

Boat Report

PRINCESS 52

Sleek curves and elegant accommodation for up to eight people characterise Marine Projects' latest motor cruiser. Our test boat had electronically controlled Volvo Penta diesels to boot.





Above: the 52's spacious saloon opens almost fully out to the aft cockpit. Below: pulling a two-seater settee across from port to starboard allows eight people to sit in comfort at the dinette. Below right: behind a half-bulkhead is the sunken galley, ultra smart with its Avonite worktops and joinery.

Launched at January's London Boat Show, the 52 has been introduced into the Princess line-up to supersede the very successful 480, although for the meantime this will remain in production.

The new boat is that little bit bigger all round, with the extended bathing platform accounting for most of the 2ft (0.6m) difference in overall length, and its exterior styling is dominated by rakish curves.

An extra attraction for us was that the test boat was fitted with a pair of Volvo Penta's TAMD 122-series units with the Electronic Diesel Control (EDC) system.

Design

Like the 480, the 52 is a Bernard Olesinski design, and its underwater shape sticks closely to his winning formula.

The hull has a medium-to-deep-vee form, 22.5° amidships flattening to 18° at the transom, with the propellers run in tunnels. There are three sprayrails on each side, all of which fade well before the transom, whilst the wide chine-flat, 6in (15cm) in depth, is angled down to deflect any wayward spray more efficiently and provide extra lift as the boat climbs onto the plane.

Above the waterline it is a different story, with much more pronounced sloping curves to the

superstructure and an elegant scarfed windowline. The transom, bowed in plan, incorporates the now familiar extra-deep bathing platform which can accommodate a personal watercraft or a small RIB.

Exterior

To handle and lift your preferred tender, and to ease boarding when you are berthed stern-to, Med-style, a telescopic passerelle/crane is included as standard on the bathing platform. Handrails on both sides help you if you are stepping aboard from alongside or using this area for watersports, and bulky gear can be stowed in a large built-in locker.

Both the platform and the cockpit benefit from teak decking, and a single door to port gives access between the two. A transom seat extends across the rest of the width of the cockpit.

The amount of storage space available in the cockpit depends on whether you opt for the additional aft cabin which is incorporated beneath the sole. Our test boat had this, at the cost of the space within the transom settee and part of the capacity of the lazaret, which is accessed via a sizeable gas strut-supported hatch.

Even so, there is still room in the lazaret for a modicum of deck gear, between the encapsulated 6kW generator and 24V banks of batteries which are



mounted outboard. Through the moulded floor, you can get access to the after bilge pumps.

There are also lockers within the coamings, one of which houses the manual bilge pump and fuel valves.

From the cockpit, you can make your way through the double sliding doors which open up the saloon, or climb one of the three easy teak-treaded sets of steps, two leading up to the side decks and one to the flybridge.

The flybridge is a good size, with an overhang which almost completely shelters the cockpit. The after portion simply comprises a large sunpad, well protected by means of perspex screens, while the main seating area forward of this is U-shaped and offset to starboard. A table can be set up here, and a coolbox is incorporated into the seat moulding.

The helm position to port has a double fixed seat, the driver sitting closer to the centreline with his own

Anticlockwise from above: stairs lead down to a forward lobby, where there are doors to either two or three cabins. The master cabin has a central double berth flanked by dressing tables. The guest cabin(s) feature twin berths with partially restricted headroom. A fixed seat has room for two at the discreet interior helm station. Joinery throughout the accommodation is high-gloss cherry. Both toilet compartments are almost fully moulded.





Uplifting experiences. Top to bottom: day-to-day engine servicing is done from the cockpit. Opposite the lower helm is a chart locker. The optional aft cabin is secreted under the transom bench. A hatch in the sole beside the galley reveals a compartment housing water tanks, pump and calorifier. Flip-up mirrors are built into the master cabin's vanity units. Even the aft cleats are found under hatches!

individual flip-up squab. The co-driver can squeeze out without disturbing him thanks to a small gap left between the seat and the coaming. The wheel and throttles are set at a comfortable distance, and for most people there is plenty of legroom.

Engine instrumentation is incorporated in an easily viewed console ahead of the wheel, with additional electronics sited on a rather plain and flat moulded return offset towards the co-driver's side. Autohelm log, depth and autopilot units are fitted as standard, together with a dual-station Shipmate VHF.

The line of the flybridge coaming and seating is quite low, for aesthetic reasons, but extra protection is built-in by way of wind-deflecting perspex screens topped off with a solid run of guardrail. Stowage is provided beneath the seat-bases, and a glovebox at the helm will take care of smaller loose items.

The side decks are around 9in (23cm) wide and safe to move along, with guardrails running right back to the break of the cockpit and inboard handholds here and along the superstructure.

Up at the sharp end, the ground tackle is managed by a vertical windlass semi-recessed beneath a hatch that gives onto the chain locker. A second hatch reveals a rope locker, which we were pleased to see partitioned off as a separate compartment.

