



— Boat Report —

LINSSSEN

34HT ROYAL

One of Europe's leading builders of medium-size river and coastal steel cruisers, Linssen now have a subsidiary company handling sales in the UK. We tested their latest model.

Above: the 34HT passing Port Hamble. This is first and foremost a river boat, but one with serious coastal cruising potential given the right engine choice. Right: air draught can be reduced to 9ft 8in.

Linssen have a justifiable position as one of the major manufacturers of river and coastal cruisers in Europe. The Dutch company's combination of build quality and efficient production techniques, plus excellent customer relations, have built up a loyal following of owners across the Continent.

France and Germany have been their strongest markets outside of the Netherlands, but now they are making a major pitch for the UK. Typical of their approach to the customer is that they have progressed from simply having a British dealer to setting up a factory-controlled outlet, Linssen UK, to handle sales and service.

Their latest model in a highly-competitive market is the 34HT, which made its UK debut at the Earls Court Boat Show in January. We tested the boat from their base on the Hamble in Hampshire, but also visited the factory in Maasbracht and spoke to designer Winnfried Wilke.

Design and manufacture

Wilke's name may not be familiar in the UK, but for more than 40 years he has been one of Europe's most prolific designers. Equally at home with comfortable river boats and fast offshore cruisers,

his successes include the classic Royal Cruisers from Storebro in Sweden. However, he has also been associated with many manufacturers, and been responsible for many innovative ideas.

One of these that he has repeated in the 34 is the recessed aft cockpit. An excellent compromise between a raised aft deck and a low-level aft cockpit, this still allows the boat to have an aft cabin, with the footwell of the cockpit being located over the double berth, sailing-boat fashion. We blushed when he reminded us that this concept was in fact introduced by him a decade ago, in the Royal Cruiser 36, and





not, as we have previously suggested, by Sealine in their 450 eight years later.

The 34 is designed as a back-to-basics riverboat, with open-water or coastal capabilities if required. A single diesel gives reliable, economical displacement performance, with power options from 62hp to 200hp giving top speeds of 7-11 knots. Wide side decks make mooring and lock work easy. The comfortable aft deck, with its commanding helm position, gives easy handling and control. The spacious saloon offers a panoramic view of the surroundings, while sleeping accommodation divided fore and aft affords maximum privacy.

Underwater, the hull has a single-chine, shallow-vee form, with a pronounced run-up to the transom, protecting the sterngear and reducing drag at displacement speeds. Further protection is provided by a keel and skeg.

The reverse transom is a new feature for a Linssen, but it allows the bathing platform to be made integral with the hull, giving a neater, more stylish finish than the previous projecting platforms.

The 34 is built in steel, the favoured material for Dutch builders. When you are sharing your waterways with 5000-tonne barges, it is logical to protect yourself with the same armour as them. Anyway, the production techniques now employed by the leading manufacturers make steel as economical to use as GRP, and with just as good a finish. The same computers used in designing a Linssen guide the plasma cutters which cut out the plates, so the final results are as smooth and fair as if they had come from a mould.

When we visited the factory, we were amazed to

Clockwise from left: a spiral staircase links the master cabin with the saloon. The galley area is spacious and practical. The main settee converts into a double berth, and the end sections pull out for use as individual seats. The aft cabin has twin berths, with lockers underneath and overhead. The toilet/shower compartment is large, but why is there only one?

see hulls set up prior to welding, with the 4mm plates meeting with such precision that you could hardly run a piece of paper down the joins. Coat the finished product with modern two-component primers and paint, and you have a tough, hard-wearing exterior, yet one that can quickly be touched up or repaired if it should be damaged.

Computers also drive the automatic routing machines which cut the timber and plywood, giving a superb but cost-effective finish to the interiors and allowing Linssen to indulge in some complex and attractive joinery.

Interior

There are two alternative layouts to the main part of the accommodation: either open-plan with a forward dinette which converts into a double berth, or with the bow area closed off as a twin-bunked cabin.

From the aft deck, you enter the saloon through a single aluminium-framed sliding door. It is a warm, welcoming space, with plenty of glowing cherry wood joinery, large windows and a pleasant open aspect.

Curved steps lead down inside, continuing on down aft to the master cabin. On the way they pass an attractively curved sideboard with a well-fiddled top to port, plus a small top-opening storage locker and a neat but practical cocktail locker which has two big swivel-out drawers with tailored stowages for bottles and glasses. Two medium-size lockers outboard forward complete the stowage here.

The doors have an inlaid dark wood stripe, a simple feature for the routers to produce, and we were intrigued by the way the ply panels are formed



into curves using multiple saw cuts at the corners, concealed behind the veneer.

