



*Boat Report*

# SEAWINGS 277

*A practical all-weather cruiser, the latest Seawings behaved well both in our test and on a first Channel crossing in the hands of its new owner.*

New models at around 28ft (8.5m) have been few and far between from British manufacturers in recent years. That is a pity, because this size is a crucial niche market — big enough for going cruising with appropriate accommodation and the option of a twin-engine installation, while keeping purchase price and running costs contained.

One boat which has set about filling this void is the latest Seawings, launched at last year's Southampton Boat Show. So we hopped aboard a twin-engined petrol version out of Port Solent in Portsmouth to put the 277 through its paces.

Later, after its owner had taken delivery and run

the boat to its new home in Guernsey, we caught up with him there to see how he felt about its first Channel crossing.

## Design

A common link in Andrew Wolstenholme's Seawings designs, from the 25-footer at entry level to the six-berth 34-footer to be launched later in the year, is the practical approach to boating in temperate climes.

The helm and aft cockpit are adaptable to give as much or as little protection as required, depending on the weather. Most of the area can be exposed in

**Above: offering as much or as little cover as required, the 277 takes a sensible approach to boating in north European climes. Right: most of the rear cockpit seating lifts to make engine servicing commendably easy.**

stages without detracting from the protection offered by the lengthy side windscreens and superstructure.

The hull itself has a variable-deadrise form, panning out from a medium-to-deep vee of 23.5° amidships to 19° at the transom.

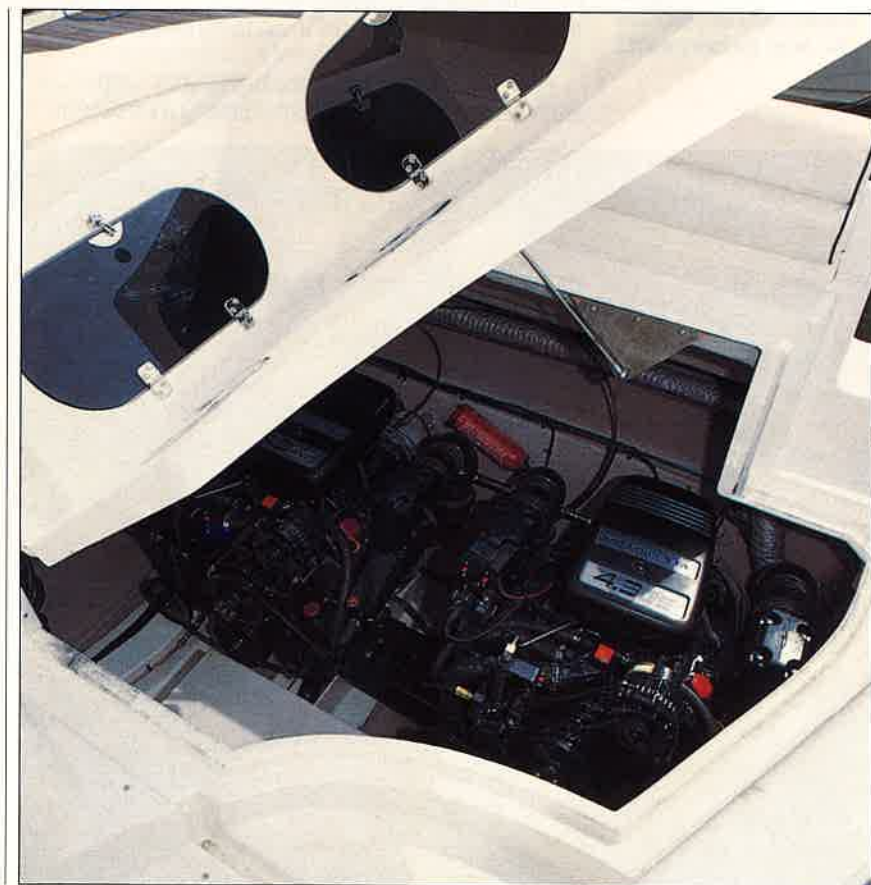
For what is a fairly bulky boat, given the hardtop fashioned over the cockpit, the 277 has a pleasingly unfussy line which should not readily go out of vogue.

