

# Pearl 34

## — Boat Report —

*A new name it might be, but this good-looking Irish aft-cabin boat is all you would expect in a river and estuarial cruiser.*

If the Pearl name is unfamiliar to you, that is because it is a brand new range being built by Rosebank Marine in Ireland and distributed by Yarnolds Marine in Stratford-on-Avon. Offshore cruisers of 41ft and 45ft are in the pipeline, but the starting point is this aft-cabin design intended for river and coastal work.

Most of Rosebank Marine's output goes to charter fleets, where durability of build and reliable engineering are prime concerns, and we always believe this stands a boatbuilder in good stead when it produces boats for the private market.

To see how this theory stands up, we took an early version of this pleasing-looking boat for a sortie on the River Thames, courtesy of local dealers Penton Hook Marine Sales.

### Design & layout

Designed by John Bennett, the 34 is semi-displacement in form and can be fitted with either single or twin engines for speeds up to 18 knots, making coastal and even cross-Channel trips perfectly acceptable propositions.

The hull shape is best described as chined round-bilge, whereby the potentially tight rounded section is interrupted by a chine-flat, giving it the edge to push back creeping spray as well as a measure of additional lift when running at semi-displacement speeds.

A deep, almost full-length keel

protects the sterngear, and with a single-engine installation also provides a landing for a shoe that extends beneath the propeller to support the large rudder.

Above the waterline, both a low and a high knuckle add definition to the topsides, which culminate at the stern in a sizable integral bathing platform.

Giving access up from the platform to the aft deck is what could almost be described as a

stairwell, the effect being heightened by the fully moulded, solid dodger which cossets it, and is then neatly scooped down to pick up the line of the side deck. All of this adds interest to what, on any boat with a raised aft deck, can be a rather boxy stern shape.

As standard, this aft deck sports the only helm station, although an interior driving position can be specified if required. The helm seat will swing



back to face the built-in seating along the transom.

Down below, the interior is bright and inviting, helped by our test boat's solid cherry joinery, and headroom is 6ft 2in (1.89m) through most of the accommodation. The saloon dinette converts into a good-sized double berth courtesy of a simple pull-out base, complementing an aft cabin with en-suite facilities and a forecabin whose adjacent WC serves as a day-toilet. Tucked in at the lower level too is a galley with good cooking facilities and stowage.

## Handling & performance

The 34 is more than just a riverboat, but sadly we only had the opportunity to test its inland cruising capacity. The so-called summer's changeable weather, and the fact that the boat was heavily in demand for demonstration purposes, precluded any thoughts of making it down from the tidal Thames to the Estuary.

Anyway, the craft we picked up from Penton Hook Marina near Chertsey had the smallest of the single-engine options, a 85hp Nanni five-cylinder turbocharged unit running through a conventional shaft. For estuarial and coastal trips, a better choice would be two of these Nannis, for a claimed top speed of around 14 knots, or twin 130hp Volvo Pentas, with which



## Saloon

A set of open stairs lead below from the aft deck. Only if you are quite tall do you have to duck to clear the gas strut-supported companionway hatch, although a handhold to one side would be beneficial.

The general feeling is a light, inviting interior, not least due to the soft, warm sheen afforded by the cherry joinery. The window line is sufficiently low to allow those seated a good view out, and the large sliding portion on both sides means there is plenty of ventilation to augment the fixed vents.

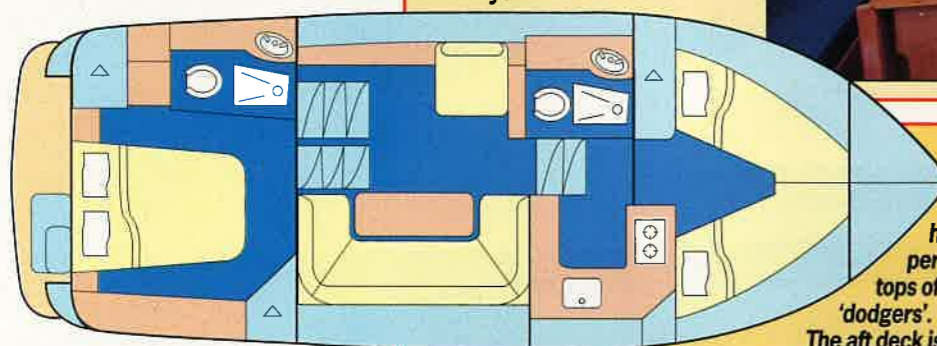
To starboard is a U-shaped settee, which readily converts into a comfortable-looking 6ft 4in (1.93m) by 3ft 4in (1.02m) berth if you

move the drop-leaf table clear and slide out an infill piece from the base. The outboard portion of the base still manages to incorporate a large drawer, while the two 'wings' have more conventional painted-out lockers, accessed by lifting the cushions.

An interior helm position can be fitted forward to port, in lieu of the small but useful settee, but we

suspect that most buyers will prefer the roominess that results from doing without it.

