



BOAT REPORT

VIKING 21

Viking Mouldings now have a starter package for those who want a motor cruiser to take into the narrow-beam canals.

THE first Inland Boat Show, on the Trent at Nottingham in May, was always going to be dominated by canal boat builders, but amongst those ably representing estuary and river cruisers were Viking Mouldings, through their main agents Walton Marine.

With bases in the Midlands and the south of England, Walton offer the complete Viking range, from 20ft (6.1m) to 32ft (9.8m). They come in 'ready-to-go' packages, rigged with an appropriately sized four-stroke Honda outboard and fully equipped to National Rivers Authority and British Waterways standards, with everything

from fire blanket to anchor, plus mooring stakes and mallet.

At Nottingham we took the opportunity to try the latest model, a 21ft narrow-beam four-berther which, like the 20-footer in their wide-beam line-up, is pitched squarely at the starter end of the market.

The designation 'narrow-beam' means a maximum of 6ft 10in (2.1m), which allows it to pass through the two-thirds of inland waterways which have a 7ft 6in width restriction.

The hull is a modification of that of an earlier craft, while the superstructure is a new design, as

are the internal GRP liners on which the cockpit and accommodation are based.

A couple of full-length knuckles break up the hull topsides, with the underwater body incorporating a full run of keel to aid directional stability. The outboard is snug to the transom, bolted directly to it rather than to a protruding bracket, and contained within a covered well.

The cockpit moulding is fashioned with a mid-height step out to the just adequate 4in (10cm) wide side decks, and a handrail is provided to the coachroof. A bow pulpit gives a further steadying handhold forward. Deck hardware here is limited to a single 6in (15cm) cleat — a fairlead either side would not have gone amiss — but fender beackets are fitted to the sidedecks and the quarters also have 6in cleats.

In the cockpit, there is a folding helm seat to port, and a transom bench topped by an upholstered cover across the outboard well. Bordered by a stainless steel handrail, this makes for a higher perch from which to admire the scenery, while shielding the occupants from unwanted engine noise.

Beneath the seat-base there is plenty of storage for the removable outboard tank and other paraphernalia. A sectioned-off portion makes for a vented gas-bottle locker, while the battery and isolator are ensconced within one of the step mouldings. A hatch in the sole offers further stowage, and the cockpit is provided with a full-headroom canopy package.

The helm position offers good visibility. To the left of the angled wheel is the throttle, and there is provision for a few electrical auxiliaries (a wiper, for instance) to be fitted by way of a small switch panel.

The cabin has 6ft 1in (1.86m) headroom over most of its length. Only towards the forward end of the dinette does the roofline slope away, still leaving plenty of sitting headroom. In its converted guise, the vee-berth here makes into a 5ft 6in x 4ft 7in (1.67m x 1.40m) double, while the 6ft (1.83m) settee adjacent to the companionway pulls out to become just over 3ft (0.9m) wide. Painted-out lockers beneath both settee-bases provide plenty of storage.

Opposite the companionway berth arrangement is the galley area, with a four-burner gas hob (fewer burners but the inclusion of a grill might be more useful) and a sink with a manual faucet. Beneath the countertop is a good-sized cupboard with shelf, while a storage rack is



located outboard.

A separate toilet compartment incorporating a portable chemical loo completes the accommodation. A small vent provides a modicum of ventilation here, the main cabin having an opening hatch forward.

The boat we tested comes complete with an electric-start 15hp Honda. Hats off to Walton Marine, because the four-stroke route is by no means the cheapest way of getting power onto the transom, but many an owner will appreciate the benefits of less smoke, quieter running and frugal fuel consumption compared with a two-stroke.

The 5-6mph required on the majority of inland waterways is achieved at around 3200rpm, at which the Honda will be sipping something less than half a gallon per hour (2.2lph). If it is necessary to open her up a touch when stemming a current, full throttle (4600rpm) will push this 21-footer up to a hull speed of just under 7½mph, albeit doubling consumption.

Noise levels at cruising speed were good, at 69dB(A) in the cockpit and 66dB(A) down below, allowing all but the extremely sensitive to get forty winks while cruising. At full throttle the level in the cockpit rose to 81dB(A), just a mite intrusive in comparison.

On the handling front, we were pleasantly surprised by the boat's lack of wanderlust, the run of keel helping here.

All of which makes this a good starter boat for narrow-beam waterway enthusiasts. Some touching up of the faced ply joinery would answer our main criticism, but this is a package which comes in at a most competitive price. □

Viking 21

Loa 21ft 0in (6.40m).
Beam 6ft 10in (2.10m).
Draught 1ft 6in (0.45m).
Fuel separate outboard cans.
Water 25gal (114lt).
Price £10,170 ex VAT.
Builders Viking Mouldings, Unit 11, Ongar Road Trading Estate, Dunmow, Essex CM6 1EU. Tel: 0371 875214.
Suppliers Walton Marine, Walton Marina, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey KT12 1QW. Tel: 0932 226266.

Above: at home on wide rivers, this 21ft narrow-beam package is also built for Viking invasions of the English canal system. **Top right:** raised cockpit seating gives passengers as well as the helmsman a good view. **Below right:** the cabin has a convertible settee opposite the galley as well as a vee-berth forward.

