

BOAT REPORT

FALCON 27



NORFOLK HAWK

Falcon Sports Boats' latest addition to the range has been designed to offer more space above and below decks compared to its successful smaller sister, resisting the temptation to shoe-horn in a lot of extra berths. We dodged the March gales to take a test in the Solent.

STARTED just seven years ago by two shipwrights from Broom Boats, the Norfolk-based company of Falcon has gone from strength to strength, and now produces around a hundred craft a year. The 18 footer that started it all is now sadly out of production, but the 22 has been a strong seller since its debut at the 1984 Southampton International Boat Show. Still available in its original form, this model was also recently modified and upgraded to become the Falcon 23 (see MBM Mar 89). Two years back, they took the bold step of producing an eye-catching, Italian-styled 35 footer and just recently to fill the gap in the range, a 27ft fast family cruiser.

The latest Falcon is very much the bigger brother of the original 22, keeping the same pleasing low profile and general layout; with spacious, uncluttered cockpit, open-plan main cabin with dinette that converts to the customary double, and a comfortable under-cockpit cabin. The boat is well balanced in terms of accommodation. Capable of sleeping six, that same number is readily catered for, whether wining and dining, sunbathing, or travelling at speeds of over 30 knots.

Design

Responsible for Falcon's successful 22, and the modifications to the old JCL Mamba which formed the base of the 35 footer, designer Andrew Wolstenholme was the obvious choice for the latest model in the range. He has incorporated deep vee underwater sections with a constant deadrise of 21° from midships to transom, and a generous beam to give the Falcon 27 an efficient, high aspect ratio planing area together with a sea-kindly ride. The wide chine flat and twin pairs of spray rails further increase lift, and provide directional stability.

Careful consideration to the aesthetic and ergonomic styling of the topsides and coachroof has paid off; a slight rise in the latter hardly shows above the sheer, while the height of the hull is effectively reduced by incorporating a smart stainless steel and rubber gunwale section well below the actual deckline. Both factors belie the headroom and general spaciousness below, while leaving a large, sociable, uncluttered cockpit. A moulded-in bathing platform has allowed Wolstenholme to blend the topsides into a wedge shape at the stern. This solid transom overhang offers good protection to the outdrives. ▶

BOAT REPORT

FALCON 27



Above: the Falcon's main cabin features a wide companionway with plenty of room for simultaneous activity at the wet bar to port, and galley opposite. Ash joinery helps to enhance the spacious feel. Right: access to the under-cockpit cabin is gained through a full-height door to starboard. Far top right: the cabin door is bordered by a useful grabrail.

Exterior

Climbing aboard the 27, the first thing you notice is that the guardrails are in fact an extension of the cockpit coaming handrails which — as they continue forward — fall well inboard of the deck edge. This is not as unsafe or awkward as it may seem. The rail is at a convenient height, enabling you to hang on rather than drift your hand over the usual outboard guardrail. The deep, moulded toerails offer extra security, and once the flat of the coachroof is reached, the foredeck crew can just step over the rail to work the pulpit area. Having said all that, we would stress that it is not an ideal

concept for junior crew where a full guardrail is really essential.

Deck hardware both here and around the rest of the boat is well sited. The foredeck carries a single substantial 10in cleat, along with a vertical electric windlass, and as well as 8in cleats on the stern quarters, there is a smaller spring cleat fitted either side amidships. The foredeck locker to port has a good-sized hatch, allowing easy access for ropes and fenders, but it would benefit from being divided, giving the 100ft (30m) of chain that comes as standard, along with a Bruce anchor, some protection against becoming fouled by any stowed warps.

The bathing platform, being part of main boat structure, is predictably robust, and comes equipped with a wide functional ladder, fender baskets and shower. Falcon have taken its rubber fendering a sensible length along the quarters, giving protection to easily-grazed sides.

Boarding could be made easier if grabrails were fitted on the GRP cockpit hoop, and while a narrow wood

tread gives some purchase on the coaming, a step down into the cockpit would also be useful. Once aboard there is plenty of space. Falcon have kept the cockpit at a single level, avoiding the raised helm area which so often creates a physical barrier between skipper and crew.

