

Boat Report

FAIRLINE SQUADRON 50

The Squadron 47 grew an extended bathing platform last year. Among the first to order the new version were readers Barry and Diane Hurst.





Above: with help from two free-standing stools and a folding table, the saloon settee can accommodate up to eight people for dining. Below: the master cabin has plenty of space, stowage and light. Below right: both WCs have a shower cubicle, an electric toilet and a bidet.

The mid-range model in the distinctive Squadron range of motoryachts is now a couple of years into production, having started life as the 47 before being redesignated to recognise its overall length of 50ft (15.24m). It continues to be one of Fairline's most popular boats, such that it has been difficult to find one which remains in the hands of the distributors long enough to enable us to run trials.

However, we managed to get our hands on the most up-to-date version, which features an extended bathing platform, courtesy of MBM readers Barry and Diane Hurst. No strangers to the marque, having already owned a Corniche and a 36 Turbo, they took delivery of their Squadron 50 Seatarga last autumn, giving themselves plenty of time to settle into her before the new season.

Design

Defining the length of a boat so that we can compare like with like does not seem to get any easier. The 50 (which has exactly the same internal volume) usurped the 47, we were told, to give a clearer indication of length; but now that Fairline, along with other builders, have taken to extending their bathing platforms clear of the integral structure of the hull, will we be in for another round of model designation changes?

This boat's overall length is a shade under 52ft, thanks to a bathing platform which measures 4ft 10in (1.47m) fore and aft, whereas its usable hull length, measured from stem to transom, is 50ft 2in (15.30m).



That is not to decry the benefits of the extended platform, which is a truly generous 'beach' as well as a robust landing for a tender, and includes a hydraulic passerelle as standard.

Bernard Olesinski's hull design uses his tried and tested formula of a relatively deep vee amidships, around 25°, panning out to 18° towards the transom. The props are set in parallel-sided tunnels for a more efficient drive angle and a lower engine installation, which in turn enables the cabin sole to be kept as low as possible. High aspect-ratio rudders are incorporated, to give responsive turning characteristics without excessive drag.

Above the waterline, the added protuberance of the stern takes a little getting used to, but the Squadron image is fully maintained in the smooth yet distinctive lines of the superstructure. The swept screen and louvred rear windows are raked to match the radar arch and protective cockpit overhang, before culminating in the retroussé transom topsides.

Exterior

Ecological extravagance or not, the laid teak of the bathing platform and cockpit gives a luxurious impression as soon as you board the boat, which is easily accomplished thanks to the extended moulding.

The passerelle, a smart hydraulic affair made by Cooney, takes up a fair amount of room of course, but it is a super gadget, and simplicity itself to operate. The inbuilt stanchions pop up and stow automatically, and extend it to around 10ft (3m) in length, giving plenty of clearance at the stern. And it doubles as a dinghy hoist, handling up to 480lb (220kg), with a sliding track to carry your mini-RIB or personal watercraft over the water.

Also set within the platform are a covered boarding ladder and shower, together with a hose-pipe locker. There are further stowages across the transom itself.

The cockpit is generous, as is the almost full-width transom bench, also finished in teak. On our test boat, a hatch in this gives access to a self-contained cabin, a £6095 extra, which has one full 6ft 4in (1.93m) berth and another of just under 6ft (1.87m).

You would not want to house your great aunt down here, but it is a great cabin for juniors, featuring a hidden toilet and a large moulded basin, a modicum of stowage, two opening ports to the cockpit and just less than standing headroom. Panels in the aft bulkhead give access to the steering gear.

Beneath the cockpit sole is a good-sized lazaret, accessed via a large gas strut-supported hatch, which nevertheless leaves enough deck area when open to allow you to walk around it safely. Apart from plenty of storage space, there are a number of auxiliaries down here, including the calorifier, the separately boxed batteries and their isolators, the battery charger, the main fuel shut-offs and a cross-over manifold for the tanks.

