

**BOAT REPORT**

# FAIRLINE SQUADRON 56

Manufacturers have traditionally moved up in size when developing a range, but Fairline have progressed downwards for the second in the Squadron series. How does it compare with the impressive 62?







WHEN Fairline introduced the Squadron 62 a year and a half ago, it marked a major step forward for this highly successful company. The significant breakthrough was in interior design, where a combination of luxury yacht styling and the use of materials hitherto considered exotic set the craft apart from all the other models in the range, and most of its competitors in the UK.

One year on, the process has been repeated with the Squadron 56, which takes all the best features from the 62 but puts them in a smaller and more affordable package. We took the second completed 56 out from Chichester, Sussex, on a sunny day in February.

It was a test which also gave us the opportunity for a more detailed look at MAN's 680hp diesels, the boat's top-of-the-range power option. These refined four-stroke V8s have rapidly gained acceptance in the medium-to-large motoryacht market, with smooth running, excellent acceleration, low noise emissions and low fuel consumption. We put our fuel meters on the engines and measured some remarkable performance figures.

## Design

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Underwater, Olesinski has used his newly developed computer program to create a pronounced variation in the deadrise along the length of the 56, from a deep-vee 25° at amidships to 18½° at the transom. Three sprayrails run nearly full length, and these, together with the chine flat, have well-radiused roots to soften the ride and reduce the loading at this highly stressed area.

The propellers run in the now-familiar tunnels, allowing the engines to be mounted at a more favourable angle and therefore giving reduced

draught plus extra clearance in the accommodation. To ensure there are no problems with handling and turning with the tunnel layout, Olesinski has developed a new series of rudders for this and subsequent boats. These feature an improved aerofoil section, allowing the rudder to turn through a greater angle without stalling, plus deeper blades, to project further into the water flow when the boat heels into a turn.

While we were talking to the designer, he pointed out a clever but less obvious design feature. Because of the number of Fairlines sold for use in the South of France, the company wanted to make the 56 transportable by road without the flybridge having to be removed. This has been achieved by a combination of keeping the fixed height of the boat to a bare minimum while at the same time developing with the







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The 56's performance with twin 680hp MAN diesels was impressive, with acceleration up to 20 knots in less than 10 seconds and a top speed of more than 30 knots. Power steering means the Squadron can be thrown around like a sportsboat.

transport company T J Clune a trailer with adjustable suspension which can be lowered to clear the worst bridges in France.

Accommodation

The layout of the 56 comprises an aft cockpit, a flybridge, a split-level saloon with an open-plan galley, and three double cabins forward. In addition an optional single crew cabin can be fitted, accessed from the aft of the cockpit.

Entry to the saloon from the cockpit is via a sliding patio door to port. The aft saloon window to starboard can be lowered electrically, opening up both areas for entertaining in fine weather.

As with the 62, the interior of the 56 is finished in maple: bird's-eye veneers for the top surfaces, crown cut for the verticals and solid timber for the trim. This is set off by contrasting inset panels of green Avonite, while the upholstery is in pastel shades of Alcantara imitation suede. The standard of woodwork is excellent, with the finish continuing inside the lockers and drawers.

The design theme is linking semi-circles, with the eye being led from one area to the next without a break. To starboard in the lower saloon is an arced settee with a matching coffee table. Up two steps to port is the dining area, again with a semi-circular settee but with a larger and taller round table which can be hinged down at the centre if the whole area is not required. Between these to port is a curved flight of stairs up to the flybridge.

Mounted on a substantial stainless steel centre post, this staircase has solid wooden steps but is open-backed so as not to obstruct the view through the saloon. The steps have ingenious brass strips let into their surface, which are intended to provide a non-slip effect but can be painful under bare feet.

To port in the lower saloon is a deep sideboard, with central double doors concealing the television and entertainments centre. Either side of this are a fridge and an icemaker, plus a curved cocktail cabinet. Low fiddles around all the top surfaces keep things from sliding off, and 6ft 8in (2.03m) headroom gives the area an open and expansive feel.

On the upper level of the saloon, to starboard,

is the galley. Open-plan layout means the chef is in full contact with the dining area to port and the helm and lower saloon forward and aft, although a cleverly placed Venetian blind can be lowered and closed to block the view from the saloon — a useful feature if you are entertaining, and do not want the preparation area to be in full view of your guests.

The galley is well laid-out and equipped, its rectangular shape making optimum use of the space and allowing two people to work together. The worktop is in moulded Avonite, and a reasonable size, with a stainless steel handrail-cum-fiddle. The four-ring halogen hob has a lifting cover, and below are a fridge, a combination oven and a concealed mini-dishwasher. Storage is not particularly generous for a boat which could have eight people living aboard.

