



BOAT REPORT

SEALINE 260

Robert Tucker's distinctive curves have grown bolder still in this replacement for Sealine's popular 255 sports cruiser.

AS POPULAR abroad as it is at home, the Sealine range goes from strength to strength whether it is enticing people into a sun-drenched cockpit or introducing new concepts in flybridge craft.

By the time of the Earls Court Boat Show, their line-up will have been fully tailored, tweaked and redesigned at every level, with the aft-cabin 390 and open-cockpit 380 seen at Southampton joined by a six-berth 350 flybridge model. This now gives them four craft in the flybridge/cruiser market, from 31ft to 45ft, and three in the Ambassador open sports-cruiser field, up to 39ft.

In a smaller but similar vein, this open-cockpit concept also extends to the Senator range of starter mini-cruisers, the largest of which is the mid-cabined 260.

Design

Introduced at Earls Court last year as a replacement for the popular 255, the Senator 260 is a completely new design rather than just an update of the previous model. Whilst the medium-vee hull was the responsibility of the in-house design team, the overall styling and detail was down to Robert Tucker.

Sealine were among the first to round off the angular look from their designs, but Tucker has taken the concept a stage further in recent designs with curves which, although giving a sleeker feel, are so positive and distinct that they stand out rather than blend in. These bolder lines are now permeating through the range at all



Above (clockwise from top left): rain clouds threaten, but the 260's two-part canopy is up to the test, giving good headroom. There is space for much more besides the single 275hp Volvo 570 petrol outdrive fitted to this example (which is not the boat we tested). The interior accommodation is in the familiar, practical format pioneered by Sealine some years ago, but up-to-date light finishes and furnishings are used throughout to give a spacious feel. The rear cockpit features a full convertible dinette/sunbed area to port and another small seating area opposite.

levels, to give a readily recognisable outline to anything made by Sealine.

As for the hull shape, underwater sections fill fairly quickly to give a deadrise of 26° amidships through to 21° at the transom. The bathing platform is fully integrated with the main hull mould, forming a distinctive wedge at mid-transom height.

The coachroof has been pushed up to give plenty of headroom below, although the designer has thoughtfully incorporated within the moulding a flat section for those on foredeck duty.

Exterior

Every time we set foot near the 260 the clouds came and the heavens opened, so we are pleased to report that the two-part canopy ably supported by the GRP cockpit hoop proved very adequate, with good headroom. The cockpit itself features a convertible U-shaped dinette-cum-sunbed to port, with a smaller seat base opposite. Half-a-dozen can therefore lounge here, although when the boat is up and running a couple of crew can comfortably lodge themselves across from the adjustable single helm seat.

Here, the skipper finds the main instrumentation, in the form of engine gauges set in a moulded, angled fascia topped off with a compass just further forward. Between this and the leather-finished aluminium wheel, surrounded by ready-use switches, is a perspex-covered area

for a folded chart or pilot book. Our test boat was a single-engined model, so the instrument fascia was not overly crowded, leaving room for a log and depth sounder. However, doubling up on the gauges might result in a shortage of space for even these bare essentials, and any electronic navigator would have to be bracket-mounted.

Otherwise there are all the usual practical details which we have come to expect from Sealine. The battery switches and cockpit fuel cock, for example, are readily accessible but recessed to avoid knocks; outboard, set into the coaming and running in the voids beneath the side deck, are a series of handy lockers which supplement the fender stowage on the transom and the lined locker under the co-driver's seat.

Handholds around the cockpit seem adequate, the coaming being bordered to the sides and transom with grabrails, while stainless steel tubing around the sliding companionway door forms another handhold. Although it proved easy enough to move along the side decks, and the pulpit rails extended almost all the way back to where the crew will hop in and out of the cockpit, the coachroof would benefit from an additional handrail or two, especially as its sides are almost vertical and tend to push wandering feet to the outboard extreme of the side decks. An area has purposefully been left flat forward, for mooring and anchoring work.

At the stern, amidships and on the quarters there are 8in (20cm) cleats, while a vertical

windlass handles the standard-issue Bruce anchor and chain. An attempt has been made to segregate the ground tackle from any other items which might be stowed in the commodious foredeck locker.

Interior

The main cabin is finished in Sealine's customary manner, with a high standard of moulding disguised by inset fabric panels to deckhead and sides, while the galley and adjacent joinery is finished in a lightly-textured plastic veneer. The whole interior is light, and provided with adequate ventilation by neat sections of captive-angled ports (rather than leak-prone sliding ones) set into the main side windows and an opening foredeck hatch, as well as by a small fixed skylight.

The dinette forward is horseshoe-shaped and, with the table dropped, forms a 6ft 6in x 5ft (1.98m x 1.52m) berth. Lockers beneath the moulded seat-bases have their own GRP liners, which reduce the overall depth available for stowage but at least ensure the area is kept dry and clean for clothes. Further storage is provided by a reasonable-sized half-height hanging locker and two small bins outboard of the seat-backs.