The rest of the deck hardware consists of 1.2in (30cm) cleats fore and aft — the latter being hidden from view beneath small hatches within the cockpit coaming — and slightly smaller ones on the toerail amidships.

Interior

There is a choice of interior layouts on the Princess 52. You can have the galley integral to the saloon, which leaves sufficient room for two guest cabins amidships, or further forward, with a raised second dinette in its place, which means you gain more entertaining area but lose the port-side sleeping cabin. The boat we tested had the former arrangement.

Either way, the main saloon is spacious and opens almost fully into the cockpit. Entertaining on the aft deck is facilitated by the cocktail bar and fridge situated just inside the sliding doors.

Further cabinetry above this houses a television and a video recorder, with the joinery setting the tone for the rest of the interior, in well-matched cherry with a high-gloss finish.

Forward of this is a two-seater settee, opposite a U-shaped dinette. On the pre-production boat we tested, the smaller settee could not be pulled across to join the bigger one, but this has been corrected on later boats, allowing eight people to be seated in comfort. The seat cushions pull clear to reveal tidily finished lockers beneath.

A couple of steps lead down to the partially sunken galley, which, tucked behind a half-bulkhead, is largely hidden from view but still an integral part of the saloon.

With Avonite worktops and more cherry joinery, it is an ultra-smart affair. A four-ring ceramic hob with extractor and a combined oven/microwave are discreetly tucked away, a domestic-sized 24V/240V refrigerator swallows the comestibles, and there is a useful range of cupboards and drawers.

Opposite, behind the helm seat, is an icemaker. A cabinet above this houses a stereo system.

A modern design trend is to play-down interior helm stations and make them less intrusive to the

ambience of the saloon, and the 52 is no exception. The console area is discreet and smartly finished but practical, allowing the skipper and co-driver to con and navigate with ease.

The main engine instrumentation is set beneath a curved visor within a lacquered burr elm dash. Other navigation heads run between this and the wheel, whilst larger electronics can be flush-mounted towards the co-driver's seat, but still within easy view of the helmsman. Less handily positioned is the small chart area ahead of this, which will crane the driver's neck.

The helm seat is fixed, but the outboard-mounted throttles and the wheel are comfortably positioned. Each of the three sections of screen is serviced by a no-nonsense pantograph wiper, and demisters are also fitted.

Under the screen on the galley side is a large flat-topped locker for charts and the like, although it would be better if this was partitioned so that things cannot get in a muddle.

Between the galley and helm, a man-sized hatch in the sole gives access to a handy storage compartment, which also houses the readily-inspected water tanks, water pump and calorifier. Well finished and painted out, it is lined clear of the bilge.

A kindly angled set of stairs, with a handrail, lead down to a forward lobby area, with doors to the two guest cabins and the master cabin.

On our test boat, it was the port-side guest cabin which benefited from an en-suite toilet/shower compartment, while the occupants of the starboard one would have to skittle across the lobby to share the facilities. But this situation has been reversed on later 52s and, consequently, the master cabin's en-suite toilet and shower are now situated to port.

In other respects the guest cabins are mirror-images of each other, with twin 5ft 11in x 2ft 4in (1.80m x 0.71m) berths split by a small bedside table. In each case there is good sitting headroom over the outboard mattress, but a slight restriction over the inboard one due to the top of the stairwell moulding pinching in on the cabin. Towards the door there is plenty of room to stand and dress.

Storage is adequate, with a couple of eye-height cupboards over the opening ports and a three-quarter-height hanging locker with shelf. Beneath the berths are screwed-down access panels to the bilge; further access through the sole, throughout the boat, requires the lifting of the carpet, as there are no bordered hatches.

The master cabin in the bow sports a central double berth which is flanked by dressing-table units and overhead cupboards, and has a run of three drawers in its base. There is a full-height locker on each side of the doorway, one fitted out with a full complement of shelves and the other serving as a sizeable wardrobe.

Both toilet compartments are similarly fitted-out, with a part-separate cylindrical shower cubicle, an electric toilet and a smartly moulded basin area with mirrored cupboards above. They are all but fully moulded, which makes cleaning so much easier, but given a luxury edge by the standard of fittings and detail.

The aft cabin which featured on our test boat is an option costing just under £6000 ex VAT. Accessed from the cockpit, via a hatch in the transom seating, it incorporates two 6ft 0in (1.83m)



Background photograph: the large, well-equipped flybridge makes an excellent conning position. Above: teak-treaded stairwells lead up top and onto the side decks. Below: the foredeck has separate lockers for chain and ropes.





Builders

Marine Projects (Plymouth) Ltd, Newport Street, Plymouth, Devon PL1 3QG. Tel: 01752 227771.

Suppliers

Princess International Sales & Service Ltd, Billing Wharf, Cogenhoe, Northamptonshire NN7 1NH. Tel: 01604 890559.

berths set at right angles to each other.

