiffer hull that was some 700 lbs lighter! In addition a lifting, bulbbed keel was developed, with a positive lock mechanism, a larger Rig, and, most notably, an incredible 550 sq ft asymmetrical spinnaker. This huge kite is flown from an extremely clever retractable, articulating boomrig. This enables spectacular deep, deep, downwind sailing for a sportboat.

The result was a huge success from a design point of view, as the hull shape very easily handles the additional power. Although few in number, the Rockets are a blast to sail, and race to the 119 PHRF rating without difficulty. Despite the similarities to their older sisterships, the Rocket is yet another step in the evolution of a great design. ↓



Pocket Rocket Fitzcarraldo at Okanagan Grand Prix.

Okanagan region is a challenging one: winds vary from scarce to storm, water is flat to four foot swells, and winds can be all over the compass. And yet no boat has consistently won more hardware on this lake than the now very much optimized Pocket Rocket 22s.

One of the things that makes the Pocket so special is its windward performance. Light or heavy, Pockets have a keen ability to use all 22' of LWL, and can climb to weather in anating

achieved from a boat with a cockpit that is bigger than most 35 footers! Yet a crew of three can competitively and comfortably, race the Pocket in all but the biggest blows.

Optimized Pocket's are very inexpensive to race. One main (Dacron is common), headsails include a 160 % #1 (usually mylar) and a #3 (usually Dacron); sails can be made of any material. The one major alteration is a huge, 550 sq ft meshed spinnaker used to assist in light air sailing, although this plays havoc with the rating. Frac kites are also carried (but seldom used) for major blows. All rigging is led aft, however in a Pocket aft is really mid-boat due to the huge cockpit. Auxiliary propulsion is usually provided by the lightest weight 5 hp OJB that can be found. Simplicity is the rule of thumb, and the local boats look to improve the fun factor above all else (hence the 550 sq ft kites). And fun they are!

If its all it's cracked up to be, why is it the best kept secret around? For starters, only seventeen were ever built. The original builder, Laminex Industries in Duncan, B.C., was facing the