



Tester says...



Matched in price by the Meridian 341, I wanted to see if the Aqualum could improve on performance while still delivering on accommodation

MOTOR BOATS TESTED

Aqualum 35

This 35-footer has travelled over 7000 miles across the Atlantic to prove it has what it takes to shake up the flybridge market. Was it worth the trip? **REPORT BY JUSTIN OLESINSKI**



The upper helm can take a 12in plotter screen

Only a few months ago we were bemoaning the lack of new sub-40ft flybridge cruisers on the market. The situation wasn't helped by the Meridian 341 that we tested in our February issue, which proved to be an accommodating but painfully slow cruiser that would cause little concern to the likes of Sealine's F37 and the Jeanneau Prestige 32 or 36. The good news, though, is that the sub-40ft market is at least coming alive. The proof is another new entry-level flybridge from across the pond, this time hailing all the way from Argentina. The Aqualum 35 is the smallest cruiser in a four-

boat flybridge range that includes a 38, 45 and a 55. And with a fine-entry hull, spacious cockpit and dashing style all present and correct, the 35 looks particularly promising.

Design & build

Designer Javier Casabé has created a good-looking boat both above and below the waterline. Above, the 35 manages to look sleek as opposed to boxy, while below a deeper than normal vee and a moderate 11ft 5in beam look like the perfect ingredients for a capable, smooth-riding hull. The build also comes in at a

very reasonable seven tonnes – that's some two tonnes less than the heavy-handed Meridian.

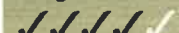
Thankfully this light build doesn't come at the price of a flimsy fitout and you'll find none of the flexible soles or hollow locker linings you might experience on some budget cruisers.

Deck space and the general exterior design is of the highest calibre for a 35-footer. It's clear that Aqualum has tried to focus on the core boating necessities of ride and deck practicality, however, at this length, that usually means the interior space is often compromised. Indeed, the 35's interior volume does feel pinched in places when compared to the competition, and this is in spite of a V-drive engine installation that keeps the enginebay as short as possible.

Behind the scenes, though, the construction appears to be solid and well put together, the wiring is neatly truncated and the interior is very neat and tidy.

Design & build

Hull and deck take priority on this sturdy cruiser



Our sole issue was with some rust on the engine belt casing, but this was tracked back to a simple blocked cockpit drain allowing water to spill in from the hatch above.

Exterior

Getting aboard is easy thanks to the deep integral bathing platform that wraps around the transom wings. The cockpit is excellent – deep and wide it can seat four round a standard-fit table with grabrails placed at every opportunity. Forward access is again superb with safe steps up from the cockpit but the 7in-wide decks are tight. The foredeck has a recess for optional sun

cushions and small anchor locker but if you need to store fenders then it's back to the cockpit where there's a dedicated locker in the transom.

Five fairly steep steps lead to the minimalist flybridge where a huge sunbed runs up to the fixed three-seater helm, filling all the available space. It does seem as though Aqualum has missed a trick by having such a large sunpad.



“The deeper, less beamy hull design looks perfect for a capable ride”


FACT FILE

Aqualum 35
LOA: 35ft 0in (10.7m)
PRICE: from £214,130
TOP SPEED: 29 knots



There's loads of room to stretch out on this huge sunpad, but could the space have been put to better use?



The magnificent cockpit is class-leading in terms of space and style, the wide step (right) leads to the deck

Had it stopped short of the helm backrest, guests could have used it as a seat, like on the Sealine F34 and F37. With no room left for a wet-bar up here, there is the option of a fridge for the cockpit.

The Aqualum 35 is about average in terms of flybridge depth, you do feel slightly exposed to the elements but not as badly as on some models. Visibility from up here is good though, running from the bow right round to the stern, making marina manoeuvres a relaxing experience.