## Exterior

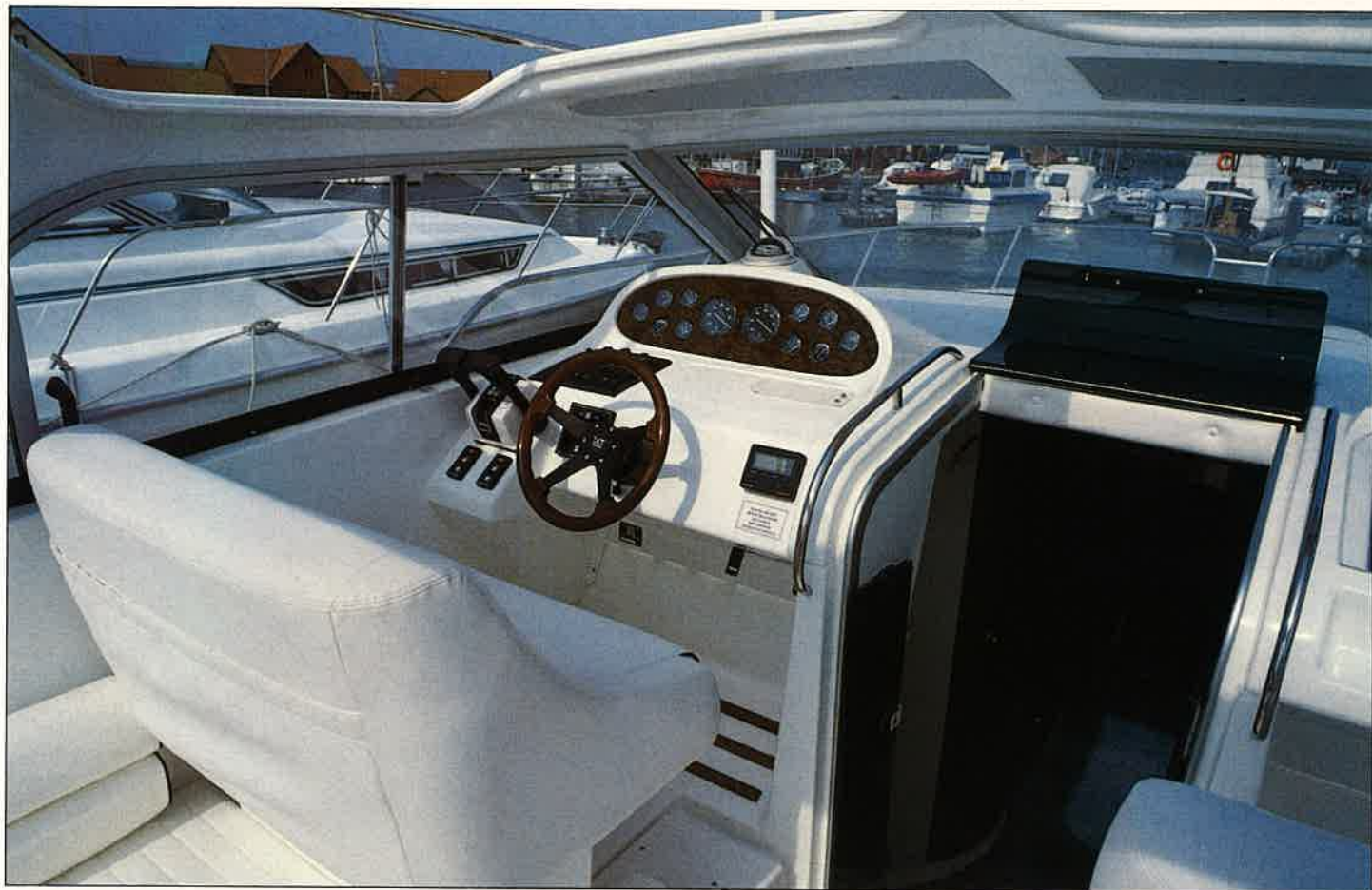
The topside culminates at the quarters in the usual built-in bathing platform, with a shower, a covered-over swim ladder and a reassuring grabrail on the coaming top.

Normally this integral moulding would provide a convenient way to board a boat of this kind, via the walk-through to the cockpit, but in this instance the depth and height of the topside makes it a bit of a stretch. The side decks with their adjacent handholds are a useful alternative, the port side of the cockpit having a moulded internal step.

The superstructure arch over the cockpit supports half-length side windows, the middle sections of which are opening, and a pair of removable canvas sunroofs. For fully enclosing the rear of the cockpit, the arch has a slide-out extension which forms a landing for a further portion of canopy and side curtains. The net result is plenty of headroom but a snigger feeling than the







**Above: visibility from the helm is excellent, and you can stand to enjoy a blast of fresh air through the sunroof. Below: the starboard quarter berth can be curtained off for privacy, and incorporates the main electrics panel.**

usual frame canopy achieves.

