

# Haines 320 AC

Why settle for a run-down holiday cottage when you could enjoy the comforts of an aft-cabin river cruiser? Is this contender good enough to be a home away from home? **REPORT BY CARL RICHARDSON**





Inland boating in the UK hasn't had an easy ride of late. The public's obsession with fast coastal cruisers and the demise of specialist river-boat builders, have left inland enthusiasts seriously short of credible purchasing options.

But choice seems to be making a comeback, as recent MBM boat reports have demonstrated.

One of the more recent successes within the realms of inland boatbuilding is Haines. Since starting up their Norfolk Broads-based business in 1980, they have quietly built up an impressive range of custom-built craft, ideally suited to their local environs.

Their latest model, the 320 AC, follows the aft-cabin, raised-deck layout that seems so much in demand with buyers.

## DESIGN & BUILD

We first came across the 320 AC at the 2003 London Boat Show, where it was making its

debut. Moored stern-to in the crowded pool, it looked square and dumpy. In its natural setting, however, it is a surprisingly elegant craft.

The design, a joint effort between Bob Haines (who, prior to establishing his own yard, was the works manager at renowned boatbuilders Jack Powles International) and Aquafibre, follows the conventional raised-deck aft-cabin style. But clever attention to detail has created a smooth, flowing profile that disguises the stern's bulk. Even the curvature of the guardrails perfectly matches that of the elliptical windows.

Compared with rivals such as the slightly larger Sheerline 1050 (see MBM Apr 03 p16), the Haines is a neater and more compact-looking craft, and it exudes a professional, well-finished edge. A good example is the smart aft deck: it might not be the biggest cockpit on offer, but with a rich teak sole and handsome GRP mouldings, it is a comfortable

and extremely pleasant place for five people to watch the world go by.

Inside, the standard layout follows a traditional path with an aft cabin, a saloon, a galley and a forward cabin. But there is a subtle twist of creativity and style, a sort of country-cottage-meets-designer-chic effect.

For the purists, solid cherry wood abounds. But this is balanced by features such as the long side windows (which can open electrically as an option) and a wide tilting sunhatch, adding a touch of up-to-date style, as well as plenty of light and ventilation.

Haines' build process has more to do with custom yachts than modern production boats. Their team of shipwrights fit out their craft from inside — no pre-fabricated units slotted into place here. This method allows for far greater flexibility when it comes to individual owner's needs and tastes, reflected in the wide range of woods, fabrics and exterior finishes available.

✓✓✓✓  
A professional and elegant design, with flexibility on layout.

## ACCOMMODATION

Although they might not log as many miles, inland cruisers tend to be used every bit as much as, if not more than, their coastal cousins. For many, they are an alternative to a weekend cottage in the country, with the added advantage of endlessly varied and beautiful scenery.

That's why the best river cruisers offer the same level of comfort and amenities that you would expect from a cottage. The Haines does a fine job of feeling like a home away from home.

The satin cherry woodwork in the galley and saloon is better than you'll find in most designer kitchens, the carpets are expertly bound and the fabrics are good enough to grace the living room of a country house.

You enter the accommodation down a wide stairway (thoughtfully provided with a hanging locker for coats) to find a huge saloon spread out in front of you. With no inner helm eating up valuable space, and large wraparound windows letting light in, the feeling of space is truly liberating.

The main L-shaped settee can take five adults comfortably, and quickly converts to an occasional berth by way of a neat pull-out shelf. The sideboard opposite can take everything from an entertainment centre to a drinks cabinet, or both.

In the lower forward sections, a well-equipped U-shaped galley continues the country living theme, with a cherry wood wall of storage cabinets. As in the rest of the boat, plenty of customer variation is possible here: you can opt for open compartments instead of cabinet doors, and choose from a wide range of worktops. The deep blue Corian counter on our test boat came with a sensibly bordered stainless steel hob and a deep sink and drainer.

When the partying is over, two generously proportioned cabins will help soothe away your exhaustion.

Secluded away aft, the wood-panelled master cabin has a spacious layout that places a bright en-suite WC across the stern, and the double berth and dressing area to either side, leaving plenty of floor space in the middle. The boat's master circuit board is also found here, neatly hidden behind one of the matching locker doors.



