



Boat Report

# SKIBSPLAST 600D

*How about 15 knots on a teacupful of diesel? We tested just such a promise from this recently introduced range of boats from Norway.*

Twenty-footers with an inboard diesel and planing performance are about as rare as hen's teeth. But one such boat is the Skibsplast 600D, the smaller of two Norwegian-built diesel craft (the other is the 700D) with overnighting accommodation.

## Design

We were intrigued to find how the builders had modified what had been designed as a medium-vee outboard-driven hull to take an inboard installation, with its associated drivetrain and sterngear. Helpfully, Poole-based importers Wessex Marine arranged to have the boat slipped prior to our test run so we could inspect the business end of things. In fact, the hull has been significantly altered to

incorporate a deep, wide tunnel section from which drops a very full moulded skeg. A metal shoe extending from this supports the large rudder, while the transom has been given a slight bulb, possibly to increase lift at this point.

One aspect that surprised us was the low shaft angle the builders have achieved, the straightest line of thrust being desirable to keep power losses to a minimum and the boat in reasonable trim. The engine installation therefore is well down in the midships vee, which also helps to give a steady, easy motion, with plenty of weight low down.

None of these modifications have come about by accident, the hull alterations and drive layout being the outcome of much testing.

The underwater sections are medium-vee, with

*Skibsplast are not afraid to break the mould throughout their wide range of boats. On the 600D, items of note include the centrally mounted helm seat, allowing a walkway either side and incorporating a galley beneath. Other surprises lurk below, notably the incorporation of an inboard diesel engine in a 20-footer.*

the Scandinavian penchant for slightly concave panels to sculpt the sprayrails and chine into the design rather than leave them hard-cornered with a definite flat. This concave shape is held into the topsides, which tend to flair outward near the gunwale, especially towards the bow.

## Exterior

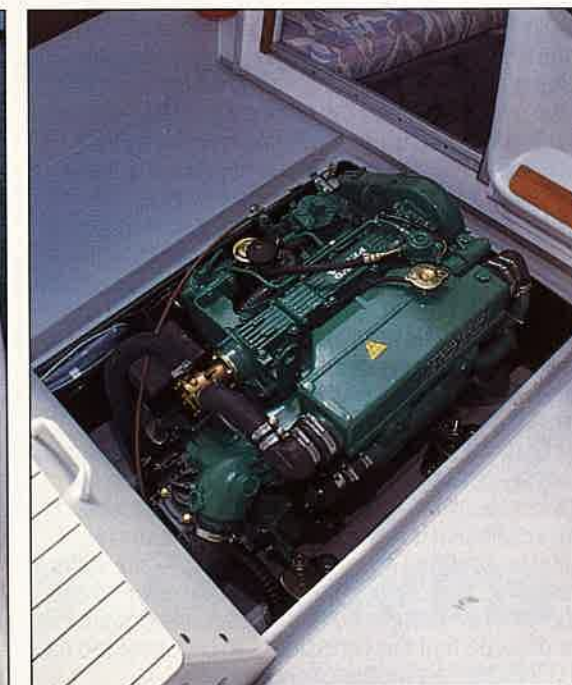
There are two alternative cockpit layouts. The standard boat comes with a bench seat across the transom, which leaves more deck space, for fishing perhaps; our test boat had the optional U-dinette, which also offers a decent-sized sunbed when the table is dropped.

Beneath the side benches are large lockers,

whose hatches can be strapped open while you rummage around inside. Hiking up the transom cushion gives access to the steering gear, the manual bilge pump and the removable 3½gal (15lt) water can; there is also plenty of room for cleaning paraphernalia, spares, oil cans and so on.

A wide fiddled shelf runs outboard, tucked under the side deck. The raised coaming towards the helm is fashioned with large, handy cave lockers.

The double helm seat is set on a plinth, which hides the slight projection of the engine above deck level. It also incorporates a neat mini-galley, revealed by hinging the seat-base forward. This 'pantry' has a sink with a pressurised water faucet, and a single-burner paraffin hob as standard. Our test boat had twin burners, plus a useful-sized locker





and drawer; you can also have a chest-type fridge fitted under the port-hand seat locker.

The helm itself is simply laid out, with a small sloping fascia for the engine instrumentation and the few ready-use switches lying just ahead of the vertical wheel, leaving just sufficient space for a combined log/sounder. The flat towards the screen, with a greyish gel to the moulding to reduce glare, is available for further bracket-mounting.

The seat is positioned centrally over the engine compartment, leaving space outboard, to starboard, so the skipper can half-stand or sit as he wishes (in fact, perching on the edge brings the throttle, mounted on the coaming, rather more easily to hand). A stowage slot here also takes the cockpit table when it is not required.

The 5in (12cm) sidedecks are topped with a chunky run of wood tread, but you can forgo them and use the large coachroof hatch to reach the foredeck, which is bordered with a low pulpit. Although there are grabrails forward of the screen, we felt the optional stainless steel cockpit hoop would have made a beneficial handhold when boarding or moving along the decks.

