

Aquador 28C

By blurring the distinction between interior and exterior, and taking a clever approach to providing a second cabin, this Finnish contender offers a new approach to the wheelhouse cruising experience.

REPORT BY MARK TURLEY

The Aquador range from Finland only comprises boats between 21ft and 32ft. But within this comparatively narrow size band it offers no fewer than 10 different models.

All have a smart countenance, and are full of clever, practical features which make the best use of the space available, but they vary in style from walkaround cuddy sportsboats through mini sportscruisers to neat wheelhouse designs.

Launched last year, the 28C appears to pool as many of these attributes as possible, boasting a decent cockpit, walkaround decks,

a wheelhouse that opens up to the elements and two separate sleeping areas.

The question is, can you fit all this into a 28-footer without them compromising one another?

DESIGN & BUILD

One of the most attractive features of the 28C is how readily the fully enclosed wheelhouse can be turned into a bright, breezy space which allows you to enjoy any good weather, while staying protected from the bad.

This trick is achieved by the way the back of the wheelhouse opens right up, the deckhead benefits from two large sliding sunroofs and generous sliding doors turn out onto both side decks.

It helps that the area is kept well clear of obstructions, for example by having the table run up a stainless steel pole to be stowed in

the deckhead when not required.

It also helps that the whole interior is open-plan. The galley is simply tucked away a step or two down from the wheelhouse, while the forward cabin's wide entrance is cordoned off by a curtain, allowing it to serve as a snug during the day.

Rather more of a separate cabin is the second sleeping area, which is cleverly tucked under the wheelhouse. A lifting section of sole gives access to what is a surprisingly useful, well fitted-out space with twin berths.

The cockpit has no fixed seating, but can be furnished with pull-out benches stowed under the saloon seats. If the weather is doubtful, a pull-out bimini adds some extra protection.

The decks are bordered by a comforting gunwale, and the nicely formed foredeck well invites you to take a pew on the coachroof and watch the world go by.

The hull itself is a medium-to-deep-vee shape with a fairly generous beam to generate plenty of planing surface. It is not shy in terms of performance, courtesy of single sterndrive installations from 260hp to 340hp.

✓✓✓✓
Clean lines, a clever layout and a good standard of finish.

ACCOMMODATION

Well executed cherry joinery and teak-and-holly flooring give the interior a rich feel, nowhere more so than the wheelhouse, which can be awash with these elements if so desired.

Nevertheless, the boat feels well-lit and airy, with the twin sliding sunroofs adding to the cockpit feel you

can achieve by opening up the rear bulkhead and side doors.

The face-to-face settees feel a bit perch-like, until you slide the smart wooden table down its pole from its stowed position at deckhead level, whereupon the wheelhouse becomes rather more convivial, especially once the helm seats are swivelled round to complete a dinette for five or six.

If you have a boat-load of guests, you can then slide out the benches which are stowed within the settee bases, clip on the seat cushions, deploy the optional table extension and voila! Your seating extends out into the cockpit, and welcomes another four people comfortably.

The helm station is neatly laid out, with the engine instruments clearly positioned ahead of a Perspex-covered chart area, and switches arranged around the



adjustable wheel. A Raymarine Tridata (depth, speed and temperature) instrument comes as standard, and there is room for fitting some extra electronics overhead; indeed, with a small amount of rejigging it would probably be feasible to make better use of the main console.

The screen is serviced by two wipers but bizarrely these are not self-parking, an odd omission in an otherwise excellent specification which includes screen heating and demisters.

The starboard side door is immediately adjacent to the helm, making it easy for the skipper to nip out and handle a line when cruising shorthanded.

The galley, a small step down from the wheelhouse itself, is offset enough to allow people to pass by without hampering the chef. It is well appointed, with a stainless steel sink setting off the Corian work surface, a moderate-sized fridge and a two-burner Wallas diesel hob, and there is storage in a

variety of drawers and cupboards.

Our main concern is that one of the fixed cupboards is just 12in (30cm) above the hob, so you had better not try to cook spaghetti!

There's a nicely fashioned upright drinks cabinet in front of the co-pilot's seat, and extra storage is provided in fully moulded lockers under the cabin sole. It is just a pity the builders haven't incorporated a rubbish bin under the nearby stair tread.

Across the way, the toilet compartment is largely moulded but given a lift by its Corian surface and wood-faced cupboards. Headroom here is less than elsewhere, but there is still adequate room for ablutions. A sea toilet and holding tank come as standard, although hot water needs to be specified as an extra.

The forecabin, with its sizeable double berth, is simply curtained off for privacy, which means that, if you dispense with the infill, it can double as a comfortable extra day cabin with inviting U-shaped seating. The backrests incorporate storage by way of

shelves and cupboards, and there are fully lined lockers under the mattresses.

