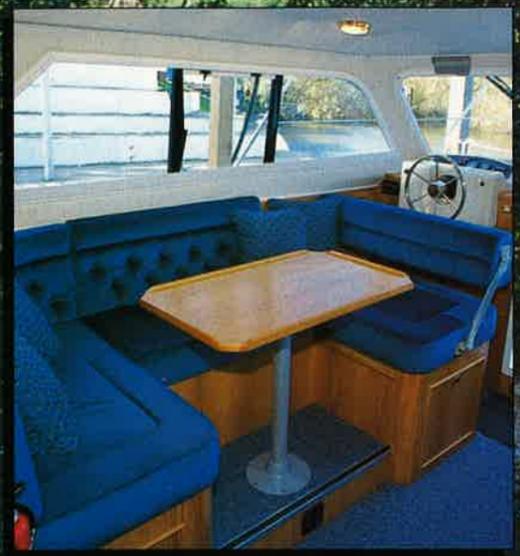


SOVEREIGN

30 SUNBRIDGE

Designed specifically for the river, this cruiser is big enough to offer a flybridge and sleep five, but small enough to get under most low bridges. We tested its handling on a Thames in spate.



Bounty Boats have built themselves a useful reputation for producing well fitted-out inland cruisers, for both the leisure and charter markets. Now they have added a dedicated 30ft Sovereign riverboat to the two alternative versions of their 34.

We say 'dedicated' because the Sovereign 30 Sunbridge makes no pretensions about wanting to go coastal, even though it cleverly incorporates a flybridge of sorts.

This feature makes the layout rather different for an inland craft, where top hamper is usually regarded as restrictive. But by folding the screen and hinging down the flybridge seats you can reduce its air draught enough to get under Osney Bridge at Oxford, where many other Thames craft find their progress halted.

Mind you, clearing bridges was looking to be the least of our problems as we tried out Bray Marine's demonstrator on the River Thames during the autumn floods.

Design & layout

The 30's hull is well geared for river and canal work, with a round-bilge form to reduce wash and about 18in (46cm) of keel to lend directional stability and protect the propeller and rudder.

Power comes from a single diesel engine, as you might expect, in this case a Nanni 4150HE rated at 37.5hp. More radical is that the actual shaft is driven by a hydraulic pump, in a system developed by Bounty themselves and already proven on their other models.

The pump's flow can be switched to provide ahead and astern propulsion in the usual way. Its advantages are twofold. Firstly, the engine does not have to be in-line with the prop shaft; in this case it is installed

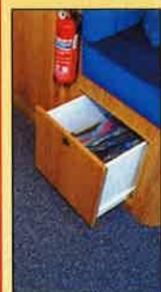


Saloon

The saloon is light and airy, especially since there is an opening door forward and a portion of the deckhead is engineered to slide open. But if you think you will be able to poke your head through this sunroof for a better look, or to direct the crew, then you will be disappointed: it is

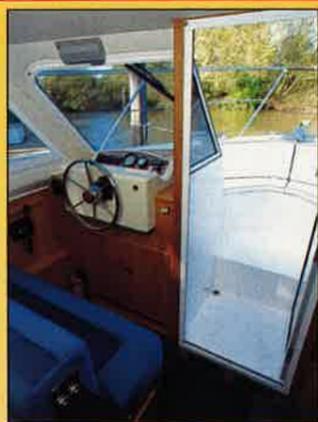
positioned towards the rear of the saloon rather than over the interior helm station, forward to port.

There is a good view just about all-round from the helm, and a single



wiper services the screen.

The back of the double helm seat swings over to complete a U-dinette arrangement, and the table here drops to form a 6ft 3in (1.91m) by 3ft 4in (1.02m) berth, which is quite tight for the double it is claimed to be. A further single of 6ft 2in (1.89m) by 2ft 0in (0.61m) can be formed by converting a settee forward to starboard.



The top of the sideboard between the latter and the galley is intended for a television, being equipped with an antenna plug and mains 240V outlets.

A combination of large drawers and lockers make good use of the voids in the seating. On Sovereigns built after our test boat, the depth of seat-bases has been changed to make them more comfortable.



