

BOAT REPORT SHAKESPEARE 960

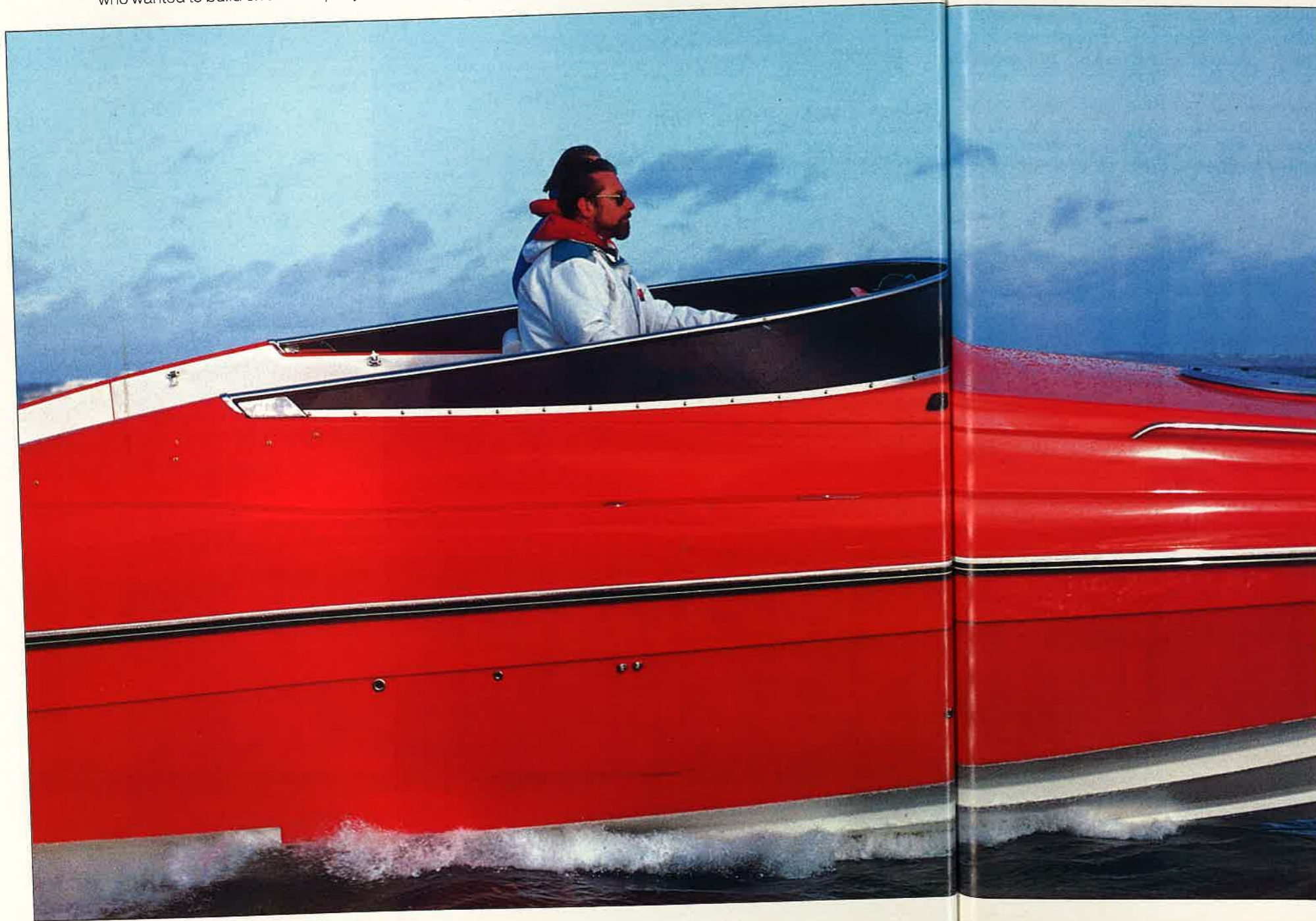
Under new ownership, a famous name in British sportsboat building is making a comeback. The flagship was designed by Lorne Campbell.