The sideboard running along the rest of the port side is not hugely deep, but its fiddled shelves make a useful contribution to the boat's stowage. We liked the way all the countertops are fitted with fiddles, too.



extra handrail or two would be beneficial here, and perhaps along the tops of the moulded 'dodgers'.

The aft deck is a good size, with room for a couple of loose director's-style chairs to supplement the fixed seating arranged across the transom and the double helm seat with its swing-over back.

We were surprised to find, on our test boat, that the rear seat mouldings were not fabricated to provide much-needed locker space, but Yarnolds tell us they are looking into this, and envisage putting hatches in the tops.

The base of the helm seat



already doubles as a gas locker, although a rethink should allow the builders to make better use of this space too, adding a separate partitioned-off stowage compartment.



## Galley

A couple of easy steps down from the saloon is an extremely workable galley. Its U-shape and thoughtful layout ensure that everything is to hand, and plenty of eye-height cupboards and fiddled shelving helps things find the right niche.

Appointments include a full four-burner hob, an oven and grill (with gas shut-offs obvious and close to hand), a fridge and a single circular stainless steel sink. An extractor unit, rather than the simple fixed vent fitted, would round things off nicely.



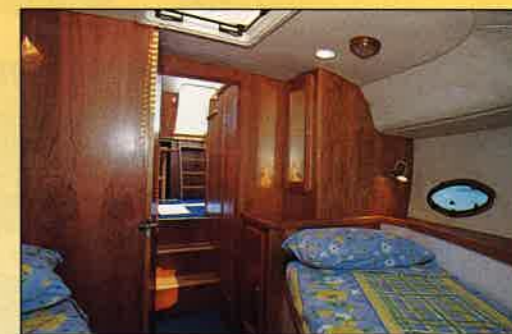
## Forward cabin

Full standing headroom extends from the rest of the accommodation into the forecabin, where you can specify either a vee-berth arrangement or an offset double. Our test boat had the former, with the mattresses measuring a generous 6ft 4in (1.93m) long by 2ft 4in wide (0.71m), and offering a fair amount of room in the shared feet area.

Clothes stowage is reasonable, including a stepped locker arrangement to the head of the port berth which incorporates a hanging locker and cupboard, plus an overhead locker towards its foot. The wide shelves outboard will also accommodate kit-bags and the like.

Although all of this is finished in the same cherry

joinery as the rest of the boat, the stowage areas beneath the berths are disappointingly left as bare GRP, and a lick of gelcoat wash to smarten them up would not go amiss.



## Aft cabin

The master cabin aft is nicely thought-out, with a walkaround double berth, headroom of 6ft 2in (1.89m) and a useful array of stowage.

The berth itself measures 6ft 0in (1.83m) by 4ft 4in (1.32m),

with a small bedside table either side, and there is a neat dressing table with a mirrored cupboard and plenty of wardrobe space.

The base of the berth lifts in one rather cumbersome piece to reveal the water tank and steering gear. This is an arrangement that suits charter boats, but private owners might prefer to see two or



## Day toilet

With little to break up the moulding of the forward toilet compartment, it has a rather plain appearance, although of course this makes it easy to wash down and keep clean.

The shower tray is almost domestic-sized, but it is part of the compartment and not a separate cubicle. The manual toilet here, like the one en-suite to the aft cabin, is connected to a sizable holding tank located in the enginebay.



Built-in storage is sparse, with just a single small cupboard beneath the sink; surely there must be other voids which could be opened up to rectify this shortcoming?

We were pleased to see the compartment fitted with a fixed vent as well as an opening port.

## Decks

You can board the boat from alongside, through the break in the guardrail amidships, with the help of a moulded step set into the topsides both port and starboard.

The inward angling of the superstructure makes it nice and easy to walk along the side decks, which are around 10in (25cm) wide and enclosed by good, high guardrails.

Likewise, the foredeck is flat and easy to move around on, although access to the chain locker is via the forecabin rather than at deck level.

Mooring hardware comprises three pairs of 8in (20cm) cleats, forward, midships and aft, together with an extra-large set of bitts at the bow to control and make off any anchor warp (there is no windlass supplied as standard) or simply act as a back-up for the cleats. Fender baskets are fabricated into the guardrails forward.



something over 18 knots is envisaged.

Certainly the Pearl's semi-displacement hull is just the ticket for steady, controllable inland work. The long, deepish keel gives excellent directional stability without the need to fuss over the wheel, whilst also making sure you are not blown about too much once the power is taken off. On the other hand, the large rudder allows the hull to respond smartly to the helm when necessary. All of this is

## Aft deck

Boarding from astern is simple, via the bathing platform and easy-to-negotiate stairs fashioned into the transom. An



## Engine room & bilge

Access to the engine room is via a large central hatch in the saloon, right over the engine if the boat has a single installation. This makes it simple enough to do basic engine checks, and to inspect and clean the adjacent raw-water strainer.

