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— *Boat Report* —

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SEACO 780

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A new manufacturer from Norway and an even newer baby of their range take on the worst a UK winter can muster.



Clockwise from left: the Seaco 780 has a horseshoe-shaped dinette in the bows, the table dropping to create a wide but not very long double berth. Teak trim throughout extends to a comfortable toilet seat. Alongside the galley, a fridge is incorporated into the inside of the door from the cockpit. The helm offers seating for two, with tight legroom, but the squab flips over for those who prefer to stand. The L-shaped settees in the cockpit can be positioned diagonally opposite each other or pushed together to make a sunbed. Features of the design are a pronounced flair at the bows and a sleek wraparound screen running some way aft.

Scandinavia has an enviable reputation for boatbuilding, though this is often reflected in its prices. So we were enthusiastic to find at last year's Southampton Boat Show a new Norwegian range of well-conceived sportscruisers without such a sting in the stern.

The three-boat Seaco line-up comprises models at 34ft (the 1030), 31ft (the 940) and, making its debut at Earls Court, a useful looking 25ft (7.8m) model, offering full cruising accommodation while still being just about trailable.

In the UK, the range is handled by a firm who are very familiar with Scandinavian craft, Offshore Powerboats. It was from their base at Lymington in the western Solent that we took out the 780, during a lull in the January gales.

Design

Whilst the Seaco range might still be finding its feet, those responsible for the design and build of the boats are long on sealegs, having been associated for many years with some of the best-known Norwegian marques. Their concept is conservative,

with medium-to-deep-vee hulls that can comfortably handle the power on tap, versatile cockpits to make the most of the elements, and interior styling that uses plenty of warm teak joinery.

The underwater sections of the 780 have a deadrise of 24° amidships, running off to 16° at the transom. The pronounced flair at the bows above the chine continues with just a slight curve to the topsides, helping to break up the slab sides often found well back towards the transom. This is topped off by a deck, coaming and coachroof moulding of pleasing, rakish proportions, enhanced by the use of a sleek wraparound screen running right aft.

Exterior

To board from alongside, it is an easy step onto the integral bathing platform. The topside returns that pinch the platform between them are narrower than many, making it less of a stretch, and the grabrail that runs across the transom is also welcome.

On the platform itself are the shoreside power coupling (a mains ring is standard), a shower and fender stowage. To help with the watersports, there



is a chunky boarding ladder with handholds on each side, and a hatch for skis, tucked away beneath the port cockpit seat. You enter the cockpit through a small transom door.

The L-shaped seating to port is complimented by a like-sized one diagonally opposite, which slides across on inset runners to form a sunbed and at the same time (its back simply hinging over) create a further forward-facing double seat — all very neat and clever. In their original positions these settees can have a table located between them, and there is plenty of locker space beneath.

Forward, the helm offers seating for two. Although the squab can be flipped up to allow a half-standing perch, the seat itself is not adjustable, and the long-limbed may find legroom a shade tight, especially when a companion is seated alongside.

Immediately to the right of the wooden wheel are the ready-use switches and trim-tab rockers, and to the left an Autohelm Tridata, which should suffice for most inshore needs. Owners requiring an electronic navigator may have to bracket-mount it. The perspex chart area tends to be shielded from view by the vertical-faced engine instrument fascia, although the compass further forward is easy to view.

Space is tighter than it might be along the console due to an inset bottle, glass and bits holder, and the main 12V breaker panel is also located here. The adjacent companionway door is bulked up to house the fridge on its inside face, readily accessible from the cockpit when it is left open but equally convenient from the galley when closed.

Pinching every inch of space to ensure the cockpit and interior are as spacious as possible has meant the side decks have rather lost out, even if they are canted slightly inboard. We would also have preferred to see a rather more solid arrangement than the foldaway step positioned to port in mid-cockpit (next to the remote engine compartment fire-extinguisher) to help us over the screen-topped coaming. The screen provides a solid enough handhold, but apart from that there is just the low guardrail outboard.

At the bows a large foredeck locker houses the ground tackle, which comes as standard. On our

test boat a bow-roller had yet to be fitted, the anchor platform extension being for effect rather than to tuck away any form of stemhead fitting. The only hardware were pairs of 6.5in (17cm) cleats forward, amidships and aft.

The 780 comes with a full-headheight framed canopy, which swings forward and stows against the screen.

Interior

Access below is helped by a sliding hatch, which falls directly over the galley area to give full standing headroom here. Headroom in the cabin is otherwise a maximum of 5ft 8in (1.73m), with sitting headroom over the horseshoe-shaped dinette forward.

As usual, dropping the attractive teak dinette table and adding an infill creates a double berth, but it is only 5ft 4in long, the footwell forward of the seat-back being too tight to stretch under comfortably. Within the ends of the seat-bases are a pair of useful-sized drawers, the rest of the void being accessed through hatch cut-outs.