There is an asymmetrical U-dinette to starboard with a wet-bar opposite. The dinette table drops to form a sunbed, and behind a pair of perspex hatches is stowage space beneath the seats. The wet-bar includes a fridge and a moulded-in sink, but no glass or bottle storage. Tucked within the coaming just abaft of this is a niche for the battery switches and the manual bilge pump.

Forward are split helm and navigator's seats. Both have half-hinged squabs, making it easy to

stand and enjoy a blast of fresh air through the sunroof, or for close-quarters manoeuvring, but all-round visibility from the helm is excellent in any case, even with the rear canopy in situ.

The console has an angled, veneered fascia for the main engine instrumentation and trim gauges, and also incorporates the wet-card compass. Between this and the wooden wheel is a clear area with a simple but effective clip to hold down a folded chart. Just over to the right is the ready-use switch panel, and to the left there is space for a couple of further instrument heads.

The extended plinth outboard provides a landing for the throttles, power trim and trim tab controls, the latter half tucked under the wheel and a fiddle to get at. There is plenty of space adjacent to the 'knee-hole' for bracket-mounting a VHF unit, and the remote fuel cut-offs are also sited here.

Under the navigator's seat is stowage for the gas bottle. The console in front of it is moulded with a shallow tray for spare charts and smaller odds and ends.

On deck, the ground tackle consists of a manual anchor winch (an electric one is an option) complete with CQR-style anchor and 99ft (30m) of chain, feeding into a moderate-sized foredeck locker. There is room in here for lines and possibly an extra fender, but the locker is not partitioned so they might foul the chain.

The 24in (61cm) high pulpit/guardrail extends back as far as halfway along the wheelhouse, where handrails along the top take over. Further hardware comprises three pairs of 8in (20cm) cleats, which are incorporated into the toerail rather than left on the side deck for the crew to trip over.

The decks themselves are 8in (20cm) wide, and angled in just slightly to lean the body inboard if anything — a useful touch all too rarely seen.



### Accommodation

Access down into the accommodation is through a beamy sliding door, via three easily spaced wide wood treads with handholds on both sides.

The interior is wholly open-plan, with plenty of headroom, and has two good-sized quarter berths (rather than the usual separate midships cabin) supplementing the very full 6ft 6in x 5ft 0in (1.98m x 1.52m) double created from the forward dinette. The dinette itself has a comfortable sweep of seating around the teak table during the day or evening, and a removable portion of backrest extends the length of the mattress for sleeping purposes.

Between the dinette and the quarter berths lie the galley and toilet compartment, both of decent size.

The former has a built-in three-burner gas hob, a combined oven/grill and a round stainless steel sink with a mixer faucet. A second fridge can be fitted in addition to the one in the cockpit, although then you lose one of the cupboards. Stowage is most adequate as it stands, with a number of sensibly sized compartments outboard and beneath the moulded countertop.

Ventilation in the standard fit-out is provided by an opening side port, as well as by the close proximity of one of the deck hatches; an extractor fan can be incorporated at additional expense.

The WC is a fully moulded affair which incorporates a measure of dry stowage and fiddled cave lockers tucked outboard, beyond the spray of the shower.

The toilet compartment's curved bulkhead gives a more interesting shape to the main cabin area and ensures the room available is working to maximum advantage; for designers, corners are invariably unusable 'dead space'.

Right aft, the quarter berths are almost identical in length at 6ft 5in (1.96m) but vary in width. The starboard one measures 2ft 9in (0.84m), with a curtain for limited privacy, with a neat built-in book rack and the main electrics panel overhead. The head of the 2ft (0.61m) wide port one is incorporated into the cabin itself, to double as additional seating.

The main allowance for clothes stowage is a half-height hanging locker just forward of the toilet compartment. Under-bunk compartments account

**Above: a comfortable forward dinette converts into a very full double berth. Below: in the galley are a three-burner hob, an oven/grill and a sink. The fridge is outside in the cockpit, leaving plenty of stowage space here.**





for the rest, some with moulded liners but most just painted-out sections of hull; given the lack of alternative stowage, except behind the reasonably deep seat-back shelves, it would have been helpful to have lined them all.