**decks** Reasonable freeboard and an accessible bathing platform make boarding easy from pontoons.



**aft deck** Good mouldings, solid dodgers and a teak sole make this a pleasant place to enjoy the ride.

The forward guest cabin and its vee-berth arrangement benefits from plenty of windows as well as an overhead hatch. The cabinetry includes two hanging lockers and a useful shelf area. Complementing the usual under-berth storage, this adds up to sufficient space for the most extended of cruises. And of course, since the master cabin has its own facilities, the forward toilet/shower compartment is left to the guests.

✓✓✓✓✓  
The aft-cabin concept implemented as well as you will find anywhere.

## EXTERIOR

Inland cruising is likely to involve more stopping and starting than coastal trips (let's face it, you just don't pass so many pubs on the coast), so the boat has to go to be easy to jump on and off. To this end, Haines have kept the freeboard as low as possible and

provided moulded footholds at the breaks in the guardrail. Once you are aboard, the 10in wide side decks and 2ft 2in guardrails make moving around both safe and easy.

The bathing platform, though integral, juts out beyond the hull length to allow for convenient step-on boarding. From here a teak-treaded ladder takes you up to the cockpit, with a thoughtfully oversized top step making your journey that much easier.

Haines' bespoke building methods make some interesting cockpit innovations possible. The sister ship to our test boat sported a hinged windscreen that swings up and over to reduce its air draught to around 8ft 3in, perfect for limboing under low bridges.

Elsewhere, the solid dodgers leave a decent amount of space around the aft cleats, which can be quite fiddly to use on other similarly designed boats.

✓✓✓✓✓  
An easy boat to move around. Teak decking is expensive, though.

**galley** Fit-out is customisable. **forward cabin** Natural light is good, and the WC is just next door.

**aft cabin** This is a warm and spacious retreat.



**saloon** Large windows, quality satin cherry woodwork and comfortable seating for five adults make this a welcoming focal point for entertaining.





## Haines 320 AC technical data



### specifications

BUILD	glass-reinforced plastic
RCD	design category C
LENGTH OVERALL	32ft 0in (9.6m)
BEAM	11ft 6in (3.3m)
DRAUGHT	2ft 6in (0.8m)
AIR DRAUGHT	with screen down 8ft 6in (2.6m)
DISPLACEMENT	6 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	60gal (274lt)
WATER CAPACITY	90gal (410lt)

### key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	0ft 11in
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 2in
HEADROOM IN AFT CABIN	6ft 1in
HEADROOM IN FORWARD CABIN	6ft 1in
AFT CABIN BERTH	6ft 6in x 4ft 5in
FORWARD CABIN BERTH	6ft 3in x 2ft 4in

### performance

engines single Nanni 5.280 HE diesel.  
configuration 5cyl, 2.746lt, 62hp at 2800rpm.  
conditions inland waterways.  
load fuel 50%, water 20%, crew 3.

rpm	knots	noise	rpm	knots	noise
800	3.2	57	1600	5.6	63
1000	3.7	59	1800	6.1	68
1200	4.6	61	2000	6.4	68
1400	5.1	64	2700	7.0	69

Noise figures are in dB(A), recorded in the saloon.

### prices

STANDARD BOAT	£116,813
with single 62hp Nanni 5.280 HE	£119,190
with single 130hp Nanni 4340 TDI	
(includes shorepower, canopy, mooring equipment, holding tank)	

ANTI-FOULING, LAUNCH & COMMISSIONING	included
DELIVERY	POA
BATTERY CHARGER	£880
BOW THRUSTER	£3,489
WARM-AIR HEATING	£3,198
TEAK DECKING	£4,107
BOAT AS TESTED	£135,466

### ENQUIRIES

Bray Marine Sales, Bray Marina, Monkey Island Lane,  
Bray, Berkshire SL6 2EB. Tel: 01628 773177.  
www.thamesboatsales.co.uk

### the rivals



#### BROOM 35CL

from £165,675 inc VAT  
From the class-leading builders, this is a bigger boat with similar high-level fit-out.  
Tel: 01628 471361.  
www.harleyfordmarine.com



#### SHEERLINE 1050

from £135,000 inc VAT  
A more muscular design with a choice of hull shapes for inshore or offshore use.  
Tel: 01189 403211.  
www.valwyattmarine.co.uk



#### STEVENS 1040

from £165,610 inc VAT  
A Dutch steel boat which is well capable of coastal work, with a 110hp diesel.  
Tel: 01932 243722.  
www.boatshowrooms.com

### ENGINE OPTIONS & ACCESS

With estuary and inland cruising in mind, the standard power options are all single diesel installations from the Nanni stable.

