

BOAT REPORT

Built in Holland — made-to-measure for our rivers. We take this sturdy steel cruiser for a day out on the Thames.

FOR anyone wanting a modest-speed displacement cruiser, suitable for river and estuary use, the choice today is becoming increasingly limited. Many of our UK builders have moved towards the high-speed, flying-bridge or open-cockpit style boats, based on planing hulls, and offer few if any low-power options.

However, over the water in Holland the situation is completely reversed. The extensive system of rivers and broad canals has bred a typical sturdy motor boat, with ample accommodation, a low air draught and, usually, steel construction. But these are not calm-water cruisers only — the Dutch are a seafaring nation, and expect their craft to be capable of at least coastal passage-making, if not more. At the same time, some of their reclaimed lakes are mini-seas in their own right — the IJsselmeer being 20 miles wide and 50 long, twice the size of the Solent — so the boats have bluff bows, high freeboards, and hulls capable of handling the short, steep seas found off many of our coasts.

Until recently, few Dutch boats have made their way over here, but gradually the number of makes available is on the increase. This month's test boat is the Kempala 32, built by Kempers Cruisers and imported into this country by Better Boating Ltd of Reading. We took the 32 for a day trip on the Thames, putting it through its paces in a variety of locks and river situations.

Design and construction

Dutch cruisers are typically of hard chine design. This simplifies the steel construction and provides maximum interior volume for a given length and beam. To increase the effective



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waterline length, and so raise the speed potential for a given horsepower, they often extend the bottom plating beyond the transom by between 1ft and 18in. This also provides a landing for the transom ladder. In the case of Kempala, this extension can be supplied either as a single plate, or boxed in to above the waterline, providing extra tank capacity and a bathing platform. A keel provides protection for the single propeller, and aids directional stability.

Construction of the hull and superstructure is in welded 4mm steel plate, finished in two-pack polyurethane paint. As we have come to expect from boats built in Holland, the standard of steel work is excellent. Few of the welds are visible, and the plating is fair and smooth; with the high gloss of the paintwork, you could be forgiven for thinking that this was a GRP boat. Edges that are likely to either deliver or receive knocks are rounded, often making clever use of tubing or half-round sections to achieve the desired effect — in all an excellent boat to take the rough and tumble of river use. And before you start asking about rust, all you have to do is make sure the anodes are regularly replaced, and that any chips are touched up immediately, and you

will be looking at a sound boat long after your neighbour is ruefully viewing the blisters of osmosis on his glassfibre hull.

No weed hatch was fitted to our test boat, though this is available for £125, a worthwhile extra for any single-engined vessel.

Exterior

The practical approach makes itself felt immediately you step aboard the Kempala. The side-decks are wide and secure, with a painted non-slip that will give you grip on the wettest days, and solid stainless steel guardrails all round. From amidships forward, further safety is ensured by a round-capped bulwark, 4in high, increasing to 12in at the bow. The aft deck has a welded lip round the gunwale, and further stainless steel rails. These have a solid lower rail rather than wire, which is a good feature, but it is sited towards the top of the space, leaving a large gap below which crew, particularly children, could slip through. An extra rail, or moving the existing one, would solve the problem.

The aft deck is a spacious area which will take all the crew. The helm is sited centrally forward, and comes complete with rev-counter, rudder indicator — a vital feature on a river boat — and the bow-thruster control

(an extra, but one well worth taking, as we will describe later). The side-mounted Volvo engine control proved smooth and precise at all times.

The windscreen and mast fold down for passage under low bridges, giving an air draught of 7ft 9in (2.35m). To special order, Kempers will build you a boat with a cut-down coachroof and slightly reduced interior headroom, which then achieves an air draught of only 7ft 3in, enabling it to pass under Oxford's Osney Bridge and opening up the upper reaches of the Thames.

Mooring is handled by good-sized stainless steel bollards forward, midships and aft, while a substantial stemhead roller stowage and manual winch take care of the anchor.

Accommodation

Access to the accommodation is via a half-height door to port, covered by a hinge-up hatch, and six steps leading down. The saloon is spacious and bright, the feeling of openness helped by large, deep windows that give a good view for all your passengers. The side windows slide for ventilation, while the one ahead of the lower helm

Below: room for a party on the aft deck. Above right: the light and airy saloon. Below right: the inside helm position, and ahead of it, the galley.

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position hinges forward. To port you find lockers and shelves for stowage, while opposite is a large L-shaped settee capable of seating six to eight people. Lockers under this extend right out to the ship's side, giving ample stowage.

