



BOAT REPORT **BIRCHWOOD** **TS39**

Birchwood first left the keel off their hull designs with the TS34, and have now extended the concept to that model's larger aft-cabin sister. Iveco 300hp diesels complete the picture.



BIRCHWOOD are the aft-cabin specialists. They are the only British company other than Broom to offer a range of models with this layout, and the policy has paid off, with the marque establishing a reputation over the last 10 years in the UK, northern Europe and, latterly, Japan. They also offer 'conventional' aft-cockpit versions, but it is their aft-cabin models from 31ft to 57ft (9.5-17.4m) that have been the most popular.

The latest in the family, the TS39, was launched at last year's Southampton Boat Show (an aft-cockpit version, the TS41, was introduced at Earls Court). It features all the trademarks of the range, together with an exciting new interior design, and slots in between the TS37, now somewhat long in the tooth, and the TS49.

Design

To recap the benefits of the aft-cabin layout, you achieve two full-size double cabins in a length of boat where you would otherwise only get one. Perhaps more importantly, the two cabins are far enough apart to achieve privacy for the occupants. The drawbacks are a smaller flybridge, and a potentially exposed aft deck rather than an aft cockpit for entertaining.

The TS39 follows the pattern, with double cabins fore and aft, each with bathrooms en-suite, plus either an optional third, twin-bedded cabin or a convertible lower dinette.

The hull follows the current thinking of the Birchwood design team: medium-to-deep vee, rather than the semi-displacement-type sections that were the trademarks of earlier models. The first of the company's boats to adopt this form was the TS34, and the success of that hull has prompted them to pursue the same thinking.

Deadrise is 22° amidships, 18° at the transom, with two three-quarter-length sprayrails and a chine flat to give extra planing lift. With a designed maximum speed of 30 knots, it was deemed inappropriate to include the keel which was normally found in earlier Birchwoods.

Accommodation

Two double cabins plus the same-price option of either a third cabin or a dinette means the TS39 has berths for six people. Our test boat, number two off the line, had the latter format, with the dinette converting to a double berth. As standard, the settee in the saloon will not make up into a berth, but this could be arranged if so required.

As you step in from the aft deck, the saloon makes an immediately striking impression, with the open layout set off by extensive joinery, in lined American white oak, and pastel pinks for upholstery and carpet. A curving flight of stairs leads you down, with the modern feeling of the interior enhanced by a painted white handrail.

Above: the helm position is comfortable except when it rains. Windscreen wiper controls are an inconvenient stretch away on the breaker panel to the left, and the wipers themselves have insufficient travel. Right: the curvaceous and practical galley (top left), the pastel shades of the modern saloon (bottom left), the optional twin-bunk layout in place of the lower dinette (top right) and crouching space between the two 300hp Iveco engines (bottom right).



Alternative joinery options (at the same price) include ash or, for the traditionalist, teak.

To your left is an L-shaped settee with room for four, and opposite a corner settee which could seat a further two or three. Lockers underneath give storage space, and also access to a manual bilge pump. The woodwork under here would have benefited from extra rubbing down, and a further coat of varnish or paint to give a smoother finish, but the standard of visible and invisible work throughout the boat was generally good.

To starboard is a short sideboard with three medium-sized lockers. The top has a good 1in (25mm) fiddle all round, a sensible practical feature that continues through most of the rest of the boat (though perhaps surprisingly not in the galley). A trap over the door to the aft cabins reveals the control panel for the standard 6kVA generator, plus shorepower switches and breakers. To port, we liked the recessed stowage for the fire-extinguisher, in the balustrade of the stairs. Windows port and starboard slide for ventilation, but are too high for the occupants of the settees to see out of.

A further curving flight of stairs leads down to the master cabin aft. This is a large compartment, running the full width of the boat, with 6ft 1in (1.85m) headroom. The centrally-placed double berth starts off as queen-size but tapers rapidly at the foot, which might cause problems for taller people. Ample storage is provided by a

full-height wardrobe to starboard, a long dressing table and a half-height locker to port.

