

Boat Report Sheerline 950

This river and estuary cruiser was a long time in gestation, but its build quality and accommodation are bang up to date. We went aboard with some new owners who clearly intend to get good use out of their boat.



This traditionally built 31ft river/estuary cruiser took a long time to come to fruition. The hull was commissioned some ten years ago, but the original hardtop design fell by the wayside when the builders, George Smith's on the Broads, fell on hard times before any more than a handful were ordered.

Subsequently, the project has been revamped, and an open-helm version of the Sheerline 950 is now being built by Wroxham Marine.

We were pleased when David and Sandra Rockell invited us aboard their new example, for a late season run on their home stretch of the River Thames around Marlow.

Design & layout

The 950's hull was drawn by Andrew Wolstenholme, and the more recent superstructure is down to John Moxham.

Between them, they have produced a boat with plenty of volume, albeit within the constraints of a boat designed primarily for river usage. Its beam allows it to cruise the Great Ouse without getting stuck, and its air draught (with the hoop and screen folded down) will get it under the notoriously low Osney Bridge on the Thames near Oxford.

That said, this boat can be ordered and specified for coastal use, with a twin-engined version available as an

alternative to the standard single inboard installation.

The hull itself has a tight round bilge, and tapered waterline sections beneath the transom in an attempt to reduce wash, with a central keel that runs almost full-length. On single-engined examples, a stainless steel shoe extension runs under the propeller where the shaft emerges, to support the rudder and lend a measure of protection from grounding.

Above the waterline is a single knuckle, for a useful

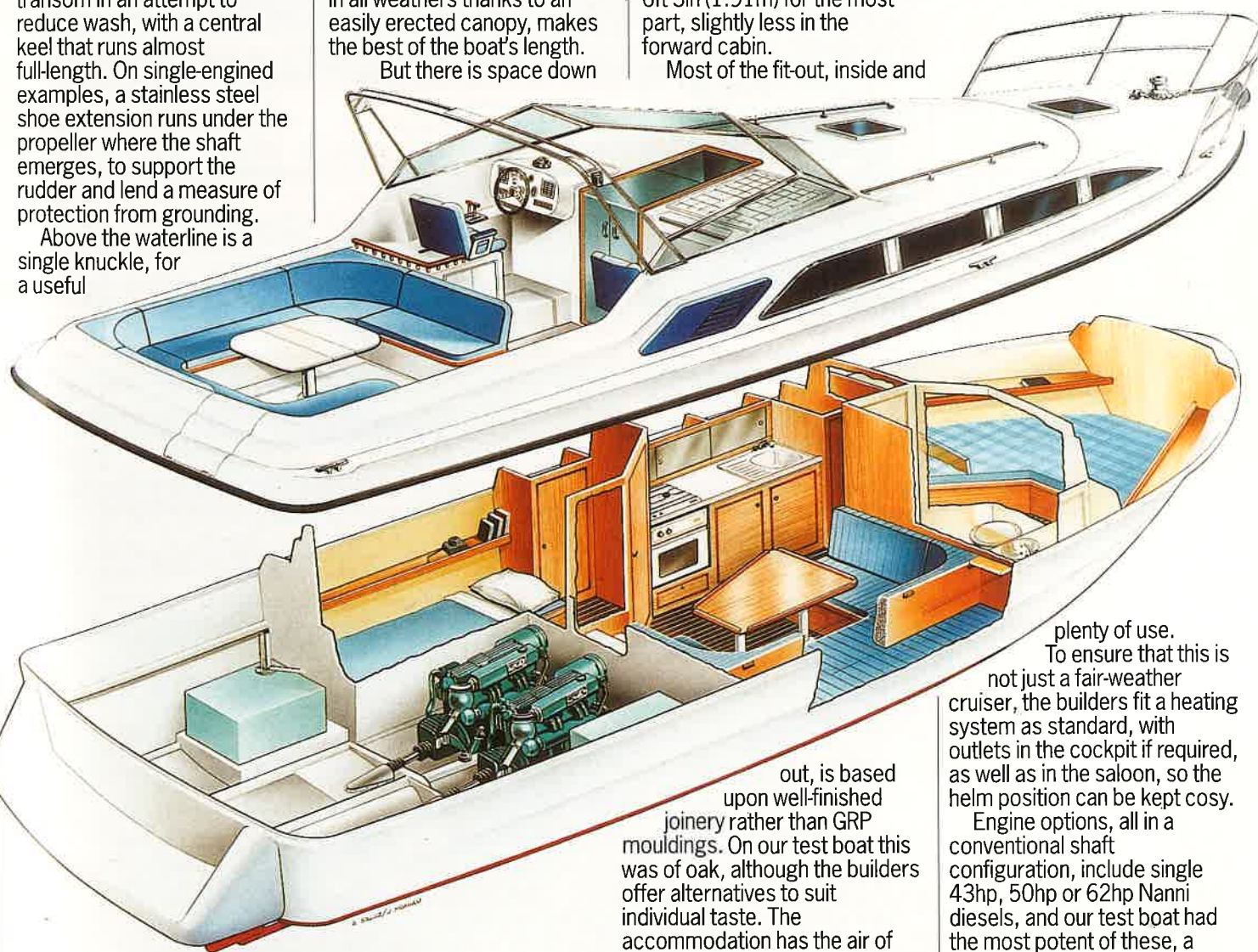
proportion of its length finished by an extra strip of rubber fendering, to protect the vulnerable quarters.

