

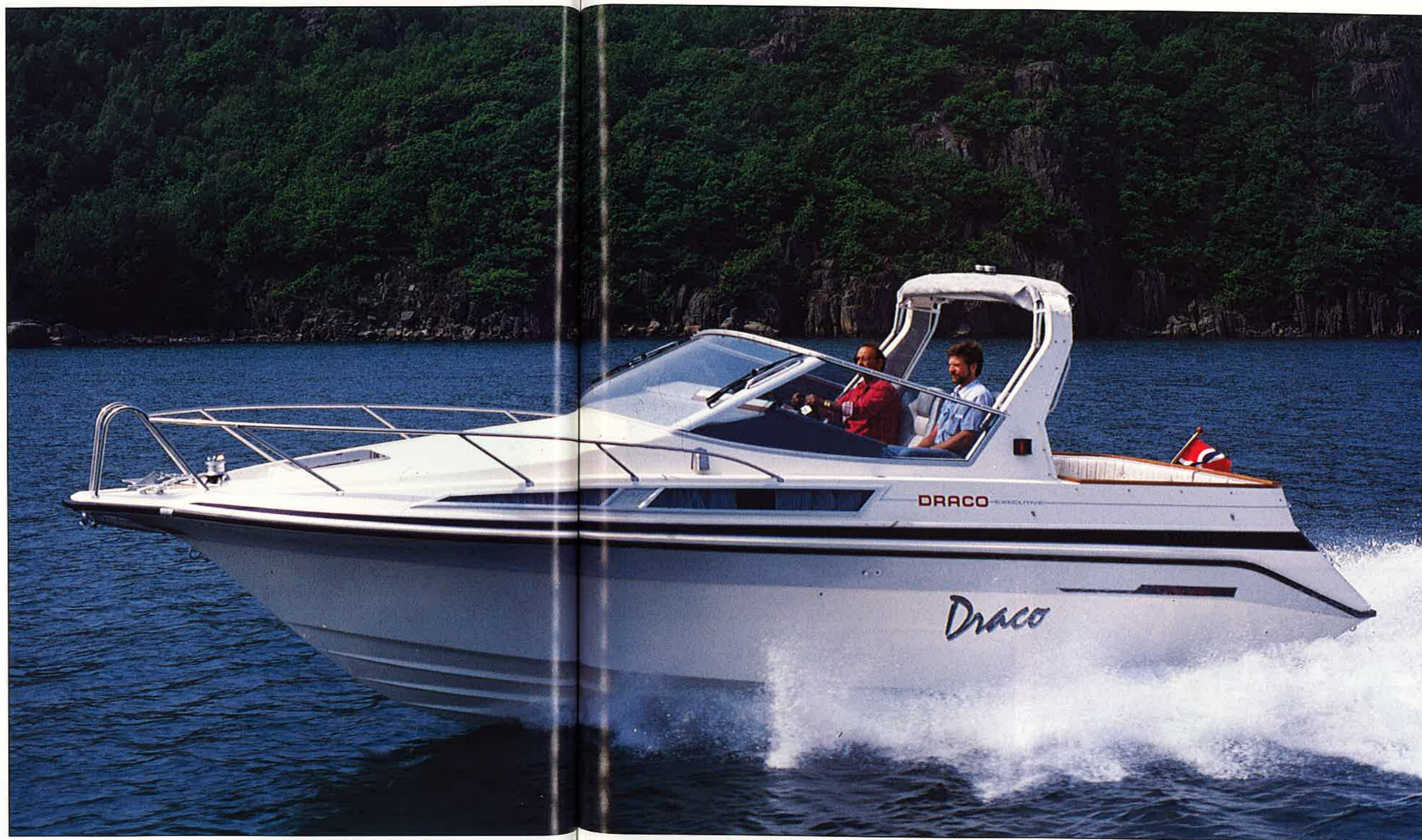
BOAT REPORT

Norwegian boatbuilders have recently been developing bold new lines for their latest releases, and Draco are no exception, with the flagship 2700 model setting a trend for the 90s. Emrhys Barrell reports.