Ahead to port is the lower helm position. There is a solid pulpit with a sloping fiddled top, but instead of putting all the engine instruments here, Linssen have mounted them forward, under the curve of the windscreen, out of the way but in the line of sight. This releases the panel area for general use, or for navigation instruments for the ambitious owner.

The single Morse lever is mounted to the right. To the left are the bow-thruster control, a VHF and a very sophisticated ready-use switch panel. This helm shares the same seat as the aft-deck position, so if you want to sit you have to bring the seat down from there.

Opposite to starboard is a four-to-six-seater settee, whose end sections cleverly pull out to form loose seats. As an option, it can be converted into a double berth.

Four steps lead down to the forward area, where you find a large galley to starboard. This has a practical layout, with a lot of worktop area, a large enamel sink, a three-burner gas hob and a sensible 1/2in fiddle all round. Underneath are a fridge, plus an oven and grill. Two medium-size lockers and a drawer below, plus three medium lockers above, complete the stowage. Two opening portlights provide ventilation.

The boat we tested had the open-plan arrangement, which comprises a semicircular settee in the bow, with a matching table which swivels to allow people to slide in behind and drops to form the infill to create the double bed. The shape means this would probably be most comfortable in the athwartships position.

The lockers under the settee have partial floors, but otherwise just go down to the unlined steel hull, while a full-length shelf around the back of the settee provides space to throw things. Overhead, an opening escape hatch (with a modesty blind) provides light and ventilation, and a solar-powered vent keeps air circulating when the boat is left unattended.

In the large WC to port, with a separate shower stall and a tiled floor, the finish is a mixture of good and bad. Two large lockers have expensively lacquered doors, but in contrast the sink-top is made

Linssen 34HT

Engine: single Volvo Penta TMD41 diesel, 150hp at 3600rpm, 6cyl, 3590lt.

Conditions: wind NE Force 3. **Load:** fuel 90%, water 50%, crew 3.

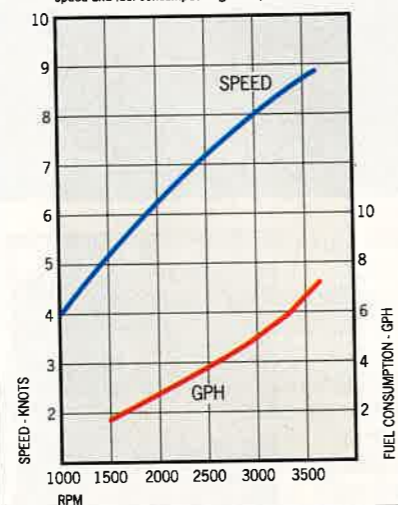
							sound levels dB(A)			
rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range*	trim	saloon	fwd sln	aft cab	ckpt
1000	4.1	—	—	—	—	—	61	60	66	61
1500	5.3	1.6	7	3.31	326	—	70	67	72	67
2000	6.4	2.4	11	2.67	262	—	72	71	75	71
2500	7.4	3.2	15	2.31	228	—	76	72	79	73
3000	8.0	4.9	22	1.62	161	—	78	75	83	77
3500	8.7	6.3	29	1.34	132	—	79	76	84	78
3650	8.8	7.3	33	1.21	119	—	84	78	86	82

(*allows 20% margin)

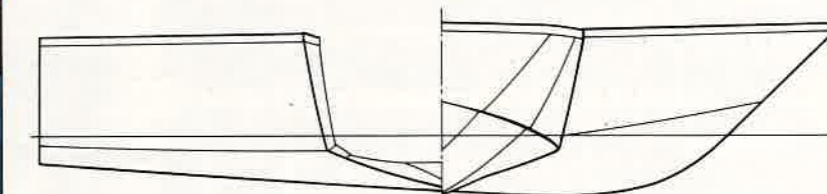
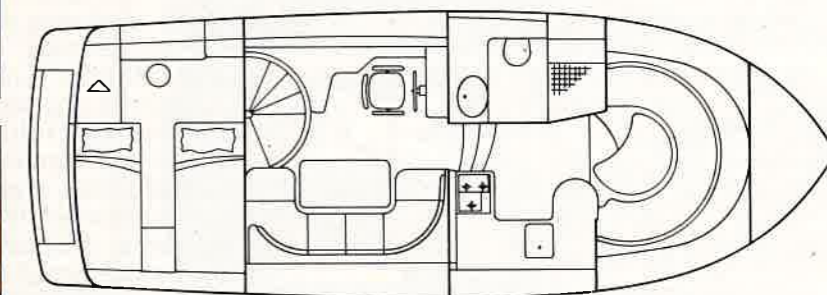
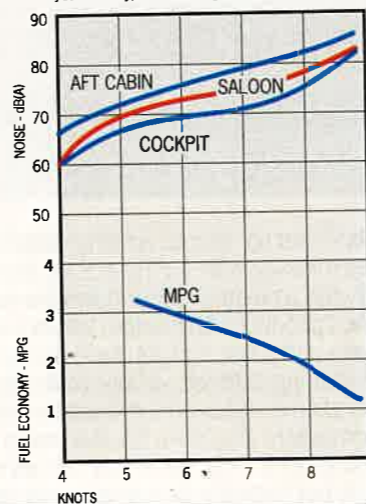
Loa	33ft 2in (10.10m)	Lwl	28ft 4in (8.65m)
Beam	11ft 8in (3.60m)	Draught	3ft 4in (1.05m)
Air draught	9ft 8in (3.00m)	Displacement	8.6 tonnes
Fuel capacity	123gal (560lt)	Water capacity	60gal (270lt)