It is a bit of a squeeze to wriggle down into the compartment itself, although if necessary the steps down into the aft cabin can be removed to give access to the rear of the bay. This whole configuration is currently under review by the builders, a likely change involving a bordered carpet with a few more lifting hatches to give access the full length and breadth of the space.

Once inside, there is loads of room to work right around a single



engine, as fitted to our test boat, and things should not be too cramped with a twin installation.

Fuel is split between two wing tanks, with the fuel/water separator located down towards the aft companionway access, whilst also outboard lies the useful-sized holding tank and calorifier. Further inboard is the battery box, which on our test boat had yet to be fitted with a lid, with the switches themselves being

tucked neatly out the way in a small cubbyhole in the saloon.

The bilges are serviced by two submersible pumps, along with a manual one located just inside the compartment near the companionway steps aft. Less accessible for immediate inspection is the shaft log, under a screwed-down panel in the aft cabin; fixing hatches in this way is possibly a hangover from the Rosebank yard's experience in building hireboats, where they do not want charterers meddling with seacocks and so on.

The engineering is nothing but sound, and every item in both the engine bay and the bilges appears easy to get at. However, there is no noise insulation, which, given the size of the compartment and the sounding-board surfaces of the tanks, is really remiss.

just what you need on the river.

For mooring and lockwork, the combination of a sizable rudder and the (optional) bow-thruster gives plenty of manoeuvrability, and that long keel makes going astern easy as well.

Setting the throttles at 1200rpm gives the maximum river speed of 4 knots (8kph), but there is plenty of leeway to drop back from this, with the hull remaining predictable at any of these displacement speeds and

producing minimum wash.

On Penton Hook's test lake, off the river itself, we pushed the engine through the rev range and found that 2000rpm gave 6.5 knots, 2400rpm gave 7.0 knots and a flat-out 2700rpm produced 7.4 knots. For river work, expect to consume little more than 1.5gph (6.5lph); maintaining 2400rpm or thereabouts for estuary sorties will double this.

Noise levels at river speed

were low, simply because of the minimal revs, but once the engine had to do some work it was noticeable that rather more was emanating from the vicinity of the companionway to the aft cabin. At around 80dB(A) at 2400rpm, this was never too intrusive, but bedding the removable steps on rubber and clamping them in place would push it further into the background.

## Conclusions

As a river and estuary cruiser this new John Bennett design works extremely well, with good access round the decks, a pleasant raised helm area, manoeuvrability and a nicely proportioned interior.

Given the 34's semi-displacement hull, obvious strength of build and power options, there is little doubt that it should make comfortable work of coastal conditions too, whether with one or two engines.

Its looks are pleasing, adding a different slant to what, given the aft-cabin format, could otherwise be a somewhat boxy shape. And the fit-out is just how a regularly used boat needs to be: pleasant to behold but unfussy and durable.

Our criticisms, such as stark WC mouldings and lost opportunities for stowage, come down to areas where the builders are more used to catering for the hirefleet operator than for the private buyer. We are assured that these details are recognised and are being addressed by the distributors, which should mean that later boats off the line are better still. □



## Helm

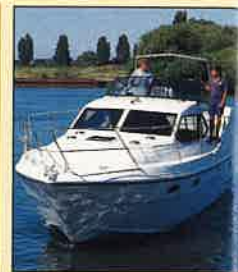
The driving position is well sheltered when you rig the protective canopy, although on the other hand the supporting hoop can be hinged down to reduce the boat's air draught for low bridges.

The seat itself is quite high, which makes for good visibility, with a moulded footrest. If you want to stand, however, the distance between seat and wooden wheel is fairly tight; Yarnolds are going to have the seat module located a little further back, and when this is done the wheel and throttle should still fall easily to hand.

The forward portion of console

houses the engine instrumentation, and the moulding is fashioned to locate a compass as an option if you intend going to sea. There is sufficient room to fit a further couple of instrument heads adjacent to the ready-use switches.

The screen is served by a rather small single-arm wiper, on the skipper's side only.



## BUILD

glass-reinforced plastic

## DIMENSIONS

### LOA

34ft 0in (10.36m)

### HULL LENGTH

32ft 2in (9.81m)

### BEAM

12ft 0in (3.65m)

### DRAUGHT

3ft 0in (0.91m)

### AIR DRAUGHT

10ft 6in (3.20m)  
with hoop down

### DISPLACEMENT

6.0 tonnes

### FUEL CAPACITY

120gal (554lt)

### WATER CAPACITY

103gal (468lt)

## ENGINE

single Nanni 5.25TDI

5cyl 2.5lt diesel

85hp at 2800rpm

## PRICE

from £84,950 ex VAT;  
£91,000 as tested

## SUPPLIERS

Penton Hook Marine Sales,  
Penton Hook Marina,  
Staines Lane, Chertsey,  
Surrey KT16 8PY.  
Tel: 01932 570055.

## UK DISTRIBUTORS

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## BUILDERS

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