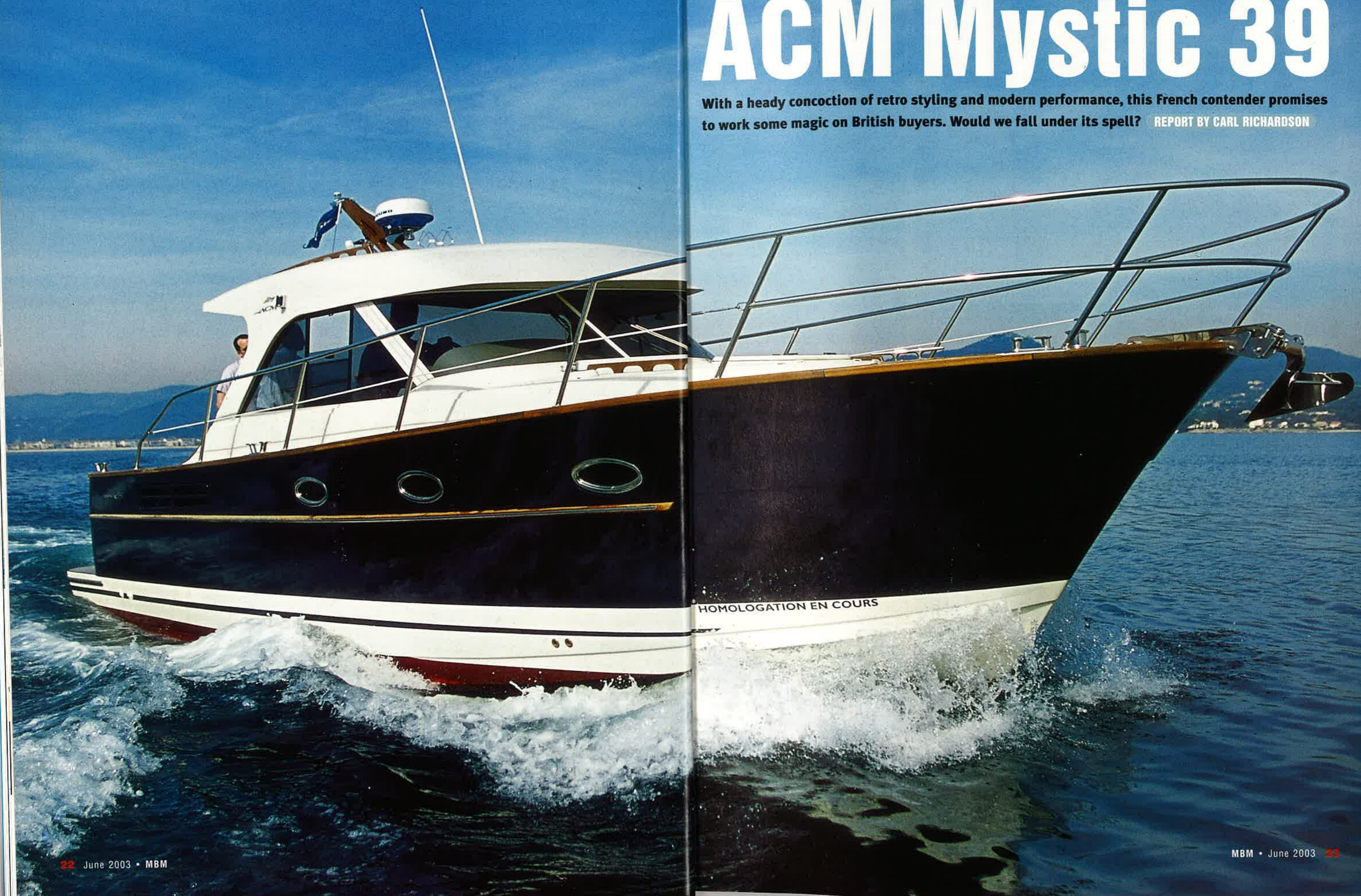


BOAT REPORT ACM Mystic 39 • aft-cockpit motor cruiser • lobster boat styling • open-

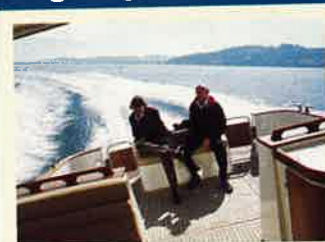
backed wheelshelter • two cabins • twin 230hp Yanmar diesels • 27 knots • £254,000

ACM Mystic 39

With a heady concoction of retro styling and modern performance, this French contender promises to work some magic on British buyers. Would we fall under its spell? **REPORT BY CARL RICHARDSON**



highlights



SOCIABLE LAYOUT

A spacious open-backed wheelshelter opens straight out into an equally roomy cockpit via a level teak sole.



