

Boat Report

MAREX 280 HOLIDAY

From Norwegian builders making a UK comeback, this family cruiser packs two separate cabins into less than 30ft. We tried the hardtop version.





Marex are well established Norwegian boatbuilders whose name has popped up in the UK only occasionally, and without great longevity. This is a pity, because the yard produces substantially constructed and well finished craft, extending up to almost 30ft in length.

However, they have enthusiastic new agents in Southampton-based Southern Motorboats, who invited us to try the flagship of the range, the single-engined split-accommodation 280. So we took the hardtop version for a run on a clear, crisp November day, when boats with wheelhouses are the only type you want to know.

Design

The 280's hull is of semi-displacement form, with a fair run of keel and shoe to protect the propeller and support the good-sized rudder. Its underwater sections are of medium-vee form, culminating in a

hard chine, and have a couple of sprayrails over the forebody on each side. Above the waterline, a knuckle breaks up the topside, and towards the bow this pushes into a good measure of flair.

An underwater exhaust has been trunked through at the transom, in an attempt to reduce noise and prevent emissions blackening the transom.

With inboard diesel engine options starting at 59hp, the boat would make a wholly usable riverboat. If this was the intention, you could probably dispense with the not inconsiderable bathing platform extension, which is priced as an extra.

Exterior

Our test boat had the GRP hardtop option, giving the forward part of the cockpit a pukka wheelshelter; the alternative is a canopy section which stretches between the goalpost mast and the full wind and side screens. All this adds to the versatility and

Above left: opposite the helm position under our test boat's hardtop was a galley with a sink, hob and fridge. Above: the whole of the cockpit sole can be removed to give access to the engines, and steps lead down through a small lobby to the forward cabin. Below: the dinette here converts into a very wide double berth.



charm of the layout, blurring the distinction between the exterior and the interior.

Headroom under the smartly lined hardtop is 6ft 2in (1.89m), and the helm position to starboard is tidily laid-out. The usual engine gauges are housed in a pseudo-walnut fascia, with further room for a couple of instrument heads, and a compass is fitted on the far side of a small but adequate perspex-covered chart area and bits tray.

The seat, whose plinth has a locker let into it, is adjustable fore and aft, and the no-nonsense ship's wheel is most comfortable to use. The fully protective screen is served by two good wipers.

Both adjacent to the helm and over to port there are opening ports to provide a cooling airstream in summer weather, and the hardtop itself can be fitted with opening hatches.

To port is a galley moulding which has thoughtfully been designed with a fiddled worktop and plenty of drawer and cupboard stowage, well executed in teak joinery. As well as the stainless steel sink which comes as standard, the boat we tested had a two-burner gas hob and an adequate-sized fridge, these being optional extras.

The gas bottle for the hob finds a niche under the adjacent seat cushion, along with the battery switches and a 240V shorepower inlet.

The aft part of the cockpit features a wide and comfortable L-shaped settee, with an infill which conceals the access to the stern cabin. When it is time to eat, you can bring out a double-hinged table which is tucked neatly away in the starboard coaming. Once the double helm seat has been flipped over, as many as six people can squeeze around this.

For clambering ashore or onto the side decks, small sections of the seat cushions can be removed, and the GRP seat-base used as a handy step.

Some 5in (13cm) wide, with a moulded lip, the side decks are easier to move along than they might be because the guardrail stanchions are affixed to the outer edge of the gunwale, allowing more room inboard. There are handholds positioned on the goalpost mast as well as neatly inset into the wheelhouse top. Pairs of 10in cleats at the bow and stern are joined by 6in (15cm) ones amidships.

The stern is fashioned with an anchor platform,

Above left: windows in the canopy offer a good view out. Above: the stern has an anchor platform, but no ground tackle is included as standard. Below (clockwise from top left): fuel and holding tanks are outboard of the engines; aft of the helm position is an L-settee with an infill to cover the door to the stern cabin; thanks to another infill, this could sleep as many as three people; vinyl-covered bulkheads alleviate the expanse of gelcoat in the WC.

and there is a chain locker let into the coachroof just abaft of it, but no roller or ground tackle is included in the standard inventory. The non-slip moulded foredeck surface continues over the coachroof.

Aft, there is a raised sunbed area over the stern cabin, and the chunky bathing platform is readily accessible via some cleverly designed moulded-in steps, with the help of a guardrail around the sunbed. The platform has two lockers let in it, and the transom is sculpted to take four fenders.

Interior

Although there is only stooped headroom to the cabins fore and aft, the interior of the 280 has much more of a big-boat ambience than you would expect, set off by the careful use of teak trim and smart upholstery.

Forward from the wheelshelter is a small lobby leading to a cabin in the bow, and to the



toilet/shower compartment, which is tucked under the helm console to starboard.

The latter is almost fully moulded, but to alleviate the bleak effect of white gel the bulkheads are part-covered in a vinyl imitation-tile design, which works well. The sea toilet is partially boxed-in, and the moulded basin is good and deep. There is stowage outboard by way of a perspex-fronted cupboard and a locker beneath the basin. A circular vent is let into the window.