Further storage for smaller items is available around the cockpit by way of a number of side lockers, one of which houses the manual bilge pump which can draw from any of the three separate bilge compartments. A gas bottle locker is located beneath the starboard part of the transom bench, and ropes can be stowed behind a hinged portion of the port coaming.



Rather surprisingly, it is not a stairway that links the cockpit and flybridge, but the more traditional ladder. Whilst this is kindly angled and certainly leaves you with an impression of space, it is less easy to use than the now more usual stairs.

A couple of wide treads on each side lead from the cockpit up to the side decks. These are a minimum of 10in (25cm) wide, and safety when moving forward is assured by the guardrail extending back to the break of the superstructure and by an inboard handrail. Both deck and coachroof are covered in a moulded non-slip, and further handrails towards the centre of the coachroof flank an area which doubles as a sunpad.

Forward is a Lofrans vertical windlass feeding its ground tackle into a compartmentalised foredeck

Above: the sculpted bucket seats at the interior helm are very comfortable, but why are the tachos placed as far apart as possible? Below: some owners would prefer to have the galley out of sight, but Seatarga's owners see it as a definite plus to have it on the same level as the saloon and helm station.



locker, the upper part of which will take ropes and fenders. Cleats are plentiful, with one pair forward, two pairs allotted for springs, a standard pair aft and an extra set on the transom for Mediterranean-style mooring.

The flybridge is dominated by a large L-shaped settee, biased to starboard. The wide central helm seat is flanked by single passenger seats, ahead of which are a couple of large opening ports to the saloon. Built into the rear moulding of the helmsman's seat is a wet-bar complete with fridge, sink and bottle storage, while all the other bases have stowage lockers.

The helm is generally well laid-out, the only niggle being that the throttles are a bit of a stretch away, given that the seat cannot be adjusted. We like the way the engine instruments are kept under the brow of a visor to shade them for easy viewing, while the generous areas for other navigation heads benefit from being protected under perspex hatches.

Interior

The whole accommodation is furnished to a particularly high standard, finished in the case of our test boat with maple joinery. Even the hidden areas beneath the seat cushions are covered in fabric, and there is no unfinished GRP or wood anywhere.