COLOURFUL GELCOAT

Our test boat came in handsome blue, but you can opt for British racing green or deep burgundy.



RETRO STYLING

Extensive use of teak helps to give the boat an attractive traditional feel.

Over the past 18 months, French boatbuilders ACM have been going through something of a renaissance under new ownership.

A split from sailboat builders Dufour was swiftly followed by the acquisition of sportsboat brand Arcoa, and a fresh focus on motorboating was backed up with a major investment in new facilities.

First fruit of the new approach is the rather

handsome Mystic, a 39-footer with a modern and more affordable take on the classic New England lobster or picnic boat design.

ACM president Bertrand Vogeles compares his boats to the likes of Eastbays, and the Mystic seems to offer a viable alternative for a rather smaller outlay.

The ACM yard is only just across the English Channel, near Caen in Normandy, and therefore closer to home for Solent

boaters than many a UK factory. But we tried the boat further south, out of Port Grimaud on the Côte d'Azur.

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Using the same hull as the capable Excellence 38, with its handsomely flared bows, gives the Mystic a head start, ensuring a sea-kindly ride.

The fusion of modern, rounded upperworks with a classically low coachroof works well, and the white mouldings contrast smartly with the coloured topsides. Teak decks top this off, and the huge foredeck is highly workable.

Lobster boat design traditionally involves a large open-backed wheelshelter-cum-saloon and a spacious aft cockpit. ACM's take on this produces a wonderfully open area that, viewed from astern, beckons you in through its dual transom gates.

The border between exterior and interior is marked by sweeping teak-finished flanks and two large cabinets. Inside, easy living is heralded by a U-shape settee and galley on opposite sides, and by a wide expanse of teak



accommodation

The layout of the boat is such that you will want to spend as much time as you can in and around the spacious wheelshelter drinking in the sights and smells of your surroundings.

Finished in a mix of teak and white mouldings, from the floor up to the 6ft 4in deckhead, this is a good balance between the practical and the comfortable. In many ways, it is reminiscent of Scandinavian craft.

The openness of this area might concern those used to less savoury weather, but with the aft canopies in place and an investment in some additional heating, there should be little to worry about. Arguably, this

hardtop design is more suited to UK waters than to the Mediterranean.

Our first impressions of the lower or 'mini' saloon, as the builders call it, were not so glowing. However, after living with the boat for a couple of days, this extremely cosy teak-clad area won us over. We see it being used as an inner sanctum for the skipper, allowing him to leave the remnants of an evening meal up top and enjoy a peaceful nightcap before struggling the last few steps to bed. The master circuitboard is also sited down here, so unneeded electrics can be turned off before retiring.

With both the upper and lower dinette arrangements



galley Flush lids open up to reveal an electric hob and a sink and drainer, with plenty of workspace left in between. All the cabinet doors have locks, but astonishingly no normal latches, so they can swing open when not locked.



lower saloon Our test boat came with a wall-mounted plasma television screen (far right) as an extra. Remove this, and you are left with a traditional, teak-clad cabin area complete with slatted cabinets and porthole, perfect for two people to relax in.



master cabin This shipshape cabin has 6ft 2in headroom and plenty of storage space, including a full-length hanging locker. It is only slightly let down by the untidy stuck-down carpet patches at the base of the double berth.



toilet/shower With direct access from the master cabin, this simple compartment has shelf and storage space, good lighting, two vents and a porthole. The shower has an encircling curtain, and, unlike some, the loo is actually comfortable to sit on.



midships cabin Given its limited space, this is a great guest cabin. The twin berths are set low, allowing you to sit up comfortably in bed, with reading lights provided. There is full standing headroom near the door.

converted, the Mystic can theoretically sleep up to eight, although you'd need to be fairly close friends. For those with younger children, it is worth mentioning that the lower saloon has an internal porthole into the midships cabin, so you can keep an eye on them.

