

BOAT REPORT

Of classic American parentage, and with three years of UK development behind it, the 267 Vee Express is looking as good as ever in its latest version.

AMERICAN manufacturer Cruisers Incorporated have come a long way since they started building wooden boats 35 years ago. Although they cannot boast the biggest statistics in Stateside terms, their current production is still impressive, amounting to 1500 craft per year, spread over 23 models in the 23ft-43ft bracket.

Three years ago, the decision was taken to move into Europe, and Corby-based Cruisers International was formed. The move was aimed not only to spearhead a marketing initiative this side of the Atlantic for European versions of the US-produced range, but also to build some of them in the UK. Headed by Managing Director Michael Phillips, a fresh face in the boating industry who quickly established a product the equal of if not better than the original, the decision was taken to initially build and develop just two of Cruiser Incorporated's models. We tested the first of these — the Holiday 224 — in our September '87 issue with very favourable results.

Her larger sister, the 267 Vee Express, has recently been re-released, with a new superstructure moulding to give more space, and

CRUISERS INT'L 267



EXPRESS CRUISER



BOAT REPORT



Above: the toilet compartment is blessed with a washbasin of proportions suitable for its function. Top left: one of two Volvo AQ205 V6 petrol outdrives on the test boat. Left: the bathing platform, with plenty of room for ladders and fender baskets. Below left: the saloon opens into the forward cabin via a curtained half bulkhead.

avoid the need for the high pedestal helm seats seen on previous examples. We first saw the improved version at last year's Southampton Boat Show, and booked a test with South Coast dealer Matchmaker International at Poole.

Design

The 267's medium-deep vee hull is from the drawing board of legendary American designer Jim Wynne. He has employed a variable deadrise, with 26° over the forward planing area, moving to 16° at the transom. Lift and directional stability are aided by two pairs of spray rails and wide chine flat. The American-style anchor platform — housing the stem roller — lets into bluff topsides which give additional buoyancy forward. However, a fine entry and the sprayrails help to keep the boat dry.

The 267 appears larger than its

CRUISERS INT'L 267

name suggests. This is not an optical illusion, as the anchor and bathing platforms add 6ft (1.8m) to the hull, giving a length overall of 32ft (9.75m).

Exterior

Boarding the Vee Express, whether moored stern-to or alongside, is simple and safe. A hinged upper portion of the transom, and comfortably-spaced teak steps allow easy access over the cockpit coaming, while a healthy array of stainless steel handholds, further wood treads and wide, mid-height steps — incorporated in the cockpit side of the bulwark — ensure a confident passage ashore, or when proceeding forward. While the moulded cockpit steps are an excellent idea, the battery switches and fuel cut-offs protruding from the kickplate behind are exposed to feet, or inquisitive hands. The consequences of cutting off the ignition system to an engine at speed do not bear thinking of.

The cockpit and narrow side decks have adequate moulded non-slip, but the handrails found around the coaming and raised after section of superstructure do not continue forward. The foredeck has no handholds apart from the main guardrail.

Rubber fendering is fitted to the topsides and usefully, around the large GRP bathing platform. Mooring is well catered for with pairs of 8in cleats forward, amidships and aft. Further deck hardware includes a Bruce anchor, with its chain/warp stowed in a self draining locker. This is suitably equipped with a purposeful cleat for securing the ground tackle. There is also room for additional warps and fenders. Further fender stowage is provided in baskets on the bathing platform.

The lower portion of the cockpit sports a full-width transom seat which converts to a sunlounger. With the full head-height canopy raised — adequately braced by a GRP cockpit hoop — an additional couple can sleep here on the balmier of our summer nights. This gives the possibility of sleeping eight within a 26ft hull. Opposite the transom settee is further seating for two, allowing several to sit around a large, fiddled teak table stowed below.

The raised helm position to starboard offers plenty of room for skipper and mate, with excellent visibility. The seat itself is adjustable

fore and aft and adequately padded to keep the occupants in place.

The helmsman enjoys a comfortably sited rally-type wheel, well-positioned compass, and single lever throttles which fall easily to the right hand. A stepped console allows clear sight of the usual Volvo instrumentation, which additionally includes their own speed/log. The switch panel, trim tab and outdrive leg controls are all well spaced out just below the wheel.

