



## Boat Report

# RENAISSANCE 31

*Every schoolboy knows that after the Vikings comes the Renaissance. Moulded in Britain and fitted out in Ireland, here is a practical new riverboat for those trading up.*



Aquafibre's 31ft riverboat mould must be one of the busiest around. Some 31 of the popular hull and deck combinations popped out last year, and they are running at the rate of one per week this year, headed for fitting-out yards on both sides of the Irish Sea. This latest version, ironically, is being fitted out by an Irish boatyard, but is destined for use on the English rivers.

The Renaissance 31 is the latest launch from Walton Marine, one of the UK's most progressive riverboat sales and brokerage operations, who have three bases on the Thames and Severn. They are best known for the Viking range of value-for-money cruisers; they do not build them, but over the years they have had massive input into their development

and are now the sole distributors of the brand.

Vikings come in broad-beam and narrow-beam form, suitable for rivers or narrow canals respectively, but the biggest model is the outboard-powered 30, leaving Walton with nothing to offer customers who want to progress to something with a little more luxury and an inboard diesel. This is where the Renaissance 31 comes in.

Rosebank Marine of Carrick-on-Shannon in Ireland have already completed ten 31s for their own hirefleet, but will now be fitting-out these Aquafibre hulls to order for Walton to sell in the UK. The standard engine option is a single diesel, although twin-engine options are available for those wishing to use the boat for estuary or coastal cruising.

The first boat made its debut at the London Boat Show in January, and we were able to take it out for a test from Penton Hook Marina on the Thames shortly afterwards.

## Design

Andrew Wolstenholme's latest river-kindly hull follows his current thinking, with an easy run-up aft to reduce the power requirement and minimise wash. The propeller is completely protected by a full-length deep keel, plus a skeg running aft to carry the bottom bearing of the rudder.

The layout provides four berths, with a convertible settee in the saloon and a forward cabin that can have either twin vee-berths or an offset angled double. The helm position is in a wheelhouse/saloon, forward of a small cockpit.

## Exterior

A full-width integral bathing platform provides a convenient boarding point from low pontoons or a dinghy, and a door to port leads through the transom into the cockpit.

Here you find a full-width seat, divided by the doorway, with room for five or six people. A large locker under the main section houses two 15kg gas bottles, and further storage space is found in two more lockers set in the 'wings' of the wheelhouse, which would be ideal for hanging waterproofs.



A large hatch in the sole lifts to reveal a spacious lazaret, with ample room for stowing a deflated dinghy. A good touch here is the floorboard which prevents items from dropping down into the keel.

The deck layout shows some hireboat influence. For instance, fender eyes are located under the gunwale rubber, which is fine if the fenders are going to be left permanently down but private owners might find it difficult to take them up while underway.

Getting out of the cockpit onto the side decks is made easy by well placed handrails, but you have to step on the cushions to do so; a removable squab would be a help. The side decks themselves are 9in (225mm) wide with a good angled lip, and there is a level run forward, helped by the pronounced inward slope to the wheelhouse sides, well placed inboard rails and an effective moulded non-slip.

Unusually, instead of a pulpit around the outside of the bow, the Renaissance has an inboard rail mounted on the coachroof. This is in fact a better arrangement for crewing on an inland waterways boat, where you are frequently stepping off, and is preferable to clambering over a pulpit. Children may have to be kept aft, however.

The foredeck area is a good size, with room for an anchor to be stowed, though the latter is not supplied as standard. Mooring is taken care of by an

Above: Walton Marine's answer to customers who want to progress from one of their Viking outboard-powered river cruisers to a bigger boat, the Renaissance 31 has some interesting design touches. Left: instead of a pulpit rail around the bow, there is an inboard handrail which some users may find more convenient. Right: the saloon is well ventilated, with large sliding windows and an optional sunroof. Top right: a fiddled edge to the work surface and plenty of stowages make for a practical galley.





11 in (275mm) aluminium bollard forward, plus 7 in (175mm) cleats amidships and aft.

## Interior

A single sliding door leads from the cockpit into the saloon, where you find a three-person settee to port, and a larger L-shaped settee with a flapped dining table to starboard.

The base of the latter settee pulls out in a single movement to form the double berth, with a one-piece cushion avoiding the joins you can feel when two separate infill cushions are used. Lockers and drawers under both settees provide storage for bedding and clothes, though some of the painted woodwork revealed is not particularly neat.

No fault can be found with the visible woodwork, however. The Renaissance has an excellent standard of joinery, with solid wood used wherever possible. The timber is teak or ash as standard, although on our test boat it was cherry, which has a warm, friendly feel and is an extra worth considering at £1300.

At the aft end of the saloon, to starboard, there is a narrow half-height hanging locker that would take the jackets and shirts of those sleeping here. The forward end of the settee houses a pull-out drawer for bottle storage.