The two large cabinets at the back of the wheelshelter and plenty of under-seat and cabin locker space provide good stowage. On top of all this there is a huge area beneath the sole, measuring around 5ft x 4ft x 3ft, which less reputable builders might have considered using for a tiny third cabin.

sole. A large glass hatch in the coachroof combines with sliding side windows to provide plenty of ventilation.

Below decks there is a lower saloon area as well as a midships cabin. On most comparable craft it would be a case of either/or, so it doesn't feel as spacious down here. However, the forward master cabin, the toilet compartment and the mid-cabin are well up to scratch, the latter having a particularly impressive layout.

The builders' finish is coming on leaps and bounds. It might not quite be a match for the standards of Azimut or Princess, but it exudes a tough and usable but classic feel, with plenty of solid teak joinery.

The whole boat, and the wheelhouse

helm Wide though it is, the fixed helm seat has space for only a single derriere. The fact that neither the seat nor the steering wheel is adjustable really needs to be addressed. The two-tier console has a fairly conventional design, with all the instruments clearly visible, and there is plenty of room to add navigation equipment both here and on a wide panel above.



upper saloon Atmospheric seating for up to six adults is provided in the open-backed wheelshelter, around a teak table that cleverly twists and folds out to increase the dining area.



especially, feel as though they will look even better a few years down the line, once the fittings have acquired a nicely weathered patina.

ENGINE OPTIONS

Currently, the sole engine option is a pair of 230hp Yanmar 4cyl 4LHA STE diesels. However the same manufacturers'

300hp 6cyl 6LP STEs are soon to be made available in the Mystic.

PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

When we were blasting past St Tropez, the afternoon sun illuminating its harbour walls and famous clocktower, we were tempted to feel it was a shame that the boat has just one helm position, inside the wheelshelter. In

decks



foredeck Very user-friendly, this has an electric windlass and single-chamber anchor locker.



bathing platform This is not walled in by integral flanks, which makes boarding easy. Two teak-panelled transom gates lead forward into the cockpit.

Running naturally on from the bathing platform and into the wheelshelter, the cockpit is an uncluttered area bordered by a solid teak rail.

The fixed seating comprises a rather uncomfortable bench that could do with a bigger base and a higher backrest. Plenty of space is left for free-standing furniture (which could be stowed in the large void under the wheelshelter sole), and self-draining lockers on either side of the enginebay hatch provide storage for smaller items.

Large steps lead up from the cockpit onto the side decks. Although these are not especially wide, grabrails along the low superstructure and sturdy outboard-leaning guardrails make the journey forward an easy one. Stainless steel fairleads protect the teak-capped toerail.

The foredeck is very crew-friendly, and one of the best we have seen on a boat of this size. Equally well proportioned is the bathing platform, where a bathing ladder and shower come as standard. A neat touch is the central liferaft locker, set flush into the transom.

Britain's colder climes, however, owners will no doubt be grateful for having a warm and cosy place from which to drive.

Under hard acceleration, the 230hp Yanmars take time to wind themselves up, but unless you're planning on some big-boat waterskiing this is unlikely to be a problem. Once up and running, they respond swiftly to any slight throttle changes.

Plenty of mid-range torque, which keeps on building all the way to the engines' 3500rpm maximum, delivers strong performance exactly where you want it: in the cruising and fast cruising speed ranges.

We recorded a top speed of 27 knots with half tanks, four crew and a hull that had been in the water for a good few months.

In a bid to hit the 30-knot benchmark, ACM are still tinkering with propeller options for this boat, which accounts for our test boat's engines revving slightly beyond the manufacturers recommended 3400rpm. But if a higher top speed is important to you, then the forthcoming twin-300hp engine option will probably be the way to go, with a claimed top speed of 35 knots.

The present set-up feels plenty quick enough for most needs. The hull's natural trim was spot on, and even under full speed turns the GPS still registered a hugely impressive 24 knots.

As usual with an inside helm, care has to be taken in tight turns at speed, as you lose sight of the forward and side horizons

engineroom

From the large hydraulic hatch in the cockpit sole, access down into the enginebay is simple.

The engines are sited forward of the hatchway. Water tanks run along the sides of them, but there is enough room to squeeze between. The single fuel tank is located forward, running athwartships.

