

BOAT REPORT

OYSTER'S PEARL

Quality yacht builders Oyster Marine have turned from sail to power for their latest model. Emrhys Barrell visited Ipswich to test the first of the range.

OYSTER Marine are one of the most widely respected names in the sailing world. Over the past 15 years they have built up a range of quality yachts from 37-68ft, whose hallmarks have been their high standard of interior fit-out and finish, and attention to the owner's individual requirements. With the rapid growth in the motorboat market, and with a managing director whose second love after his racing yachts is a Fairey Huntsman, it was only logical for an Oyster motorboat to appear. In fact, a whole range of powered craft is envisaged, but as with all its developments, the company is moving prudently rather than precipitously, and the family is starting with a mid-market 39ft flybridge cruiser, the Powerline 390.

We took the first production boat out for a rough-weather test in the North Sea from Oyster's own marina at Ipswich, then followed with a visit to the company's building facility at nearby Colchester, to see what goes into making an Oyster so special.

Design and construction

If the Powerline looks familiar, it is because found under a modified deck and superstructure moulding is the hull of the Humber 38. For their first steps in the motorboat market, Oyster wanted a boat from a proven designer, and the logical choice was naval architect John Bennett. His craft formed the backbone of most of the British production builders' fleets in the '70s through the early '80s, and he has recently enjoyed another surge in demand for his designs. The Humber formed part of this new look, and when the model was superseded by the aft-cabin 40, the

POWERLINE 390



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Oyster Marine have an enviable reputation for quality of construction and finishing on their range of yachts. This is also everywhere evident on the Powerline 390, from the saloon (above) and master cabin (left), to the U-shaped galley (above right) and purposeful interior helm (right).

POWERLINE 390



moulds of the 38 became available. The boat had already built up a reputation as a solid, no-nonsense long-distance cruiser and, with its solid track record, was ideal for Oyster's requirements. Some changes to the mouldings were necessary to bring in the company's own ideas, but then it went straight into production.

Underwater, the 390 has a medium-to-deep vee hull, with a deadrise of 21° amidships, 18° at the transom. Two short spray rails start at the bow, but in keeping with Bennett's current thinking, these quickly fade out at around one-third length. A noticeable keel, with a maximum depth of nearly 9in, provides directional stability and some measure of protection to the stern gear. The transom has the now fashionable reverse-angle 'bustle', giving extra planing length without extra weight. A 6in wide chine flat further assists the boat onto the plane, and provides grip in the turns, while at the same time reducing spray. Two pronounced knuckles near the top and bottom of the topsides stiffen the flat panels, ►

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◀ breaking up any tendency towards a boxy appearance, and help reduce drag-inducing water running up the sides.

Walking around the moulding shop at Colchester, it was good to see the attention to detail going into the Powerline. Recesses in the hull for skin fittings and P-brackets reduce drag. Solid foam in the keel, spray rails and outboard at the main fore-and-aft stringers help stiffen and strengthen the hull. Bulkheads forward and aft of the engine room give the boat three separate watertight compartments, and this integrity is continued up to the cabin sole, with all cables and pipes having watertight glands. Conduits are laid the full length of the boat at the building stage to carry wiring, pipes and services. The fuel tanks sit in moulded GRP trays, to spread the load, and contain any leaks. All the bulkheads are seated on foam pads, to prevent hard spots and stress cracks in the hull, and a full 6in of glassfibre is used to bond these bulkheads in. Finally, the hull and deck joint is both bolted and glassed to ensure the maximum strength. Clearly the experience of 15 years building sailing boats for the toughest of conditions has been put to good use.

Accommodation

The layout of the 390 follows conventional thinking in the main, with aft cockpit, midships wheelhouse/saloon, and two double cabins. Entering the saloon you find a six-person, U-shaped settee to your right and facing it, a smaller two-person seat. The upholstery of the seats is sprung for extra comfort, and the cushions are reversible to allow you to change the interior colour scheme between day and night. Lockers to port hold a cocktail cabinet and entertainments centre, but apart from a little shelf and a couple of small lockers under the settees, there is a shortage of general stowage in the saloon.

The helm position is on the starboard side forward. Here there is a two-person bench seat facing a very stylish dashboard. We liked the layout of this, but were less happy with the shiny black gelcoat finish — a matt effect would have caused fewer problems with reflections. Ahead of the driver is a three-function Autohelm autopilot/echo-sounder/speedo flanked by the engine gauges, while to the right are separate switches for the three wipers, the washers and the trim tabs. The rest of the electrical switches are in a comprehensive panel down by the navigator's knees. In an overhead console you find the VHF, Decca Navigator and radar. This console is in the process of being rearranged and modified for boat number two.

