

The brief...

Downsizing is the new holy grail. From increasing market share to enticing new buyers to a brand in the hope of upselling them through the range in the future, many builders are taking smaller models very seriously. But it has to be done with care if a manufacturer isn't to tarnish its reputation. As Azimut extend its Atlantis range down to its smallest hull length to date, we set off for Italy asking whether the cheapest way to buy into the Azimut brand can still deliver the marque's legendary quality and style? **Nick**

LOA: 33ft 7in (10.25m) **PRICE:** from £176,743
TOP SPEED: 30 knots **BUILDERS:** Atlantis
ENQUIRIES www.atlantis.com



BOAT REPORT ATLANTIS 34

Azimut umbrella of companies, which includes multi-million-pound superyacht builders Benetti at the other extreme, this 34-footer is the smallest Atlantis yet, slotting in beneath the Atlantis 38, 44, 48 and 58.

Design & build

First impressions are good – the lines and proportions are spot on. Following the sharp family profile, the 34 looks every inch a full-fat Atlantis. Look closely and you can spot areas where costs have been shaved, such as the thick black rubbing band used in place of the polished stainless steel on the Azimut range.

But far from jarring with the aesthetic, the black line complements the pared-back, minimalist vibe of the boat. Viewed from side on, the hull accounts for about 60% of the height, the sleek deck mouldings and hardtop giving the sporty profile a hardtop needs.

The 34 is only available in hardtop guise, so it's particularly important that it integrates well with the design. With simple spars sweeping back almost to the transom and black C pillars, it is a triumph of design and absolutely avoids the stunted bulbous look that afflicts some hardtops of this size.

Rightly, Atlantis has opted for a simple but effective full-length vinyl roof section which opens up the cockpit as much as possible. The cockpit is as straight-forward as the exterior, with a flat floor and a large settee which snakes across the transom and up the port side, where it opens out into a large aft-facing chaise longue alongside the double helm seat. On the starboard side a wet-bar houses a griddle, sink and fridge.

Hidden beneath the hardtop, that chaise longue might seem an odd place to try and catch the sun, but it makes a wonderfully sheltered place to relax and watch the world go by at anchor or to enjoy the wake streaming away aft while keeping the helm company. It also serves another useful purpose, which is revealed as soon as you drop down a couple of wide steps and turn into the mid-cabin. It creates fantastic headroom over the head end of the bed, making this cabin one of the best I've seen on a sub-40ft craft.

Further forward the main cabin is open-plan, with a galley to port and a large V-shaped dinette that can be converted into a huge double berth as wide at the shoulders as it is long at 6ft 4in each way. A proper toilet and shower compartment completes a very well-proportioned and well-lit interior.

Beyond all this intelligent use of space, the overriding feeling is one of quiet class. From the lustre of the satin-finish walnut and the polished GRP drawer fronts, to the chunky chrome door handles and the fit and finish of the vinyl panels, the 34 feels like a quality product, with no sense of being built down to a price.

PHOTOS: Nick Burnham

Atlantis 34

Minimal is in vogue these days and the smallest Atlantis yet is an attempt to deliver a smaller, cheaper boat that doesn't skimp on Azimut quality REPORT BY NICK BURNHAM

Manufacturers love to boast about how their latest flagship was such a challenge to create; how it stretched every sinew of their design and manufacturing process. Nonsense. Building big is easy. With list prices rising disproportionately to size, every step up brings bags more cash to play with, allowing designers' fevered imaginations to run amok in all that extra space. No, scaling down is where

the real challenge of boatbuilding lies. A 10% drop in boat size might equal only a 5% drop in build costs, but a 20% drop in retail price. And woe betide any manufacturer that compromises on its core values and perceived level of quality. Although the target buyer's budget may be diminished, you can be damn sure that their expectations won't be.

Azimut offer several boat ranges, the entry level being served by the Atlantis line-up. Run as a separate brand but kept firmly under the



Interiors

Acres of space at the cost of storage

Quality is evident throughout the interior. The look, feel and ambience are a notch or two above what you'd expect given the boat's price, aided by features such as the classy stainless steel portholes and chunky grabrails which are fitted to the

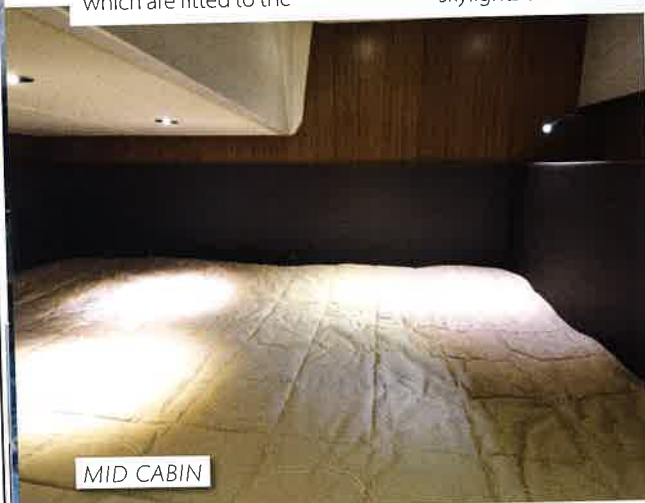
companionway, and even overhead in the ceiling.