However, set in the floor alongside the galley is a hatch that gives access to a large store running the full width of the boat. A ladder allows you to climb down and reach the calorifier and battery charger. There is plenty more room down here for stowing gear, plus overflow supplies from the galley if some bins were to be fitted.

Opposite the galley to port is a dining area for four to six people, raised one step to give an excellent view out. Sliding windows port and starboard provide ventilation and allow communication with the deck crew. The seat cushions lift out to give access to storage space, but the finish here is not particularly good, with rough edges to the wood and projecting staples from the upholstery.

The main electrical distribution board is located forward in the dining area, in a sloping dash panel, and contains circuit-breakers for the AC and DC systems plus a mimic panel.

To starboard is the lower helm position, which has a bench seat for two people, or three at a squeeze. The instruments are well laid-out, with the engine dials set in a curved panel forward, and there is space on the sloping front panel for the growing array of navigational aids demanded by today's sailors.

Ahead is a line of ready-use rocker switches, whose curved form neatly matches the rounded edge of the console here. They are sensibly

grouped according to function (five for lights, five for pumps and blowers, and five for wipers, washer and horn), making it much easier to select the right one at night.

Morse single-lever engine controls are well placed next to the helmsman's right elbow. A half-size chart area forward has a perspex lid and a shallow tray underneath. A couple of moulded trays will take loose items, but there are no holders for glasses or mugs.

The cabins are reached via a flight of stairs forward, and the area at the bottom of these is arranged in the same 'Maltese cross' layout as on the 62, with curved bulkheads between doors leading off on three sides. This design makes a feature area of a space that can so often become an unwelcoming box, and is a good example of the detail design thinking that now goes into all Fairlines.

A hatch in the floor at the foot of the stairs gives excellent access to the inside of the hull and many of the essential service ancillaries, including an automatic electric bilge pump, shower-drain pumps and three pumps for the optional air-conditioning.

To port and starboard are matching guest cabins, each with two single berths, double wardrobes, a full-length shelf, overhead lockers, 7ft 0in (2.13m) headroom over 80% of its area and two opening portlights.

The port cabin has its own door to the guest WC forward. This is a generous size, and comes complete with toilet, bidet and separate cylindrical shower stall. A large sink is set in a moulded green Avonite top, and there are good-sized lockers above and below. The whole compartment is finished in moulded GRP, for a finish that is both attractive and practical.

The master suite in the bow is a spacious cabin with a central double berth, matching double wardrobes and an en-suite toilet that is similar to the guest one both in size and appointments. Even this far forward you have 6ft 6in (1.98m) headroom over the foot of the berth. There is an overhead hatch with privacy blind, and a hatch in the sole gives good access to the (optional) Vetus bow-thruster.

The attractive finish of the saloon is continued in the forward compartments, with the maple veneers of the bulkheads broken up by contrasting mahogany stripes. We particularly liked the large, chunky door handles, stylish and modern but still practical.

Exterior

The cockpit, a full 9ft (2.7m) long, provides a splendid reception or entertaining area. Laid teak for the sole and seats adds to the welcoming feel, making this a place in which to linger rather than just a through-route to the saloon or flybridge. Lockers in the wings port and starboard provide stowage, and also take the manual bilge pump. In the aft coamings are clever hinge-out stowage bins, with horns to hold coiled mooring lines.

Walk-through transom doors port and starboard lead onto the integral bathing platform, again teak-floored. Unfortunately, half the depth of the platform is taken up by stowage racks for four large fenders. A boarding ladder stows under a hatch in the floor.

The rear cockpit seat has a lifting central section which gives access to the crew cabin, a

Fairline Squadron 56

Engines: twin MAN D2848 LX diesels, 680hp at 2300rpm, 8cyl, 1462cc.

Conditions: wind SW Force 2, sea slight. Load: fuel 75%, water 10%, crew 3.