For the midships cabin, you need to look down from the wheelhouse, where it is revealed by lifting the central section of sole on a gas strut. Using the boat's full beam, it has a good-sized berth ranged along each side, with sitting headroom, whilst the central area is well finished with some smart cabinetry.

Whether you will want to drop the access hatch when sleeping down here is debatable, but it's not as claustrophobic as it might first appear, as there are curtained-off openings in the settee mouldings overhead.

✓✓✓✓✓
Clever, original but not gimmicky use of space, with a smart finish.

EXTERIOR

Nicely sculpted into the stern, the bathing platform is of just the right proportions for boarding, as well as for watersports. There are

below A midships cabin under the wheelhouse sole supplements curtained-off forward vee-berths, all served by a well appointed galley and a small WC.



below The interior seating spills out into the cockpit courtesy of slide-out benches hidden in the settee bases. A table slides down a pole from the deckhead.



above The deep cockpit has no fixed seating. Teak decking is an optional extra.



above Wide side decks and high gunwales lead to a safe foredeck.

plenty of handholds here, and the platform is finished in teak as standard; if you want the cockpit and side decks to enjoy the same treatment, it adds a full £5,000 to the price.

The central door through to the cockpit opened outwards on our test boat, but is set to be changed so that it opens inwards, making it safer as well as a neater fit.

There are no fixed benches in the cockpit, but the pull-out extensions under the saloon settee provide seating when you need it.

The large port and starboard sliding doors from the wheelhouse make access to the 11in (27cm) side decks extremely easy. And what's neat is that they lock in situ wherever you leave them, so you can leave them as open as the prevailing conditions permit.

A gunwale around the side decks gives you an extra measure of security moving forward, and the spacious foredeck well itself could end up being a favourite spot for crewmembers who are after a bit of peace and quiet. Protected by the extended topsides, you could sit up here on the coachroof quite happily with a book and a cuppa.

Set within the raised forepeak is a locker sizable enough to take the ground tackle and a few fenders, although no anchor winch is fitted as standard. Cleats are of an adequate

number and size, with 10in (25cm) ones fore and aft, and 8in (20cm) ones amidships.

✓✓✓✓✓
Space for most needs, with easy access around the decks.

ENGINE OPTIONS & ACCESS

A single sterndrive engine provides the power, and both petrol and diesel installations are available, although there are likely to be few takers for the former.

A 285hp Volvo Penta KAD300 diesel is one option, but our test boat had the same manufacturers' more powerful and more technically advanced 310hp D6.

Some potential buyers might like a twin option, but they will be disappointed.

Access to the enginebay benefits from the same clear thinking that is evident in the rest of the boat, with two hatches provided rather

than one large one. This means that only half the cockpit needs be out of bounds during engine checks, and that each hatch, on gas struts, is easy to lift.

The port side one will be most in demand, as it gives access not only to the raw-water strainer, coolant and dipstick, but also to a lazaret which is sizable enough to take a deflated tender. But why the primary fuel/water separator is buried down in the bilge is something of a mystery, not least because there is more convenient space elsewhere.

The tanks and calorifier take up a good portion of the area beneath the starboard hatch. There is still room to shuffle down here and get around the side and front of the engine, but it's much tighter around the bell-housing end.

In general, the engineering is of a high calibre, and the whole compartment benefits from a GRP hull liner. We approve of the effort that has been made to contain engine noise,

by way of quality aluminium-faced insulation and extra-deep rubber bedding round the hatches.

✓✓✓✓✓
You can only have one engine, but at least it's well installed.

PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

In its 310hp guise, Volvo Penta's D6 does not come with a supercharger to boost its mid-range revs, relying instead on a variable-geometry turbocharger. With the best will in the world, this does not deliver the goods in quite the same fashion; it is less noisy, certainly, but lacking in va-va-voom.

Not that there's any lack of power, it just comes in smoothly and steadily, rather than aggressively. The Aquador eases modestly onto the plane, reaching 20 knots from standstill in 17 seconds, without ever running nose-up.

Once up and running, the engine's response is punchier, and there is plenty of scope in the revs to select the speed that befits the occasion. A 2400rpm setting gives a jog-along 19-20 knots, and at full throttle, 3400rpm, our test boat turned in a well-mannered 34 knots.

This is 100rpm off the engine's rated

maximum, so perhaps a slightly smaller prop set might be advisable, helping to find the lost revs and potentially improving acceleration to boot.

For a service speed we selected 2800rpm, which gave a useful 25.8 knots and an easy, dry ride. With the wheelhouse doors shut, we hummed along with only 75dB(A) showing on the sound meter, which is commendable.

Ducking and diving in some sloppy seas off The Needles, the hull handled extremely well, with just the odd harder smack as we turned and heeled into unfriendly, slab-sided waves.