Mooring gear comprises a pair of 7½in (19cm) cleats to the flat of the foredeck, with further examples on either quarter. There is no bow roller just a locker forward. Back aft, the moulded bathing platform has a hinged central section, giving some access to the sterngear.

## Interior

Accessed through a wide, sliding door, the accommodation consists simply of a very full cuddy, with adequate weekending potential.

There is full sitting headroom around the small table, and either a portable or sea toilet in the dedicated space, adjacent to the cabin bulkhead. The vee-berth has an infill which pivots out from under the port-hand cushion to make a 6ft x 5ft (1.83m x 1.52m) mattress area, pinched at its foot.

Lockers beneath the seat cushions are the main stowage. They have decent-sized hatches, and are painted out and kept clear of the bilge.

## Engines

Two power options are offered as standard, both naturally-aspirated four-cylinder units around the 60hp mark: Yanmar's 4JH2 or (as on our test boat) Volvo's MD22. Due to the different gearbox ratios, a four-bladed prop is used with the former, a three-blader with the latter. A 40hp installation can be specified, if mainly river work is envisaged.

For checking the coolant and oil, a small hatch is let into the raised footrest of the helm seat. The fuel/water separator is accessed through a central lift-up section of cockpit sole. Also under here and simple to get at is the fuel tank, complete with inspection plate and shut-off, together with the battery and its isolator, the shaft log and bearing greaser.

For more thorough inspections or for servicing, it is simply a matter of partially lifting and sliding the whole seat plinth, which allows excellent access. The installation is tidy, but one important item we found lacking was a raw-water strainer — the waters around Norway being significantly free of weed and other flotsam compared to those around Britain. We are assured that this omission is to be corrected on all UK boats as a matter of course.

## Handling and performance

Although the Skibsplast looks as if it should have an outdrive, conventional inboard handling principles apply, of course. The tunnel and skeg do not unduly upset things, although some punch has to be applied for effective steering in astern; the boat is predictably responsive to both helm and throttle.

Without a comparative test with an outboard or outdrive version of the 600, it is difficult to say whether it is the hull or the dominance of the new keel section that makes for the boat's steady handling in both displacement and planing modes. The attention needed to the helm while meandering in Poole Harbour was minimal, and it was an equally easy drive when up and running at sea.

Open the throttle and you are away, straight and level with no burying of the stern as it moves past its hull speed to, in this instance, a maximum 15 knots. This performance was light of the claimed 17 knots, but the test model was significantly underpropped, the engine working well in excess of its 4000rpm rating. An increase of at least 2in pitch should, in our view, enable the 600D to make the extra speed.

Even so, 15 knots is a likely cruising speed. At what would be an awkward pace for other cruisers of similar size, we were impressed by the comfortable running angle — the short waves whipped up off Poole by a freshening offshore breeze, and the larger wakes of the fishing and pilot boats, could be criss-crossed at whatever speed we fancied without a murmur from the hull.

The use of faced ply in the fit-out, rather than drum-inducing GRP mouldings, helps make for a reassuringly solid ride, and the hull itself takes everything with commendable softness.

The large rudder gives plenty of manoeuvrability at both high and low speeds, although not as tight a turning circle as an outdrive. Given the sterngear arrangement, we were surprised at how the boat could be thrown about on full power without any discernible loss of grip.

A benchmark fuel consumption figure for the MD22 will be 2-2.5gph (9-11lph) for cruising. Sound levels in the cockpit, pretty well immediately over the engine, we measured at 84dB(A) at 3700rpm.

According to the European magazine Skipper, who undertook similar trials but with the more commonly fitted Yanmar 4JH2, this engine is capable of a top speed of just over 19 knots, so it seems the 600D prefers its power delivered through the four-bladed prop.

Wessex Marine tell us they envisage teaming up the Volvo installation (£800 less expensive) with the bench-seat option for those who require a dayboat, and the Yanmar with the alternative fit-out options for those who see themselves weekending.

## Conclusions

The lines of the 600D are a little harsh against other current designs, and the split rather than wraparound screen does not help. However, that will not worry those who are looking for a small diesel boat at almost petrol-engined prices with more than mere displacement performance.

The Skibsplast is not meant to be a glossy, rakish craft; it is built to be used hard, by those who enjoy being out on the water rather than by those who just like to be seen to be on it. The fit-out is plain and practical, the engineering simple and fixable. You just hop in and go. □

## Skibsplast 600D

**Loa** 20ft 9in (6.40m).  
**Hull length** 19ft 8in (6.00m).  
**Beam** 7ft 7in (2.30m).  
**Draught** 2ft 0in (0.62m).  
**Displacement** 1.1 tons.  
**Fuel** 24gal (1.07lt).  
**Water** 5gal (23lt).  
**Engine** Volvo MD22A 60hp diesel.  
**Price** £21,195 ex VAT as standard with Volvo MD22A; £22,323 as tested with alternative cockpit seating, 'pantry' galley unit and sea toilet.  
**Builders** Skibsplast A/S, Postboks 145, 4660 Evje, Norway.  
**Suppliers** Wessex Marine, Salters Marina, Salters Way, Lilliput, Poole, Dorset BH14 8JR.  
**Tel:** 0202 700702.