GREAT (LAKES) ADVENTURE

TIARA'S 46 LS PROVES TO BE THE PERFECT VESSEL FOR A TREK BACK IN TIME ON LAKE MICHIGAN.

BY CHRIS DIXON



“Are we really doing this?”

It was a picture-perfect summer’s day on Lake Michigan. Whitney Vishey, Josh Emmick, and I were floating beneath a five-mile span linking Michigan’s Upper and Lower peninsulas. The 22-inch Garmin display aboard the new Tiara 46 LS showed about a million fish passing below us in the 300-foot-deep channel beneath the third longest suspension bridge in the Western Hemisphere. Emmick is Tiara’s business manager. “Every year, growing up,” he said, “You[‘d] go under the Mackinac Bridge, you[‘d] jump in the water.”

The only problem with this tradition? Wel,l first, this was an active shipping channel. Second, the screen indicated that the gin-clear water was hovering at a mere 59 degrees. Emmick hadn’t taken the leap in years. Despite growing up on Lake Michigan, Vishey, Tiara’s longtime marketing director, had never made the jump. Nor had I.

We found ourselves at this chilly juncture because Tiara needed to take this brand-new 1,800-horsepower vessel on a 60-mile run from Bay Harbor, Michigan, to Mackinaw City for a VIP event and invited us along for the passage. All I’d ever seen of Lake Michigan was its murky southern reaches during a few trips to Chicago. Yet at 118 miles across and 307 miles from north to south, this Great Lake alone has more coastline than California. I’ve long been particularly fascinated with the sapphire-blue waters of its northern shores. And ever since I watched Christopher Reeve seduce Jane Seymour at Mackinac Island’s historic Grand Hotel in the Victorian-era sci-fi romp *Somewhere in Time*, it’s been on my bucket list.

At my Airbnb in the town of Alanson, I told my gregarious host—a retiree and lifelong local boater named Len—that I was heading for Harbor Springs. He reported that I was in for a treat. After snagging a blueberry coffee cake from Alanson’s 93-year-old Dutch-Oven Bakery, I drove through dense forests of maple, aspen, and white pine, past multi-generational farmhouses, and down to a Gilded Age summer retreat set along the protected waters of Little Traverse Bay. Harbor Springs is a tony town of galleries, eateries, and stunning Victorian era vacation homes—some built by scions of American industry and politics (Fords, Wrigleys, and Proctors among them). In this mashup of Sag Harbor, New York, Ferndale, California, and Abaco’s Marsh Harbor, Vishey directed me towards the venerable Walstrom Marina where Emmick was hosing down a gleaming yacht set atop water so clear that she appeared to be floating in space.

Spread evenly among the Chris-Crafts, Pursuits, Four Winns, and sportfishers along Walstrom’s waters, Emmick pointed out a host of other privately owned Tiaras. Harbor Springs, he said, is ground zero for these Holland, Michigan-built yachts: “There are more Tiaras here than pretty much anywhere,” he said. “We call it Tiara country.”



LOA: 46’6”
Beam: 13’9”
Draft: 3’10”
Displ.: 27,500 lb.
Fuel: 600 gal.
Water: 60 gal.
Power: 3/600-hp Mercury Verados
Price: $1.9 million

RPM	Knots	GPH	Range
700	3	4	517
1000	4.8	5.5	600
2000	8.9	14.2	432
3000	12.6	33	263
4000	30	70.2	295
5000	40.2	92.5	300
5900	48.4	145	230

Dixon and Vishey take a dive beneath I-75 at the Mackinac Bridge. Left: Dixon, pushing 1,800 galloping horses.







Mackinac Island's Grand Hotel is one of the architectural gems of the United States. With transportation by horse and buggy, the island is a true step back in time—and a must-see for any boater.



With a trio of two-speed Mercury V-12 600 Verados, Emmick said Tiara considers the 46 Luxury Sport the replacement model for its 48 LS, a boat our own Charlie Levine trialed back in 2021. At that time, the 48 LS was Tiara's largest model (today it's been outgrown by the 56 LS and 60 EX) and the first specifically designed around these new Mercury outboards. Before joking, "I don't think I have enough friends for all of the seats in this boat," Levine pushed the 1,800-horsepower yacht to 50 knots. "The 600 is the only power pack for this boat too," Emmick said. "It likes to go fast."

Since we were starting early, the weather looked perfect, and plenty of sandwiches and beverages were stored in the center station fridge, Emmick, Vishey, and I agreed that we'd let chance and sea state dictate how this "day at the office" would unfold. Stepping aboard, my first impressions were of a versatile and very well-laid-out weekender that could indeed hold a serious posse of friends and family. With a dry head below to starboard, full forward stateroom, and a queen-sized bed in the low-rise cabin under the helm, she looked plenty comfortable for a family, a pair of couples, the grandparents, and grandkids—or, well, a party. At the nearly 14-foot-wide stern, a swim platform extended beyond the motors. Forward to port was a fold-down gunwale beach platform we'd soon put to good use. Forward of that platform sat an inviting four-across chaise module whose dual backrests could flip forward or backward. Set this way, I noted, one guest could face forward while sitting right alongside—and having a conversation with—a passenger facing aft. Normally, this chaise would rotate 360 degrees, a Tiara trademark, but Emmick said, if they wanted to keep the four-across seating and maintain the floor space, the chaise needed to be fixed. You can sit, or lounge, facing fore or aft in high style. I doubt the turntable chaise will be missed.

