



Harley 25FS

Despite its very traditional pilot-boat looks, this pedigree weekender comes from a racing yacht stable.

REPORT BY CARL RICHARDSON

If the Harley 25FS looks very much the traditional motorboat, dig a bit deeper and a secret history emerges: it comes from a yard which only recently crossed from 'the other side'.

Harley Racing Yachts have, for some considerable time, been producing lightweight racing sailboats. Many of these have found international fame and success, including the Corby, Mustang and Reflex designs, and the Solar One of Olympic fame.

Now, having made themselves a byword for ability and performance within the field of yachting, some of their considerable know-how has been turned towards building powered boats.

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Performance sailboats need to be light and strong, and specialist builders use various carbons and polymers in their construction.

In the case of the 25FS, Harley have opted

for glassfibre unidirectional beams laid on top of chopped-strand mat, a combination which aims to provide all the strength of more traditional lay-ups but with the benefit of lower weight. The beams provide additional flexibility or give to the hull.

For the upperworks, a high-density lightweight foam core is used, providing strength without the addition of weight high up.

The decks have a heavier balsa core, still relatively light but offering more resistance to knocks. They form an integral part of the boat's structure, providing buoyancy chambers from the forepeak aft to enhance the structural integrity and seaworthiness of the boat.

But if the Harley's build is unconventional, its semi-displacement hull was designed by someone well-versed in the genre: Arthur

Mursell of TT Boat Designs, who were responsible for the Nelson range.

The hull form follows that of other modern semi-displacement craft. A finer entry flattens out aft to provide the platform and lift for faster speeds, helped by a hard chine instead of the more traditional rounded bilge. A keel, around 4in (102mm) deep, provides some additional bite for low-speed handling and stability.

The builders' choice of powertrain, an inboard/outdrive set-up, might miff a few purists. But it does make sense on a 25-footer, allowing greater flexibility with engine size as well as freeing up space below decks.

Responsible for the boat's superstructure and interior styling was the celebrated Ken Freivokh (indeed, the FS in the model designation stands for Freivokh Styling), and

the results are most handsome.

Above the blue hull with its teak strake is a pure white pilot-boat style wheelhouse. The two small portholes set into the forward coachroof look the part, as do the inboard handrails.

Within the limits imposed by the vessel's physical dimensions, Harley offer a lot of flexibility in the layout of the aft cockpit and accommodation.

The standard boat comes with a raised area of aft deck, which makes boarding particularly easy, but alternatives to this include a sunpad, or pushing the seating right aft.

Folding teak doors open up the wheelhouse, where a port-side bunk and starboard galley unit dominate the social area. Light gushes through the large side windows, front screen and overhead sliding hatches, which creates a good feeling of space.

A step down leads you to the forward cabin which, though not offering full standing headroom, is a curiously welcoming place with a 'proper' cabin feel, and a separate toilet compartment. ▶▶

highlights



VERSATILE BENCH

The wheelhouse bench can be swivelled to face forward, for sociable seating when underway, or aft, to link with the cockpit.

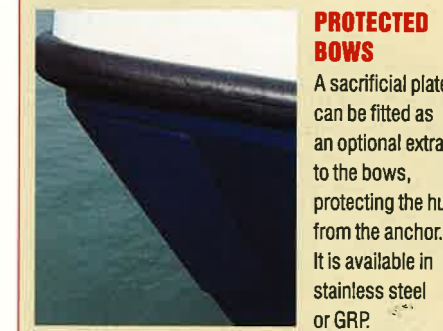
STEPS

The stainless steel tubular-framed steps up to the side decks have solid teak treads. A smaller one at the helm serves as a footrest.



PROTECTED BOWS

A sacrificial plate can be fitted as an optional extra to the bows, protecting the hull from the anchor. It is available in stainless steel or GRP.



decks

A wonderfully easy boat to move around, the Harley features 9½in (24cm) wide decks with a 2in toerail.

Deck hardware comprises 6in bollard cleats at the bow and stern, and further 7in T-bar cleats forward and amidships.



cockpit A pleasant, sociable setting, the cockpit comes as standard with a teak sole and a bench and jump seats. Aft of these is a raised area of deck.



cockpit option Buyers can specify a sunpad instead of the raised section of deck.



guardrails Inboard handrails lining the forward part of the superstructure make an easy transition to the pulpit rails.



bathing platform The standard boat has a good-sized teak and stainless steel platform.

ENGINE OPTIONS

Volvo Penta's Aquamatic diesel outdrive range comprise the main engine options. A single 150hp AD31/DP comes as standard, while our test boat was fitted with a 170hp KAD32/DP.

HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Accelerating in sprightly fashion, the Volvo had us up to a maximum of over 31 knots in what seemed like no time at all.

In calm conditions, the Harley also moved effortlessly along at fast cruising speeds of 19-24 knots, at 3000-3200rpm. We would expect the hull to perform just as well should the going get tougher, and to readily lap up a Channel crossing.

