

Boat Profile



Hell's Bay 18 Marquesa

In 1998 former Keys light-tackle guide and angler Hal Chittum launched Hell's Bay Boat Works. His company quickly earned a reputation as *the* boat of choice among the elite fraternity of flats anglers and guides. In 2002 Chittum sold the company to an Alabama investor who drove the company into bankruptcy four years later, ceasing production and leaving a wake strewn with burned customers and lost deposits.

But the company has recently emerged from bankruptcy under the new leadership of Central Florida businessman, angler and licensed captain Chris Peterson — and the boat builder's rebirth is sure to make a big splash.

With a passion for the sport and the process of building boats — as well as a genuine concern for Hell's Bay's loyal fan base, Peterson is honoring up to \$10,000 per customer for those who never received their boats from the previous owner. It's an unheard-of gesture in the boat-building industry and one that will likely erase an otherwise murky chapter in the company's history.

RUNNING AND FISHING

My first experience with the Marquesa 18 came several years ago while practicing for the Little Palm Island Celebrity S.L.A.M. Chittum had loaned Key West guide RT Trosset one of

the boats, and we were pre-fishing the tournament near Marvin Key, northeast of the Southernmost City. Spotting an odd-looking tail on the edge of a cap-rock flat adjacent to a deep channel, Trosset stealthily poled me to within 20 feet of what turned out to be the spookiest of flats species — a tailing mutton snapper. I dropped the fly on its nose, and the fish followed right to the rod tip before realizing we were there. From that point on, I was convinced — zero-footprint skiffs like the Marquesa were the wave of the future.

Several changes were made to the running surface of the boat prior to Hell's Bay ceasing production, and the company is rolling them out. More rocker has been added aft, giving the boat more bow lift and allowing anglers to adjust the running attitude better in rough water. Reverse chines acting as spray rails were also added, making the boat drier. The Marquesa didn't lose any draft and still responds very well on the pole with very little windage. If you need a boat that will let you fish big water for tarpon or stripers yet slip quietly into the shallows for the likes of permit and bonefish — this is a good choice.

As opposed to the past when the company only hung Mercury outboards, Hell's Bay is rigging boats with the owner's choice

of power. With an Evinrude E-Tec 90, the Marquesa cruises at 28.5 mph at 4,000 rpm, getting 5.6 mpg and offering anglers a 152-mile range with a full 30 gallons of fuel. Top end is 39.5 mph. With a 90-horsepower Mercury, it tops out at a little over 40 mph.

There is under-gunwale rod storage for 24 (yes, 24) fly rods, including backward-facing tubes allowing the angler on the bow to access rods easily.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Hell's Bay has rehired a number of its veteran employees — including shop foreman Stan Nash. Their experience shows on the finished product — it is one of the most polished boats on the market.

The boat's light weight (625 pounds) is derived from the use of ATC Core Cell and Kevlar. The entire boat is vacuum-bagged and chemically bonded, resulting in a single, solid boat.

A single center livewell is fed by a double-failsafe pump system housed in the wet box in the stern of the boat, preventing any unexpected die-off in the release well. Two aft dry-storage compartments flank the center well. The standard center console includes an insulated cooler but may also be rigged as a release well.

The company has also upped the bar with hardware and switches, opting for Orcas hardware on the hatches and unique screw-out drains, so you never lose the plug. And as always, the Hell's Bay list of accessories is limitless, bounded only by your imagination — and budget. If you are a serious shallow-water angler and need a boat that you can pole into the wind and current all day long, you owe it to yourself to check out the new Marquesa 18 from Hell's Bay Boat Works.

— Capt. Ted Lund

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA:	17 Ft. 11 in.
BEAM:	6 ft. 4 in.
DRAFT:	7.5 in.
	(fully rigged)
WEIGHT:	625 lbs.
	(w/o power)
FUEL:	30 gal.
MAX HP:	115-hp OB
MSRP	\$43,450
	(w/60-hp 4-stroke)

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