These berths are a mite less than 2ft 0in (0.6m) wide, but still adequate for junior crewmembers, and with its separate mini-toilet compartment and washbasin, plus a modicum of clothes storage, this is a fun self-contained camp.

Panels in the aft bulkhead allow access to the steering gear, and there is a hatch to the bilge.

Engines

Our test boat was fitted with the more powerful of the two Volvo Penta engine options, a pair of 610hp TAMD 122Ps in their new EDC guise, whereby fuel injection and gearshift are controlled by a 'black box', via electronic throttles. The alternative is a pair of TAMD 102Ds developing 470hp apiece.

For day-to-day inspection and servicing, access to the engines is via a cockpit hatch, just ahead of the one for the lazaret. More major work will require the removal of the deckhead panels.

The hatch takes you down adjacent to the aft bulkhead, where the Separ fuel/water separators and main raw-water strainers are readily checked. A walk-through is provided between the two engines, clear of the bilge, and most other service points are accessible, although the filters on the starboard engine are tight, and it would require a hearty volunteer to change a fuel filter in any kind of a seaway.

At the head of the compartment, there is just sufficient room to check the belts, whilst back aft the stern glands can be readily got at.

The hatch and panels are covered in a simple foam insulation, as are the fuel tanks outboard.

Cut-outs to the centre walkway allow access to the bilge, where the boat has a total of four electric submersible pumps, plus the manual back-up.

Performance & handling

There was no smoke on start-up, and the EDC system ensured the engines were particularly smooth in operation.

The controls themselves were also very smooth, yet also positive, with just a moment's delay while the black box allowed the gearbox to nudge to and fro. Together with the 7hp bow-thruster which comes as standard, they certainly make for an easier time at the helm during low-speed manoeuvres, although with 1200hp on tap even our 'in-gear' speed was well over 6 knots.

Our performance runs were equally prone to the electronic control system, which oversees the application of revs and power output for the good of the engine. In practice, this means that the build-up of engine speed is down to the black box, rather than at the mercy of any over-zealous skipper. That said, in no way is the performance sluggish.

We ran smoothly from standstill through the hump to 20 knots in under 10sec, which is not at all bad for 18 tons of boat. For cruising, 1800rpm looks to be the best setting, for a most comfortable 25 knots, whilst the boat's top speed of 33 knots will bemuse any sportsboat that fancies playing in its wake.

The day of our test threw up a useful amount of short swell, which the hull knocked aside with indifference. Our trials turned up no obvious vices, the hull turning on full power easily and remaining nicely level, with the steering light but still responsive. Similar handling characteristics to the 480 should make the 52 a good seakeeper.

Both helm positions are comfortable, and visibility when up and running is restricted only dead-aft from the interior one, as is usual. Noise levels were also good, our 25-knot cruising speed registering a commendable 75dB(A) in the saloon.

Conclusions

Cruisers of around this size are the limit of what a husband-and-wife team or family can handle, and enjoy, without their boating becoming something of a chore. They are large enough to go just about anywhere comfortably, whilst not being too much of a handful once you get there.

So it is good to see builders Marine Projects filling this niche with a combination of good looks and performance, without forgetting the hands-on practicalities that will make the 52 really a boat to enjoy.

It can sleep up to eight people given the good choice of accommodation arrangements on hand, with extremely pleasing and solid fit-out, an impressive specification, and little to criticise on the engineering front. □

Above: low flybridge coamings, rakish curves and a scarfed windowline make for an elegant profile. Below: so why not remind the owner of it on the switchpanel?



Princess 52

Engines twin Volvo Penta TAMD122P EDC diesels, 610hp at 2250rpm, 6cyl, 12lt.

Conditions wind SW Force 4, sea slight. **Load** fuel 50%, water 50%, crew 5.

							sound levels dB(A)			
rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range*	trim	ckpt	flybg	saloon	fwdcab
1400	15.6	11	50	1.42	483	3.0	80	67	71	69
1600	20.7	22	100	0.94	320	4.5	82	69	73	70
1700	23.5	26	118	0.90	306	5.0	83	70	74	72
1800	25.0	29	132	0.86	292	5.0	84	70	75	73
2000	27.8	38	172	0.73	248	5.0	85	74	78	74
2200	31.3	46	209	0.68	231	5.0	88	76	79	78
2300	33.1	51	232	0.65	221	5.0	89	77	80	79

Acceleration 0-20 knots, 9.8sec

(*allows 20% margin)

Price £378,990 ex VAT as tested with aft-cabin fit-out

Loa
52ft 2in (15.91m)

Hull length
47ft 8in (14.53m)

Beam
14ft 8in (4.47m)

Draught
3ft 8in (1.12m)

Displacement
18.2 tonnes

Fuel capacity
424gal (1900lt)

Water capacity
157gal (714lt)