Exterior

Great cockpit, loads of space, functional flybridge
✓✓✓✓✓



Engine and stowage access from the cockpit

Accommodation

Designers usually install V-drives to max out on interior space – the doubled up shaft design takes up less space resulting in a smaller enginebay. This sort of installation usually equates to a saving of 3ft or so, which could mean that this Aqualum has the interior of a 38ft cruiser in a 35ft hull. This, though, feels like a 35ft craft, perhaps even slightly less. It certainly can't compete with the far beamier Meridian when it comes to internal accommodation, nor the similarly priced Sealine F37.

With no engines beneath its sole, the saloon can drop down a good few inches from the cockpit, negating the indent of the flybridge sole above. These varying levels give the saloon an interesting style but more importantly deliver headroom of 6ft 1in. The finish is comfortable but more shipshape than soft furnishings. American oak cabinetry helps break up the moulded finish, with the option of cherry, rosewood and mahogany also on offer.

A raised saloon sofa stretches out to almost 8ft along the portside and the matching oak table allows four to dine with ease or, when dropped down, doubles up as an occasional berth.

“The cockpit is excellent with grabrails placed at every opportunity”



Teak adds class but there's no flybridge hatch cover



Good all-around access, though 7in decks are tight

Opposite is a useful looking Avonite-topped galley with a circular sink, a twin ceramic hob and a standard microwave and fridge. And beneath the saloon floor are three huge, drop-in bins that can easily store all the food and extras you would need for a two-week cruise.

The forward master cabin has an angled double berth, which slopes downwards slightly. This is a trick used to maximise bed length, although we doubt there is much gain. Beneath the berth are

two separate compartments, which give access to the air conditioning and bow thruster. Headroom in the master cabin is 6ft throughout and there's more than enough room between the door and the

foot of bed, plus there's plenty of space to move round the berth. The two full height wardrobes and a queen-sized vanity unit are all worthy of praise. The only thing missing is en suite access.

The one area that truly feels the squeeze is the portside guest cabin, the use of which is severely limited by the saloon sole pushing in overhead. Headroom aside, the cabin offers a small sofa, vanity unit and a skylight, while the cockpit table can be stowed neatly by the double berth.

Accommodation

Smart design helps lift low volume interior
✓✓✓✓✓

Engine options & access

The 35 is being offered with 225hp and 300hp V-drives as well as IPS. The test boat's 300hp V-drive installation, which utilises Volvo Penta's D4 engine, sits tightly in the enginebay. A large hatch means you can get to all the service points, albeit in an unsophisticated way. The extra £17k price tag for IPS may well help you add a knot or two to the performance but we imagine engine access is similarly tricky.

We certainly liked the power of the D4-300s as they suit the capable hull perfectly, but it's worth noting that twin 225hp versions will save you

Engine options & access

Volvo's D4-300s deliver the goods in terms of power
✓✓✓✓✓

around £10k. On test in strong cross winds, we found the powerful bow thruster and shafts more than good enough to manoeuvre the boat around with ease, making IPS an unnecessary option.

Performance & handling

Acceleration is brisk and a top speed of 29 knots is comparable to the best in the market. Speed control is easy and subtle adjustments on the throttles are instantly realised. On the plane, it does trim higher than some 35-footers but with those deep-vee sections running further aft you



The separate toilet and shower room is fairly tight



Bright and neatly fitted out, the saloon breaks up its mouldings with oak timber and leather upholstery



A raised sofa offers a sweep of seating or an occasional berth The galley behind looks fit for action



Skylights below decks work well



The cockpit table stows in the small guest cabin



The master cabin looks the part with a very clean, oak-clad fitout and plenty of stowage

BOAT REPORT

AQUALUM 35

still end up with a ride that cuts through waves rather than bouncing over it. This ride doesn't affect forward visibility from the lower helm but the large flybridge steps reduce the view aft and to starboard, so when in doubt it's worth double checking through the sliding helm window.

In turns the hull bites well and carves a smooth arc even in choppy seas. We encountered some large swell just outside Weymouth Harbour and apart from one rogue wave we managed to stay dry on the flybridge.

