

BOAT REPORT

IN THE CLASSIC MOULD

Stylish fun in the sun, coupled with practical design and build, in this all-new 26-footer from Sweden.



EPOCA 26



AS Scandinavia's largest boatbuilder, Nimbus produce nearly 500 boats a year, from the 4004 Carisma, their six-berth flybridge flagship, down through the versatile DC range of fast cruisers with their dominant, sociable cockpits — partially enclosed by pilothouse superstructures — to a 22ft, 45-knot sportsboat.

It is towards this smaller end that they have now introduced a classically styled 26ft (7.9m) weekender, the Epoca, which offers exciting performance and generously proportioned comfort, along with the inevitable Swedish close attention to design detail and quality.

Design and construction

Underwater sections are medium-to-deep vee — 22° amidships, 18° at the transom — with a fine entry forward that flares into generous topsides having met the wide chine flat. The angle of gunwale fendering at the transom as it runs down and around the integral bathing platform is almost parallel to the rake of the bow, giving a sleek yet elegant profile to what is in fact a generous freeboard. This in turn allows for a deep, safe cockpit — the outdrive engine being tucked tidily away in an after seat locker — and adequate headroom inside the cabin with no more than a slight rise of coachroof above the sidedecks.

Nimbus use a high-density foam in the sandwich construction of hull and deck to produce strong, lightweight boats which are approved by the Scandinavian classification societies. Modular glassfibre mouldings then form the basis for the interiors, which are positioned to form a rigid, strengthening matrix within the hull. Our test boat on this occasion was the top-of-the-range 'Exclusive' model, which above and beyond the functional standard spec also includes a choice of blue or red topsides, teak decking to cockpit and bathing platform, and docking lights set in the bow.

Exterior

In true Scandinavian style, the Epoca offers a spacious, versatile cockpit area, which Nimbus have cleverly extended onto the full-width bathing platform via a wide transom door set into the U-shaped settee. The platform itself sports locker seats backing onto the transom, with one hatch giving

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access to the outdrive service points, a second into a good-sized self-draining stowage compartment.

The U-settee can seat six at a pinch for al fresco dining around the table commandeered from below, and this converts to an inviting sunbed — protected as it is by the high coaming — or occasional extra berth. Lockers beneath the seats provide more than enough bulk stowage on either side, together with access to the separate battery box and associated master switches, vented gas bottle container and fuel shut-off, while the middle section hinges on a gas strut to give further access to the engine compartment.

The open-air galley area running along the port side opposite the helm has been stepped down, allowing a thoughtful extra measure of headroom when the canopy is raised. Facilities include a stainless sink, two-burner gas hob and fridge, plus plenty of drawer and cupboard stowage beneath the worktop moulding.

The helm area to starboard is nothing short of a delight. Twin flip-up seat squabs incorporating extra high backrests and side supports ensuring driver and co-driver remain in situ whether seated or standing, while the layout of the stepped console is both comprehensive and clear, with everything checkable at a glance, and at the driver's finger tips. The usual Volvo engine gauge fascia is sited just to the left of the varnished wooden wheel, with the single-lever throttle

nestling comfortably just forward of the padded arm rest.

Directly in front of the wheel is a clearly marked ready-use panel complete with legend, to the left a handy-sized, perspex-protected glove box, while ahead of the throttle are the power trim and tab controls. On the angled fascia, speed and depth are supplied courtesy of the standard VDO instrumentation; a stereo cassette and tank gauges are also fitted, as is a large bulkhead-style compass which might be better housed further from any electro-magnetic interference from adjacent instrumentation — possibly on the other side of the generous, perspex-covered chart area which tops the lot.

Handrails abound, not only running around the cockpit coaming and down the topside extensions bordering the bathing platform, but within the cockpit itself. Grabrails are fashioned around the helm seat backs, making a firm purchase just where you need it most — in the middle of the cockpit, along the galley moulding — where it doubles as a fiddle — and either side of the wide perspex sliding door that leads below. Out on deck, prospective owners can either opt for guardrails to border the foredeck or (as on our test boat) a pair of grabrails running along the coachroof.

Further hardware includes pairs of 8in cleats fore and aft — but none amidships for springs — together with anchor and chain located in the fore-deck locker. Amongst the safety

equipment is an electric bilge pump in the engine compartment and two manual units: one as back-up for the electric, the other servicing the bilge forward of the tank space. Two fire extinguishers also come as standard, with that in the engine compartment remotely activated from the helm.

