

Boat Report

SAGA

26HT

New in from Norway, this semi-displacement cruiser has an excellent layout for the changeable British climate.



Dorset-based Wessex Marine pride themselves on importing true users' boats, some of them performance-orientated but all with an eye for simplicity. To this end they are now offering a number of shaft-drive craft, the latest of which is a perky 26-footer representing the Saga range from Norway.

The semi-displacement Saga 26HT is available either with a fully enclosed wheelhouse or with an open-backed wheelshelter, and it was the latter version that we tested out of Poole Harbour.

Layout & design

Opting for the open back to the helm area allows more use to be made of the cockpit, an area which still benefits from the shelter provided by the generous superstructure, and it can be battened down with a full canopy when the weather closes in.

The cockpit incorporates the boat's galley, so you can prepare meals in a camping atmosphere, although that has not been used as an excuse to provide less than complete cooking facilities. This leaves the interior to accommodate a good-sized dinette-cum-double berth, a yacht-style quarter berth slipped in along the port side of the engine space, and a separate toilet compartment with a shower.

Outwardly the boat's appearance is a little dated, especially given the hard corners of the window line, although no-one is pretending this is a new design. In fact the hull is the best part of 15 years old, but then why change that works?

It has an almost full run of keel,

Decks

You can board the boat either at the stern, via the full-width bathing platform and a half-height gate in the transom, or from alongside, the topsides being low enough to allow you to climb onto the deck, from where you can step down into the cockpit via the seat-bases.



The large bolt-on platform moulding incorporates three useful lockers, and includes a bathing ladder with good handrails to help you pull yourself out of the water. Further handrails along the top of the wheelshelter make moving forward along the 6in (15cm) side decks easier, before giving way to a pilot-type inboard handrail rather than outboard guardrails. This is sturdy and well placed, handy to brace yourself against, but we are not convinced it is an ideal arrangement if you have junior crewmembers aboard.

A foredeck locker is provided and if required a bow-roller arrangement can be fitted. Coming as standard are 10in cleats to the quarters and amidships, and slightly larger ones at the bows.

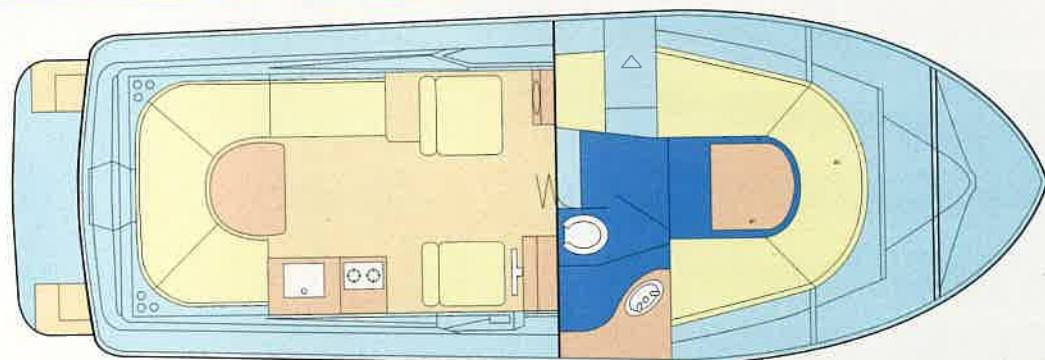
Cabin

A wide companionway leads down just a couple of steps to the main cabin, which is nicely finished in teak.

Commanding the forward area is a U-dinette, not too pinched towards its head as the boat's full beam is carried well forward. There is plenty of sitting headroom here, and a full 6ft 0in (1.83m) plus headroom around the companionway.

The table drops to make a comfortable 6ft 2in (1.89m) long by 5ft 0in (1.52m) wide double berth, and a further single berth runs along the port side, extending beneath part of the cockpit seating; at the same length and 1ft 8in (0.51m) wide, this is just sufficient to take an adult frame.

Lockers beneath the seat cushions are only painted-out, but for clothes storage there is a large, deep cupboard in the bow and a half-height hanging wardrobe to port, the latter with a small 'bits' drawer underneath. The area behind the seat backs is also good and wide, and will safely cosset weekend kit-bags and plenty of other clobber.



Galley

Lying to starboard in the cockpit, the galley boasts a twin-burner hotplate-type Wallas hob and a circular stainless steel sink, both concealed under a cover which hinges out to form a worktop. Useful stowage is provided by way of three drawers and a



cupboard underneath, plus a further drawer and cupboard under the co-driver's seat opposite, which itself folds forward to give some extra work surface if required. A fridge is neatly tucked under the helmsman's seat, but we were a little concerned about the proximity of the seat-back to the hob, if the former is not pushed forward.