A generous cockpit, usable in all weathers thanks to an easily erected canopy, makes the best of the boat's length.

But there is space down

below for two full sleeping cabins, with a combined saloon/galley and a well proportioned toilet/shower between them. Headroom is 6ft 3in (1.91m) for the most part, slightly less in the forward cabin.

Most of the fit-out, inside and



plenty of use. To ensure that this is not just a fair-weather cruiser, the builders fit a heating system as standard, with outlets in the cockpit if required, as well as in the saloon, so the helm position can be kept cosy.

Engine options, all in a conventional shaft configuration, include single 43hp, 50hp or 62hp Nanni diesels, and our test boat has the most potent of these, a smooth-operating five-cylinder unit. Where the boat is to be

out, is based upon well-finished joinery rather than GRP mouldings. On our test boat this was of oak, although the builders offer alternatives to suit individual taste. The accommodation has the air of being easily lived aboard, and looks unlikely to suffer through

used predominantly for coastal cruising, a twin 62hp installation is offered, along with a slightly heavier lay-up.

Performance & handling

Purists might posit that there is no need for a bow-thruster, but Sheer Magic has this option fitted, and we can see the sense in it. When cruising shorthanded it makes it easier to ease the bow away from a lock wall, and David and Sandra, whose mooring has a more than average cross-current, find it helps them to complete the tight swing necessary in one move, and steady the bow into their slot. The 950 handles in good order, and responds smartly to the wheel, with a blip on the throttle helping to turn smartly through 90°. If you need to do a 180° about-face and check the boat on the engine, then the single Nanni has plenty of smokeless grunt without making a big thing of it. The helm, throttle and instruments are all well placed, and there is room between the

Decks

Our test boat's cockpit layout allows for a step up behind the helm seats on both sides. This makes it easy to hop up onto the side decks, which are adequately wide at 8in (20cm). With a guardrail running right back as far as the break of the cockpit, and a handrail extending along on the coachroof, tending lines is a safe business. Three pairs of 10in (25cm) cleats on each side are complemented by the nice finishing touch of a T-bar bollard at the stern.