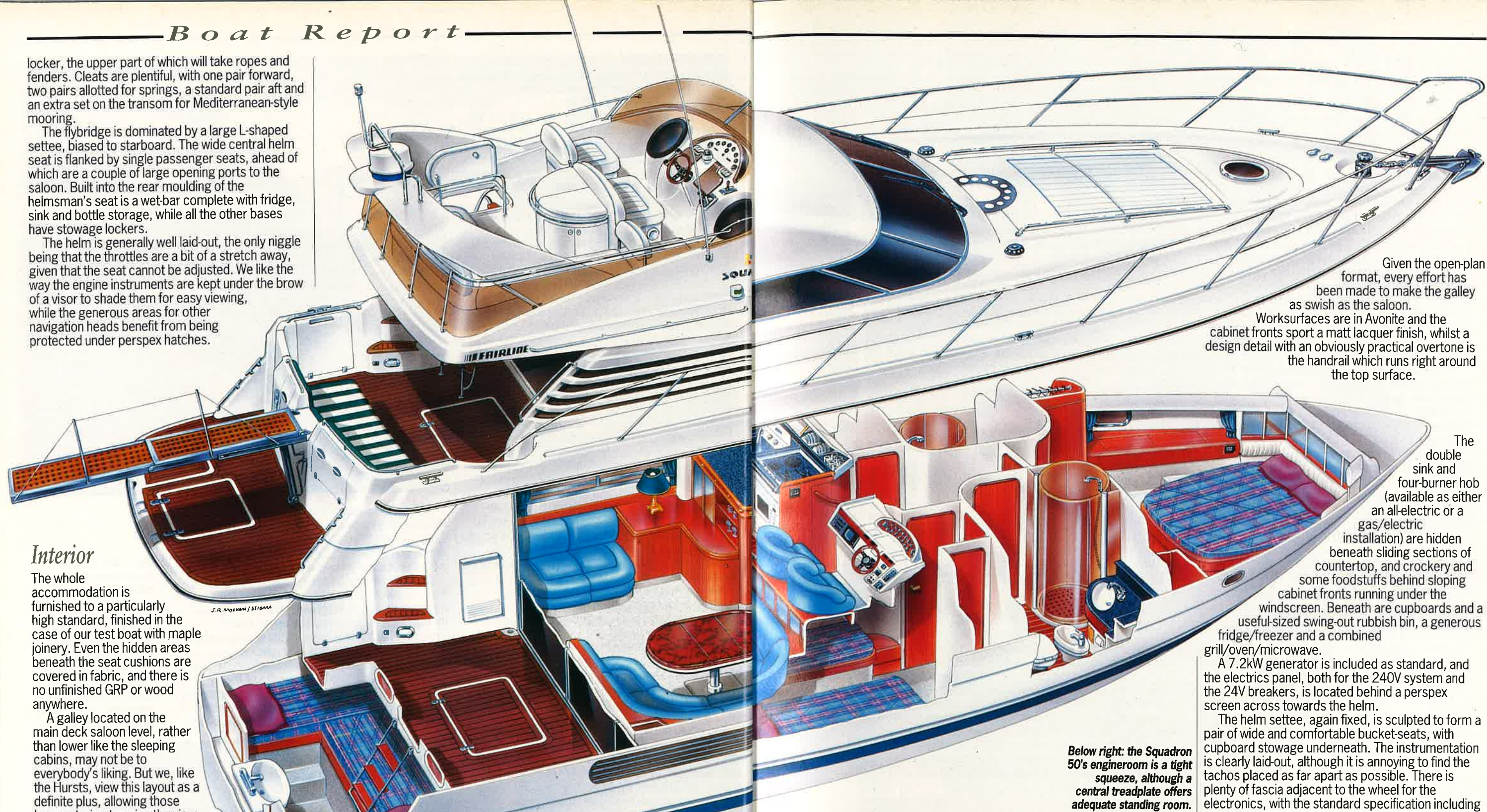
A galley located on the main deck saloon level, rather than lower like the sleeping cabins, may not be to everybody's liking. But we, like the Hursts, view this layout as a definite plus, allowing those busy catering to enjoy the view, remain in touch with those taking their ease in the spacious saloon and chat to the skipper at the interior helm station.

As a bonus, Barry finds the aftmost work surface just right for handling paper charts, which he uses in conjunction with a Yeoman-style plotter, although a half-size chart area is set into the console towards the windscreen.

The two large ports in the flybridge helm console keep the saloon in contact with the upper helm too, while also allowing in plenty of natural light. A further neat device to keep the interior as airy as possible is the electric opening window adjacent to the main sliding door. With the owners' intended cruising grounds encompassing the Med, to be on the safe

side they have also had a reverse-cycle heating/air-conditioning system fitted on Seatarga.

In this particular boat, a full sideboard area to port houses both an entertainments centre and a bar complete with fridge; an alternative layout does away with some of this, to incorporate a small settee instead. In any case the main seating area is to starboard, where the table folds out to accommodate six to eight people for dining, with two free-standing stools being brought into play.



Given the open-plan format, every effort has been made to make the galley as swish as the saloon. Worksurfaces are in Avonite and the cabinet fronts sport a matt lacquer finish, whilst a design detail with an obviously practical overtone is the handrail which runs right around the top surface.

The double sink and four-burner hob (available as either an all-electric or a gas/electric installation) are hidden beneath sliding sections of countertop, and crockery and some foodstuffs behind sloping cabinet fronts running under the windscreen. Beneath are cupboards and a useful-sized swing-out rubbish bin, a generous fridge/freezer and a combined grill/oven/microwave.

A 7.2kW generator is included as standard, and the electrics panel, both for the 240V system and the 24V breakers, is located behind a perspex screen across towards the helm.