THE Norwegian boatbuilder Draco has gone through several ups and downs over recent years. However, it has now been acquired by the same group that owns Windy Boats, and has entered a period of re-growth. The first priority was to update the range of designs, and the earliest of these new models, the Sterling 27, named in honour of the company's 25th anniversary, came out 18 months ago. While we have reported briefly on other new models in the range, a full test on the 27 has eluded us. Our chance came when we visited the Draco factory this summer, and this was followed by a short update in the UK on the latest version of the boat.

Design of the Sterling was entrusted to Jan Linge, one of Norway's leading naval architects, and he has produced a hull of deep-vee form, with two spray rails and a chine flat that runs the full length of the boat; plus a third half-length rail. This combination ensures easy planing at low speeds, together with a soft dry ride when travelling fast into head seas. She has a fine entry forward and heavily-flared topsides. In profile, the 27 has a distinctive look,

DRACO 2700



STERLING SILVER



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DRACO 2700



The Sterling is a typical example of Scandinavian thinking, with well appointed accommodation below, supplemented by a large cockpit which readily converts to an equally large sheltered area courtesy of a practical canopy arrangement.

with sheerline and coachroof blending into a forward anchor platform, while the topsides extend beyond the transom to accommodate the bathing platform.

The layout of the Sterling is equally divided into the large open cockpit, with seats for up to 10 people, and the cabin, with comfortable accommodation for four. Starting down below, you find a compact toilet compartment with WC, shower, and tiny sink to port. The moulded GRP tray and Formica bulkheads are practical for showering, helped further by overheads and sidelinings which are made of waterproof fabric. Headroom is 5ft 9in, but a curved door maximises the space.

Opposite, another curved door gives access to the aft cabin. This has 6ft headroom at its forward end, but clearance over the double berth where it runs under the cockpit is low. The

berth does compensate for this in other ways, being a full 6ft 6in by 5ft. Stowage is limited in here, with what you assume to be a hanging locker turning out to be the electrical distribution board behind a curtain. The breakers in this are okay, but you do not expect to find wiring and exposed terminals so touchable. At the same time we cannot quite understand why the fuel shut-off valves are mounted above the berth—just right to hang your tie on, but not much help in an emergency.

Ahead of the aft cabin, to starboard, is the angled galley. This has a two-burner gas hob and oven, and a medium-sized sink. Three drawers and a small locker are found underneath, while the fridge is surprisingly located in the aft bulkhead. A small shelf outboard and second locker take the crockery, but clearly this is not a boat for extended periods afloat.

Headroom at the aft end of the saloon is 6ft, reducing to 5ft forward over the large oval settee. This has room for six people to sit round a circular table, which drops down to form a double berth. The seat back hinges out of the way on gas struts to give more room over the bed. Three

small lockers under the settee and a shelf on either side take care of your gear. Joinery throughout the boat is in teak, in that easy, comfortable style that typifies good Scandinavian craft, complemented by clean white upholstery and deckhead lining.

The cockpit is reached by three steps, and through an easily-slid perspex and aluminium door. We liked the well-placed grabrail on this, but were less happy with the ugly lock. To starboard is the helm position, with a two-person seat, but the wheel is placed centrally, making it awkward for the second person to sit down. The whole seat slides to make room for those with long legs, but the wheel was set too low for comfort.

Engine controls are perfectly sited by your right hand, with a good panel of ready-use switches to the left. We did not like the power trim switches on the right, with three switches per engine for trim up, trim down and trailer lift, causing us confusion. The instrument display is excellently placed, in a near-vertical panel ahead of a usefully-sized chart area, though we personally did not like the green and orange dials.

To port, a single bucket seat allows ▶

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◀ a third person to sit facing forward when underway. This seat is mounted on top of two lockers which take bottles and glasses plus general gear. The aft end of the cockpit features all-round seating, with comfortable room for half a dozen or more. A central table on a pedestal drops down to form a sun-lounger, with a cushion on top.