With great headroom, full optimisation of the wide beam, and plenty of light through large hull windows and overhead skylights there is so much room

that any passing cats run a real risk of being swung. The only downside to this is slightly limited storage. Shelving instead of lockers around the dinette keeps costs down and increases the sense of space, but it is less practical –

Items tend to stay in place at planing speeds until the first big wave. Likewise, although the galley appears to have four big lockers, two house the fridge and the microwave, while the others lack shelving.

The mid cabin is the real coup of the 34. That chaise longue in the cockpit provides fantastic headroom over the bed where it is needed most, really transforming this area.



MID CABIN



NEAT DETAILING



GOOD-SIZED HEADS

From the helm

Great viz, but signs of compromise on the dash

Evidence of tightly controlled budgetary expense is seen in the fixed helm seat and wheel, and the lack of a lifting bolster, although there is a hinged drop in the floor to increase height when stood. Having said that, the sociable double seat is a bonus and the view out inspires confidence, although a few inches of extra seat elevation would be useful. A smart matt grey finish, well-positioned instrumentation and plotter, and an easily sighted compass all earn the 34 merit points while the fundamental relationship between the wheel, throttles and seat is good. Some oddment space would be welcome however, as would a cupholder or two.



SAFE EASY ACCESS FORWARD



FLAT FLOORED COCKPIT



"Any passing cats run a real risk of being swung"

Exterior

Practical and unfussy layout

The 34's target audience is likely to include a few first-time

buyers, so it's great to discover a deck layout that is simple, effective and above all safe and easy to use. Side decks are nearly 1ft wide and the pulpit is high, substantial and extends all the way back to the transom, where long access steps on both sides

will help new crew. The only issue (easily solved) is the lack of a handrail along the edge of the hardtop. Further forward a generous bow locker can handle two or three fenders. A large locker under the aft seat will take a couple more.



COCKPIT WET-BAR





Performance & handling

In a bid to keep purchasing costs to a minimum and thus keep the price of the 34 competitive, Atlantis only offer one engine option – a pair of Volvo D3-220 diesels running Duoprop sterndrives. It's an increasingly common trick, one which permits greater economies of scale for purchasing as well as a simpler production and buying process. So, all good – as long as the engines deliver.

Our test boat has the largest generator option to power the air conditioning that's also fitted, so it is carrying a fair bit of extra weight. But equally, the boat is fresh into the water, so that weight is balanced to some degree by a complete absence of any drag from hull growth. With that in mind, our top speed of 30 knots (a couple of knots down on claimed figures) feels a little pedestrian for such a sporty boat. Easing down to 3500rpm results in 26 knots at a reasonably efficient 1.6mpg, which is where most owners will operate.

And what a joy to drive an sterndrive boat without the omnipresent joystick option. With

the steering wheel connected directly to the outdrives rather than via a slow-witted computer the boat turns the instant you ask it, rather than a heartbeat or two later. At all speeds it's very steady across the water, with little tab required, while high-speed turns are handled confidently. Indeed, there's absolutely no sense of this being a budget boat in the drive. The Atlantis feels utterly solid and rattle-free, helped by the strength and stiffness of the resin-infused hull.

"Considering the budget ethos of the boat, there's absolutely no sense of that in the drive"

For me, the only slight sense of compromise can be found at the helm, where the fixed seat could be a little higher. I'm over 6ft but I still find myself craning to see forward, particularly when vision begins to be obscured by dried salt spray beneath the arc of the large pantograph wipers. But it's not a big issue, there's no sense of squinting through a narrow far away screen and a little fine-tuning of the seat height would help enormously. Standing resolves the issue completely, of course, but places my eye-line level with the sweep of the hardtop spar, thereby reducing peripheral vision. A lift bolster would probably be the perfect compromise.

Ultimately, the D3s might be working at the very edge of their abilities in the Atlantis, but they provide a good compromise between performance, economy and cost, offering most of the performance that most owners will require most of the time, and helping to keep the price pegged too. But with plenty of space in the engineroom and such a capable hull, I can't help but wonder what the 34 would be like with a pair of D4-300s installed.