To the left of the helm is an excellent chart area, big enough for a half-folded Admiralty chart, and capable of being angled up to provide the most comfortable position for working on and viewing. A perspex top covers

the chart, but we thought this unnecessarily thick and heavy. The whole area hinges up to give access to chart and instrument stowages, but it needs a deeper fiddle at its base to stop pencils going astray.

The steering wheel is uncomfortably vertical, and this is being angled on future boats. The throttles are well sited to the right, and we were pleased to see that the side window slides to allow the helmsman to talk to the deck crew. Under the seat is a large locker.

Down three steps you reach the galley to port. U-shaped, this is of a good size, with ample worktop area. Deep fiddles all round reflect the company's sailing background, but are no less essential on a motorboat. Cut-away corners allow for easy cleaning. Equipment includes a combined 1½ sink and drainer unit, mixer taps, three-burner Optimus hob, oven and grill, and a large fridge. Stowage is provided by crockery lockers overhead, plus further lockers under the worktop, and four drawers. All the doors and drawers are fastened by 'key-hole' catches, which you have to put your finger through to operate. There is no doubt that these give positive locking, but they are fiddly to use, and are one sailing boat feature that most modern powerboats have improved on.

Through the backs of the lockers you have good access to skin fittings, a feature which is continued when you lift a hatch in the sole. Here you can reach the bilge pump and strum-boxes. The inside of the hull revealed is well finished, and gelled out. Further hatches throughout the accommodation give good access to the inside of the hull, and to all services.

Opposite the galley is the guest cabin to starboard. This has 6ft headroom over its forward end, reducing to 3ft 6in over the twin berths where they run under the saloon. Good light comes from an opening portlight, and a hatch overhead. Stowage is provided by a four-drawer chest, a three-quarter-height wardrobe, and lockers under the berths. A shelf along the boat's side would be a useful addition. Door catches here and through the rest of the boat are substantial brass and stainless steel non-rattle types. They are certainly efficient, but not the prettiest we have seen.

In general, the finish of the Powerline is good. Oyster have moved away from the traditional teak joinery of their yachts, using ash veneers with teak trim. Boat number one was pushed through fast for the Southampton Boat Show, and we would expect some of the detail to be tidied up on later models.

The main toilet is found forward of the galley, to port. This is a good-sized compartment with 5ft 11in headroom, a sensible-sized sink, and good locker space. A Solarvent helps clear the air. It is not intended that you shower in the compartment, as the

POWERLINE 390

Powerline 390

Engines: Twin Cummins 6BTA 5.9-M2, 300hp at 2800rpm, 6 cyl, 5900cc.

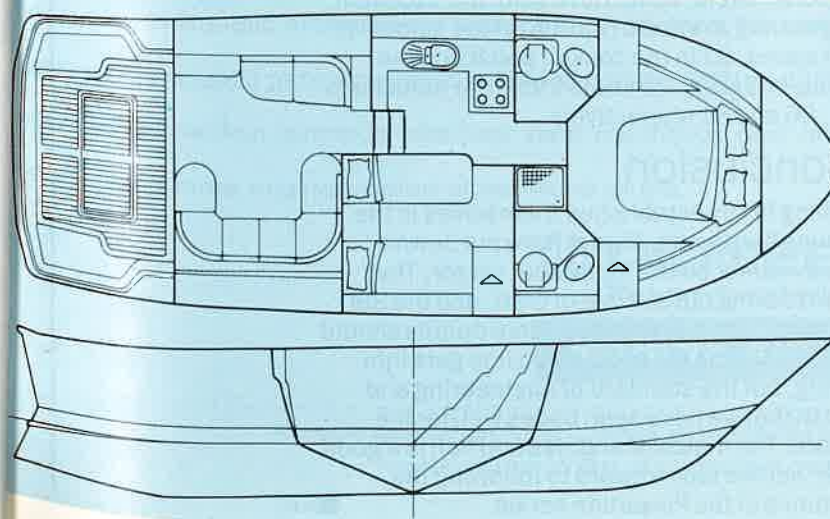
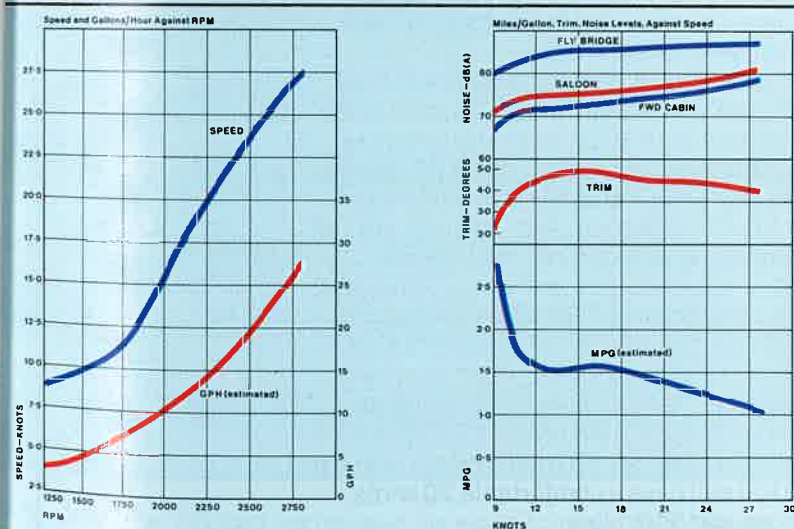
Conditions: Wind S'ly force 4, sea slight. Load: Fuel 50%, water 25%, crew 3.