Idling out of Harbor Springs, we made for the Harbor Point sandspit just across, where deep, cerulean water lies right off the shoreline. "I've seen people put straight-shaft inboards right up on the beach here," said Emmick. A handful of folks were out swimming, kayaking, and romping with their happy, waterlogged dogs. It looked pretty much like paradise.

At the climate-controlled helm lie bolstered and arm-rested four-across seats with dual-level footrests. The stitching was beautiful and the hinges smooth and precise. Sightlines behind the huge wraparound windshield are excellent—particularly given the lack of bow-rise on acceleration. The helm is served by dual 22-inch Garmin screens. A separate overhead monitor reports on the trio of Mercurys beneath a giant motorized sunroof. We ran the boat completely open. But were the weather too hot, too cold, or too wet, the helm station could quickly be hermetically sealed with sliding, motorized doors to starboard and port and a thick, rear-rolldown isinglass window. All sealed up even with isinglass instead of actual glass out back, she's remarkably quiet.

"The client who buys this boat," said Emmick, "they want to use the boat for weekenders and day trips. You can do the Bahamas for the week. You can have all the climate-controlled enclosure if you need it. 99 percent of the time, I'm running the boat open but man, let me tell you, two weeks ago, it was cold. Close it up, have the heat on. Perfect all-weather protection. This boat allows folks here in Michigan to boat early in the spring and late in the fall. In Florida, it rains almost every day. Rain's gone? Open it back up. It's a true weekender."

Rounding the point, we made the bigger, deeper water of Little Traverse Bay to see what the 46 was made of. I've visited plenty of global coastlines, but I can't understate the impression this breathtaking sweep of hilly, forested shoreline made. The bay was ruffled with a light southerly wind chop and occasional boat wake. When Emmick offered the helm, I eagerly roused the 46 LS's 1,800 horses. Despite pushing over 28,000 pounds, she lunged forward. Zipwake interceptors (she can also be had with a Seakeeper Ride or the Zipwake Pro systems) kept her remarkably flat while accelerating and in a half minute, we were galloping along against the breeze at 48 knots. Laying her hard over, she maintained better than 40 through a tight arc and then sliced smoothly through her previous wake with very little pounding. We then cruised along the coast, paralleling the "Tunnel of Trees" scenic road. It was a dramatic and wild stretch of water, and I mentioned to Emmick that you could tell the shoreline's



Josh Emmick makes way off Mackinac Island with every bit of info he could need on the Garmin displays.

sandy beaches were shaped by wind and waves. A series of low islands on the horizon and exposed lighthouses including the historic Grays Reef Lighthouse—a swell-pounded open-water citadel that marks a 1,000-foot-wide passage through the Straits of Mackinac—spoke of the myriad of nautical hazards. There was plenty of shoaling en route to the Mackinac bridge too—a recipe for foggy or gale-driven disaster. "It gets wild up here," Emmick said. "And this entire bay will freeze up in the winter."

The Mackinac Bridge spans the channel between lakes Michigan and Huron and separates Michigan's Upper and Lower peninsulas where Emmick recounted his adolescence. Yeah, it gets damn cold, but even when you couldn't be out on the boat, there was always an adventure. You could even snowmobile clear over the frozen lake to Mackinac Island—a roughly 4-square-mile 18th-century summer colony whose 500-plus residents long ago decided they'd do just fine without cars.

Cruising towards the looming bridge, I had a chance to further take in what the 46 LS is all about. Sure, she's not a hot rod, but the solid ride delivered by her non-stepped hull (we were seeing around .5 mpg at 34 knots), and her overall vibe is highly civilized. At the stern, our boat featured the "Chaise" module with its copious lounging space, but there's also an "Adventure" module, which offers a forward-facing fold-down seat, livewell, fridge freezers, grill, sink, tackle storage, and rod holders. More rod holders can be added across the top above the retractable roof sunshade and on the supports too. The "Buffet" module also offers a forward-facing bench but with a full galley with fridge, freezer, and grill.

The 46 offers a pair of 45-gallon, macerator-equipped, insulated floor storage boxes and a stern door conceals not only fresh and raw water washdowns but a hot and cold shower. Behind the helm, the cockpit bears a bolstered, Corian countered prep station with a grill and sink (with a trick cutting board cover/splashguard) and acres of countertop space. Climate-control vents from one of three A/C units make catch prep comfortable on a baking or chilly afternoon.