Specification & value

For boatbuilders, entry-level boats are all about attracting new buyers into the family in the hope that they will stay loyal and progress through the ranks. With that in mind, the Atlantis 34 has to walk a tightrope between offering proper Azimut quality while also competing with boats that might be deemed a rung or two below it. So, has it succeeded?

Hell yes! VAT paid, on the water and ready to go, the boat is about £176,000 depending on the exchange rate. Compare that to the £260,000 price-tag Sea Ray attach to its (admittedly two-cabin) 355 Sundancer or the £227,000 Regal want for the 355C with the same engines. Even the 'deluxe pack' (a generator, air conditioning, teak-laid cockpit, TV, DVD, CD player and other goodies) only takes the Atlantis up to £213,000 – a lot of boat for the buck.

The real competitor here is the larger Sealine SC35, still a market-leader after six years in production. Sure, the Sealine is larger, with two excellent cabins, but in the 34 it finally faces real, high-quality keenly priced competition.

If you only want one cabin the Atlantis 34 is a bargain.

Technical data

KEY DIMENSIONS

| BUILD | GRP |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| RCD | B |
| LENGTH OVERALL | 33ft 7ins (10.25m) |
| HULL LENGTH | 32ft 8in (9.95m) |
| BEAM | 11ft 6ins (3.52m) |
| DRAUGHT | 3ft 1ins (0.94m) |
| DISPLACEMENT | 6.65 tonnes |
| FUEL CAPACITY | 144gal (650lt) |
| WATER CAPACITY | 41gal (185lt) |
| WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS | 11ins (28cm) |
| FORECABIN BERTH | 6ft 4ins x 6ft 4ins (1.93m x 1.93m) |
| AFT CABIN BERTH | 6ft 6ins x 4ft 9ins (1.98m x 1.44m) |

PERFORMANCE

Engines 2x Volvo D3 220 diesel engines with outdrives

Configuration 5 cyl 2.4 litre 220hp @ 4000rpm

Conditions North East Force 2, sea state slight.

Load fuel 50%, water 0%, crew 3

| RPM | KNOTS | GPH | LPH | MPG | RANGE | NOISE |
|------|-------|------|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| 2000 | 9 | 5.1 | 23 | 1.8 | 207 | 77 |
| 2500 | 13 | 8.7 | 39 | 1.5 | 172 | 85 |
| 3000 | 17 | 12.2 | 55 | 1.4 | 161 | 83 |
| 3500 | 26 | 16.6 | 75 | 1.6 | 184 | 82 |
| 3800 | 30 | 21.3 | 96 | 1.4 | 161 | 83 |

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 in the saloon.

PRICES

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|
| STANDARD BOAT | inc VAT |
| with twin Volvo Penta D3-220 diesels | £176,743 |
| DELUXE PACK | £36,070 |
| UPGRADED RAYMARINE CHARTPLOTTER | £5729 |
| COCKPIT BARBEQUE GRILL AND FRIDGE | £1893 |

BOAT AS TESTED £220,435*

*Boat as tested (not including electronics)



Enginebay

An electric rather than hydraulic ram and a large heavy lid which requires low gearing equates to possibly the slowest engine hatch lift-mechanism I have ever experienced. However, once it is finally up the access is superb – the hatch opens high and wide and takes the seating with it. Twin Volvo Penta D3-220 engines are the only option, a logical step to keeping costs under control but a pity nevertheless because there seems to be plenty of room for a pair of D4-300s. Various pumps, pipes and valves litter the floor but there's still lots of space to get in and around the engines.

THE VERDICT

Building a budget boat isn't hard, neither is building a high-quality boat. But combining the two takes skill, and the smaller the size and price, the greater the challenge. With the new Atlantis 34, Azimut has risen to the task with tremendous success, creating a boat that feels every inch the quality product yet at a price tag that's bound to send a few shivers through the competition.

Meet the family



BIGGER

Atlantis 38 from £268,159

LOA: 38ft 1in (11.62m) Engines: Twin Volvo Penta D4-260s
Very similar concept, but adds separate forward cabin

The rivals



Regal 35 Sport Coupe from £227,163

LOA: 36ft 10in (11.2m) Engines: Twin Volvo Penta D3-220 sterndrive diesels
Sharply styled and well put together American sports cruiser



Sealine SC35 from £220,680

LOA: 36ft 5in (11.1m) Engines: Twin Volvo Penta D4-260 sterndrive diesels
Two cabins and a hardtop. Bigger not much dearer but lacks Italian chutzpa