Large strainers and glass bulb pre-filters are well positioned for easy maintenance, and the level of finish is reassuringly high.

There is plenty of room at the rear of the compartment for additional equipment, such as a generator, and for easy access to the sterngear.



TEST DATA

rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	noise
2000	11.4	6.1	28	1.87	234	76
2200	13.3	7.9	36	1.68	211	77
2500	17.3	9.2	42	1.88	237	78
2800	21.4	11.7	53	1.83	230	80
3000	23.4	13.9	63	1.68	212	80
3200	25.4	15.4	70	1.65	208	81
3400	28.5	21.0	95	1.36	171	82

range in miles, allows 20% margin.

noise in dB(A), in wheelhouse.

conditions wind southwesterly Force 2-3, sea slight.

load fuel 50%, crew 4.



regardless of the amount of trim applied. So a good look around before entering a dramatic course change is mandatory.

From previous runs in the Excellence 38, we know that this hull's finer-than-normal bow section returns a soft, dry ride, even in big seas, but the conditions for our test could muster nothing to ruffle the Mystic 39. Crossing the wake of the 40ft photo boat was the best we could come up with, and that was shrugged off with typically Gallic disdain.

For an open-backed wheelshelter, sound levels near the helm are lower than might be expected, hovering around 80-81dB(A) all the way from cruising speed up to maximum.

Below decks, a sleep-easy 75dB(A) was the most we recorded. All this points to a solid, tightly finished craft that does not suffer from such bugbears as rattling doors and thin bulkheads.

The layout of the helm is functional enough, although the decision not to offer an adjustable steering wheel and helm seat seems short-sighted.

For those under 6ft tall, the view forward is fine, but the low, sun visor-like overhang at the front of the wheelshelter roof could give taller skippers a problem. The obvious solution could be to take a couple of inches off the overhang's reach.

the rivals



SEALINE C39

from £197,988 inc VAT

The contemporary contender, with a similar level of interior accommodation (but no lower saloon) and a wide range of propulsion options.

Tel: 01489 885115.

www.sealine.com



EASTBAY 38

from £347,800 inc VAT

A very gentlemanly modern classic, offering one cabin and an Asian rainforest worth of wood (sustainably harvested of course).

Tel: 023 8045 8990.

www.boatshowroomsolondon.com

specifications

BUILD	glass-reinforced plastic
RCD	design category B
LENGTH OVERALL	38ft 6in (11.75m)
BEAM	12ft 4in (3.78m)
DRAUGHT	2ft 11in (0.90m)
DISPLACEMENT	5.5 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	220gal (1000lt)
WATER CAPACITY	77gal (350lt)
ENGINES	twin 230hp Yanmar 4LHA STE diesels
BUILDERS	ACM Group, Avenue des Canadiens BP4, 14460 Columbelles, France. Tel: +33 2 31 72 17 21. www.acm-yachts.com
SUPPLIERS	SMN, Chantier Naval, 83310 Port-Grimaud, France. Tel: +33 4 94 56 02 25. www.smn-port-grimaud.fr
UK AGENTS	Les Williams & Associates, 1 Knights Bank Road, Hill Head, Fareham, Hampshire PO14 3JY. Tel: 01329 665680.
PRICE	from £210,000 inc VAT; £254,000 as tested including generator, bow-thruster, teak side decks, electronics and entertainment systems

conclusions

LAYOUT

The layout is unusual but it did eventually win us round. The open space of the wheelshelter and cockpit cannot fail to impress.

Space below decks seems more confined, but the cabins themselves are well proportioned. The fixed helm position is our only serious complaint.

BUILD

ACM's new management set themselves the task of improving their boats' overall finish, and on this evidence they are moving in the right direction.

The thoughtful use of solid woodwork and stainless steel fittings embellish what is a soundly constructed craft.

PERFORMANCE

Although our trials in the Med offered nothing to truly test the hull, we are quite certain that this boat will perform as a comfortable express cruiser.

MBM's verdict

For a modern boatbuilder, ACM have produced something with a convincingly traditional edge. The Mystic 39's retro-styling looks sure to find favour with British buyers.

As long as you can accept the limited size of the lower saloon, there is a great deal to recommend this boat. Whatever the Chinese calendar may say, we suspect that 2003 is set to be the year of the lobster.