The galley is equipped with a double gas hob, a stainless steel sink with mixer tap and a reasonable quantity and variety of stowage, not forgetting the fridge in the door from the cockpit.

The toilet compartment opposite is again neat on space, but nevertheless adequately appointed, even down to an electric ventilator. The half-moulded liner incorporates a decent-sized basin and a shower tray topped off with a grating, while the pump-out toilet, which deposits into a holding tank as standard, has the added attraction of a wooden seat. Indeed, the teak trim found elsewhere, around the locker beneath the sink for instance, makes for an attractive ambience throughout the interior.

Rounding off the accommodation is the midships sleeping area, separated from the main cabin by a curtain. There is no standing or dressing space as such, just the 6ft 2in x 3ft 5in (1.89 x 1.05m) mattress with sitting headroom. Towards the foot of the berth is a large opening hatch facing into the cockpit, and towards the head of the compartment stowage is provided by a shelf and cave locker.

An easily removed part of the bunk-base gives access to the shower-drain pump and toilet seacock; a further screwed-down section exposes the holding tank.

Engines

Diesel and petrol installations are offered, all single Volvo Penta outdrives harnessed to Duoprop legs. Petrol engines range from a 205hp V6 to a 330hp 7.4lt V8, while the diesel options are 150hp, 200hp and 230hp. The boat we tried was fitted with the apparently standard 5.0Fi, an electronic-injection OMC-based 235hp V8.

A simple two-part hatch gives access to the engine compartment, and there is plenty of room to stand at its forward end. Sharing the same stretch of bilge are the transducers and automatic bilge pump, so you need to take some care with your feet; a small grating hooked over the bearers would be a simple solution.

Access to the normal service points is reasonable in most instances but particularly tight in a few others, not least the spark plugs on the petrol boat we tested. Whilst we are in favour of boxing-in engines to reduce the amount of noise that can

escape, the insulated sidewalls of the compartment really do pinch the V8 in, making access to the tail end of the block and the drive very tight also.

Located on the forward bulkhead is a manual bilge pump, together with the freshwater service pump. Behind this bulkhead is the fuel tank, without any discernible stopcock in line to the engine-mounted filter, and similarly boxed-off outboard to port are the water tank and calorifier. To get at any of these will require a certain amount of surgery, although this is not the case with the rest of the ancillaries. The batteries and their associated switch, the 240V breakers, the manual discharge pump for the holding tank and the trim-tab pump are all readily accessible in their own neat compartment to starboard.

Performance and handling

After several attempts during a tempestuous January, we finally managed to find an interlude where gales were not 'imminent', just 'soon', and the previous front could only be felt by a steep, white-bearded chop, pushed up more as the tide turned against a Force 5 blowing up the Solent.

These were conditions that this 25-footer took to commendably, given the punch and slam that smaller craft invariably experience in abrupt seas, spanning and slicing the wave-tops to give a comfortable ride in all directions.

The controls fall easily to hand, and the hull reacts steadily to alterations to both the leg and the trim tabs. Pouring on the power whenever the conditions permitted brought an eager response, the 780 being light on the helm but predictable through the turns. There were plenty of confused seas to challenge the hull, but it was not to be wrongfooted.

The screen gave useful protection whenever the odd bit of spray blew back aboard; the driving position is well tucked in, and the whole crew should benefit from the full length of the screen.

With the passing of another gale, we ventured forth again in rather flatter seas to conclude our test. The radar gun all but confirmed the manufacturers' claimed 39 knots, registering just a half knot less with a crew of two and full tanks. To get below the 30 knots mark we had to shave a thousand off the open-throttle 4800rpm, and dropping to 3500rpm still brought 24.5 knots. That is not to say there is too much power on hand, simply that there is plenty, all handled cleanly and predictably by the hull through the Duoprop leg.

Expect fuel consumption to be of the order of 9-10gph (41-46lph) at 3800rpm. Keeping the engine tightly boxed and reasonably insulated means noise levels rarely push above 80dB(A).

Conclusions

The larger boats in the Seaco range, especially the 1030, offer exciting alternatives in the 30ft-plus sports cruiser market. But it is the 25ft mark that is the most taxing for any manufacturer. Here the onus is on trying to be all things to all people — providing plenty of comfortable, protected cockpit space and adequate accommodation for weekending, while not forgetting sportsboat performance.

Fortunately, this is a niche that is second nature to Norwegian builders, and Seaco's 780 addresses all these criteria most fully. Given the one or two refinements we would like to see incorporated, it is a clever and attractive package. □

Seaco 780

Loa 25ft 9in (7.86m).
Hull length 24ft 8in (7.52m).
Beam 8ft 2in (2.50m).
Draught 2ft 11in (0.88m).
Displacement 2.05 tons.
Fuel capacity 55gal (250lt).
Water capacity 22gal (100lt).
Engine 235hp Volvo Penta 5.0 Fi/DP.
Price £38,904 ex VAT.
Builders Seaco Boats AS, Loga, N-4400, Flekkefjord, Norway.
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