Cockpit & wheelshelter

Effectively the cockpit and wheelshelter are a single integrated area, which makes for excellent boating and socialising. A large U-shaped settee with a table wraps around the after section, with the galley located to starboard between this and the helm, where skipper and co-driver have independent seats.

The superstructure protects everyone from the worst of the wind, but in more clement conditions a canopy in the coachroof (a sturdy affair which does not flap and whistle in the wind when underway) can be peeled back, all but fully opening you up to the elements.

The rest of the cockpit also has its own canopy, a full framed arrangement that folds down across the transom coaming.

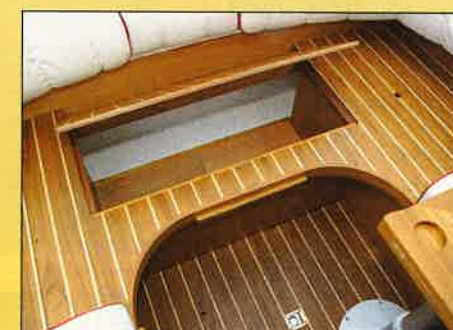
The settee has a removable cushion in front of the transom gate, and with the aid of optional infill cushions can be converted into a sunbed. Its table has fold-out leaves so you can make it bigger at meal times, and a cranked plinth so that it can be offset to allow easy movement to and fro the transom.

Stowage is provided by a good array of seat



lockers, most of which have false bottoms to provide access to items such as the steering gear and batteries. A portion of the cockpit sole also lifts, allowing you to get at the calorifier, water pump and tank connections, and the void here is large enough to swallow all manner of

gear, even up to the size of a deflated tender. Everything is very practical and shipshape, with nicely finished teak joinery. The sole is laid with a teak and holly-veneered ply, and the seat-bases too, so they still look good even when the cushions are not in situ.



Helm

The helmsman's seat is adjustable fore and aft, allowing you to sit or stand comfortably.

Thanks to the opening in the coachroof, you can stand upright with your head and shoulders unobstructed, while still having the wheel and throttle to hand; in fact, with just this in mind, the throttle is located on the flat of the console, which makes it a bit of a stretch away when you are seated.

Warning lights rather than individual gauges feature on the engine instrumentation dash, although the UK importers are working on a modification to this. Ready-use switches are easy to lay a finger on, and there is space on the angled console or towards the screen to site

any electronics required; our test boat had a Bidata log/depth-sounder and VHF radio.

Each portion of the three-part screen is serviced by a self-parking pantograph wiper.

Besides an adjacent perspex chart area, there are some useful 'bits' trays and cave stowage within the coaming.



which enables it to stick to the water nicely whilst still giving semi-displacement speeds from a single shaft-drive diesel. The bottom sections are a medium vee from the keel to the chine, whereupon a number of simulated-clinker strakes take the topsides up to the gunwale.

These are mainly for design effect, and to add stiffening to the topsides; our expectation was that they would also reduce the

tendency for water to creep up the hull, but in fact the chine does a first-class job and the water never gets that far. An additional skeg at the transom funnels the exhaust underwater, burying any emissions and stifling part of the exhaust noise.

A choice of two engine options is offered, both of them four-cylinder Yanmar diesels. The more potent version, as fitted to

our test boat, is the 4JH2-DTBE producing 85hp, whilst for river and estuary cruising the boat will be just as well off with the 60hp unit.

Performance & handling

Its hull form clearly marks the Saga down for semi-displacement performance,

Engineroom

The power installation is as simple as they come, a straight shaft-drive configuration with the shaft log easy to get at by lifting the aftermost hatches in the cockpit sole. The Yanmar engine itself is reached by raising a pair of hatches further forward, beside the galley.

These have to be lifted clear rather than hinged open and supported, but access is excellent, with a good 8in (20cm) of clear space right round the block. Service points are easy to get at, and ancillaries such as the fuel/water separator and raw-water strainer are also well placed.

The battery switches are tucked out the way, but still accessible, in a small cavity within the base of the seating. You can readily get at the fuel tank connections, sited beneath a section of sole in front of the helm seat, and the tank is constructed with a good-sized inspection plate.

We were also glad to see that the compartment is completely boxed-in and insulated, to prevent engine noise reverberating too far through the boat, and that air is draughted in through good-sized trunking.

