

BOAT REPORT

FALCON 23

BIRD OF PLAY

the main moulding, gives a measure of protection to the outdrive leg. The moulding itself runs just short of the full beam of the vessel: this helps to prevent it from brushing against a pontoon or quay when turning the bows out — useful on a motorboat of any size.

Exterior

Staying at the blunter end of things for a moment, the platform comes equipped with a substantial teak and stainless boarding ladder, fender basket (complete with fenders) and a shower tucked away in the cockpit. The 6in-wide sidedecks are cambered inwards and finished with a toerail.

As on the 27, Falcon have utilised a combination handrail that skirts the coachroof and foredeck. Falling well inboard of the deck edge, this gives a useful purchase whether moving along the sidedeck, or over it, onto the flat of the foredeck area. This is a sound solution for adults — superior to many craft of this style — but is still not an ideal concept for junior crew.

An anodised stemhead fitting, 50m of chain and warp, and a 7kg spade anchor all come as standard, with the tackle stowing in the large foredeck locker. This also doubles as the gas locker, which comes equipped with an effective clamp arrangement for the bottle. Twin 8in cleats fore and aft are thoughtfully supplemented by a further smaller pair either side, which are suitably sited to bend on fenders and springs.

Prior to the sun appearing for our photo shoot, we were grateful for the protection offered by the Falcon's two-part hood as the last of a frontal system made its mark. With 6ft-plus of headroom, it gives a useful amount of extra accommodation. The GRP cockpit hoop lends a robust landing for its stainless framework, although when this is folded against the arch it could catch you unawares if used as a handhold whilst boarding.

Topped off with a safe run of stainless steel handholds, the aft portion of the cockpit is fitted with a facing pair of bench seats. With the cabin table brought from below, this can just about accommodate six for dining or, with the cushion infills, makes a full-width sunbed. Large perspex-fronted cave lockers beneath take care of bulky items, and keep the main battery isolators out of harm's way. Hinging the helm seat forward reveals an Engel chest fridge, allowing ▶

Falcon Sports Boats' popular 22ft open cockpit cruiser has been a steady seller ever since it was first introduced in 1985. And it now has an updated partner, the 23SPC, to keep it company. We tested the latest offering out of Port Solent.

A year ago we ran a test on the then all new Falcon 27, and commented that the Norfolk-based company's successful 22 model had undergone a series of alterations in layout. The new version is known as the Falcon 23SPC, and we were kindly lent one by PJ Yacht Sales of Port Solent as a photoboot for last month's Cranchi 40 report. Afterwards, we took the opportunity to put this four-berth performance weekender through its paces — with favourable results.

Design

The modifications to Andrew Wolstenholme's original design are essentially to the superstructure and cockpit moulding, leaving the medium to deep vee hull untouched.

After a fine entry forward — running into fuller topsides offering plenty of reserve buoyancy — underwater

The 23 tracked cleanly and positively, handling well in the sharp swell which emerged between the Isle of Wight and the mainland.

sections run to 23° at amidships before easing to 21° at the transom. A 23ft boat that offers full standing headroom amidships below, and a sensible depth of cockpit coaming must, by these physical parameters alone, employ a fair bulk of topside and coachroof. To ease this, the deck and superstructure lines are allowed to run through the usual dominant sheer line and into a reverse flair along the upper topsides. As a result, the bold gunwale strip is the eye-catcher, while a spray deflecting knuckle and careful use of thin style lines help give a pleasing proportion to the whole.

The teak-clad GRP bathing platform, whilst not fully integrated as part of



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◀ swift access by those in the cockpit. A further bench seat opposite the helm keeps the skipper in sociable contact with any crew who wish to share this elevated position.

The helm position itself cossets two in comfort, the adjustable seat having high cushioned sides to keep the occupants in situ, while the footrest is well-placed. Finished in a blue gel, the console tends to reflect less glare than would be the case with white. Engine instrumentation, outdrive controls, trim tabs, plus switches and breakers — including a legend marking the status of vessel lights — are readily viewed on the angled fascia. An Incastec log, echo sounder and compass (all standard) are mounted in front of a perspex-covered chart area. This is a useful size, but needs greater depth of moulding and a means of securing the cover. Some further small pockets for stowing odds and ends would also be useful.

The wheel is padded and comfortable to the touch, with the single-lever throttle mounted clear of obstructions to the right hand. Extending back to the radar mast, the anodised aluminium frame windscreen gives good protection.

Interior

Access below is via a pair of teak louvred doors and a sliding perspex hatch. Immediately to port, a tidy galley incorporates a two-burner hob, grill and drainer beneath a hinged cover complete with a necessary fiddle. Once the hob cools, a small GRP moulding fits over it to act as a useful draining board.

With the fridge located in the cockpit, stowage is available for dry stores and utensils. These find a home in a single large locker beneath the counter-top.