The skipper's companion has been thoughtfully provided with a robust grabrail, along with a small perspex covered chart area complete with red night light, and Incastec echo sounder as standard. Protection from the wind is a must for comfortable cruising and the 267's toughened glass screen is good for this, due to its height, rake and the fact that it runs a useful way aft. Opening quarter-lights provide any necessary ventilation. Two perspex-fronted lockers to port (one vented outboard for the gas bottles) are inset in the coaming opposite the helm position. These and the cave locker above them provide stowage for bulkier items. Some additional pockets and compartments, especially around the helm for binoculars and the like would be beneficial.

Accommodation

Cabin access is to port, through an aluminium-framed glass door and down a couple of wide, carpeted steps. After the bold, rather hard styling of the modern exterior, the abundant use of quality teak joinery and well-matched, veneered panelling is a warm, friendly surprise. Deckheads, and the few areas that escape Cruiser International's carpenters are finished in a cream, cushion-backed hessian that further enhances the richness of the wood.

The L-shaped galley lies immediately to port, suitably equipped for cruising, with an Optimus three burner gas hob and sink, together with Engel fridge. Outboard are a couple of long, if not over-deep, cave lockers which, although bordered with fiddles, would be better off fitted with proper sliding doors to stop tins and other containers being thrown out in a seaway. Under the fiddled work surface is a large double cupboard — one shelf of which is usefully segmented for the crockery supplied as standard. A bar unit, also with appropriate cutouts, is sited adjacent to the fridge, and faces the dinette

opposite. The garbage bin on the other hand is next to the cockpit access, allowing rubbish to be easily deposited in its rightful place, rather than overboard. Both these designs show a thorough and practical understanding of the needs of the family afloat.

A 240V ring main is included as standard. The galley is supplied with two outlets, with several more available around the rest of the accommodation.

The dinette lies to starboard and seats four comfortably — any more would be a squeeze. This area converts to a double berth. The seat lockers provide ample stowage for bedding and clothes, and these are lined. In fact attention to detail here was commendable on the test boat. It is not often we find hatches veneered on both sides, with finger holes that are properly finished.

A pair of shallow cupboards outboard provide stowage for smaller items, including tapes for the radio/cassette located above the hanging locker, just abaft of the dinette. The locker is half-height and serves the whole boat. As such, it should tidily accommodate all of the crew's shore-going gear.

The sleeping area beneath the raised helm can be curtained off for privacy, and provides sitting headroom. Twin lockers at the mattress head will accommodate enough clothing for a long weekend, while ventilation and light come via a port opening into the cockpit.

The forecabin has the usual vee-berth arrangement, with an infill for a double if required. Lined cupboards under the berths — rather than lockers buried directly under the mattresses — make life easier. Although this is a separate cabin, it can be opened up almost totally into the main saloon to give extra living area during the day. Natural light and ventilation are provided by a large opening escape hatch.

The toilet compartment lies forward of the galley and is ably equipped with a Brydon sea toilet, good-sized sink and shower. Here wood panelling sensibly bows out to a textured vinyl but there is still plenty of teak trim in evidence to take the knocks. Stowage is adequate, with a pair of cave lockers outboard of, and cupboard beneath the fiddled vanity surface. Rarely do we see those useful raised fiddles carried into the smallest room, but it makes good sense. Jewellery and

BOAT REPORT

◀ watches, removed for washing, often slide around and wind up on the floor with the slightest movement caused by a passing boat, even in the marina.

Although well-endowed with teak, the interior is not overly dark or oppressive, which can often be the case when such timber is used in quantity on a comparatively small boat. The teak used is of a lighter shade than often seen, while double-banked side ports — some opening for ventilation — and a pair of front facing windows let in plenty of natural light. The interior is close carpeted, but aluminium-trimmed hatches give access to the automatic bilge pump and through-hull fittings for domestic services. All are double clipped and fitted with pipe runs in armoured hose.

Engines

Over a dozen different outdrive arrangements are available, covering both petrol and diesel, single and twin installations, all taken from the Volvo range. As a result, the Vee Express varies in price by some £13,500, dependent upon engine choice. The smallest installation, suitable for river and estuary cruising, is a single 120hp petrol unit priced at £29,345; a twin installation with the same engines increases this by approximately £4,400, making it a sound coastal cruising choice. At the other end of the scale, Cruisers claim 45 knots with the most powerful option — a pair of petrol AQ271s, producing 540hp in total with an ex VAT price tag of £43,024. Slightly more expensive is the twin 130hp diesel installation at £43,369. Our test boat was mid-range in both power and price, being fitted with a pair of Volvo's new V6 petrol 205s with DuoProps.