The view from the helm is excellent, and the only time your vision becomes obscured is laterally, when executing a tight turn; it's just a matter of remembering to look before winding on the helm.

The controls are well placed and easy to use, and the helmsman's and co-pilot's seats are fashioned in a cossetting bucket shape so their

occupants are well supported. An additional handhold in front of the co-pilot would be welcome.

✓✓✓✓✓
Slightly sluggish off the mark, but handles well and rides comfortably.

below Twin sunroofs make the wheelhouse airy, and sliding doors give access to both side decks.



SPECIFICATION & VALUE

Aquador is the premium brand for Finland's most prolific boat manufacturers, Bella Boats, and the builders certainly go the extra yard in terms of quality.

Although manufacturing costs are kept in control by the plentiful use of well-finished mouldings, these are given a lift by equally plentiful and well-executed joinery.

On top of this, the standard specification of the 28C includes such bonuses as heating, trim tabs and screen demisters, although, oddly, not hot water.

All of this goes a fair way towards justifying a price tag that starts at £106,589 with a D6 diesel, which is more expensive than rivals such as the Targa 27, Nimbus 280 Coupé and Landau 29.

However, the only likely suspects that most buyers will want to add into the equation are a bow-thruster and a shorepower facility, at a further £3,200.

✓✓✓✓✓
A well-specified boat, but what do Finns have against hot water?

Verdict

There is a fine line between design that is clever use of space and design that is gimmicky. The Aquador 28C definitely falls on the right side of the divide.

Its unusual midships cabin is a comfortable bolt-hole in its own right, as well as a great conversation piece, and the way the wheelhouse opens up both to the elements and to the aft cockpit makes it a joy to use come rain or shine.

In short, this is one of the most versatile layouts we have come across, using the full length of the boat to good effect. Moreover, the boat has been well put-together, is super-smart in appearance and performs cleanly at up to 25 knots.

It would be nice to have the option of twin engines and a slightly faster pick-up, but perhaps Aquador decided this would push the already stiff pricing just a little too high.

MBM RATING

8/10



Aquador 28C technical data



ENQUIRIES

Sea Ventures Ltd, Lymington Yacht Haven, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 3QD. Tel: 01590 672472.
www.sea-ventures.co.uk

specifications

BUILD	glass-reinforced plastic
RCD	design category C
LENGTH OVERALL	28ft 10in (8.80m)
HULL LENGTH	26ft 10in (8.17m)
BEAM	10ft 2in (3.10m)
DRAUGHT	2ft 9in (0.90m)
AIR DRAUGHT	10ft 6in (3.20m)
DISPLACEMENT	3.7 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	77gal (350lt)
WATER CAPACITY	21gal (95lt)

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	0ft 11in
HEADROOM IN WHEELHOUSE	6ft 4in
FORWARD BERTH	6ft 3in x 5ft 4in
MIDSHIPS BERTHS	twin, 6ft 7in x 2ft 6in

performance

engines single 310hp Volvo Penta D6 diesel sterndrive.
configuration 6cyl, 5.5lt, 310hp at 3500rpm.
conditions wind southwesterly Force 3, sea slight.
load fuel 30%, water 100%, crew 3.

rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	noise
2000	11.3	2.6	12	4.35	269	75
2400	19.3	4.4	20	4.39	272	75
2800	25.8	6.8	31	3.79	235	75
3000	28.5	8.6	39	3.31	205	76
3400	34.0	13.6	62	2.50	155	78

Range figures above are in miles, with 20% margin.
Noise figures are in dB(A), recorded in the wheelhouse.
acceleration 0-20 knots in 17sec.

prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with single Volvo Penta D6 diesel	£106,589
COMMISSIONING & ANTIFOULING	£3,141
RAYMARINE TRIDATA	standard
HOT WATER SYSTEM	£925
DIESEL HEATING	standard
BOW-THRUSTER	£2,260
TRIM TABS	standard
TEAK DECKING	£5,488
ELECTRIC ANCHOR WINCH	£2,044
HOLDING TANK	standard
SHOREPOWER CAPABILITY	£1,076
COCKPIT CANOPY	£807
BOAT AS TESTED	£119,112

the rivals



TARGA 27

from £80,260
A multi-role wheelhouse stands out in this walkaround design renowned for speedy seakeeping.
Tel: 01202 700702.
www.wessexmarine.co.uk



NIMBUS 280 COUPÉ

from £98,300
A popular, traditional wheelhouse model with useful accommodation and a single shaftdrive engine.
Tel: 01590 677955.
www.offshorepowerboats.co.uk



LANDAU 29

from £98,900
An extra efficient, stable hull with a shaftdrive installation that offers a large wheelhouse and a single cabin.
Tel: 023 8045 2177.
www.selectyachts.co.uk