Cockpit



A main attraction of the 950 is its well proportioned cockpit, which runs through at a single level. In its standard fit-out, the after portion will readily seat half-a-dozen people around a full-width U-shaped dinette. But with the seating being built up of wood, rather than mouldings, the layout can be customised. Well finished and varnished lockers in the seat-bases provide excellent stowage, including space for twin gas cylinders. Bulk storage is available in a lazaret which is accessed via a

hinged hatch aft. The water tank takes up much of the port side, but there is still loads of room left to starboard, and we were pleased to find the bilge boarded over to prevent anything stored here from sitting in puddles of water. A walk-through gate aft to starboard facilitates access over the stern and gives onto a bathing ladder mounted on the transom. A bathing platform is available if a buyer prefers this. The GRP cockpit hoop unbolts and hinges back readily for reducing the boat's air draught.

Helm

Our test boat was fitted with a second seat opposite the helmsman's. Both plinths offer a little extra storage, and the co-pilot's houses a second fridge. The console is clearly laid-out, with instrumentation set in a smart burr-walnut fascia. Apart from the



engine gauges, there is a helm indicator, depth-sounder and log, so all the basic requirements for river and estuary cruising are catered for. The throttle is located on the outboard coaming, to the skipper's left hand, while the wooden wheel is vertical. The inland waterways Boat Safety Scheme demands a fuel shut-off fitted as close to the helm station as possible, and

this duly finds itself within immediate reach. The aluminium screen is served by a pair of wipers, and can be dropped when you need to minimise air draught. A moulded shelf running along the coaming is useful for setting down odds and ends, and given the builders' attention to detail elsewhere we were surprised it is not finished off with a fiddle.

Galley

Laminate worksurfaces are fitted as standard in the adequate-sized galley, although Corian can be specified if required. Inset is a four-burner hob, topping off a smart fitted oven and grill unit. Storage is good, including both eye-height and countertop lockers as well as the larger cupboards and drawers beneath the worktop. The only disappointment is the size of the fridge, which is why the Rockells added a further unit in the cockpit. Sandra says the galley is fine for foodstuffs, but that David required further room for beverages! The whole cabin area has the mandatory amount of fixed ventilation specified by the Boat Safety Scheme, and in addition there are opening sections of window.



Saloon

The companionway access from the cockpit to the saloon is a sliding affair, which affords clear headroom as you negotiate the two steps down inside. The hinging stair tread gives access to the battery switches, and the raw-water inlet for the engine. At first sight the dinette table appears rather short, given that the arrangement of facing seats will accommodate four in comfort. This is to ensure it is easy to walk past, but the table can be pulled out further when required. And at night the whole lot can be dropped down to create a supplementary double berth. Good use has been made of the stowage potential in this area. The seat-bases offer roomy cave lockers, and there is a drinks cupboard tucked behind one of the seat-backs and a range of eye-height lockers outboard.



seat and the console to stand if preferred. The steering is only three turns lock-to-lock, which is just what you need rather than winding for ever, and we were glad to find a helm indicator fitted as standard. Going astern, the large rudder and tapered keel give

commendable steerage, although there is a slight initial kick to port on engaging astern gear. Out on the open river, the hull runs straight as a die and the helm is all but redundant, leaving the skipper and mate to enjoy the view from their

respective seats. In a lock, the helmsman can quite easily nip back and attend to the stern line. The day of our excursion on the Thames could not have been finer, so we could happily dispense with the cockpit canopy. At river speed (5mph), the

noise of the Nanni is barely discernible at 1500rpm, and being naturally aspirated it will not suffer from low-revs usage as turbocharged units do. On the river, there was nowhere we could run the engine at any significant revs, but with full power being

Midships cabin



With both a window let into the coaming and a good-sized hatch opening into the cockpit, the midships cabin is light and airy. As with the forward cabin, it is accessed via double doors.

The berth runs lengthways, rather than athwartships, and measures 6ft 4in (1.93m) long by just over 3ft 0in (0.91m) wide, which makes it a tight double. However, there is a comfortable amount of dressing room. The only clothes stowage is provided by the quite generous

half-height hanging locker, but there is room to set down a holdall without it being too much in the way, and a couple of shelves, so weekend guests or family should be comfortable enough. Concealed beneath the berth are the calorifier and the domestic water pump.