The en-suite toilet to port is narrow but sufficient. We liked the all-moulded interior, and the sensible-sized basin with locker underneath. A hatch in the base of this gives access to valves, but the cut-out was hurried and rough.

The carpet in the cabin is edged to prevent fraying, and lifts to reveal several hatches giving good access to the inside of the hull. Under one of these is an electric bilge pump, safely mounted in a cage to prevent jamming by debris but (at 800gpm) too small for a boat of this size. Under the berth is another storage locker, plus a hatch which gives good access to the steering gear.

At the forward end of the saloon is the helm position to starboard. This has a comfortable two-person seat, facing a simple but effective dash. Engine instruments are well-sited in an angled panel, with a small 3 1/2in (85mm) compass set ahead but rather close to the tachos. A small breaker panel is mounted to the left of these, which is alright for main circuits but provides the only means for controlling the windscreen wipers, and is really impractical for this purpose, necessitating a long lean forward. Ready-use switches for these should be sited closer to the wheel, there already being space for this on the right.

A small chart area is sited ahead of the wheel, though this would have been better placed in

front of the navigator. Two moulded recesses are presumably intended for holding glasses or mugs, but are too small, and with radiused bottoms. Trim tab switches are to the left of the wheel, with a combined log/echo-sounder to the right, and the VHF ahead of the navigator; otherwise there is no further room for electronics, which presumably would have to be mounted overhead.

Morse single-lever engine controls are sited conveniently by your right hand, with a sensible hatch beneath to allow access to the underside. Also in here is the main battery masterswitch, but this proved impossible to operate without getting on your hands and knees. We also noticed there was no seal round the control cables where they passed into the engineroom, giving rise to unnecessary ingress of noise.

The view from the helm is generally good, but cluttered by wide pillars between the screens, large wipers which do not park far enough out of the way, and the draw cords used to pull down blinds. The curtain to the right also intrudes, while the sliding window goes the wrong way, which means the helmsman cannot talk to anyone on deck. The wipers themselves are deep, and have washers, but have not been set up with enough travel.

Useful stowage space is provided under the helmsman's feet, with a further large cave locker under the seat itself, accessible either from the front or the side.

Three steps down lead to the galley to port. This is a roomy area, separated from the saloon but not isolated from it. A curved line to the

worktop breaks up the square feeling these spaces so often have, while the white joinery and surfaces add to the open feeling. The worktop has a practical rail running around its perimeter, but is let down by the finish of its edges, and by the lack of a fiddle. Equipment comprises a triple electric hob, a microwave, a single sink and a neat white fridge. Storage is provided by lockers beneath and above, and a shelf outboard.

Opposite to starboard is the lower dinette. This converts to a double berth, with a blind for extra privacy, or can be supplied as a twin-bedded guest cabin. The dinette form is likely to be the most popular, giving a comfortable dining area for four to six people. Lockers under the settees will take overnight gear and sleeping bags, but the seat cushions are difficult to remove.

Forward to port is the guest toilet, accessible from the saloon or the double cabin ahead. The room inside is good, within a practical square shape. The finish again is a one-piece GRP moulding — practical, and made attractive by the use of a grey/blue styling stripe. A locker, shelf, extractor fan and neatly recessed showerhead complete the appointments.

The main guest cabin forward has a good-sized angled berth, a small dressing table to port, a three-quarter-height hanging locker and several smaller cave lockers.

Engines

Power for the TS39 comes from a pair of 300hp Iveco SRM30.11 diesels, mounted under the saloon. The latest versions of this highly

Below and right: on a calm but grey test day, the TS39 handled well with help from the Morse single-lever engine controls and trim tabs fitted as extras. Below right: the wide and roomy aft master cabin (top) has a tapering double berth, the forward guest accommodation (bottom) an angled double.

successful unit feature a wastegated turbocharger to give extra low-down torque, which in turn provides improved acceleration onto the plane.

Access to the motors is either via a door behind the steps leading down to the galley or via hatches in the saloon sole. Space in the engineroom is limited, with crouching access between the engines but virtually no way of getting outboard, except by lifting all the sole hatches and hanging down from above. Similarly, the tops of the engines are hard up under the hatches. The restriction becomes further apparent when you try to reach the fuel filters, which are mounted close to the tanks outboard and necessitate a crawl past the exposed drivebelts.