Price from £107,600 ex VAT; £121,959 as tested

speed and fuel consumption against rpm



fuel economy, noise levels against speed



only in Formica-faced board with exposed joints, which looks poor and is likely to let in water. A moulded GRP or Avonite top would be more practical and attractive, and would allow a fiddle along the outboard shelf.

The taps and shower fittings are high-quality, but the overall effect is plain and bare, a failing we have noted before in Dutch boats, whose builders seem to consider exotic bathrooms decadent.

The master cabin is aft, five spiral steps down from the port side of the saloon and through a double folding door. The port side has 6ft (1.82m) headroom along its full length, and the fiddled shelf with lockers underneath would serve as a dressing table; at the aft end is a full-height hanging locker. To starboard you have the option of two single berths or one double, with sitting headroom above them. Under the berths are drawers and lockers, with two more lockers overhead.

We were pleased to see the bunk-bases are made from slatted battens, to give extra springing, but more importantly to allow the mattresses to breathe and to prevent the build-up of condensation or dampness.

An 18in x 18in (450mm x 450mm) opening hatch in the aft bulkhead provides an escape route from the cabin, but also serves as a window onto the bathing platform, giving a magical low-level view over the water. Alongside it, a wooden panel gives excellent access to the steering gear.

We were surprised to find there was no aft toilet, in a boat which would otherwise provide comfortable accommodation for two couples or a family. Even a vanity basin in the sideboard to port, which would be easy to achieve, would help relieve the queue for the one WC at peak times. Alternatively, the hanging locker and some floor space could be sacrificed to create a small toilet compartment.

Exterior

From the aft deck, a stainless steel ladder leads down to the integral bathing platform, with a hinging lower section for boarding. We liked the polished stainless steel chafing plate protecting the gunwale here, and the similar plates alongside the cleats. Outlets are provided for a transom shower, which is an optional extra.

Up on deck, an aft seat runs nearly full width, with three lids giving access to deep stowage space inside, plus a plastic box for the gas bottles.

Some 30% of the deck area to port is raised, while the other 70% is recessed 18in (450mm) to give a greater feeling of security to those sitting or standing there.

On the raised section is the outside helm position, whose swivelling seat is supported on a stainless steel tube that runs from the deck up to an aft extension of the cabin side. The latter was designed partly to carry the seat strut, but also to improve the styling of the boat in profile; unfortunately this has required a matching overhang to starboard, which encroaches unnecessarily into the space, and which you could hit as you move onto the side decks.

Once you have the height and angle of the seat adjusted to your taste, the helm position is a comfortable one. There is a raised footrest, and the wheel and engine controls are within easy reach. However, it is a long step down to the recessed deck, and we thought some sort of handrail should be provided as a reminder not too get off too quickly. The folding step from the raised section to

Left: throughout the boat, ply panels are formed into attractive curves using multiple saw cuts concealed under the veneer. Above: the bunk-bases have slatted battens to provide extra springing and to allow the mattresses to breathe.



the recessed section is flimsy, but Linssen say it will be improved.

The decks here and all around our test boat were finished in teak — normally an extra, but one we consider well worthwhile for its looks and comfort.

In fact, this and several other extras are included by Linssen in the boat's standard UK specification, designated the 34HT Royal. These include central heating, a bowthruster, a holding tank and macerator pump, an automatic battery charger and an Autohelm Tri-data repeater at the outside helm, adding £14,359 ex VAT to the basic price.

The guardrails are of stainless steel tube, bolted to the deck. They are more secure and solid than we normally find, giving reassurance for anyone working around the deck. Breaks amidships on both sides are closed off with chain, but we noticed this was already starting to show signs of rust. Forward on each side, the top rail divides to create an oval-shaped stowage for two fenders, a much neater arrangement than the usual add-on baskets.