Interior

The cabin area opens sociably into the cockpit via another wide, sliding perspex door, and affords comfortable sitting headroom. Most of the space is taken up with the usual vee-berth dinette that converts to a wide double — Nimbus pushing the seat backs right out to the topsides rather than incorporating outboard shelves, allowing wide cushions for a comfortable area to lounge in when rain stops play. A separate compartment aft of this settee arrangement is equipped with pump-out toilet and sink; those wanting a shower have to nip back to the one on the bathing platform.

In addition to the large under-seat lockers, a half-height hanging

Below left: flip-up base and wrap-around seats keep driver and crew in place at all times. The neatly-sited galley can be seen to port.

Below: cleverly-designed walk-through transom and lockers. Right: the compact but comfortable interior, featuring the U-shaped settee, lockers and toilet compartment.

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cupboard outboard of a bar unit, suitably sited betwixt galley and vee-settee, will accommodate shore-going Number Ones. Smart yet functional as always, the interior enjoys a good deal of teak trim to set off the mouldings against the suedette head and side linings. Apart from a pair of opening side ports, natural light and ventilation are supplemented by a foredeck hatch complete with dorade ventilator for when the weather closes in.

Handling and performance

Before setting off to play in the white water kicked up by the overfalls through the Hurst Narrows, we thought it prudent to give the 275hp Volvo outdrive a quick check over. Though it fits snugly beneath the transom and bathing platform seats, all the service points are accessible, all wiring ducted, and the annealed copper fuel lines fixed out of harm's way.

We were pleased to see a water/fuel separator fitted extra to the usual Volvo filter arrangement, and conscious attention to the use of foam noise-insulation over the entire compartment. Other engine options are again drawn from the Volvo range, a 200hp diesel giving a claimed 35

knots, and a pair of 205hp V6 petrols turning in 45 knots.

Although Atlantic rollers were not in abundance, with spring tides multiplying the inevitable wind over tide chop a nastier than usual slop greeted us around the headlands of the West Solent. The deep vee revelled in the conditions from every direction, practically dancing from one wave top to the next, while a suitable attitude on longer runs with head or following seas was easy to adopt the hull trimming progressively with the application of tabs.

Her response to the helm was both immediate and precise, with hard turns around the photo boat requiring just a casual one-handed 90° flick of the wheel, and the drive trim being left at zero to let the Duoprop do the work as the Epoca spun on her heel.

Back in slightly calmer conditions we conducted our speed runs. Our radar gun clocked a touch over 36 knots, a couple down on the claimed maximum due to the engine not running quite up to its rated 4600rpm and the steady wind over tide chop.

At full throttle, expect the Volvo AQ271 to drink around 19gph (86lph), giving a range of around 125 miles, while throttling back to 3500rpm will produce just over 30 knots and a fast cruising range — on its 62gal (280lt)

tank — of a creditable 200 miles at 9.2gph (42lph). Nudging back further does nothing to extend her range, but the hull was good enough to keep us comfortably on the plane down to a rough-water 18 knots or so (at 2500rpm) without constant attention to tab or drive.

Noise levels were, on the whole, good, our sound meter registering in the low 80s dB(A), with just the exhaust bark pushing it to 86dB(A) at full throttle, the inherently quiet V8 being further assisted by thorough sound insulation. Responding smartly to the throttle, the Epoca popped easily out of the water with barely a change in attitude, staying comfortably trimmed while accelerating from rest to 25 knots in 8.5 seconds — justifying the ski hook on the transom.

Conclusions

Full of the practical design detail that we have come to expect from Nimbus, together with the high standard of build that is very much the norm rather than the exception around Scandinavian yards, the Epoca could scarcely be faulted. Although towards the top end of the price range for this type of sports weekender — especially in its Exclusive livery which adds a further £2600 ex VAT — it is an exciting, able, well-appointed boat which merges performance with a classic elegance.



Good access to the 271hp Volvo through the aft seat/locker.

LOA	25ft 8in (7.9m)
Beam	8ft 5in (2.6m)
Draft	2ft 8in (0.8m)
Weight	5060lb (2.3 tons)
Fuel	62gal (280lt)
Water	22gal (100lt)
Price as tested	£43,873 ex VAT

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