| rpm  | knots | gph  | lph | mpg  | range | trim | sound levels dB(A) |        |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-----|------|-------|------|--------------------|--------|------|-------|
|      |       |      |     |      |       |      | saloon             | fwdcab | ckpt | flybg |
| 1000 | 9.3   | 7.6  | 36  | 1.16 | 697   | 1.0  | 72                 | 64     | 81   | 69    |
| 1200 | 11.1  | 10.5 | 48  | 1.06 | 634   | 2.0  | 74                 | 66     | 82   | 70    |
| 1400 | 15.0  | 19.7 | 90  | 0.76 | 457   | 3.5  | 76                 | 68     | 83   | 71    |
| 1600 | 17.5  | 24.6 | 112 | 0.71 | 427   | 4.0  | 77                 | 69     | 84   | 72.5  |
| 1800 | 22.3  | 31.3 | 142 | 0.71 | 427   | 4.0  | 77.5               | 70     | 84   | 73    |
| 2000 | 23.8  | 36.9 | 168 | 0.64 | 387   | 4.0  | 78                 | 72     | 86   | 74    |
| 2100 | 26.2  | 41.7 | 190 | 0.63 | 378   | 4.0  | 78                 | 73     | 86   | 74    |
| 2200 | 27.4  | 44.0 | 200 | 0.62 | 372   | 3.5  | 78                 | 73     | 87   | 75    |
| 2350 | 31.5  | 54.1 | 246 | 0.58 | 349   | 3.5  | 79                 | 77     | 88   | 76    |

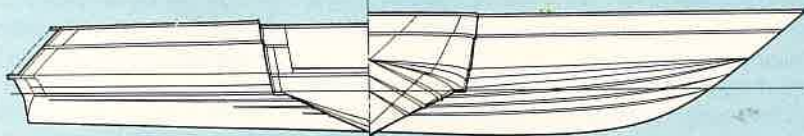
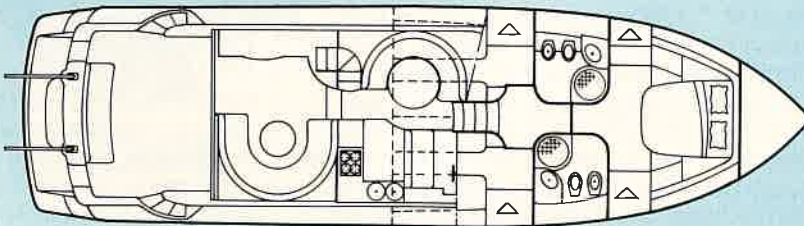
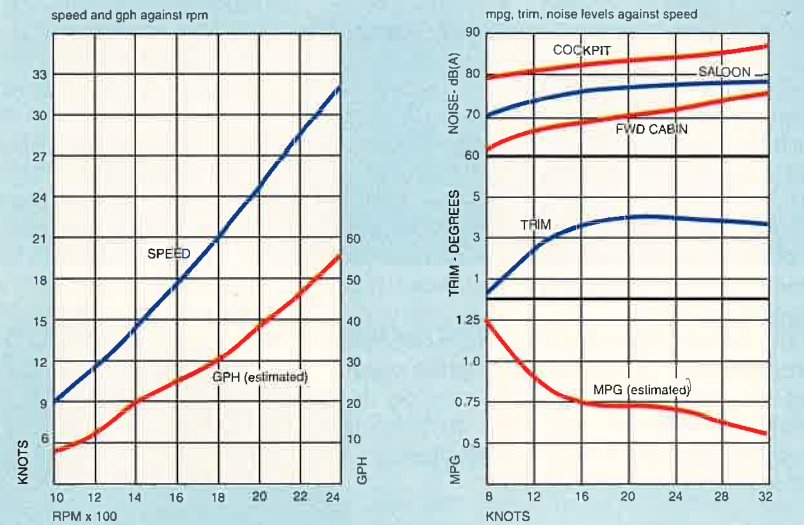
Acceleration: 0-20 knots, 9.5sec.

|             |                    |                |                     |
|-------------|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Loa         | 58ft 10in (17.93m) | Displacement   | 22 tonnes           |
| Hull length | 55ft 6in (16.90m)  | Fuel capacity  | 2 x 600gal (2725lt) |
| Beam        | 15ft 6in (4.72m)   | Water capacity | 166gal (755lt)      |
| Draught     | 3ft 10in (1.16m)   |                |                     |

Price: £357,900 ex VAT with twin 480hp Volvo TAMD 122s; £437,770 as tested.

Builders: Fairline Boats, Oundle, Peterborough PE8 5PA. Tel: 0832 273661. Fax: 0832 273432.

Suppliers: B A Peters, Chichester Marina, Birdham, Chichester, Sussex PO20 7EN. Tel: 0243 511381. Fax: 0243 511382.





£5250 option. This is compact, with a single berth, a WC under a seat and a corner sink. Headroom is just 5ft (1.52m).

A large hatch in the cockpit sole lifts on a gas strut to give access to the lazaret. This would provide plenty of storage space, if much of the space were not taken up by the freshwater tanks port and starboard, leaving only the central space suitable for cushions and covers. A hatch at the forward end gives crouching access to the engineroom.

Stepping out of the cockpit onto the side decks is made easy by teak-treaded steps. The decks are a good width, 12in (300mm), with an angled gunwale lip. Solid guardrails with lower wires are matched by inboard rails on the cabin side.