The starting point in the range is Nanni's 50hp 4cyl 4.220 but, given the marginal difference in cost, we think the smoother-running 62hp 5cyl 5.280HE fitted to our test boat is a better bet. Alternatively you can opt for an 85hp 5cyl, or a 130hp 4cyl turbocharged unit.

For buyers wanting to venture out to sea, there is sufficient space in the bay for twin engines, which Haines will happily fit for you.

Given a single installation, access to the machinery is good, with plenty of space left for additional equipment. Even taking this into account, you would be hard-pressed to beat the Haines' spotlessly clean enginebay with its expertly plumbed fuel lines, neat cable tracks and trimmed insulation pads.

For more complex servicing jobs, the entire saloon sole lifts up and out in five sections, although lifting the central panel is all that's required for regular daily checks. Two powerful lights make sure everything is properly illuminated.

There can be no excuses for missing the large, transparent-topped raw-water strainer which takes centre stage.

The fuel pre-filter and batteries are tucked further back, but still within easy reach.

### PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

The 320's underwater design is perfect for minimal-wash, displacement cruising. Fairly flat hull sections are bolstered by a fine entry and long keel, all of which provides steady handling characteristics and a level of protection for the propeller and rudder, which even George W Bush would feel comfortable with.

For inland boating, low-speed manoeuvrability is the name of the game, and if you are not already a fan of the single engine/bow-thruster set-up, you will be after taking the helm of this boat.

Casting off from Haines' smart moorings of the Broads (does this company have a messy bone anywhere?), we negotiated some indecently tight turns around a maze of pontoons and banks with something close to ease, before emerging into the main channel of the River Yare.

The 320's ability to turn on a sixpence, and without the need for too much power, makes it an immensely easy boat to drive. The throttle feeds in so slowly and smoothly that even a ham-fisted helmsman would struggle to make a mess of driving it. A tickover (800rpm) speed of 3 knots is usefully, rather than painfully, slow; a gentle 1200rpm returns a river-friendly 4.5 knots.



**windscreen** An innovative approach to squeezing under low bridges is this optional up-and-over arrangement, reducing air draught to around 8ft 3in.

Further up the rev range, 1800rpm equates to 6 knots, and 2000rpm to 6.5 knots. The top whack of 7 knots is reached when the rev-counter hits its 2700rpm red line, not that most owners are likely to use full throttle very often.



**sunroof** A big hatch lets extra light in the saloon.

From the raised helm position, the view is good whether you are seated or standing. The fixed steering wheel and conventional throttle are always within easy reach, and the narrow console, tucked to one side, provides clear instrumentation and a handy plinth for additional displays.

### SPECIFICATION & VALUE

This particular market may not be the biggest around, but the fact that there are some close rivals means that pricing must be keen.

The 320's nearest rival is the heftier Sheerline 1050. At 34ft it is a slightly larger craft, but the Haines has a definite edge on quality of finish. It is also cheaper, by more than £10,000.

Alternatively, you can go to the market leaders, Broom. Their 35CL is again larger, and offers an equally good build and finish, with a better-known brand name. But there is a whopping £50,000 premium to pay.

There are other advantages to choosing this Haines. The options list, for example, appears to be littered with 'standard equipment' signs in place of the normal three or four-figure sums. Surely some mistake? Apparently not: shorepower, a holding tank, antifouling, canopies, ropes and fenders are all included in the price.

And we don't expect heavy depreciation. Limited build numbers, coupled with strong demand for this type of boat, should keep the boat's residual value as buoyant as its hull.

## Verdict

Visit the Haines boatyard, and you can't help but be struck by the friendly, professional air of the place. The 320 AC perfectly captures the mood of the company that builds it.

Here is a craft that has been built by riverboat enthusiasts for riverboat enthusiasts, and the result speaks for itself. It is elegant, well-finished and thoroughly enjoyable both to drive and to spend time on.

A strong, workable standard specification gets you off to a flying start, and the builders' flexibility makes sure you get the boat you want, all for a price that is cheaper than its rivals.

Forget that weekend cottage in Norfolk. If you want a place to relax with friends and family, this boat really is a home from home.

**MBM RATING** 9/10



**helm** The boat's single, narrow driving position offers an excellent view even if you remain seated.



**engine room** The single diesel installation is clean and well engineered, with space to work around it.