The helm settee, again fixed, is sculpted to form a pair of wide and comfortable bucket-seats, with cupboard stowage underneath. The instrumentation is clearly laid-out, although it is annoying to find the tachos placed as far apart as possible. There is plenty of fascia adjacent to the wheel for the electronics, with the standard specification including

Below right: the Squadron 50's engine room is a tight squeeze, although a central treadplate offers adequate standing room.

Fairline Squadron 50

Engines twin Volvo TAMD 122P diesels, 600hp at 2250rpm, 6cyl, 12.0lt.

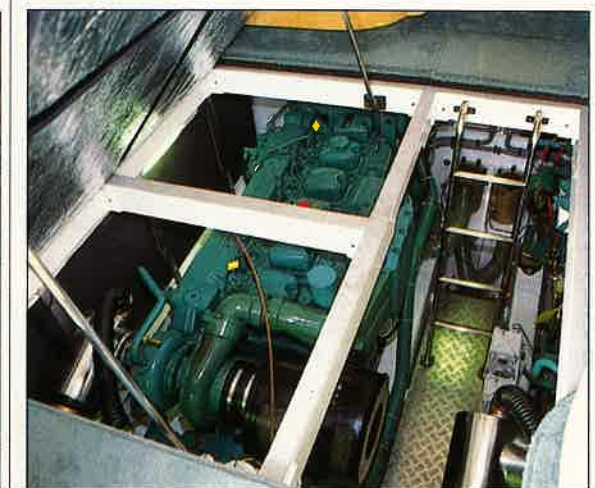
Conditions wind SW Force 3, sea slight. **Load** fuel & water 100%, crew 3.

rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range*	trim	sound levels dB(A)			
							saln	fwdcab	ckpt	flybg
1400	14.6	16.4	75	0.89	284	3.5	74	73	83	74
1600	18.3	24.1	110	0.75	240	5.5	77	76	85	75
1800	22.8	30.6	139	0.74	237	5.0	79	78	87	76
2000	27.0	39.8	180	0.67	214	4.5	80	79	88	77
2250	30.8	51.7	235	0.60	192	4.5	82	80	89	77

Acceleration 0-20 knots, 12.0sec

(* allows 20% margin)

Loa 51ft 10in (15.80m)
Hull length 50ft 2in (15.30m)
Beam 14ft 8in (4.47m)
Draught 3ft 8in (1.12m)
Displacement 17 tonnes
Fuel capacity 400gal (1818lt)
Water capacity 126gal (572lt)
Price £355,845 ex VAT with aft cabin



not just the VHF, log and depth sounder but also an autopilot and a Furuno 1831 radar, together with a combined deck-hailer/foghorn.

In addition to a reasonable chart area, you have a neat covered 'bits' tray. Two pantograph wipers should ably clear the screen.

An attractive, bannistered stairwell leads down to a lobby area forward, from which a bordered hatch gives access to the forward bilge compartment, containing the shower sump and seacocks. Even here, there has been no scrimping on the finish, the GRP being smoothed clear of spiteful barbs and well painted out, and we liked the large limber holes incorporated in the hull stiffeners to allow a ready inspection of the adjacent areas of bilge and hull.

The first doors to port and starboard from the lobby are to the two guest cabins, which are almost identical. Each is furnished with a pair of 6ft 2in x 2ft 5in (1.89m x 0.73m) berths, separated by a small bedside table with drawers, the only difference being that the starboard cabin has direct en-suite access to the guest toilet compartment.

There is just about sitting headroom over the berths, and plenty of standing room towards the head of each cabin. Both have a full-height wardrobe separated into hanging and shelf areas, while hatches let in the inboard berths give access to the water tanks.

The guest WC and the master cabin's en-suite facilities each include a separate shower cubicle as well as an electric toilet and bidet. There is plentiful handy stowage, an opening port and an extractor in each case. As in the galley, the basin areas have Avonite surfaces; the easy-clean mouldings are softened by elegant wood trim.