The welcoming forecabin has a generously upholstered vee-dinette which converts into a shortish but very wide double berth, which means you are probably best off sleeping somewhat askew across the mattress area.

Lockers beneath the seat cushions are well finished and lined, and there is a useful hanging locker tucked behind a curtain in the port quarter. To the head of the cabin, behind the backrests, are a pair of nicely constructed lockers, one of which incorporates a cut-out infill for stowing glasses securely.

A panel in the sole of the lobby lifts to give access to the bilge and the shower drain pump.

Accessed from the cockpit, the aft cabin could at a pinch sleep three, with the width of the starboard berth being increasing to 4ft 0in (1.22m) when you insert an infill. The other berth is 2ft 3in (0.69m) wide, and both are 6ft 4in (1.93m) long.

Beneath them is a useful array of painted-out lockers, while the builders have done a tidy job of incorporating cave-lockers and shelves above. Higher again are windows on both sides, with opening ports. Access to the rudder stock is via the loose-fitted table top at the stern.

Engine

A useful line-up of conventional single-diesel engine options is offered from the Mercruiser, Volvo Penta and Yanmar stables, of 57hp to 165hp. Our test boat was fitted with a 150hp Volvo TAMD31.

The whole of the cockpit sole comes up in smartly finished teak and holly panels. The central pair lift clear to enable you to get at the engine itself, others outboard of these give access to the fuel and holding tanks, and the aftermost hatch reveals the battery boxes. There is room to stand both at the forward end of the compartment and over the gearbox, the shaft log itself being reachable through a screwed-down panel in the aft cabin.

Day-to-day checks are easy enough, with the raw-water strainer and fuel/water separator being located nice and high, while there is sufficient room down either side of the engine to get at the other main service points.

The hefty-looking manual pump mounted on the aft bulkhead is in fact for discharging the holding tank. The bilge itself is serviced by a small submersible unit plus a manual one located in the cockpit.

Foil-faced foam lines most of the compartment's surfaces, and the installation appears well found and tidily executed.

Performance & handling

Pushing without fuss through whatever wakes and wash we could find, with barely a squeak from the hull or the solid fit-out, the 280 settles readily enough into its semi-displacement mode at just under 16 knots, at 3600rpm. Opening her up fully to

4000rpm, we clocked a top speed of just on 20 knots, with fuel and water tanks all but full.

At both these speeds, and at a 3200rpm setting which gave 12.5 knots, we felt it would be handy to have trim tabs to flatten the ride a touch. Not that the visibility or ride is penalised, but this would let the boat have its head more easily and allow the hull to run at an easier angle.

The steering is positive at any speed, and neither too heavy nor too light. The hull turns smartly with just the slightest of inward heel.

Slow-speed manoeuvring is well-mannered, the boat turning in its own length on a single lock as well as being steerable astern. A bow-thruster is listed as an option, and perhaps, given the cost saving of a single engine over a twin installation, it would make life simpler if you undertake a lot of lock work.

At displacement speeds the hull tracks in a straight line without continuous recourse to the wheel, which is obviously important if you are doing most of your boating inland.

Noise levels on our test boat were most reasonable in the cockpit and forecabin area, where we recorded 82dB(A) and 79dB(A) respectively at 3600rpm. Things were distinctly noisier in the stern cabin, which is to be expected given the closeness of the prop.

Expect to consume around 45gph (21lph) at our cruise setting of 3600rpm.

Conclusions

This is a super little cruiser offering versatility and comfort for the family afloat. Well thought out and well built from stern to stern, the Marex has a solidness of fit-out and detail that is usually only found on bigger craft, and which will readily take the wear and tear a well-used boat will suffer.

The choice of available engines means you can pick the appropriate one for your cruising plans, whether they be inland, coastal or cross-Channel (the 150hp Volvo makes for a reasonable compromise). The single installation is not a problem in terms of handling, and should be no great drawback with regard to reliability given that you can get at items such as the fuel tank to give it a good clean once in a while.

Be wary of the standard price, however; you will add a good few thousand pounds if you opt for the hardtop, the bathing platform and creature-comforts such as shorepower, a fridge and a hob. ☐

Marex 280 Holiday

Loa 29ft 8in (9.04m).
Hull length 27ft 0in (8.23m) excluding bathing platform.
Beam 9ft 2in (2.80m).
Draught 2ft 3in (0.70m).
Displacement 2.8 tons.
Fuel capacity 53gal (240lt).
Water capacity 53gal (240lt).
Engine single 150hp Volvo Penta TAMD 31 diesel.
Price £61,239 ex VAT as standard, with Volvo Penta TAMD 31 but without hardtop and bathing platform; £67,723 as tested.
Builders A/S Marex, N-4870 Fevik, Norway. Tel: (47) 370 47777.
Suppliers Southern Motorboats Ltd, 37-39 Vespasian Road, Bitterne Manor, Southampton, Hampshire SO18 1AY. Tel: 01703 224252.

Below: with a canopy over the aft part of the cockpit to add to the option of the hardtop, the Marex blurs the distinction between interior and exterior accommodation.