The installation was sound, with fuel lines — complete with filters — wiring and control cables kept well clear of the large, twin hatches. These are hinged and ably supported by gas struts, although the transom seat could do with some modification as it complicates access. The power steering is taken off the starboard engine, while an 11 gallon (45lt) calorifier is run from the port unit — this is also fitted with a mains immersion heater as standard. Batteries are secured in their own boxes on a shelf well clear of the bilge. These can be topped up by a charger (also standard) via the shoreline.

There is plenty of room to stand at the front of the compartment for both

the daily once over, and more serious maintenance, with clear access right round both the engines and drive units. An automatic bilge pump is fitted, but a manual back-up should be considered essential. For a boat with such a high specification, we were also surprised to find that the compartment was devoid of any sound insulation. This was an essential optional extra which is now being included as standard.

Automatic fire extinguishers are attached to the hatches. This is not to be recommended in most installations, but in the case of the 267 there is little choice. The compartment is large and the sensor and outlet obviously need to be directly adjacent to the main point of flare-up and excess heat.

Handling and performance

With a touch over 400hp in a 26ft hull we were expecting sportsboat performance and were not disappointed. The 205s were barely run in and a couple of hundred rpm down on their maximum rated 4,800, but our radar gun still registered 37.5 knots as a top speed. Burning around 29gph (130lph), this gives a good range from the 100gal tank — sited under the aft sleeping area — of about 130 miles. Throttling back to 3,500rpm gives a comfortable fair-weather cruising speed of 31 knots and a range of 240 miles, by improving consumption to a reasonable 13gph (60lph) or 2.38mpg.

The 267 enjoys speed but keeping it just planing around the comfortable, head sea 12-15 knot mark was tricky — even with the tabs down. The boat tended to slip off the plane completely or spring ahead at 18 knots plus. Acceleration from a standing start clocked in at 7.5 secs to 20 knots and a touch over 11 secs to 30 knots, making the 267 a proficient tow boat for the water skier! It is noteworthy that the Volvo pitot tube pressure log was seldom more than half a knot out when compared to the radar gun at any given speed. Normally we find large, optimistic discrepancies, even on newly-commissioned boats.

Apart from power trim on the outdrives, the Vee Express is also fitted with trim tabs. The effect of these, and the powerful directional steering thrust of the outdrives themselves, makes this small cruiser

sensitive to any helm or trim adjustment and in particular to any alteration of the amount of planing area in contact with the water — when crossing another boat's wake for instance. However, fine adjustments mastered, the boat threw up no obvious vices, with little slamming and a dry ride.

Without any insulation in the engine compartment, noise levels were high, even at our economical cruising speed of 30 knots (3,500rpm) with dB(A) readings of over 90 in the cockpit and 84 in the accommodation. At full throttle, our sound meter registered a painful 100 dB(A) at the helm.

Conclusions

The 267 Vee Express combines many facets: a performance hull, the bold, practical lines of a modern superstructure but the comfortable warmth of a more traditional interior in a versatile boat, fit for today's demanding family. In particular, the standard of construction is high.

The boat is sensitive to her controls but this is nothing that the prudent skipper cannot learn through some experimentation. We enjoyed our day on the 267, our only areas of concern being the exposed fuel and battery switches within the cockpit and lack of sound insulation. This latter omission is now to be included in what is otherwise a very full specification. ■

Loa	32ft 0in (7.95m)
Hull length	26ft 1in (7.75m)
Beam	10ft 0in (3.05m)
Draft (leg raised)	1ft 6in (0.45m)
Fuel	100 gal (450lt)
Water	50 gal (225lt)
Weight	6600lb (2993kg)
Price with twin Volvo AQ205	£37,750 ex VAT

Builder:
Cruisers International
Earlstrees,
Corby,
Northants.
Tel: 0536 65878

Boat supplied by:
Matchmaker International,
Salterns Marina,
Poole,
Dorset.
Tel: 0202 700604