The interior is light and airy but, being set off with a tidy array of teak joinery with little exposed GRP liner, at the same time enjoys a pleasant warm feeling.

## Engines

There is a wide choice of options, all from the Volvo Penta stable, in single and twin installations, petrol and diesel.

The diesel listing includes both derivatives of Volvo's six-cylinder block, the AD41 at 200hp and the supercharged KAD42 at 230hp. The twin option is AD31s in their XD 150hp versions.

On the petrol front the options start at a single 205hp 4.3lt V6 with Duoprop. The least potent twin installation is a pair of 145hp four-cylinder units, while the meatiest is two of the V6s, as on our test boat.

There is nothing awkward about getting at the engine compartment. You just remove the seat cushions, and a goodly portion of the rear cockpit seating lifts with the help of gas struts. The hatch extends almost to the transom, so as much of the engines and legs as possible are exposed, making checks and servicing commendably easy.

Likewise, the auxiliaries are simple to get at, the sturdy battery box making a handy step to the head of the compartment as being readily checked itself. Piping and cabling are run tidily and out of harm's way, the fuel/water separators on the forward bulkhead are easily monitored, and the water and fuel tanks can be got at through a screwed-down panel in the cockpit.

The bilge is serviced by a rather lost-looking Rule 800 submersible, and there is also a manual pump. Insulation is attached only to the hatch itself.

## Handling and performance

Although there was little more than a Force 4 blowing from the south, the seas around the approaches to Portsmouth Harbour could not have been more of a short, sharp mess, even when we pushed out beyond the forts. There were boat-size holes opening up from nowhere, and chunky waves running up from any point on the compass.

In such conditions it proved tricky to tune the boat for really comfortable fast cruising, which is why we were particularly interested to hear how the new owner of the boat we tested, John Martel, got on during his run across the Channel to Guernsey.

John, a motorboater of almost 20 years standing in the challenging waters around the Channel Islands and the adjacent coast of France, reports that he is delighted with his 277.

He completed the main leg from Yarmouth (where he topped up with fuel) to St Peter Port, a distance of around 90 miles, in about four hours, with the engines set at an easy 3250rpm to give up to an indicated 25 knots. This means an average speed over the ground of 22.5 knots, using about three-quarters of the 80gal tank. In a lumpy beam-sea-cum-swell, approaching a Force 5 in mid-Channel, the hull took the passage without complaint.

Our own data gave a top speed of 35 knots at 4800rpm, a couple of knots shy of the brochure specification, which is understandable given the conditions. For sustained running through the unpredictable lop, we eased back to between 3500rpm, giving 24 knots, and 3000rpm, for just under 20 knots.

Noise levels in the cockpit were reasonable, at 83dB(A) over the lower rev settings and 86dB(A) flat-out. Empirical fuel consumption figures from the Volvo V6s accords with John's findings, at something like 13-15gph between the two at 3500rpm, but you can expect this to double if you are running near to maximum speed.

## Conclusions

The 277's semi-hardtop concept makes plenty of sense when you are boating in changeable, temperate climes, a point that was not lost on John Martel when he made his approach to Guernsey in the heaviest of spring downpours. There is a balance to be drawn between stifling under two much shelter and being drenched before you can batten down, and this boat meets the challenge adequately.

In fact the whole layout is highly successful, with a fit-out that is both comfortable and well executed, although a touch more consideration for stowage would not go amiss. Our own sortie was inconclusive when it came to judging the boat's seakindness, but the owner's early open-sea excursion proved nothing but reassuring. □

## Seawings 277

**Loa** 27ft 7in (8.41m).  
**Hull length** 26ft 6in (8.08m).  
**Beam** 10ft 6in (3.20m).  
**Draught** 3ft 0in (0.91m).  
**Air draught** 8ft 0in (2.44m).  
**Displacement** 3.0 tons.  
**Fuel** 80gal (360lt).  
**Water** 35gal (160lt).  
**Engines** twin 205hp Volvo Penta 4.3GS/DPs.  
**Price** from £46,450 ex VAT with single Volvo 4.3GS/DP; £54,850 with twin 4.3s and standard inventory.  
**Builders** Hardy Marine, Gaymers Way Industrial Estate, North Walsham, Norwich, Norfolk NR28 0AN. Tel: 0692 500091.  
**Suppliers** Crest Marine (Port Solent) Ltd, 17-18 The Slipway, Port Solent, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO6 4TR. Tel: 0705 201506.