The lower helm position is forward to port. The driver is well served by an instrument panel that includes rpm, oil pressure, temperature and voltmeter, plus tank gauges and another helm indicator. A neat circuit-breaker panel is sited to port, with the Morse control to starboard. The dashboard hinges up to give excellent access to the back of the instruments and the electrical distribution panel and fuses. The wiring revealed is all to a high standard.

Forward down three steps is an open-plan dinette to starboard, with the galley to port. The dinette table, which drops down to form a double berth, will seat four to six persons. Lockers under the seats have rather awkward lids. The galley opposite is well equipped, with a large Optimus oven, grill and separate four-burner gas hob. An instantaneous gas water



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heater above supplies hot water for all the boat. A fridge completes the facilities, though stowage space is distinctly limited.

Forward again is a small cabin, with two vee berths. The lockers underneath would probably double as overflow storage for the galley, but shelves outboard would be a welcome additional feature, easily accommodated by the generous flare of the bows. A hatch in the forward bulkhead gives access to the chain locker, and reveals that the inside of the hull is well painted out.

Aft of the saloon you find the boat's toilet and the master cabin. This latter rather surprisingly has only 5ft 9in headroom (1.75m), a feature Kempers consider essential if the overall line of the boat is to be maintained. A large double berth is located to starboard, with a good-sized locker underneath. Opposite is a hanging locker and cupboard, while aft is a seat that lifts to give good access to the steering gear. A couple of drawers in this cabin would be a useful addition.

The shower/toilet compartment also

has limited headroom, but is otherwise a good size. The finish is somewhat spartan, with formica surfaces rather than the moulded GRP we have come to expect, though we did like the non-slip rubber floor covering. The corner sink is too small, but there is plenty of space for a larger one. Forward is a large locker which needs some shelves and a back, as otherwise it leads straight into the engine room.

Finish throughout the accommodation is excellent, with a high standard of visible teak joinery and upholstery. Opening the locker doors reveals a somewhat less deluxe standard of timber, though it is still well-built and all varnished.

