

# BOAT REPORT REGAL VENTURA 8.3

## Regal were one of the first American builders to recognise the European preference for diesels. Does the marriage work?

REGAL are one of the largest remaining American boatbuilders to have remained independent of acquisitive marine engine manufacturers. As a result, they can offer a wide range of power options throughout a line-up which currently extends to a 40ft (12.8m) sports-cruiser. Their latest 27-footer can be powered by a single 220hp Mercruiser diesel, a useful package for European waters.

### Design

The Ventura's underwater sections are medium-to-deep-vee, erring towards the medium, with deadrisers of 21° and 23½° at the transom and amidships respectively. Three pairs of sprayrails are employed, the innermost ones facing out on their run to the transom. The chine flats themselves are moderate in width, with the lower topsides fashioned with a small knuckle.

Whilst the bathing platform is integrated into the hull moulding in the usual fashion, the designers have ignored the Stateside penchant for incorporating an anchor platform forward. The finely raked stem ends in a bow roller, and this makes for a sleek, well proportioned craft, especially with its swept screen.

### Exterior

The first time we tried to test the Ventura, the rain was nearer horizontal than vertical, so we were glad of the full-headroom canopy which allowed us to inspect the boat in complete comfort.

The canopy, in breathable Sunbrella fabric, has a complete set of screens and can either be folded back to form a hoop or removed by extracting four easily released cotter pins. If you are ever nervous

about leaving the canopy rigged, you needn't be in this case: our test boat had been trailed along the motorway at 60mph with everything in situ.

The rear portion of the cockpit is given over to an extended U-shaped settee which, optionally, can be equipped with a drop-down dinette table to double it up into a sunbed. Lockers underneath are finished with aluminium trim around the hatch openings, the one to starboard containing the battery-isolator switch.

Further storage is to be found beneath the single co-pilot's seat forward of the bar sideboard (fitted in this case with its own fridge, although a sink modification is also available), and adjacent to the double settee at the helm, which is adjustable fore and aft and can be propped up to make a form of sit/stand squab.

Bulkier items can go beneath the sole, accessed via a gas strut-supported hatch, while smaller and more readily required pieces of kit can be deposited in the central, netted bag just under the hatch. This can be removed for reaching other items, as well as for access to the auxiliaries located here, including the holding tank and optional battery-charger.

Beneath cut-outs in the panelled floor are the fuel tank connections and shut-off valve. A more readily accessible location for the latter would help, although we must commend the overall finish to the GRP work here — we came across no resin-hardened glass barbs in any corners when unclipping the bag or inspecting this area.

The helm layout seems straightforward enough, although room for additional instrumentation is limited. The centreline portion of console is given over to a step through an opening section of screen to the foredeck, there being no sidedecks



The photograph (above) only hints at the Force 4 gusting 6 conditions in which we tested the Ventura. The single 220hp Mercruiser diesel proved to be a good match, and performance was impressive provided that trim was employed correctly. The main emphasis accommodation-wise is on the cockpit (left), with interior space (below) limited by headroom.

because the cockpit runs full-width.

There are handholds past the screen. Although the deck towards the gunwales had grabrails, these could do with being brought in to within immediate reach of someone emerging from the safety of the cockpit, especially as only the central portion has a non-slip moulded finish.

A bow roller is included in the spec, with the chain locker accessed via a small offset hatch; a vertical windlass is listed as an option. The 8in bar-type cleats, whilst only modest for a boat of this size, were sufficient in number, there being three forward plus pairs amidships and aft.



### Interior

With the onus being on providing a good-sized cockpit for socialising, below-decks accommodation appears a mite pinched. In particular, headroom is limited to the extent that it is necessary to stoop.

There is reasonable sitting headroom, however, over the V-dinette. An infill-cum-table is strapped beneath the forward seat cushion, and once this is in place the berth measures 5ft 9in x 4ft 11in (1.75m x 1.5m). Stowage underneath amounts to a pair of shallow lockers on both sides and a somewhat more commodious one forward; all are lined and clear of the bilge. Hanging space is provided by a small half-height locker adjacent to the companionway.

On entering the cabin, you are also faced with what would normally be a modest galley area, with a minimal amount of storage. But the sportier bias of this boat means items such as hob, sink and pressurised water system are listed only as options — an anomaly to say the least.

The toilet compartment opposite is also devoid of a sink, let alone a shower, although the moulding does have provision for a drain.

To be fair to Gibbs Marine, the UK distributors, our test boat was not specified to their particular requirements, and it is only a matter of ordering from the comprehensive options list to get the

inventory you require. There is certainly room at both galley and toilet compartment worksurfaces to install the usual appointments. In the latter, some ventilation would not go amiss either.

## Engines

As we have already stated, Regal are affiliated to none of the major enginebuilders, and so the range of outdrive options they offer covers Mercruiser, Volvo and Yamaha, in both petrol and diesel formats.

Single petrol installations are V8 330hp units, twins are either 4.3lt or 5.0lt units totalling 360hp or 420hp. Our test boat was fitted with Mercruiser's six-cylinder 4.2lt D254, producing 220hp; Volvo's KAD 42 with Duoprop is the other diesel alternative.

An electrohydraulic ram lifts a major portion of the rear seating and sole to reveal a tidy, accessible installation. All service points can be easily checked and worked on if required, the front of this lengthy block still being a comfortable distance from the forward bulkhead for replacing the impeller or tensioning belts.