All-in-all it is a simple but robust installation, and one which is not going to confound the DIY boatowner, which helps to keep running costs down.

The bilge is serviced both by a manual pump located in the cockpit and also by an electric unit.



and the builders are right not to be tempted to overpower it. The 85hp Yanmar installed in our test boat fits the bill perfectly, giving a top speed of nearly 16 knots and a cruising speed (300rpm down on its rated 3800rpm) of just under 14 knots.

In speed-restricted waters, you can trundle happily along at 2000rpm, to give the boat's hull speed of 6 knots.

At whatever pace, the hull tracks positively with little recourse to the helm necessary. As the throttle is opened, it merely perks its stern up a touch and then runs level, with unimpaired visibility from the wheelshelter.

Noise levels are kept well in check, no doubt largely due to the snugness of the enginebox.

Trim tabs are fitted but are generally not required, the 26HT

being nicely balanced for most sea conditions. There are few incidences of any spray finding its way aboard.

Turns in semi-displacement mode have a slight initial outward swing, but this is almost immediately corrected and the boat spins around in little more than a couple of boat-lengths, almost flat. At slower speeds, the large rudder gives plenty of manoeuvrability, and when going astern it is simply a matter of going softly-softly on the throttle to keep some way on and let the rudder and keel do their bit.

Our first test run out of Poole offered little to tax the Saga, except for trip-boat wakes. We tried to get stuck in, but the hull and rudder would have none of it, and we steered through them without any misbehaving.

Toilet

There is good standing headroom in the WC to starboard. The basin is a good size too, although the floorpan/showertray is on the small side.

The sea-toilet empties into a holding tank, which is a standard fitment. Oddly, the showertray is drained using a manual bilge pump.

It was in this compartment that we found the only disappointing piece of workmanship on our test boat: a rather crudely formed melamine-faced door to the cupboard beneath the moulded countertop. The other cupboard, outboard, has a pair of neatly trimmed teak sliding doors.

We were pleased to see that Saga incorporate an extractor for the compartment.



A second sortie encountered a livelier sea state, but again we came away happy with the good, positive ride. The weight of the largely wood fit-out provided plenty of substance, and there were no creaks, thumps or groans from the hull.

Conclusions

Single-diesel shaft-drive craft of this size are handy boats, large enough to cruise aboard in comfort but none too difficult to handle and maintain. Strangely they are few and far between, which makes the appearance of the Saga 26HT in the UK all the more welcome.

The concept of a wheelshelter with a large canvas-covered opening in the coachroof is an excellent one for British climes, and the layout is both comfortable and practical, our only disappointment being the limited space the inboard power train leaves for a second, midships sleeping area.

If this is not an issue for you, the layout and the Scandinavian yard's good standard of build should offer many years of sound, enjoyable service.



BUILD

glass-reinforced plastic

DIMENSIONS

LOA

26ft 4in (8.03m)

HULL LENGTH

24ft 3in (7.43m)

BEAM

9ft 0in (2.75m)

DRAUGHT

2ft 8in (0.80m)

AIR DRAUGHT

7ft 10in (2.4m)

DISPLACEMENT

2.5 tonnes

FUEL CAPACITY

62gal (280lt)

WATER CAPACITY

21gal (95lt)

ENGINES

single Yanmar 4JH2-DT(B)E

4cyl 1.8lt diesel

85hp at 3600rpm

PRICE

£49,950 ex VAT

SAGA 26HT

PERFORMANCE & CONSUMPTION							SOUND LEVELS dB(A)		
rpm	knots#	gph†	lph†	mpg†	range*	trim	cabin	helm	cockpit
2000	6.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	70	68
2500	7.5	1.4	6	5.37	265	—	—	73	72
3000	10.1	2.2	10	4.59	229	—	—	75	73
3200	12.2	2.6	12	4.69	234	—	—	75	73
3500	14.0	3.0	14	4.67	233	—	79	78	77
3800	15.6	4.0	18	3.90	195	—	80	81	79

Measured by radar gun. † Calculated from engine manufacturers' figures. * Allows 20% margin.

CONDITIONS ~ wind southerly Force 2-3, sea slight

LOAD ~ fuel 100%, water 50%, crew 2

SUPPLIERS

Wessex Marine
Salterns Marina, Salterns Way,
Lilliput, Poole, Dorset BH14 8JR.
Tel: 01202 700702.

BUILDERS

Saga Trading AS,
N-6740, Selje, Norway.
Tel: (47) 57 85 63 03.