	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	trim	Sound levels dB(A)			
							saloon	helm	aft ckpt	flybdg
7.5	—	—	—	—	—	1.0	69	65	78	75
8.8	3.1	14.0	2.84	682	2.5	72	72	68	80	75
9.6	4.4	20.0	2.18	523	3.5	74	74	71	82	76
11.4	7.3	33.1	1.56	374	4.5	75	75	72	84	78
16.1	10.1	46.0	1.59	382	5.0	76	76	73	86	79
19.8	14.0	63.8	1.41	338	4.5	77	77	74	86	81
23.7	18.6	84.5	1.27	305	4.5	78	78	76	87	83
27.3	27.0	122.6	1.01	242	4.0	80	80	78	87	82

inc platform)	39ft 7in (12.06m)	Fuel	2×120 gal (1090lt)
length	38ft 0in (11.58m)	Water	80gal (450lt)
line length	32ft 6in (9.90m)	Designer	John Bennett
n	13ft 8in (4.17m)	Price ex VAT	
ght	3ft 0in (0.91m)	With 250hp Cummins	£144,950
lacement	10 tons	With 300hp Cummins	£149,450

ler:

er Marine, Fox's Marina, Wherstead,
ich, Suffolk IP2 8SA. Tel: 0473 688888.



390 features a separate shower stall on the other side of the passageway. This is definitely a standing-room-only space, but it avoids getting everything in the toilet wet. Access to the shower stall is also gained through the en-suite bathroom in the forward cabin.

This cabin has a large double berth, and plenty of stowage space, including a full-height hanging locker, with opposite a smaller locker and drawers. Further lockers and drawers are found under the berth, while two small shelves are sited outboard. The substantial hull framing in this area of the boat is neatly capped by more ash joinery. Forward a mirrored door gives access to the anchor locker, with a lock and seal to keep out damp and smells. The en-suite bathroom is similar in layout and size to the main toilet.

Engines

Power on the 390 comes from a pair of Cummins 6BTAs, either 250hp as standard, or with the option of uprated 300s. Our test boat had the bigger engines. The power-to-weight ratio and size of these new B-series units is perfectly matched to craft in this size bracket, giving speeds up to close on 30 knots.

Three years ago, Oyster bought Fox's of Ipswich, a long-established boatbuilder, and it was this company's experience and expertise in high-speed motorboats that they drew on to ensure the engineering of the 390 was right on the mark. Fox's reputation is in building and refits of pilot boats and patrol boats, and this showed clearly in the standard of engineering and installation of the boat we tested.

The engines drive conventional shafts, and are mounted under the saloon sole. Quick access is gained via a hatch at the after end. For more serious work you can hinge up the settees then raise two larger sections of the floor. Getting at the port engine, and down between the two is OK, but the starboard engine is harder to reach. Once down between the two, aluminium treadplate forms an excellent walkway, with no cross-bearers to trip over. Two of the largest available Racor filters are mounted on the forward bulkhead, with remote electric alarms. Fuel is run in copper pipe, well-clipped with screwed brass saddles, not the normal nail-on clips, with armoured flexible tails to the engines. Twin stainless steel tanks are mounted port and starboard, and we were pleased to see three large cleaning/inspection hatches in these.

Stepping down through the aft hatch is a tight squeeze, and you have a tendency to stand on the main electrical cables or the shaft. Reaching the port sea-inlet filter and stern gland is easy enough, together with the two stern greasers, but access to the starboard units is almost impossible. The battery master switches and breakers are right under the hatch, and while this makes them easy to reach, it also makes them vulnerable.