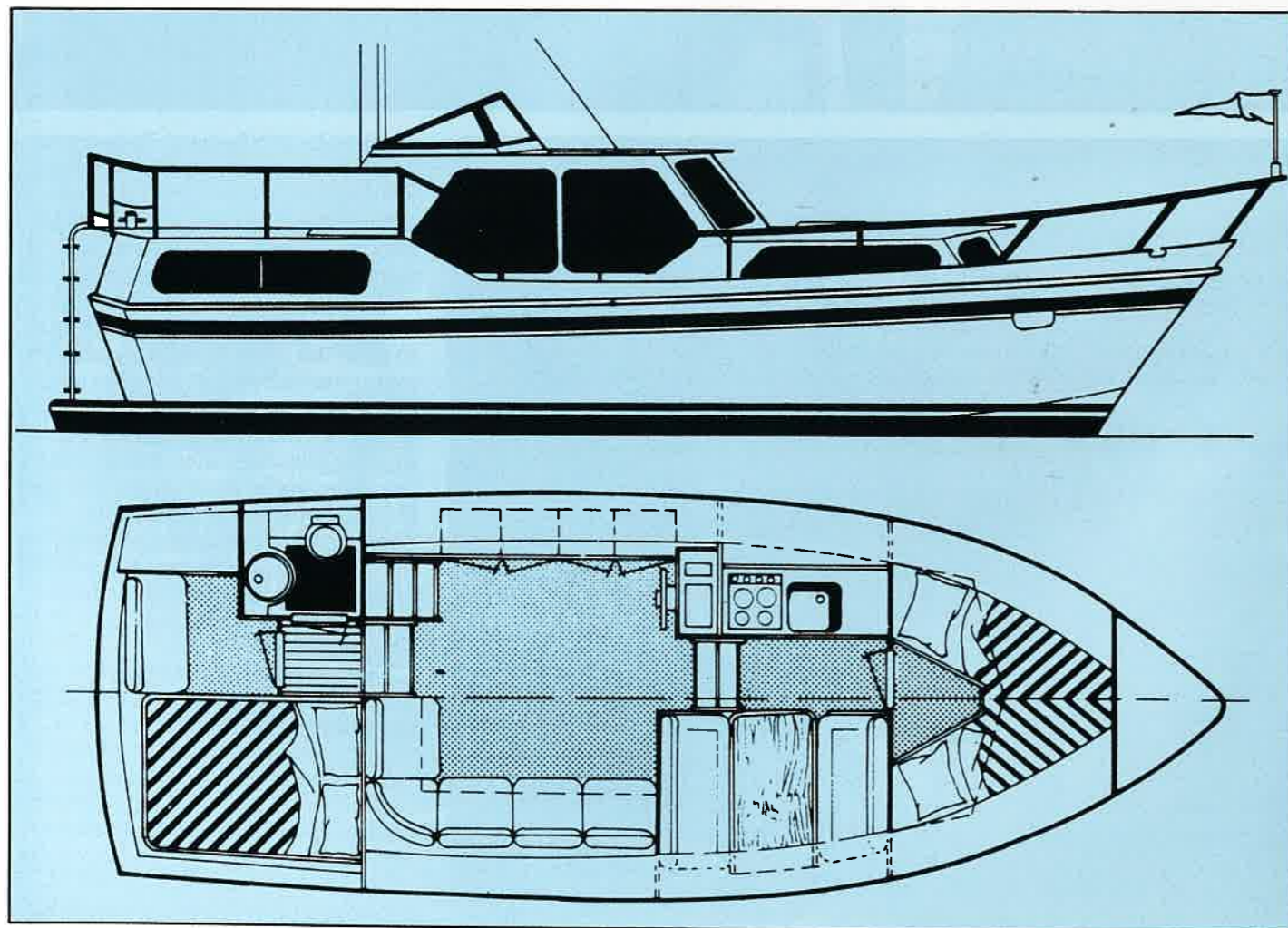
Engines

A single diesel engine comes as standard, though twin installations can be specified. These make little difference to the top speed, but give an extra measure of security to anyone travelling frequently offshore. Our test boat was fitted with a single four-cylinder Volvo MD31, naturally-aspirated and producing 62hp. The

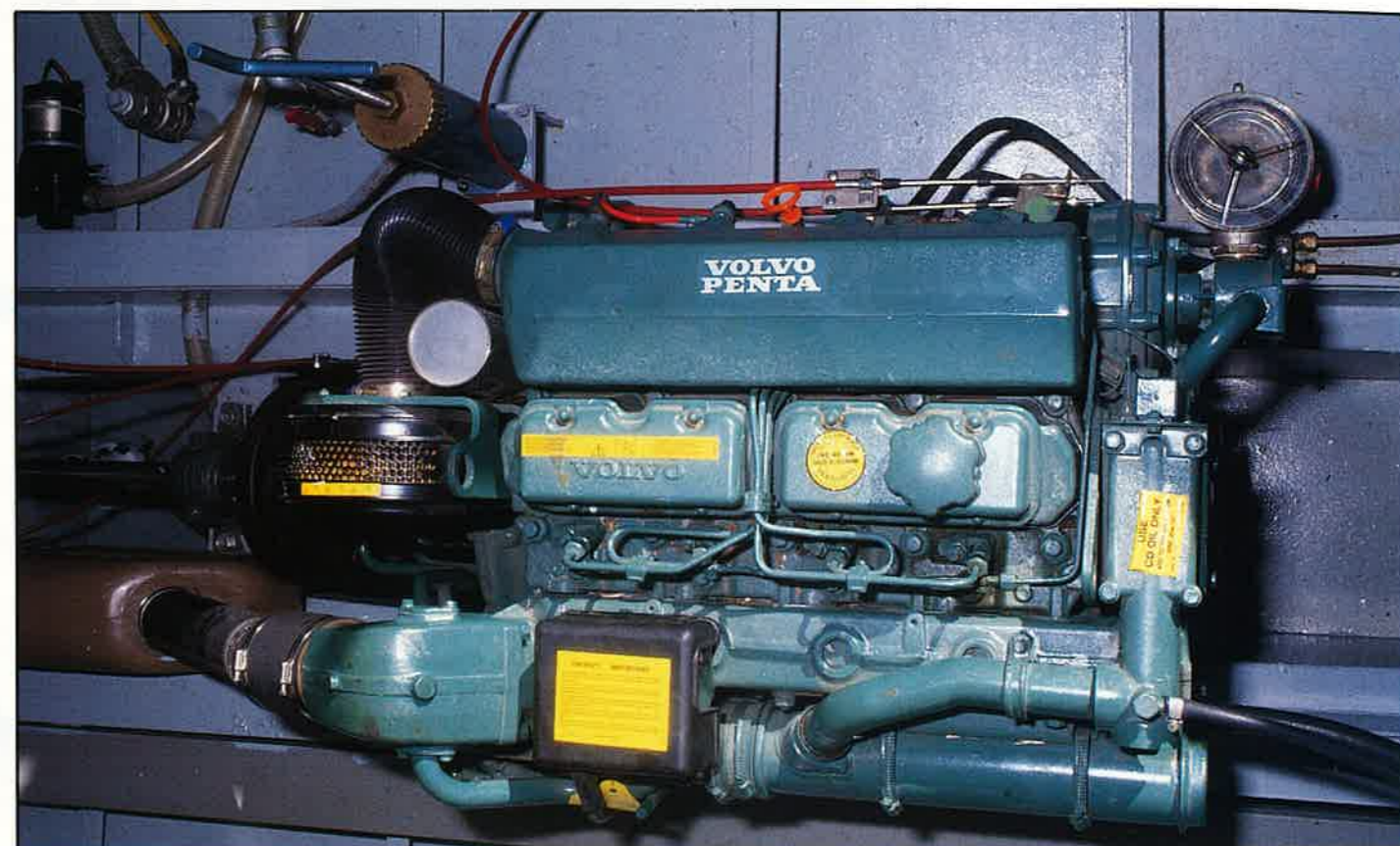
engine is mounted under the saloon, with access gained by lifting two large sections of the floor. To get at these you have to roll back the whole carpet, a complication that will turn routine checking into a chore. Smaller access hatches would be beneficial.