The aft section of seating lifts up to allow access to a walk-through transom door. This lets you out onto the good-sized, integral bathing platform. Lockers set in the transom here provide stowage for small fenders, a folding anchor, and a hot-and-cold freshwater shower, though we would have preferred fender racks here. The port locker is long enough to take a boat hook or fishing rods. Further stowage space is found under the cockpit seats. The cockpit in general is superbly finished in teak, with lined teak ply for the sole, a wooden capping round the coaming, and wooden steps to help you in and out. The upholstery is attractive in grey and white.

The weather in Scandinavia can be as unpredictable as our own, and the Sterling is provided with an excellent two-piece hood. Both sections hinge up and stow neatly against the central goalpost mast. The forward portion provides cover for the helmsman and crew, with a zipped section over the driver allowing him to stand up for a better view. The aft section gives a full 6ft headroom over the cockpit, turning it into useful living space whatever the weather, aided by large areas of clear plastic. This is fitted with zip-up doors,

which give good access to the bathing platform and side-decks.

Moving along the latter is helped by hand rails on the windscreen sides and front, but even so there is a tendency to grab the windscreen wiper as you go forward. The side-decks are narrow, and the guardrails low, making for a precarious few paces before you reach the coachroof top. This has good moulded non-slip over it, helping you to keep your feet.

The divided foredeck locker is a good idea, keeping anchor chain separated from the fenders and warps. The anchor itself self-stows in the forward platform, with a split pulpit allowing safe and easy working. Alternatively you can anchor Scandinavian style, by standing up through the opening hatch at the forward end of the cabin below. Aluminium cleats forward and aft take care of the lines.

Power for the Sterling is provided by a variety of outdrive options, including Volvo, Mercruiser and Yamaha, petrol and diesel, single or twin, with powers ranging from a single 230 up to a pair of 205s. Our test boat had a pair of Mercruiser 205s, which gave an easy top speed of 40-knots. Handling was as good as we expected, the boat coping with both short steep seas and longer rollers.

The engines are mounted under the cockpit, and access on the latest models is gained by hinging up the whole cockpit sole, seats, table and all, assisted by a pair of gas struts. It is a little daunting to climb in under this structure, but once you do, you have excellent access to all necessary

services. Some of the items are vulnerable to being stepped on as you climb in, including the power steering pump and some of the wiring. We were also concerned to see the electrical distribution board on the forward bulkhead — somewhat basic in its layout, with only a simple fuse-board, and again exposed to damage. Next to it is the manual bilge-pump, a useful safety back-up to the electric unit under the engine, but not easy to use in an emergency. Mounting it out in the cockpit would be a better idea.

Good strong battery boxes are located port and starboard, plus the calorifier, and a neat box for the gas bottle. We were pleased to see drip trays fitted under the engines, to stop oil and petrol swilling around the bilge. Soundproofing consists of extensive foil-faced foam on the bulkhead and hatch, which worked well in practice. A remotely-operated BCF fire extinguisher is located next to the helmsman, and piped to the engine compartment. Further portable units are fitted in the cabin.

When we first saw the Sterling, we were impressed by its sumptuous and stylish cockpit. The feeling grew as we looked below, and was finally sealed by using the boat in operation. It looks good, provides a more than adequate turn of speed, handles itself in the sort of weather you might be caught out in, and has some excellent practical touches. Storage space is limited for longer trips, but for weekends and short passage cruising, it would be an ideal choice. ■



The whole cockpit sole lifts to reveal the engines.

LOA	29ft 6in (9.00m)
Hull length	27ft 0in (8.23m)
Beam	9ft 4in (2.85m)
Draught	1ft 8in (0.50m)
Displacement	2.75 tons
Fuel capacity	90gal (400lt)
Price:	
With twin 205	
Mercruiser petrol	£44,470 ex VAT
With single 230hp	
Mercruiser	£39,090 ex VAT

Builder:
Draco AS, PO Box 114, N-4401,
Flekkefjord, Norway.

Supplier:
Bob Spalding Ltd, Suffolk Yacht
Harbour, Levington, Suffolk
IP10 OLN. Tel: 0473 88674.