But this isn't only a capable hull but an efficient one too. If you can keep your cruising speed to a moderate 20 knots you will cover around 1.6 miles per gallon with a range of over 200 miles. This might be short of a sterndrive equivalent but it's pretty impressive for a shaftdrive boat.

The only disappointment is that the notoriously noisy V-drives are felt from the lower helm with sound levels pushing past 80dB(A). No doubt the IPS alternative would be considerably quieter.

Performance & handling

Top performance matched with equally good range



Value for money

With a fully spec'd boat coming in at under £250,000, the Aqualum 35 delivers a build on par with the market leaders as well as some real zing in the performance stakes. But even with a long list of impressive attributes you still get the feeling that you're not getting quite as much boat for your money as you would do with, say, the Sealine F37. Aqualum offer plenty of extras at

reasonable prices, which is ideal if you like to customise, but you'll have to allow an extra 5% on the purchase price if you want cockpit canopies and a wooden sole.

Specification & value

Price is on par with the competition, but space isn't



MBM verdict

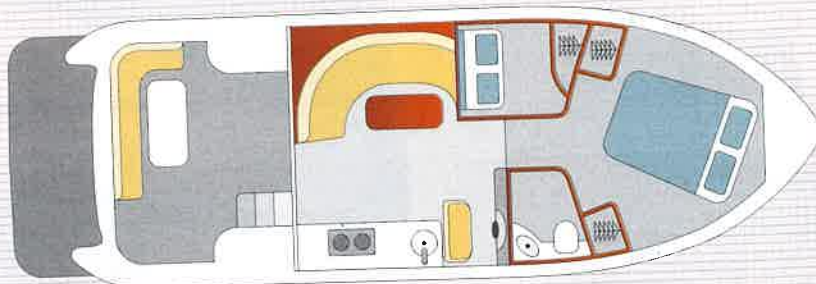
Aqualum's emphasis is more about comfort at sea than in the marina, and who could begrudge designer Casabé of that? No one, if it weren't for the fact that Sealine and Jeanneau offer boats that do both jobs pretty well. If only Casabé could have found a bit more space inside, he could have created a design the outside world would have been very interested in.

MBM rating



7/10

Aqualum 35 technical data



specifications

BUILD	GRP
RCD	B
LENGTH OVERALL	35ft 0in (10.7m)
BEAM	11ft 5in (3.5m)
DRAUGHT	3ft 0in (0.9m)
DISPLACEMENT	7 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	750lt (165gal)



key dimensions

WATER CAPACITY	300lt (87gal)
WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	7in (18cm)
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 1in (1.8m)
HEADROOM IN MASTER CABIN	6ft 0in (1.8m)
MASTER CABIN BERTH	6ft 2in x 4ft 3in (1.9m x 1.3m)

performance

Engines	Volvo Penta D4-300 V-drives
Configuration	4cyl 3.7lt 300hp @ 3500rpm
Conditions	wind Force 5, sea state moderate
Load	fuel 50% water 0% crew 3

Rpm	knots	lph	gph	mpg	range	noise
2400	16.8	44	9.6	1.75	231	78
2600	19.3	53	11.5	1.67	220	80
2800	22.3	64	13.9	1.60	211	81
3000	24.2	74	16.3	1.48	196	82
3200	27.2	90	19.8	1.37	180	84
3400	28.5	108	23.8	1.19	157	85

Range figures quoted above are in miles based on standard fuel tanks and include a 20% margin. GPH & MPG refer to Imperial gallons. These figures may vary due to weather conditions, air, water, engine temperature, crew numbers, hull fouling, fuel quality and other issues. Noise readings in dB(A) were taken at the lower helm.

prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with Volvo Penta D4-300 V-drives	£214,130
5kVA (4kW) GENERATOR	£7187
HEATING	£2990
4kW BOW THRUSTER	£4140
COMMISSIONING	£1200

BOAT AS TESTED £240,873

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