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◀ The batteries themselves are mounted in a strong wooden box, with a lid, but we were surprised to find this was screwed down — a quick release method would be advisable.

Bilge-pumping on the 390 was excellent, with three separate automatic electric units, and two manual back-ups. The forward-most of these is mounted in a box under a hatch at the forward end of the saloon, and here you also find the comprehensive fuel management system. Clearly-marked valves allow each engine to draw and return from either tank. We also liked the GRP tray to catch any drips from these valves — a nice touch.

Engine room insulation consists of plastic-faced foam rubber, stuck on the underside of the sole and the hatches, plus the bulkheads, and also on the hull side above the waterline, and up behind the joinery in the saloon. This attention to detail, together with Elastomuff silencers in the exhausts, led to excellent noise levels, both inside the boat and out.

Exterior

The first thing you notice in the cockpit is the teak-laid deck. Not cheap to apply, but certainly the most comfortable and effective surface. As an extra this can also be specified for the side-decks. A large hatch on a gas strut gives access to the lazarette, and here again the edge of the coaming is teak-capped to improve the visual effect and give a smooth edging to climb down over. In here you find the stainless steel water tank, calorifier, water system pumps and plenty of space to stow the dinghy and its engine. You also have access to the sterngear, which will shortly have a protective box fitted over it. The second manual bilge pump is also mounted down here, but this is to be moved up into the cockpit for easier use.

Outside again, aft seating in the cockpit has lockers beneath for the gas bottles, warps and gear, and a fresh water shower. A walk-through transom door leads to the bathing platform which is presently the easiest way to board the 390. The topsides are high, and a recessed foot step has only been partly successful; it is hoped that a modified version of this will improve the situation.

A teak-stepped ladder leads up to the flying bridge. Here you find a central helm seat, plus a settee to port and a single seat to starboard. These have useful lockers underneath them, so often a feature missing on other boats. Good rails all round give security, though an additional lower rail aft should be fitted. Six fender stowages are found on the aft rail.

Back down below, the side decks are wide and secure, with flat surfaces at least 12in wide, plus a 3in raised lip around the gunwale. The moulded non-slip proved effective, and was carried over the coachroof. Stainless steel cleats forward, midships and aft take care of mooring, with an electric anchor winch installed for the ground tackle.

Handling and performance

Outside the River Orwell, a southerly gale had lumped up the nastiest short waves you could ever hope to avoid. In fact conditions were really too confused to be fair to the boat, but we had come a long way, so we pushed out anyway. Heading into the seas, we were reduced to 12 knots, in deference to the fittings down below, but the 390 plugged into the waves with a reassuringly solid feel, and not too much spray flying around. Out across the bar it got really nasty, but then we bore off 90°, and were able to pick up to 15-18 knots. Despite the beam seas, the rolling was bearable, and the boat tracked well.

We then headed back up into the wind for a couple of miles to give us a good run up, before turning round and heading back downwind. With the waves astern, we were able to crank the speed up to 20+ knots, and the 390 really began to motor. Plenty of armwork was needed on the helm, but we could keep our course well, even when we angled off to give quartering seas, a planing boat's least happy position. Still the 390 coped, even when we cheekily maintained our speed over the bar, running down short, steep seas and surfing into Harwich somewhat faster than the tugs and container boats nearby.

On the second day of our test the wind had moderated, and in the sheltered waters of the river we were able to run our meters over the boat. Top speed we measured was 27.3 knots, but the engines were only the second pair of uprated units in service, and Cummins are still experimenting with different fuel pumps. Based on log readings taken on previous days, Oyster are predicting a 30-knot maximum. Even so, our figures are still creditable for a boat of this size, and give an estimated mpg figure of 1.01, and a range of 240 miles at 2800rpm. Dropping the revs to 2500 gives 24 knots, 1.27mpg and 300 miles range, while at 2250 you still have a comfortable 20 knots, 1.41mpg and 340 miles.

Noise levels, as we have said, are excellent, registering a relaxed 80dB(A) in the saloon at full speed, 87 in the cockpit and 82 on the flying-bridge. At 20 knots these are reduced to 77, 86 and 81 respectively.

Conclusion

Having firmly established themselves in the sailing boat world, Oyster have put down a clear marker on the motorboat sector. They plan to bring out a range of craft, and the 390 is a good start. One or two minor details should be tidied up as the production line gets into swing, but the standard of engineering and finish that we have seen bodes well for the future. The match of engines and hull is a good one, and we look forward to following the fortunes of the Powerline series.