The fuel system itself is in copper pipe to the filters, with armoured flexible hoses to the engines. A transfer pipe joins the two tanks, but we could see no changeover system.

A sturdy battery box is mounted between the engines, and in fact is the only place to stand, there being no floor aft, just the bilge. Since the electric pump (again only an 800gph unit) is also down here, this would seem an unsuitable arrangement in practice.

Access to the sea-inlet strainers aft is good, as it is to the sternglands. Here you also find the 6kW HFL generator, mounted in its own soundshield. General sound insulation consists of double-thickness foam, PVC-faced and applied to most of the flat surfaces. There is one automatic fire-extinguisher each for the main engines and generator.



Working around the engine space, we kept getting snagged on plastic tie-wraps. Beloved of fitters for the purpose of clipping wires and cables in place, they are the very devil in close quarters if the buckle portion is left protruding.

Exterior

The main outside entertaining area is, of course, the aft deck. Out here you have room for eight to ten guests, with corner seats port and starboard for three or four people each. The seat bases in fact form part of the deck moulding, and have useful lockers in them for covers and ropes. Well-cushioned backrests make the seats comfortable, and fend off much of the wind. The aft deck is teak-planked, laid in a recess in the GRP moulding and forming an attractive and comfortable surface.

A central transom door leads to a vertical ladder down to a narrow bathing platform, with a hinged lower section allowing swimmers to board.

Four steps up lead to the flybridge. This is small, with two bucket seats forward, and a narrow bench aft, but nowhere to sunbathe. The helm position is a good one, but the dashboard has an unattractive black perspex finish. Two small shelves flank this, but there are no lockers, and no holders for glasses. The radar mast aft is low, putting the scanner just 4ft 6in (1.2m) above the flybridge floor. It is however hinged, with two quickly-released bolts allowing it to be lowered for bridges.

The side decks are a good width, with forward movement aided by substantial solid guardrails outboard, and well-placed inboard rails along the

Birchwood TS39

Engines: twin Iveco 8061 SRM30 diesels, 300hp at 2700rpm, 6cyl, 5900cc.

Conditions: wind E Force 3, sea calm. **Load:** fuel 25%, water 100%, crew 3.

| rpm | knots | gph | lph | mpg | range | trim | sound levels dB(A) | | | |
|------|-------|------|-----|------|-------|------|--------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| | | | | | | | saloon | aftcab | fwdcab | flybdg |
| 1200 | 9.1 | 6.2 | 28 | 1.47 | 352 | 2.0 | 70 | 79 | 79 | 71 |
| 1450 | 9.9 | 7.7 | 35 | 1.29 | 327 | 3.5 | 73 | 81 | 80 | 73 |
| 1600 | 12.8 | 10.2 | 46 | 1.25 | 301 | 4.5 | 75 | 83 | 82 | 75 |
| 1800 | 15.3 | 12.9 | 59 | 1.19 | 285 | 5.5 | 77 | 86 | 83 | 76 |
| 2000 | 18.7 | 16.3 | 74 | 1.14 | 276 | 5.5 | 79 | 88 | 84 | 78 |
| 2200 | 22.3 | 18.7 | 85 | 1.19 | 286 | 5.0 | 80 | 89 | 84 | 80 |
| 2400 | 24.4 | 24.0 | 109 | 1.02 | 244 | 4.5 | 83 | 92 | 87 | 83 |
| 2600 | 28.0 | 26.5 | 120 | 1.06 | 254 | 4.5 | 85 | 94 | 91 | 85 |

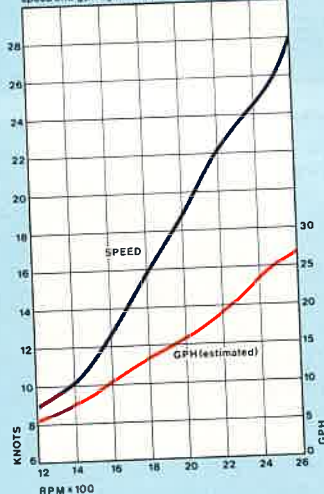
Acceleration: 0-20 knots, 11.0sec.

| | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Loa | 40ft 6in (12.34m) | Displacement | 10½ tonnes |
| Hull length | 38ft 9in (11.73m) | Fuel capacity | 2 × 120gal (1090lt) |
| Beam | 13ft 4in (4.06m) | Water capacity | 100gal (450lt) |
| Draught | 3ft 8in (1.11m) | Price ex VAT | standard boat £146,810 |

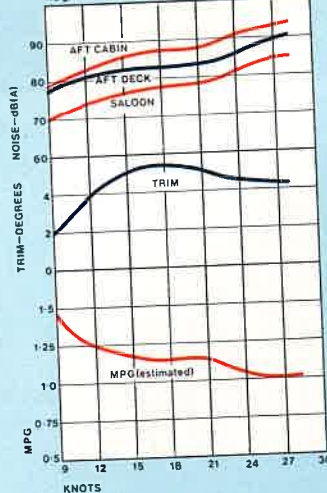
Builders Birchwood Boats, Common Road, Huthwaite, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire. Tel: 0623 515133. Fax: 0623 440328.

Suppliers Birchwood Boats Solent, Vespasian Road, Bitterne, Southampton, Hampshire SO2 4AY. Tel: 0703 224252. Fax: 0703 639835.

speed and gph against rpm



mpg, trim, noise levels against speed



cabin side. The inward slope of the latter adds width at shoulder height, and keeps the nav lights from protruding. A novel raised-dot moulded non-slip gives acceptable performance, and would be comparatively easy to keep clean. The finish continues over the forward coachroof, which is a good feature, but the expanse of this area could also have been used to incorporate a sunlounger to make up for the absence of one elsewhere.

The foredeck has room for mooring and anchoring, with an electric winch, split pulpit and sternhead stowage for the anchor. A small lockable lid reveals a reasonable-sized locker.

Ten-inch (250mm) aluminium bollards forward, midships and aft take care of mooring, but the TS39 is a tall boat, particularly aft, and climbing up or down from the pontoon proves almost impossible without steps. At least a couple of recesses in the topsides would assist.

Handling and performance

Birchwood claim "close to 30-knot" performance for the TS39 with the Ivecos. On our test, at around quarter-load, we recorded exactly 28 knots on our gun.

At this speed, according to our fuel meter, the two engines were burning 31.3gph (60.4lph) each, giving just over 1mpg and a maximum range of 250 miles. Dropping down to nigh on 19 knots at 2000rpm improved these figures to 1.14mpg and 280 miles respectively, giving the boat the ability to cross the longest sections of the Channel easily at cruising speed, and to make the return journey at most points on one fill-up with a safety margin.

Noise levels were high. In the aft cabin we recorded a maximum of 94dB(A), contributed to by propeller and exhaust, with the aft deck and flybridge similarly being comparatively noisy at 91dB(A) and 85dB(A) respectively. Figures at a 22-knot cruising speed showed an improvement, but the aft cabin remained uncomfortable at 89dB(A), and was louder than we would have wanted for long passages.

Out at sea, the TS39 handled well. Steering was good, being positive and precise, and the turning circle acceptably tight. We hit one of our calm days for the test, but managed to find some large ferry wakes to tax the head-sea performance of the hull, which coped well. Trim tabs are fitted as an extra for £1100 and gave good control, levelling up any list quickly and with enough power to put the bow up or down sufficiently to cope with any rough weather that might be encountered.

Low-speed handling was helped by the Morse controls which, as ever, seem to give a more positive feel to gearchanges and throttle than do some of the look-alikes.

Conclusion

Once again Birchwood have filled a need. The TS39 offers a roomy interior, two good cabins and reasonable space outside. The finish down below is excellent, with good use being made of modern fabrics and materials.

In some areas we felt the company's usual attention to detail design had slipped, especially at the helm position and on the flybridge, but these were items that could be worked on. □