Inboard rails on the cabin-top provide extra handholds, but the ends are left protruding rather than curved down to the surface, so you can catch your cuff in them.

The anchor stows in the stern, keeping the deck clear. This is useful when bows-to mooring, further aided by a chain-break across the pulpit.

This arrangement also means the anchor windlass can be mounted under the deck, in the chain locker, reached through a glass-topped hatch. In here you have good stowage space for ropes and extra fenders but, as is so often the case, these just lie on top of the pile of chain, giving potential jamming problems should you let go the anchor in a hurry.

Engine

Power comes from a single Volvo Penta diesel, with a variety of power options available. The smallest, fitted as standard, is the 62hp 4cyl naturally-aspirated MD31, and the most potent is the turbocharged and aftercooled 200hp 6cyl TAMD41. Our test boat had the 150hp TMD41, the turbocharged-only version of the same unit.

The engine is mounted under the saloon. To get at it on our boat, you had to lift the carpet and then the floors underneath, but future boats will apparently have hatches let into the carpet.

A long way down, the engine is lost in the space; there is plenty of room to move over and around it, although you would have to climb down to do even basic checks. Linssen have anticipated this with the siting of the inlet strainer, high under the floor and cleanable from the saloon, but anything else is a long way distant. The battery switches are on the floor next to the three batteries, in such a position that you would never turn them off in normal use, yet alone in an emergency. Similarly inaccessible are the fuel filter, on the aft bulkhead, and the stern gland.

The fuel tanks are mounted port and starboard, with a balance pipe. A plus feature would appear to be the sight-gauge on the port tank, but again this would be unusable in practice, as you have to climb down to press the shut-off valve at the bottom for it to register.

The optional plastic holding tank is mounted at the forward end of the compartment, together with the macerator discharge pump. Noise insulation would appear to be behind aluminium-sheet

covering, so we were unable to ascertain its composition, but it can only be about 0.5in thick. No engineroom fire-extinguisher is fitted as standard.

Handling and performance

Normally when we pick up a boat from the Hamble we turn to starboard out of the marina and head for the open sea. But the Linssen is first and foremost a river boat, so initially we put the wheel the other way and headed upriver to the Jolly Sailor.

The 34 handled perfectly, tracking a straight course, but swinging easily to the big rudder when required. For really tight manoeuvring, the bowthruster came into its own, allowing us to tuck into small corners, edge up to a pontoon or turn on the spot. A comfortable inland cruising speed was 1500rpm, with 5.3 knots (6mph) showing on our radar gun. Noise levels were muted, just 70dB(A) in the saloon and 67dB(A) out on the aft deck.

Later we took the boat into salt waters. Pushing the throttle forward, we again found an easy cruising gait, at 2500rpm and 7½ knots. At this speed the noise levels were again reasonable, with 76dB(A) in the saloon, still allowing you to talk comfortably, and 73dB(A) on the aft deck.

A quick calculation confirmed that this is the boat's hull speed. Any more throttle produced a lot more noise but not much more speed. We saw 8.0 knots at 3000rpm, and 8.8 knots at the maximum 3650rpm, at which point noise levels were an uncomfortable 84dB(A) in the saloon, and not much better at 82dB(A) on deck, with a lot of vibration coming through the hull. Also the boat was starting to squat decidedly by the stern.

Our fuel consumption figures verify these conclusions, with the engine sipping a frugal 1.6gph of the precious red stuff at 1500rpm, which translates to 3.3mpg and a maximum range of 325 miles. At sea cruising speeds this drops to 2.3mpg and 230 miles; try maximum revs and you will get just 1.2mpg, and 120 miles (allowing a 20% margin) from a tankful.

Linssen claim that, with the 200hp engine, you will get up to 12 knots. Frankly we cannot see this happening, and would estimate that you are unlikely to see more than about 9 knots, however much power you put in. However, this should not be seen as a drawback in what is basically a comfortable displacement-speed boat.

Unfortunately there were very few waves on the day of our test, so no way of putting the boat's seakeeping to the test, but a look at the 34's lines shows plenty of flare at the bow to provide buoyancy and keep the waves down.

Conclusions

The Linssen 34HT is a pretty boat which manages to carry its headroom well on a comparatively short waterline length. It is well finished inside, and well built behind the scenes, with plenty of good features for easy river handling.

For extensive river cruising, the turbocharged engine options might start to cause problems, while if you undertake the occasional sea passage the lowest rated naturally-aspirated unit is going to be short on power, so this would appear to make a good case for the option of a mid-powered naturally-aspirated unit, such as the Perkins 135.

Linssen's strong reputation should ensure that the boat maintains its resale value well. □

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