Belowdecks, the 46 LS is all about utility and comfort. Like the 48 LS she replaces, there's a big, queen-equipped cabin forward with about seven feet of headroom, recessed lighting and all the bells and whistles and a lower cabin under the helm with about four feet of headroom. On the 48, the rear cabin was enclosed by a bulkhead. But on the 46, it's open to the passageway that links head and forward cabin—making this cozy bedroom anything but claustrophobic. Like the 48, she gives up a recessed portside walkway (there's still a deep, handrailed, and over-bow water-draining walkway to starboard) in favor of belowdecks room—a countertop and storage opposite a high-luxe head with a separate shower. Another thoughtful touch: The shower hose is made of black silicone instead of the typical aluminum wrap. "That keeps it from banging on the wall when you're underway," said Emmick.

I sat with my feet propped up on the reclining forward lounge as we followed a freighter towards the imposing support towers of the Mackinac Bridge. There, we'd face our important decision: To leap, or not to leap into the waters of an active shipping channel. My shorts doubled as surf trunks. Vishey and Emmick had packed bathing suits. I've never been baptized in any Great Lake so despite the 59-degree water, it seemed like bad karma for us not to go for it.



Thus, posted up underneath Interstate 75 in 300 feet of water, with semi trucks roaring overhead and untold thousands of fish beneath us, we lowered the swim platform, questioned our decision-making, and jumped.

Damn, that water was cold. But after gathering my breath and composure, I found the lake survivable. So I swam around the 46, admiring its lines and straight up marveling at where I was swimming. I dove down, eyes open, and stared down into that seemingly bottomless water trying to make out a sturgeon or salmon, but I reckon we scared them away. It was spooky as hell. I'm so glad I went for it.

With a few more hours to kill and no particular place to go, we pointed the 46's bow towards Mackinac Island. It was a busy summer's day—which meant dock space would be tight—but fortune had been smiling, and Emmick had a hunch. Passing into the protected waters of Haldimand Bay, Mackinac's old business district hove into view and Emmick called the harbormaster to find there was indeed a waiting list. "Well, do you maybe have a contact for the freight-dock operator?" Emmick asked. "Sure," came the reply. A few minutes and a friendly call later, we were tying off in the heart of downtown. A couple of dancehall-chanting Jamaican dockworkers loading hay fuel for Mackinac's equine freight haulers greeted us with a smile and a "yes mon." We stepped right into Mackinac's bustling downtown—and back in time.

If you've never visited Mackinac Island, well, let's just say that even though it's obviously overrun with tourists, as a boater, you still must experience it. Mackinac's Lake Shore Drive is next level; the 19th-century fudge stores, breweries, restaurants, and artisan shops. The horse-drawn carriages hauling humans and the actual goods that supply those businesses—and the pungent reminder of what every town smelled like before the advent of the automobile. It's a heady, wonderful hamlet, made even more alluring by the fact that most of the island is a state park and you can rent bikes to explore it. Grabbing a trio of Treks, we made for Horn's Gaslight Bar & Grill. When it opened in 1933, Horn's didn't feature burritos or Michigan-brewed Two Hearted IPA, but you could still feel the old vibe beneath its mammoth wooden bar. Thoroughly satiated, we then pedaled towards one of the treasures of these United States, Mackinac's Grand Hotel.

To call the Grand Hotel breathtaking would be a disservice. Opened on July 10, 1887, as a summer getaway for Gilded Age tourists, the Grand Hotel has blown minds for 140 years with its gabled roof, colonnaded facade, and manicured grounds. The hotel's 220-foot-long serpentine-shaped swimming pool was featured in the 1947 romance *This Time for Keeps*. Starring Esther Williams as an aquatic performer, the film pulled the hotel out of a postwar financial crisis. Then in 1980, Christopher Reeve and Jane Seymour's *Somewhere in Time* introduced my generation to the hotel and its rocking-chair-festooned 660-foot-long front porch, the longest such structure on earth. I've long wondered what it would have been like to have wandered the Titanic or lounged on her decks and I reckon the Grand Hotel is about as close to that experience as I'll get. Snagging a table out front as the sun began to draw long shadows, we marveled at how the day had unfolded in our favor.

That good fortune continued on a beautiful sunset passage to Mackinac City. Slowing to enter Straits State Harbor, I figured the 46 LS had functioned for us exactly as Tiara's design team had intended. She's a fast, capable, nimble, and eminently comfortable home base for adventuring close to—and far from—the shoreline.

The day's luck held until we passed a cadre of Coast Guard officers who waved us over for an inspection. The boat was so new, Emmick feared something had been left off the list of items we might be fined or ticketed for, but fortunately, they were in a good mood—and we were shipshape. I suspect that at least part of the Coasties' motivation was simply to check out the boat. Indeed, the youngest officer turned out to be a local. Despite plenty of interdictions, he'd had yet to step aboard a brand-new Tiara. He marveled at the yacht's helm, noting with pride that it was Michigan built. Emerging from belowdecks with eyes wide, he shook his head and said, "Damn, I've never been aboard anything quite like this."

I knew exactly what he meant. ❐