The after cockpit is dominated by an L-shaped settee lying along the transom and port coaming. For al fresco dining, its accompanying table caters for six, while for serious sunbathing, this drops to form a sunbed or for balmier nights, a third double berth. A full head-height canopy can totally enclose the cockpit area. This was difficult to erect on the test boat, but Falcon are modifying both it, and also the boat's rather low windscreen — pushing it further forward and increasing its height to raise headroom.

The sliding helm seat to starboard can accommodate two at a squeeze, but with the wheel located centrally and the single lever throttles positioned to the right, there is little room for the second person. However,



a further seat to port — with gas bottle stowage under — accommodates a companion. These seats have raised sides to keep the occupants in place and, in common with the rest of the cockpit upholstery, are finished in a smart two-tone hard-wearing vinyl which will take a good deal of abuse.

The helm itself is well laid out, with two angled tiers of instrumentation split by a perspex-covered chart area. The lower fascia incorporates the usual Volvo engine instruments, a breaker panel and ready-use switches, together with fuel gauges and engine hour meters. The second tier houses a Silva log, echo sounder and electronic compass, along with an indicator panel showing the status of navigation lights and bilge pumps. Trim tab and outdrive leg controls are sensibly sited just forward of the throttles, together with remote windlass and engine hatch controls.

Three large lockers let into the coaming sides beneath the port bench seat take care of bulkier items, but the helm area is lacking any handy stowage for smaller gear.

Interior

Access to the main cabin is via a robust acrylic sliding door bordered with a useful stainless grabrail. When the door is shut, this rail makes a sound purchase for those standing or sitting around the helm. With its open plan layout, ash joinery, deep upholstery and plenty of light through both fixed and opening hatches and ports, the main cabin is bright and spacious, yet still warm and inviting.

A large horse-shoe shaped dinette in the bow seats six in comfort, and provides stowage for clothing and bedding under the seat cushions, in painted-out lockers.

Sitting headroom around this main entertaining area is adequate, although the taller members of the crew will find it a little restricted further towards the bow. The dinette converts to a double berth, and forward of this is a deep, lined cave locker to starboard, with a smaller one to port thoughtfully providing stowage for a first aid kit. The high, well cushioned seat backs provide a deep

fiddle for shelves running outboard.

The galley area lies to starboard, and includes a two-burner gas hob, grill and sink, all from the enamelled Optimus range. There is plenty of stowage under for pots, pans and the bulkier dry stores, together with a fridge, while tea, coffee and mugs will have a safe home in a pair of perspex fronted lockers outboard of the sink.

If the cooking arrangements are adequate for weekending, the 'wet' area opposite is something else again, with a handsomely-proportioned divided bar unit outboard of a fiddled work surface. Under this is a further cupboard for general stowage and a large galley draw for place mats and cutlery.

Doors either side of the main companionway give access to the toilet compartment lying to port — complete with shower — and a separate, under-cockpit sleeping cabin, to starboard. Falcon tell us that the toilet has been modified with a more sensible and pleasing full GRP moulding, rather than the Formica and vinyl version we saw.



BOAT REPORT

◀ The under-cockpit cabin sleeps two, with sitting headroom provided by the raised base of the helm seat. The dressing area adjacent to the door gives standing headroom, while natural light and ventilation is provided by a large escape hatch into the cockpit, and a smaller opening side port. Stowage is adequate for a weekend cruise, with a half-height hanging locker — which caters for the whole crew's Number Ones — and a pair of cave lockers.

The whole accommodation is carpeted, but an aluminium-trimmed hatch gives access to the automatic bilge pump. The textured deck head is actually a GRP moulding, and Falcon are now progressing this to fit a complete interior moulding. This should give more space still, and ultimately, a lighter boat.

Engines

Single and twin outdrive options are available in both petrol and diesel, all drawn from the Volvo range. Prices start at £31,386 when fitted with a single petrol AQ271, with the smallest twin installation, at 120hp apiece, only £600 more. The single 200hp diesel model comes in at just over £34,000 while the most expensive installation of all is predictably, with twin diesels — AQAD31As producing 260hp in total, priced at £39,695 (all ex VAT). Our test boat was fitted with the most potent option — a pair of the increasingly popular V6 petrol AQ205s.