Once into the compartment, all-round access is excellent, the engine looking lost in the space. It is a pleasure to be able to report that you can easily reach the stern-gland, the sea-water strainer, and the huge screw-down stern-tube greaser. No less impressive was the engineering revealed, with a massive flexible-rubber shaft coupling and plummer block bearing. Forward is the single mild steel fuel tank, welded integrally into the hull, with good copper piping, shut-off valves and a CAV 296 filter. Twin stainless steel freshwater tanks are mounted outboard. Three 140Ah batteries are positioned aft, one for the engine start, one for domestics, and one for the bow-thruster, though

Right: ample space round the single Volvo diesel, particularly for access to stern-greaser and inlet strainer.



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access over the top of these is limited. All pumps for the water system are easily reached.

Standard soundproofing on the 32 consists of 1/4in (6mm) rubber bonded to the top surface of the saloon floor panels. This, combined with a Vetus water lift silencer, produced excellent noise levels both in the saloon and out on the aft deck. Further sound insulation can apparently be specified as an extra, though we would see little need for this.

One automatic electric bilge pump is fitted as standard, together with three portable fire extinguishers in the accommodation.

Handling and performance

In deference to the speed restrictions on the Thames, we did not carry out our usual extensive tests, but quick bursts of the throttle indicated a likely top speed of around 7-8 knots, possibly 8-9 with twin engines. Comfortable cruising on the river was around 2000rpm and 5-6 knots, at which the Volvo scarcely disturbed the peace. Likely fuel consumption at this speed would be around 1gph, though overall, including locks, you would average less than this.

We have already pointed out that

our test boat was fitted with the optional bow-thruster, and this transformed the handling. Manoeuvring into a lock and turning in narrow parts of the river became so easy it almost felt you were cheating. Putting the foredeck crew ashore with inch-perfect precision, or coping with changes in the side you were tying up to in the lock, became routine. The only thing you have to remember is that the paddle-wheel effect still pushes the stern sideways when you engage reverse or move off ahead—in the reverie of finger-tip control of the bow, this was easily forgotten.

Conclusion

After a day on the Kempala, it was easy to forget that the boat was only 32ft long. On deck you had room for a party of ten, while below there was entertaining space for nearly as many. Weekending for six or seven would be quite in order, with comfortable accommodation for four on longer trips. For river use the boat was perfect, with the bow-thruster being the pièce de résistance. Coastal cruising would be possible, though for the safety conscious crew, the twin-engine option would give greater peace of mind.

The engineering we saw was excellent; likewise the interior finish,

reflected by a price that is towards the top end for this type of craft. Better Boating import the boats to what they call an "English" specification, which includes, amongst other items as standard, dual helm stations, central heating, anchor winch, stainless steel davits and a stereo cassette.

LOA	33ft 8in (10.25m)
Hull length	32ft 2in (9.80m)
LWL	29ft 6in (9.00m)
Beam	11ft 6in (3.50m)
Draught	3ft 3in (1.00m)
Air draught	7ft 9in (2.35m)
Displacement	7.5 tons
Fuel capacity	165gal (750lt)
Water	2 x 45gal (200lt)
Price ex VAT (English spec)	
Standard with 62hp Volvo	£59,653
Bow thruster extra	£1741
Twin engines from	£71,045

Builder:
Shipyard Kempers, 2404 HL Alphen A/D, Rijn, Holland.

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