The forward master cabin benefits from plenty of headroom throughout. A 6ft 5in x 5ft 2in (1.95m x 1.55m) queen-size berth dominates, flanked by deep shelves set with dressing tables, but there is still plenty of room right around it. For clothes storage there is a pair of full-height cupboards, one equipped as a hanging locker and the other fitted with shelves. Two deep drawers are provided at the foot of the berth, while a canvas-lined locker forward of these will swallow any spare bedding.

A stainless steel bordered hatch in the sole gives access to the bow-thruster, an 8hp unit which comes as standard.

Engines

The 50 has some 1200hp under the sole, courtesy of either Volvo Penta or Caterpillar, and our test boat had a pair of Volvo's newish TAMD 122P units. In their previous guise these were rated to 480hp, but the latest version of the 12lt block has been engineered for a hefty 25% jump in output, topping out at 2250rpm.

Day-to-day access to the installation is via a large hatch in the saloon, set slightly to port. For more major servicing to the starboard engine, a couple of sections of settee have to be moved to enable a second hatch to be lifted.

Not only is the main hatch a fair weight in itself, but you have to grapple with a pair of drop-down arms to act as supports. Surely there must be gas struts man enough for the job?

A central treadplate offers adequate standing room between the engines, although checking the header tanks takes some dexterity as they are tight to the deckhead. Both engines are also well up to

the forward bulkhead, making fanbelt and impeller maintenance somewhat fiddly.

Altogether simpler to inspect and maintain are the fuel/water separators and raw-water strainers, the latter being located centrally on the forward bulkhead, next to the fuel cocks which allow either engine to draw from either tank if required.

The location of the encapsulated generator, to the rear of the compartment, makes rummaging around the sternlands (especially the starboard one) a bit of a squeeze.

A quilt-style noise insulation system has been fitted right through the compartment, including around the outboard-located fuel tanks.

Handling and performance

Barry specified TX electronic throttles on Seatarga. He was a mite wary of them at first, fingertip control of 1200hp requiring a softly-softly approach with their built-in delay, but now extols their virtues. Indeed, these and the bow-thruster make handling 17 tons of boat a relatively simple operation for a crew of two.

At speed, she remains well mannered, negotiating easy and tight turns without a murmur and easing into planing mode without fuss, as one would expect with this amount of power on tap: in our acceleration test she reached 20 knots from rest in 12sec.

Flat out, we achieved just under 31 knots, on what was a well-loaded boat. An easily maintained 1800rpm gave 22.8 knots, for a cruising guideline of 0.86mpg. Noise levels were reasonable too, barely nudging up to 80dB(A) in the accommodation, even at the higher revs.

Both helm positions are comfortable, despite the non-adjustable seating, and both offer excellent all-round visibility.

On neither the Squadron 50 nor the earlier 47 have we been caught out in much of a blow, which is a pity because this is where Olesinski hulls usually come into their own. Our previous experience of similar-sized boats from his drawing board suggests all should be well. However, it will be interesting to see what effect an extended bathing platform will have in severe downwind conditions.

Given the current popularity of these on various new boats, we will no doubt be able to bring you an assessment sooner rather than later. Indeed, we will almost inevitably catch up with Seatarga and her crew on one of this year's MBM Club cruises, which usually manage to turn up a good mixture of weather conditions.

Conclusions

With 50ft at your disposal, you would expect to have room and comfort enough, and indeed you have, with a combination of three good cabins (and of course that option of a fourth), together with a wholly convivial saloon arrangement. Cap this well proportioned layout with excellent joinery and materials, and you have styling which imparts an easy opulence but does not offend. You really feel you are on something that little bit special.

Apart from tight squeezes in the engineroom, Fairline's engineering standards appear as sound as ever, a truly high level of care has been taken throughout the fit-out, and the Olesinski hull does not disappoint, giving a well mannered performance true to the Squadron image. □

Builders

Fairline Boats plc, Oundle,
Peterborough PE8 5PA.
Tel: 01832 273661.

UK distributors

B A Peters plc, Chichester
Marina, Birdham, Chichester
Sussex PO20 7EJ.
Tel: 01243 511381.