The galley is very adequate for a craft of this size, with a good run of work surface (roll-top, alas, without any attempt at a fiddle) and plentiful outboard and chest-height segmented locker space. Beneath the counter-top lies a larger double cupboard for bulkier items, and a good-sized fridge. A hinged cover hides the twin-burner hob and grill, doubling as a flame-resistant border to protect adjacent joinery.

Opposite is the fully moulded toilet-cum-shower compartment which, with careful design thought, has allowed space for the necessary ablutions while remaining extremely size-conscious.

Although fully partitioned from the main saloon, the midships cabin is little more than a double-berth sleeping compartment, with the bare minimum of stooped standing space in which to dress, although it is furnished with a small seat.

Engines

No fewer than seven outdrive options are offered, all from the Volvo line-up. Single-engine installations are available in either petrol or diesel, up to 275hp in the former case and with either the 200hp AD41 or the new 230hp KAMD42 unit in the latter. The most potent twin-petrol alternatives are four-cylinder 251s delivering more than 300hp in total. Our test boat was fitted with a single Duoprop 501 V8 rated at 229hp

For optimum access, the engine hatch is a full-width affair, meaning that the seat-bases have to be removed before it can be opened. Unshipping the integrated cushions, bases and legs is easy enough, although the fore part of the cockpit soon becomes cluttered with these appendages.

Once the seats are clear and the hatch open (a gas strut would be a definite advantage here) access is excellent, with both the engine and the complete inboard end of the drive leg fully accessible for routine checks and major servicing. All control cables and wiring are kept clear and ducted in a tidy manner.

A fuel filter/water separator is conveniently

located on the forward bulkhead, with the lines themselves tucked out of harm's way and run across to the engine via armoured hose. The battery boxes are properly secured well clear of the bilge, which in its turn is serviced by an automatic Rule submersible pump and by a manual unit sited in the cockpit. The calorifier is engine-fed and fitted with a 240V immersion heater, the ring main and battery charger also being standard. A heat-sensitive fire-extinguisher is included, but there is no sign of any attempt at noise insulation other than a bedding rubber between the hatch and deck edge.

Handling and performance

Despite various forms of precipitation — rain, hail and just plain drizzle — plus the odd associated blustery squall, the elements could provide little by way of taxing conditions. Fortunately, our photoboot was one of Sealine's flagship 450s, which pushed around a considerable quantity of water and at least allowed some benchmark testing as we played in its wake, especially when it coincided with wash from ferries and busy tugs.

All in all, we could find little to criticise in the handling of the 260. The tug wakes, extremely steep and fast-moving, might have been most interesting, but we have to commend the boat's manners. The odd thump or two and some water pushed up, which is only to be expected, but the hull gave a stable account of itself.

Through the turns there was the same predictable motion, with the hull pushing round smartly but in comfort, the Duoprop allowing the trim to be left pulled up to 0° without loss of power. Application of tab quickly straightened out any heel induced by cross-winds.

At full throttle, 4500rpm, we recorded 32 knots, and dropping to a cruising 4000rpm gave us 28 knots. Trimming the leg in and backing off to 3000rpm, we sat quite happily on the plane at 16 knots, the Duoprop maintaining sufficient thrust at this awkward speed to keep the hull up and running without needing to be nurtured unduly. Fuel consumption should be in the order of 13-14gph (65lph) flat-out, and a more fuel-conscious 10gph (45lph) at the lower setting, giving the 76gal (345lt) tank a fair run on a top-up.

Sealine's estimate on the 200hp diesel option is a flat-out 29 knots or thereabouts, which does not seem unreasonable and, given the fuel savings in terms of both consumption and expense, makes for an economical option if you intend to put in some hours cruising.

There being no insulation in the engine compartment, noise levels were nowhere near as low as they could have been. At full-throttle we measured 90dB(A) in the cockpit, and at 4000rpm our meter showed 85dB(A) there and a more reasonable 78dB(A) down below.

Conclusions

We found the 260 to be a tidy, well-mannered family weekender offering all creature comforts along with a cockpit which is well-planned and usable come rain or shine. Although there seems to be an abundance of rather stark, shiny GRP, it is evident that Sealine still take as much care with the styling, finish and practicalities of these starter craft as they do with their flagship models. □

Sealine 260

Loa 27ft 6in (8.47m).

Hull length 25ft 9in (7.85m).

Beam 9ft 0in (2.74m).

Draught 2ft 9in (0.86m).

Displacement 2.8 tons.

Fuel 76gal (345lt).

Water 30gal (136lt).

Price £33,763 ex VAT with Volvo 501DP.

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