Forward cabin

Despite having slightly less headroom than in the rest of the accommodation, the forward cabin has the same air of homeliness and practicality. Nicely executed double doors give access from the saloon, taking up less room when being opened and closed than a larger single door. And the cabin enjoys plenty of natural light, and is well ventilated. The berth is well proportioned at no less than 6ft 2in (1.89m) by 4ft 2in (1.28m). It is offset to starboard, which makes best use of the available space, even if it means that the outboard occupant cannot get out without disturbing his or her partner. There is plenty of shelving for odds and ends, and a useful amount of stowage in a half-height wardrobe and cave lockers.





Toilet

A mix of GRP mouldings and Formica bulkheads makes the toilet compartment practical, with regard to keeping water in its proper place and being easy to clean, while maintaining a traditional, hand-built feel.

The sizeable showering area comes complete with teak grating. The standard arrangement is for a folding screen to pull across and protect the rest of the compartment from getting splashed when the shower is in use, which is definitely a good idea, although the owners of our test boat felt that a curtain would be less obtrusive and Wroxham Marine obliged by fitting this instead.

As in the galley, a laminate worktop comes as standard, with Corian as an option. A corner basin is inset into this, with a good-sized locker behind.

The toilet is of the manual variety, and plumbed through to a holding tank as standard.



developed at 2800rpm there is plenty of power available for tideway and estuary use. Sheerline agents Val Wyatt Marine say the hull will push up to 9-10 knots with this installation, or 8 knots with the more usually fitted four-cylinder 50hp engine.

Conclusions

In their two months of ownership

prior to our test, the Rockells had already put 200 hours on their Sheerline 950's engine. We can quite understand why they had spent so much time aboard.

With its simple but highly practical cockpit, combined with just the right amount of accommodation, this is the type of boat that begs to be used. And the package comes within an overall length which is

manageable, both in terms of handling and running costs.

Add to these advantages a hand-built fit-out that is going to last, and is engineered to be taken apart for ease of maintenance, and it is evident that Wroxham Marine have done a good job.

The 950 has turned out to be a fine river and estuarial cruiser. And not a day too soon! □

Engineroom

The engineroom hatch lies between the two helm plinths, and our test boat's single diesel installation left plenty of room all round it for servicing work.

All day-to-day checks and maintenance jobs can be carried out from deck level, or you can ease down to stand on the starboard side of the engine, which is necessary to access the batteries.

The fuel tank is to starboard (which has left room for the midships cabin to port), with the fuel/water



separator located on the forward bulkhead. With everything well clipped and secured, and the whole enginespace gel-flowed for ease of cleaning, it is a tidy installation.

Our only criticism concerns the location of the small submersible bilge pump, which nestles in the keel recess below the gearbox and is difficult to service. In the builders' defence, this is often a problem on hulls with a keel: you want the pump to be right down where water is going to collect, but this is bound to be beneath a mass of ironmongery.

The sternland can be accessed via a cut-out in the lazaret flooring.

SHEERLINE 950

BUILD

glass-reinforced plastic

RCD

category C/D

DIMENSIONS

LOA

31ft 0in (9.50m)

BEAM

10ft 7in (3.23m)

DRAUGHT

2ft 5in (0.76m)

AIR DRAUGHT

6ft 8in (2.03m)
with mast and screen down

DISPLACEMENT

4.4 tonnes

FUEL CAPACITY

38gal (170lt)

WATER CAPACITY

70gal (318lt)

ENGINES

single Nanni 5.280s

5cyl 2.75lt diesels

62hp at 2800rpm

PRICE

from £68,750 ex VAT



SUPPLIERS

Val Wyatt Marine Sales Ltd,
Willow Marina,
Wargrave on Thames,
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Tel: 0118 940 3211.

BUILDERS

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