Aft cabin

The raised aft seating on the flybridge above allows full standing headroom to the starboard side of the aft cabin, with only the area over the berth encroached upon by the well at the exterior helm. There is still loads of sitting headroom over the generous double, which measures 6ft 4in (1.93m) by 4ft 10in (1.49m) and enjoys a view



Flybridge

At the flybridge helm, the vertical wheel and single-lever throttle are set at a comfortable height and distance from the single central seat, and it is good to see that the builders have incorporated a 'bits' tray and cup-holder into the moulding.

The back of the helmsman's chair can be flipped over to face the L-shaped settee aft, with its small moulded table, although the former is at a distinctly lower level, being set in a well rather than perched atop the cabin.

When encountering the lowest bridges, the aft seating can simply be folded down to reduce the boat's air draught.

If you are helming shorthanded, it is easy to nip out of your seat and down the two broad steps to the side decks.



transversely in the port quarter of the boat, which frees up the midships area for extra accommodation. Secondly, any floating debris that hits the stern gear tends to do little damage; the hydraulic motor simply stalls, which prevents the contact skewing the propeller or upsetting the drivetrain.

Hydraulic pumps run pretty hot, and the oil requires cooling by a heat-exchanger, but the system is not complicated or expensive to service, needing no more than a filter change every year. Bounty have fitted it to many a hireboat, and hirefleet operators always favour mechanical parts which require the minimum of

servicing and which inexperienced holidaymakers find hard to break.

With the machinery tucked neatly out of the way, the accommodation is of almost domestic proportions, offering a convertible 2+1 sleeping arrangement in a pleasant open-plan wheelhouse/saloon forward, with a galley, and a

double-berth cabin aft of the single toilet compartment. Joinery is of good sturdy construction and finished in American white oak, and headroom is largely around 6ft 4in (1.93m) throughout.

The saloon opens onto a small cockpit area right at the bow, and the aft cabin has a door out onto the aft deck, and

astern through the window. Stowage is plentiful, with a hanging locker to starboard and cave lockers both over and under the berth. There is also a bedside table, complete with drawers.

A small seat adjacent to the rear companionway houses the batteries, with a small cupboard on hand to give access to the isolators and electrical panels. A second, smaller hatch gives access to the fuel shut-off.

The hydraulic drive pump is found beneath a hatch in the sole. Also accessed here is an electric bilge pump tucked away in the keel.



Toilet

The toilet compartment is of a good size, with a square shower tray incorporated into the lower moulding rather than a fully separate cubicle.

There is plenty of countertop space, but just a small cupboard built in beneath the ceramic basin. Ventilation is limited to an opening port.



Galley

Although part of the saloon, the galley is largely disguised when not in use, with a hinged countertop covering the cooker and a large wooden 'tray' dropping over the sink/drain. On later boats the fridge is also being recessed further, and faced with wood, so it is less noticeable.

There is a useful arrangement of drawers and cupboards immediately around the cooking area, and just ahead of it is a sideboard with bottle stowage within one of its cupboards.



ence up to the raised helm and seating area.

The boat's standard specification covers most things you might want, including a 3kW Eberspächer heating system, an immersion heater for hot water, a holding tank system and a bow-thruster.

Performance & handling

The week prior to our test day had brought some of the heaviest rain of the autumn, and the Thames at Bray was in full spate, with a fair crosswind to boot. Fortunately neither of these made the Sovereign ill-mannered, and it turned against either without fuss, and without recourse to the bow-thruster.

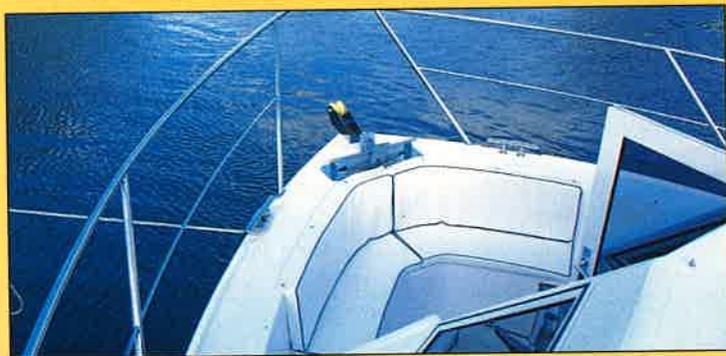
The hydraulic steering is pleasant to operate, and pushes a fair-sized rudder which gives good steady steerage and manoeuvrability, whilst the keel steadies the hull in the water and

stops it being blown about. The gearshift and drive pick-up off the engine hydraulics is also positive and smooth, with no banging in and out of gear.