A clear-topped raw-water strainer and fuel/water separator are located on a platform outboard to port. The hydraulic reservoirs for the power trim and tabs are just as accessible, as are the well secured batteries opposite. A space is also allocated here for stowing the optional, removable cockpit table.

Seacocks are located in the hull bottom for the toilet inlet and holding tank discharge, and we were pleased to see a large 90° lever-type shut-off for the self-drainers from the cockpit. The bilge itself is serviced by a Rule 1500gph pump on a float switch, while the halon extinguishing system, complete with status indicator at the helm, is listed as an extra.

Foil-faced foam insulation is fitted to the fore bulkhead and hatch. The latter has a removable port adjacent to the lifting ram's connecting pin, enabling it to be manhandled open should battery or hydraulics fail.

## Performance and handling

As we drove down the M27 motorway, the radio was full of reports of floods, landslides and ferries struggling to enter port. In fact good luck gave us a short window when the sun shone briefly. The wind died a little but was still there all the time, at least Force 4 gusting Force 6 on occasions, with waves to match.

Given the prevailing conditions, the handling and performance of the Regal were really quite remarkable. Conditions were at times atrocious, yet it handled them confidently and competently.

We launched from Poole and did our speed runs on the waterskiing area, by prior consent of the harbour authority.

Top speeds we recorded were 29 knots into the teeth of the wind and 31 knots the other way, giving an average of 30 knots. This equates well with the manufacturers' quoted 36mph (31 knots) under more reasonable conditions. Acceleration with the diesel engine was not stunning but it still pushed the boat quickly onto the plane, and more importantly gave the helmsman good control in the vital 20-30 knot range, allowing him to respond quickly to the waves.

Noise levels were acceptable, at 87dB(A) in

the aft seat and 81dB(A) at the helm at maximum speed. Cruising at 3000rpm and 25 knots reduced these figures to 81dB(A) and 80dB(A).

Our own test data on the D254 indicates consumption in the region of 8gph (36lph) at these revs.

We motored out of the harbour in search of some seas to test the hull.

Immediately in the lee of Studland we were protected from the southwesterly, but as we got out towards Old Harry conditions rapidly deteriorated. The wind had already pushed up 3ft waves which were being stood up by an ebbing tide, but underneath these was a growling swell from the previous gales, running at 45° to the chop. The result was the most confusing set of waves you could find, certainly not what you would recommend taking a 27ft boat out in. At times our photo boat was lost in the troughs, and the wind was whipping the tops off the waves and throwing them over the boat.

All this the Regal took in its stride. The Ventura 8.3 comes as standard with trim tabs and power-trim, and it was essential to get these right. Too much bow-up and the boat was thrown in the air by every wave, but get the nose down and the medium-vee hull cut easily through them.

We could maintain 20-22 knots dead into the waves, with virtually no pounding. Beam on, you had to work the tabs to keep level, but then the boat rode the waves well. Downwind, we opened the throttle wide.

Again, the temptation was to pull the bow up to high, but then the boat would sit up on its transom and roll as the waves passed underneath, so you had to get the trim just right. This was made so much easier by the power-trim button on the throttle head. With this, you could play the trim with your thumb, while keeping your left hand on the wheel, and still have control over the speed. With the leg set right, the tabs then allowed you to level the boat out athwartships, and from then onwards it was an exhilarating rollercoaster ride.

As we ran up the Poole Fairway, we overtook the pilot boat coming back from a service to the Truckline ferry. It seemed almost embarrassing to be able to pass a Nelson 40 as it ploughed in at 18 knots, covered in sheets of spray, but that was what we could do.

We met the pilot boat again in the harbour, but here we were fighting into a short, steep 3ft chop, set up by a three-mile fetch. Again, the Nelson was taking it on the nose, throwing up plumes of spray which blew across the deck. The Regal, on the other hand, just rode the waves, the deep screen protecting us from the bitter wind.

## Conclusions

With its wraparound cockpit layout and low profile, the Ventura is a more Mediterranean-style craft than we have seen before from Regal, and it certainly looks good and sits well on the water.

Accommodation is on the diminutive side for a 27-footer, and rather scantily appointed in its standard rig. But then, as Gibbs point out, there are other like-sized boats in the range which fill this niche — primarily the midships-cabined Valanti 260. And no-one can argue with the price.

The Mercruiser diesel is a steady, positive match, and all in all this was a comfortable boat to handle. The same can be said for its engineering and finish. □

## Regal Ventura 8.3

**Loa** 27ft 6in (8.38m).

**Beam** 9ft 1in (2.76m).

**Draught** 2ft 10in (0.81m).

**Displacement** 2.6 tons.

**Fuel** 87gal (397lt).

**Water** 20gal (90lt) optional.

**Price** from £26,702 ex VAT with single V8 330hp petrol; £35,639 for standard boat with 254D Mercruiser diesel; £38,546 as tested.

**Builders** Regal Marine Industries Inc, 2300 Jetport Drive, Orlando, Florida 32809, USA. Tel: (1) 407 851 4360.

**Suppliers** Gibbs Marine Sales, Russell Road, Shepperton, Middlesex TW17 9HY. Tel: 0932 242977.