Mooring is taken care of by 12in (300mm) stainless steel cleats forward and aft, plus 10in (250mm) ones amidships. The Lofrans anchor winch is semi-recessed into the foredeck, with a slot for the chain and the anchor shank. Either side are good-size hatches into a deep, divided locker, though their lids are held closed only by spring-type catches rather than by locks.

The moulded non-slip extends right over the coachroof, which has a large central sunpad and low stainless steel rails on both sides, plus a clever bottle and glass holder at its head.

There are two routes up to the flybridge: via a ladder from the cockpit and via the flight of stairs from the saloon. The area itself is spacious, with a double sunpad aft, a large L-shaped seat to starboard and a central console with wet-bar and cocktail lockers.

Ahead of this is a helm seat which would have been wide enough for two people had the wheel not been positioned exactly amidships. As it is, you can only seat the driver, with one person perched on each side, but moving the wheel 9in (23cm) either way would solve the problem. Another forward-facing seat is provided by the forward end of the starboard seat, which has a flip-over backrest.

The helm position itself has all the necessary instrumentation, with neat lids over the panels that house the VHF, the autopilot and log, and the chart area. Again, though, there are no holders for glasses, surely one of the most basic requirements on any fast boat?

## Engines

The standard power provision is a pair of 480hp Volvo TAMD 122Ds, but our test boat had the optional 680hp MANs, which boost top speed from a claimed 25 knots to over 30 knots.

Access to the engines is via a hatch in the forward lazaret bulkhead. A small wooden step is designed to help you down, but it is easier to step straight onto the solid tops of the battery boxes.

Immediately on either side you have access to the excellent stainless steel inlet water strainers made by Malcolm Cole Ltd. These feature easily-released transparent tops, so you can check the condition inside before opening them. The large Separ fuel separators on either side are similarly easy to access.

Getting to the forward end of the compartment is not so easy, with just 12in (300mm) between the exhaust manifolds, and deep frames in the walkway between the engines. Once through, you find the generator to port, plus half of the fuel changeover system (the return changeover

valves are here, but the supply valves are back in the lazaret, an unnecessarily complicated arrangement which could cause misunderstandings in rough conditions).

## Handling and performance

We took the 56 out on two occasions, and although neither could be called rough they at least threw up a fair selection of moderate waves.

Seakeeping in all directions was excellent, the boat running straight and true, and handling well. Just occasionally in the shortest of the head seas it started to pound, but this was more due to the fact that, high up on the flybridge, it is too easy to forget how fast you are going. At 30 knots on any boat you are going to hit the occasional wave hard, and backing off to a still-impressive 25 knots evened things out.

When we took the first 56 out from the Southampton Boat Show last year, we found the steering too heavy. This has been solved by fitting power steering as standard, which has transformed it. The wheel is now fingertip-light, and it is possible to throw the boat about like a sportsboat. The rudders grip at all speeds and no matter how hard you turn, allowing you to spin the boat on the spot. More importantly, they give you total control when running before the waves, even at full speed or across quartering seas.

The big MANs turned in an impressive performance. A 31½ knots maximum speed is good in itself, but acceleration from 0-20 knots in 9.5 seconds is quite remarkable. Of course, the simple statistic is not what really counts; what it indicates is the reserves of power and torque at mid-range speeds which enable this big boat to maintain its speed in rough conditions, without constantly climbing on and off the plane or up and down the waves.

Fuel consumption figures make equally fascinating reading. From 23 to 30 knots they are virtually constant at 0.62-0.64mpg, giving a maximum range of around 380 miles and allowing you to set your speed according to the conditions rather than trying to achieve optimum performance. Even at the maximum they worsen only by 6%, a tribute to the match of hull and engines, while dropping to 17 knots improves things only by 10%.

Noise levels are generally good. We recorded 79dB(A) in the saloon at maximum speed, 78dB(A) at cruising speeds.

## Conclusions

Fairline have repeated the success of the Squadron 62 with the smaller model. More significantly, they have successfully taken luxury yacht styling and finish into a smaller boat while their direct competitors in the same size range are still doing the opposite, carrying the interior designs of their smaller motor cruisers forward into larger craft.

At the same time, however, Fairline have kept the price of the 56 competitive. This may be just a marketing strategy at a time when sales are hard to come by, but if so, judging by the response from customers at the latest Southampton and Earls Court boat shows, it has succeeded. With a Squadron 47 to be launched shortly, the company look to have given themselves what may prove a decisive edge in the market. □

## Next month

*We take full fuel and performance figures on Mercruiser's new V8 diesel, and also conduct a comparative trial of eight 23ft cruisers.*