Steering was first-class, as were throttle positioning and response, the boat willingly entering turns.

In very tight turns there was a

tendency for the hull to grab slightly, but this can be put down to the semi-displacement design and some abuse of the helm!

From the driving position, visibility is excellent, both forward and aft. Whether it is an intentional design feature or not, we liked the fact that, with the side window slid open, you can brace yourself on the inboard handrail.

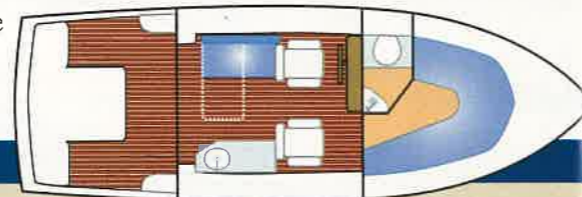
The build presented a slightly different set of acoustics from what we might have expected. You feel as if you are in a larger craft, so the occasional hollow slam comes as something of a surprise. However, noise levels stayed well under 80dB(A) in the wheelhouse.

accommodation

The interior styling and trim is a mix of the classic and the modern. Stainless steel fittings and teak flooring and detailing mix easily with modern fabrics, producing a comfortable but practical environment, with traditional overtones.

Although the builders offer a certain degree of flexibility with interior layout, it is difficult to argue against the general plan of our test boat.

Accommodation for two people comes by way of convertible vee-berths forward, a useable toilet compartment and a decent galley in the wheelhouse, including a sink, a microwave oven and a fridge.



forward cabin Despite only 5ft (1.5m) of headroom, the sleeping compartment feels comfortable. Asymmetrical berths, the largest of which measures over 6ft 6in (2.05m) long, can be converted into a double berth. An overhead hatch and opening portholes provide ample light.



toilet Our test boat had a stainless steel 'dogbowl' basin specified as an option.



wheelhouse/saloon This is simple but effective, offering around 6ft 2in (1.86m) of headroom and a great view out through large windows. A teak panelled deckhead features inset light fittings.

engine room

Regardless of your chosen installation, engine access is first-class and relatively simple.

A typical enginebox, which forms part of the cockpit seating, opens aft, whilst a separate hatch in the sole opens forward, leaving a huge area to work in.

There is easy access to batteries, fuel and water filters and seacocks. Screw-in panels give access to the bathing platform fixings and any ancillary equipment such as an autopilot.

Finish is good throughout the bilge area. The engineering appears competent and cable runs have been left accessible for future installations. Three batteries come as standard, with priority charge for engine starting.



helm Morse controls, engine instrumentation, a compass and a half-size chart area come as standard, and our test boat's console had been modified to take extra navigation equipment. From the twin adjustable swivelling seats, the helmsman and navigator have good visibility through two forward screens, both with wipers.

specifications

BUILD	glass-reinforced plastic
RCD	design category C (there are plans to uprate this to category B)
LENGTH OVERALL	25ft 0in (7.5m)
BEAM	8ft 4in (2.5m)
DRAUGHT	1ft 8in (0.5m)
AIR DRAUGHT	6ft 11in (2.1m)
DISPLACEMENT	2.4 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	48gal (220lt)
WATER CAPACITY	22gal (100lt)
ENGINE	single Volvo Penta KAD32 diesel, 4cyl, 170hp at 3800rpm
BUILDERS	Harley Racing Yachts Ltd, Samuel Whites Estate, Cowes, Isle of Wight P031 7DU. Tel: 01983 280060.
PRICE	from £52,875 inc VAT; £82,250 as tested

the rivals



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conclusions

LAYOUT

Overnight accommodation for two is well provided for, and complemented by a sociable layout able to seat six adults comfortably. While there are some areas of detail that could do with improvement the general level of fit-out is good. A minor niggle would be the lack of interior handrails.

BUILD

Rather than try to compete with the computer-aided design proficiency of mass-produced boats, Harley have opted for effective use of classic enduring materials such as teak and stainless steel. Sound construction gives the boat a strong emphasis on 'jump on and go' boating.

PERFORMANCE

Although we did not have the sea conditions in which to test it fully, there is nothing to suggest that this boat is anything other than sea-kindly. It has the legs for a quick sprint and the ruggedness for longer cruising and Channel crossings.



MBM verdict

As a launch, a weekender or a holiday cruiser, the Harley 25FS offers a great mix of practicality and comfort.

We took to it immediately, and found it an easy craft to live with. It suits Britain's boating and its changeable weather conditions very well.

Although our test boat came with an array of extras such as heated windscreens and modified doors, underlining the builders' willingness to pander to their clients' needs, the standard specification is more than sufficient.

On price, the Harley cannot match most modern sports cruisers, but nor should it try. Something of a rarity in these days of mass mouldings, it should be appreciated for that.

It breaks no new ground in its concept or appearance, instead following a tried and tested course. But it offers year round usability with definite cruising comfort.