Forward lies a U-shaped dinette capable of seating six in well upholstered comfort. For sleeping, the fore backrest is removed to extend the berth to sizeable proportions when the accompanying teak table infill is employed. Again this is sensibly fiddled, as is the area above the adjacent half-height hanging locker. Stowage for sleeping bags and such like is found beneath the seat bases in GRP-lined lockers, with odds and ends finding a niche outboard of the seat backs.

Headroom over the dinette is sitting height only, but adequate enough,

The U-shaped dinette comfortably seats six while the console, finished in blue gel, tends to reflect less glare.

while towards the galley and opposite, in the toilet compartment, it is comfortably over the 6ft mark. The headlining is an easy-clean, textured GRP moulding. Falcon have also designed this latter area with a view to hiding the unsightly pipework for the pump-out toilet, while the basin moulding has recesses for soap and tooth-mugs. The basin faucet doubles as a shower. An opening port provides ventilation here; further sideports and a deckhatch air the rest of the accommodation.

The second sleeping area runs athwartships across the boat, under the forward cockpit and helm area. This is curtained off, with access just abaft the galley. The berth itself is a full 4ft in width and there is comfortable sitting headroom. Stowage is limited as the space below the mattress accommodates the stainless steel water tank and pressure pump, with just a narrow shelf adjacent to the bunk for small, loose items. Under cockpit areas often appear claustrophobic but the Falcon

benefits from a large opening hatch let into the side of the cockpit seating, providing plenty of natural light and ventilation.

Handling and performance

Checking over the engine compartment before setting off proved easy enough. The hinged hatch between the aft side benches is firmly supported by a gas strut, giving good access to the 210hp Volvo 500DP petrol V8 (formally designated AQ 211A) as well as the outdrive leg's hydraulic reservoir and service points. Only single installations are available and all options come from the Volvo stable, from 120hp at a cost of £21,173 ex VAT, through to 307hp at £25,868. Two diesel models are also listed, the larger DuoProp-equipped AD41 at 200hp being the most expensive installation of the lot at just over £31,000.

We were pleased to see braided lines run carefully out of harm's way from the water/fuel separator, but were less happy with the location of the adjacent fuel shut-off. The manufacturer assured us that a correction is already in hand, and that a remote mechanism sited at the helm is to be installed. Sturdy shelves outboard of the main engine provide a landing for battery boxes and the calorifier. The latter can be fitted with

an immersion heater if required, while standard safety equipment includes an automatic bilge pump and extinguisher.

The compartment is devoid of any insulation, although the possibility of resonance from the stainless fuel tank is avoided, the tank being sited in its own GRP box forward of the main compartment. With the inherently quiet V8, at cruising revs of 3,500rpm, we motored along at a comfortable 25.5 knots, and with the actual engine hatch bedded on rubber, sound levels were reasonable at 84dB(A) in the cockpit and 82dB(A) for anyone napping below. Theoretically running the 50gal (230lt) tank dry, the range at this speed will be in the order of 150 miles at around 9gph (42lph).

For those with the need for speed, a shade under 32 knots at 4,600rpm is the maximum. Bear in mind consumption will be pushed up to a none too frugal 13gph (60lph). Sound levels were up as well, indicating 87dB(A) in the cockpit, which is still bearable, although on diesel-engined craft we would envisage the need for some measure of insulation.

In common with other small performance cruisers, the 23SPC has little hull below the waterline, but a fair bulk above, giving greater windage effect. However, maintaining a straight course at slow speeds required only the slightest attention to the helm and, once up and running,

the 23 tracked cleanly and positively. Positioning the Falcon at speed adjacent to the Cranchi 40 during our photo shoots caused little anxiety, even when crossing her considerable wake; the DuoProp and medium-vee hull maintaining the necessary thrust and lift through hard turns without recourse to trim or throttle.

A low but sharp swell emerging from between the Isle of Wight and the mainland meant keeping the drive tucked in as we headed westward from Portsmouth, allowing the hull to benefit from the deeper vee of the bow sections. In this trim, we found we could drop the revs and maintain a steady, comfortable speed of 17 knots without alternately dropping off the plane and rushing off headlong.

Conclusions

Set up just short of a decade ago by a couple of shipwrights from Broom Boats, Falcon have gone from strength to strength in this highly competitive sector of the market, producing some 120 boats per annum.

As with the larger 27 model, we found the 23SPC soundly built, with its overall finish capable of handling the wear and tear of the family afloat. While comfortably accommodating four in its practical layout for coastal cruising, the cockpit will nevertheless cater for sunnier days when the enhanced appeal of boating yields extra volunteers to crew.



Loa	24ft 5in (7.46m)
Hull length	22ft 3in (6.78m)
Beam	8ft 3in (2.51m)
Draught (leg raised)	1ft 3in (0.38m)
Displacement	2.4 tons
Fuel	50gal (230lt)
Water	29gal (130lt)
Price ex VAT	
basic with Volvo 500DP	£23,876
as tested	£25,203

Supplier
PJ Yacht Sales & Charter, 16 The Slipway, Port Solent, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO6 4TH.
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Builder
Falcon Sports Boats Ltd, Griffin Lane, Norwich NR7 0SL.
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FALCON 23