The engine hatch runs nearly the full width of the cockpit, so Falcon have thoughtfully provided one of Bennett's hydraulic rams — run off the trim tab pump — for push-button convenience. This compartment is a real engineer's treat. Braided fuel lines run from the water separators to the engines, with colour-coded annealed copper pipes feeding from the two tanks mounted in their own GRP compartment forward of the engines. Pipes, control cables and any wires that are not actually ducted, run along the side of the bearers — not on top where they would be exposed.

Three banks of batteries — one for each engine and a separate domestic supply — are soundly secured on raised platforms outboard of the engine, well clear of the bilge. The compartment of the test boat was devoid of any sound insulation, but this is to be rectified on future craft.

Forward of the 205s, there was plenty of standing room, making

routine maintenance easy, with ample space down the sides to reach the batteries, outdrives and their ancillaries.

The calorifier and fresh water pump lie outboard to starboard, and are fed by a 30 gal (136lt) stainless steel tank, sited beneath the under cockpit berth. All domestic pipework has been led back to the engine compartment, where it is double-clipped to the easily-accessed seacocks. Safety equipment includes a large automatic fire extinguisher mounted on the forward bulkhead and a Rule automatic bilge pump, although a manual pump is an optional extra.

The only slight disappointment on the mechanical side was the position of the fuel cut-offs. Located in the compartment — albeit easily accessible, adjacent to the fuel/water separators — it obviously means the hatch has to be opened, a dangerous if not impossible task if a fire was already established. A longer pipe-run, to accommodate the shut-offs nearer the helm would be ideal.

Handling and performance

Under test, the 27 competently handled the 410hp from its two Volvo V6s with no vices. At its top speed of 38.2 knots she gave a clean, sure ride, ironing out squall-whipped waves with the minimum of fuss. Playing in the photoboot's wake she took flight, but always landed squarely, before being easily tucked into a tight high-speed turn.

Fuel consumption at full throttle, 4800 rpm, is in the order of 29 gph (130 lph), so from twin 50 gallon tanks expect a range of around 130 miles. Dropping the revs to 3500 still gives a no-nonsense cruising speed of 26.8 knots while reducing consumption to a more economical 13 gph (60 lph). This should give seven hours of cruising and a range of just over 200 miles. Still making 20 knots at 3000 rpm, the 27 gave a gentle ride over the residual swell from an earlier gale.

Ski-line hooks are an optional extra and with acceleration from 0-25 knots timed at just over seven secs, this is not unreasonable — the 27 would make a responsive towboat. At the more sedate end of things, nudging along off the plane back up the Beaulieu River, there was little of that annoying wandering often found on outdrive craft, the deep vee sections

helping to maintain a steady course.

Even with the absence of any sound insulation, noise levels were surprisingly low. At full throttle we measured 86 dB(A) at the helm, 88 dB(A) by the sun-lounger further aft. At our 27 knot cruising speed, they were 83 dB(A) and 84 dB(A) respectively, with 81 dB(A) recorded in the main cabin. Dropping to 20 knots, levels fell below 80 dB(A), allowing normal conversation in the cockpit.

Conclusions

It took several attempts to conclude our test on the Falcon 27, due to the vagaries of March gales and April blizzards. However, these abortive trips to Falcon agents Yachts International at Bucklers Hard, allowed us plenty of time to explore every corner of the boat.

Despite the detailed examination, there is little we can find to criticise. The windscreen and canopy are due to be changed, and apart from the cockpit area needing further handholds, the general layout is practical for extended weekend cruising. The fit out is robust enough to take family boating knocks, without detracting from the overall look.

Performance is excellent, offering a sound ride with sparkling pace and sportsboat handling. All in all, a carefully-conceived and conscientiously-built family cruiser with that added dimension of a good turn of speed.

Loa	27ft 4in (8.33m)
Beam	9ft 8in (2.94m)
Draft	1ft 7in (0.48m)
Weight	3.4 tons
Fuel	2 x 50 gal (454lt)
Water	30 gal (136lt)
Price with twin Volvo AQ205	£35,486 ex VAT

Builder:
Falcon Sports Boats Ltd,
Griffin Lane,
Norwich.
Tel: 0603 35516.

Supplied by:
Yachts International Ltd,
Beaulieu River Yacht Harbour,
Bucklers Hard,
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