SHAKESPEARE were one of the best-known names in British sportsboats and circuit racing under the guidance of their charismatic and much-loved founder Bill Shakespeare. After his death, the company carried on producing the hulls he had designed, but gradually the impetus faded.

Just over a year ago, a new owner came along who wanted to build on the company's reputation

and give it new direction. He called on the world-renowned powerboat designer Lorne Campbell to produce a new generation of hulls worthy of the famous name, and a new generation of Shakespeares was born.

The first model was a pure sportsboat, but at last year's Southampton Boat Show the company unveiled their new flagship, a striking sportscruiser with a radical hull design.



Campbell has always been at the leading edge of racing design, prepared to try out new concepts and challenge conventional thinking. His greatest successes have been with multihull forms, either catamarans or (more radically) three-pointers, and he has two reigning World Champions in his hulls, in the 2-Litre and 4-Litre classes. He can still turn his hand to monohulls, but even then he cannot miss an opportunity to put his radical ideas into practice.

The hull of the 960 has a single step 7ft (2m) forward of the transom, with its transverse shape in the form of a swept-back gullwing. Aft of this the keel line angles down slightly towards the transom, to the extent that a datum line taken along the bottom of the forward keel would intersect the aft keel halfway. The after hull also has deep-vee sections, whereas the forward part is medium vee.

The intention is that the moderate forward sections allow the boat to plane readily, and run at low-speeds without the pronounced bow-up attitude of a true deep-vee boat. However, once the speed builds up, the after section takes on a greater role, with the step giving the added benefit of reducing wetted-surface area, and

Rakish lines and strident red gelcoat give the 960 an aggressive appearance. The pair of racing seats at the helm have jump-seats attached to the backs to make the rest of the cockpit more usable. The steeply angled console is convenient but the low screen is due to be modified on future boats.



hence drag. In addition, the down-angle of the after section gives lift and allows the boat to run at a lower trim angle.

In view of the untried nature of this concept, the mould for the first boat has actually been made with extra down-angle aft, on the grounds that it can easily be reduced on future models, but less easily increased.

Above the water, the 960 is just as striking. The rakish lines are matched by the strident red of the gelcoat, while the full-length sprayrails rise aggressively to the stem. The sleek profile of the deck is topped by a vestigial screen, and the cockpit is laid out for fast driving, though without forgetting the creature comforts you need when you reach your destination.

There is a sun-lounger aft, over the engines, with the wings of the side decks keeping you in place athwartships but no rail to stop you rolling off the back. The three-person rear cockpit seat has bolsters to give side support, while the squabs lift to give access to lockers which have enough room for fenders and lines. The starboard one also contains the battery-switches, though we suspect this leaves them vulnerable to being accidentally turned off when gear is removed in a hurry.

Ahead are a pair of racing seats on GRP pedestals. The squabs lift up if required, while the backs fold forward to open up the space in the cockpit. A pair of jump-seats are also attached to the backs, to give extra places when the boat is at rest. The stainless steel side-frame of the forward seats is somewhat hard and unprotected, and extra cushioning will be provided on future craft.

The helm position is to starboard, and the driver faces an array of instruments laid out on a steeply-angled console for quick assimilation of information. A panel of ready-use switches is well placed to the right of the wheel, plus a bank of rocker-switches for the power-trim and flaps. Morse racing controls and a wood-rimmed wheel provide the finishing touches.

A sliding perspex door with a vertical handrail on it gives access to the cabin, which is adequate for overnight stops or friendly weekends. Headroom is 6ft (1.8m) in the way of the open hatch, but otherwise 5ft (1.5m), reducing as you go forward.

To port is a small galley, with a stainless steel sink, a double gas hob, a small locker and a fridge. The worktop is cleverly designed, in simulated marble. Above is an electrical breaker panel, plus the stereo. To starboard is an enclosed toilet compartment which is surprisingly roomy, with an all-moulded finish, a Vacuflush toilet and three lockers.