Although the engine itself is rated at 37.5hp, the actual output at the propeller is going to be considerably less, as hydraulic drive systems tend to sap flywheel horsepower. But of course outright performance is not an issue for inland use: for an 8kph (4.5mph) river speed, it is simply a matter of nudging open the throttle to something like 1800rpm.

The boat will achieve its hull speed of 6.5 knots (7.5mph) at wide-open throttle, 2900rpm, so there is plenty of extra grunt to combat a strong current.

Sound levels are in keeping with the concept of relaxed river cruising, which is an advantage over a larger-engined sea boat brought inland. We recorded just 64dB(A) in the saloon and 67dB(A) up on the flybridge at 1800rpm.



Decks

Inland waterways cruisers need to be easily boarded right along their topsides, for mooring and lock work, and this boat's side decks are excellent for that purpose, just the right height and clear of obstructions. They are also safe to walk along, being 10in (25cm) wide and with a convenient handrail extending all the way along the coachroof.

Mind you, with direct access to

the foredeck and aft deck from the accommodation, it is easy just to pop out and tend the lines without walking along the side decks at all. Guardrails at either quarter and at the bow give that extra measure of security.

The 10in (25cm) cleats fore and aft are augmented by like-sized ones amidships to take springs, and fender beackets are positioned along the toerails. The stem is fitted with a bow roller, and we liked the neat way the anchor was stowed: suspended vertically within the moulding betwixt this and the forward seating area.

Those sitting in the small but sociable forward cockpit area can chat easily with anyone helming from the saloon.

Aft, what appears to be a large locker to port is actually the box covering the engine and associated hydraulics, so deck stowage is limited. But a portion of this machinery space could be segmented or fitted with baskets to hold spare warps and cleaning gear.



Engine room

The athwartships engine is tucked into the port quarter of the vessel, accessible partly via a deck hatch and partly via the aft cabin.

For normal day-to-day checks the deck hatch is fine, with the fuel/water separator located on the forward bulkhead and plenty of space around both the engine and hydraulics for easy access, including to the latter's reservoir, actuator and heat-exchanger.

To help with servicing, the mattress in the aft cabin is split in two, so the rear portion can be lifted clear, making it easier to remove the panel in the bulkhead and get at the remote greaser and one of the two raw-water strainers. There are two cooling pick-ups fitted, several feet apart, to reduce the likelihood of problems caused by weed, silt and debris.

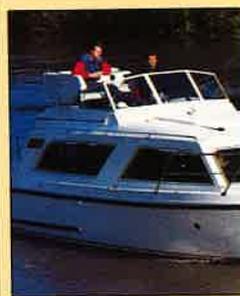


Conclusions

To many this will not be the prettiest of boats on the market, but its onus is on comfortable and practical inland cruising, and the Sovereign 30 Sunbridge is one of few craft which are able to offer a flybridge while still managing to squeeze under low river bridges.

Comfort comes from the spaciousness of the layout, even if the saloon's convertible double would benefit from being slightly bigger, and there are many practical touches, both inside and out, making life afloat easier still.

Fit-out is sturdy, specification almost all-inclusive, and the 'alternative' means of propulsion helps to make best use of the space available, as well as preparing the drivetrain for the ever-present danger of flotsam. If the river is your cruising ground, this boat is certainly worth a look.



BUILD

glass-reinforced plastic

DIMENSIONS

LOA

29ft 8in (9.07m)

HULL LENGTH

28ft 6in (8.69m)

BEAM

11ft 7in (3.54m)

DRAUGHT

2ft 6in (0.76m)

AIR DRAUGHT

8ft 9in (2.67m) with screen & seating up
7ft 4in (2.23m) with screen & seating lowered

DISPLACEMENT

5.25 tonnes

FUEL CAPACITY

50gal (250lt)

WATER CAPACITY

100gal (455lt)

ENGINES

single Nanni 4150HE

4cyl 1.5lt diesel

37.5hp at 3000rpm

Bounty 2.84:1 hydraulic drive

PRICE

from £65,960 ex VAT

SUPPLIERS

Bray Marine Sales,
Bray Marina, Monkey
Island Lane, Bray,
Berkshire SL6 2EB.
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Tel: 01603 712070.