Forward to port is the helm position, with a swivelling bucket seat facing a simple console comprising gauges for fuel, water and the holding tank, plus the standard Nannidiesel panel. The single-lever Morse engine control is well placed by the skipper's left hand. The space in front of the wheel will take maps and guidebooks, but the sloping areas of fascia on both sides are wasted space and should have been fashioned to take mugs, binoculars, cameras and so on.

A single switch controls the windscreen wipers, but there are individual switches on the units themselves. Two wipers are standard, but a third is available as an extra.

The main electrical panel is down to the left of the helm seat. You have to open a wooden door to reach it, an unnecessary complication because all the ready-use switches are behind it, as well as the fuses, bilge-pump controls and battery switches.

Light and ventilation in the saloon are excellent, with the large side windows having sliding sections. You can specify a double-opening sunroof as a £450 extra.

Forward, three steps lead down to the good-sized U-shaped galley to starboard, with a good fiddled worktop. Equipment comprises a three-burner gas hob, oven and grill, plus a fridge, sink and drainer.

There are narrow drawers under the worktop, three medium-sized lockers and two large shelves outboard, behind sliding perspex doors. Storage for bulkier items can be found in a large locker alongside the stairs. A small hopper window gives some air, and there is a ventilator in the overhead (which can have a mechanical fan as an extra), but the whole area above the galley is open to the saloon which provides sufficient light and air.

To starboard is the WC, which has 6ft (1.82m) headroom. There is a tiny locker under the neat moulded sink, but otherwise no stowage space, a strange omission since there is room to provide it. As standard you get a manual toilet, but our test boat had a neat-looking electric unit, a £280 extra.

The forward cabin is a good size, with 6ft 1in (1.85m) headroom aft and 6ft forward. As standard

this has twin vee-berths set in a GRP moulding, with an infill to form a double, but a £300 option is an offset angled double with wood trim and drawers.

There are narrow three-quarter height hanging lockers port and starboard, but the lockers under the berths go straight down to the hull, and some form of lining would help to keep clothes here neat, clean and dry. Light and ventilation come from narrow windows with small hopper openings, plus an overhead hatch.

## Engines

The Renaissance 31's standard engine is a single 52hp Nannidiesel, mounted under the saloon. A 4ft square hatch in the sole gives excellent access to the top and starboard side of the engine, though the port side is more difficult.

It is easy to get at the two batteries, and there is reasonable access to the sternland. But reaching the large bilge pump (down in the keel aft) would be a long stretch, and the fuel filter (low down on the engine bearer forward) virtually impossible. With this first boat still due to be modified to comply with the inland waterways Boat Safety Scheme, we would expect these and the fuel shut-off valve to be moved.

Surprisingly, there appears to be no sound insulation on any of the engineroom surfaces. For private owners we would have thought this is a must, though noise levels are not excessive.

## Handling and performance

Underway, the Renaissance handled and performed well. The long keel means it tracks a straight course, while the large rudder and light steering enables it to turn quickly and easily. A bow-thruster is offered as an option, and would be useful for shorthanded crews, to position the bow when coming alongside or for really tight manoeuvres.

Where we did get caught out initially was when stopping. You have to use a lot of revs to get the propeller to bite in reverse, which took some getting used to. This may just be a characteristic of the engine, but experimenting with gearbox ratios or prop diameter and pitch could prove beneficial.

Speed is more than sufficient for river use, the maximum we recorded being 8.7mph at 2800rpm. More importantly, the boat runs well at normal river speeds, 1300rpm giving a comfortable 5mph with minimal vibration and noise; 1600rpm produced 6mph, and 2000rpm gave 7mph.

Noise levels at 5mph were 63dB(A) in the wheelhouse and 62dB(A) in the cockpit. At 6mph these figures increased to 65dB(A) and 67dB(A), and at 7mph to 68dB(A) and 69dB(A) respectively. These figures would suggest that the absence of soundproofing was not a problem, but it might be a welcome addition for anyone using the boat for prolonged periods at higher speeds.

## Conclusions

Walton Marine would appear to have a useful addition to their range. Comfortable and well-suited to the river, the Renaissance would be ideal for many owners, once some minor problems have been addressed.

The craft we tested had a considerable number of extras, and its price reflects this, but a boat with a good cruising specification could be on the water for around £53,500 ex VAT. □

## Renaissance 31

**Loa** 9.45m (31ft 0in).  
**Beam** 3.50m (11ft 6in).  
**Draught** 0.90m (3ft 0in).  
**Air draught** 2.50m (8ft 3in).  
**Displacement** 5 tonnes.  
**Fuel capacity** 275lt (60gal).  
**Water capacity** 365lt (80gal).  
**Power** 52hp Nannidiesel.  
**Price** £49,950 ex VAT as standard; £58,220 as tested.  
**Suppliers** Walton Marine Sales, Penton Hook Marina, Staines Lane, Chertsey, Surrey KT16 8PY.  
**Tel:** 01932 569200.