The centre of the saloon has a U-shaped settee, seating four people around a table on a swivel-away leg which, with an infill, makes into a generous double berth.

Shallow lockers under the berths are lined with carpet, and further small lockers are found behind the backrests port and starboard. Forward of the settee, in the bows, is a cushioned area which has a locker underneath but is otherwise somewhat wasted. Hatches in the sole give access to the inside of the hull, while a Bomar hatch overhead provides light and ventilation.

Back outside, the 960 has a large bathing platform which projects beyond the outdrive legs

and has seats/lockers port and starboard, plus a shower outlet.

The side decks are a reasonable width for this style of craft, with a raised gunwale lip and a dotted-pattern non-slip. Pop-up cleats amidships and a low inboard rail complete the hardware, with the ends of the rail cleverly forming the fore and aft cleats.

A large foredeck locker will take anchor chain, fenders and warps, but there is no divider so they will end up in a heap. The stainless steel anchor is mounted in a projecting stemhead fitting.

Power comes from twin outdrives, petrol or diesel. The boat we tested had a pair of 350 Mercruiser Magnums, delivering 240hp at the prop, whilst the next boat will have 230hp Yamaha diesels. Both of these options are estimated to give 40-42 knots. The boat is designed to take up to twin 502 Magnums, totalling 830hp, giving 60 knots plus.

The engines are located under the aft sun-lounger, which lifts hydraulically. The compartment is clean and neat, with all equipment easy to reach and the wiring and piping clipped out of the way. Three GRP lockers across the forward end hold the batteries and bilge pumps (one electric and one manual) with clipped-down lids, but the hydraulic reservoirs for the trim tabs and hatch lift are vulnerably mounted at the forward end, just where you are likely to step on them.

A neat changeover manifold for the fuel system is mounted between the engines. A calorifier is aft to port, making use of the space provided by the bathing platform 'wing'. Two automatic fire-extinguishers are fitted to the hatch surround over the engines, but thankfully not to the hatch itself as we so often find.

The day of our test was not a good one for testing a performance boat. December gales had left a nasty confused sea, which made setting up the Shakespeare almost impossible without a lot of playing, while the wind had reduced from the Force 8-9 of the day before but was still the wrong side of Force 5.

We carried out our speed runs in the comparative shelter of Poole Harbour, by prior permission of the Harbour Commissioners, clocking 40-41 knots on our radar gun with the boat coming quickly onto the plane.

Motoring out into the rough stuff, we found the 960 ran level as predicted — possibly too much so, as it was frequently clipping the tops of the waves. A brisk crosswind picked up the spray, and the low screen did nothing to stop it being thrown into our faces. An extra 3in (7.5cm) is being added to the screens of future boats, while consideration will be given to tweaking the stern sections to allow the bow to be brought slightly up in these sort of conditions.

The boat handled the seas well. We still found ourselves reaching for the trims to bring the bow up, but this might have been a natural reflex to the running attitude of the 960, compounded by the cutaway line of the foredeck. Also, we were probably not giving ourselves enough time to set the boat up as an owner would.

There was no pounding when travelling into the waves, or rolling across them, and downwind the control was always there.

Shakespeare's radical sports cruiser is a boat with performance to match its good looks, as well as room for occasional overnight stops. □

Shakespeare 960

Loa 31ft 6in (9.60m).

Beam 8ft 6in (2.59m).

Draft 3ft 1in (0.93m) with the drives down.

Displacement 3.7 tonnes dry.

Fuel capacity 2 x 70gal (640lt).

Water capacity 25gal (110lt).

Power 2 x 240hp

Mercruiser petrols.

Price £53,918 ex VAT as tested.

Builders Shakespeare International Marine, Station Road, Hartlebury, Worcestershire DY11 7YJ. Tel: 0299 250685.