

Bella Falcon 26 Fantino

The British market is a natural one for a prolific Finnish boatbuilder to expand into. But what kind of value for money does this attractive and versatile little cruiser offer? **REPORT BY MARK TURLEY**

Finnish boatbuilders have proved themselves very good at producing wholly practical small craft with comfortable weekending accommodation. And they tend to suit the British climate admirably, invariably being designed with a good degree of weather protection.

The only problem is that they were not always available in the UK. But that is beginning to change, and quite a number of

the country's manufacturers are now represented here.

The latest is one of the most prolific Finnish builders of all, Bella Boats, whose range extends from open dayboats to cruisers of just under 30ft.

For British buyers, one of the most interesting models is the Falcon 26 Fantino, offering a versatile wheelhouse and accommodation for up to four people.

DESIGN & BUILD

The Fantino has been in production for some while now but, as with anything that is designed well, it looks far from dated. Its hull and superstructure have clean yet soft lines, and it's an attractively proportioned craft.

Unlike on other boats of this ilk, the cockpit is a decent size, and benefits from a good measure of seating. This is a neat feat, given

four berths • single 200hp diesel engine • 31 knots • from £57,225

the amount of accommodation and the fact that over two feet of the overall length is taken up by a sizable bathing platform.

The wheelhouse is a multifunctional area, providing a fully protected helm position, a dinette which doubles as an extra helm seat, and a workable galley. All of this can enjoy a good dose of fresh air and sunlight, thanks to a sliding sunroof.

Aft of the galley is a quarter berth with legroom extending under the cockpit, while opposite is a separate toilet

compartment complete with a shower.

The main berth is forward, and with the infill lifted out this doubles as a comfortable extra seating area, with plenty of headroom.

Build quality is sound in all important places, even if a few lockers are only painted

out rather than lined. Fit-out is practical erring on smart, but always shying away from being precious.



A good trade-off between cabin and cockpit space.

ACCOMMODATION

The sliding door from the cockpit into the wheelhouse is a good width, and once you are inside the latter is light and airy, especially with the sunroof slid back. Besides offering ventilation, this is located so the skipper can pop his head out for a

better view while manoeuvring.

The helm position is to starboard, with a comfortable seat that is adjustable fore and aft. The throttle, wheel, switches and gauges are all within easy view and reach, and a depth/speed instrument and compass are fitted as standard.

A handy 'bits' tray is fashioned into the moulding outboard, and there's a covered chart area ahead of the wheel.

Across the way, the dinette's seat-back can be swung over to allow a couple of crew to face forward, once the table has been slid back to give the necessary clearance. The table will also drop to form a 3ft (0.9m) wide bunk, to supplement the 5ft 7in (1.70m) long quarter berth aft.

The galley has a Wallas paraffin hob and a neat oval stainless steel sink, plus a fridge tucked into the rear seat dinette. There is also quite reasonable stowage, not least for mugs





and tea and coffee outboard, plus a nest of drawers located under the helm seat.

Another thoughtful item is the grabrail-cum-towel rail running along the countertop. And if you need extra workspace, a sizeable hinge-up flap fills in the gap over the quarter berth.

Adjacent to the companionway (whose step houses the battery switches) is a reasonably sized, mainly moulded toilet compartment, complete with a shower. There is a shelf of sorts, to retain washbags, but what is missing is dry stowage, apart from a small area under the sink, with the seacocks.

The bow area is upholstered to serve as a seating area, but has a central infill that converts it into a sizable berth. A privacy curtain can be pulled across to shut it off from the wheelhouse.

There is some stowage within the seat mouldings, although the forward part is taken up by the water tank. Hence the most

convenient spot to stow clothes will be the large cupboard set inside the helm module; we just wish it was fitted

out as a hanging locker, as well as having the odd shelf or two.

EXTERIOR

For boarding, there is plenty of bathing platform to clamber onto, plus a useful step/locker helping you up through a scalloped-out section of transom. Grabrails on the cockpit coaming offer further assistance.

The cockpit is a good size, and furnished with facing side benches, so it is ready for use whether you fancy relaxing or a bit of fishing. The starboard seat is an enclosed affair, doubling as a locker, while its equivalent to port simply hinges up to allow you to inspect the batteries beneath the sole.

below The galley is small but neat. The vee-berths can be curtained off. The WC lacks dry stowage.



below Especially airy with the sunroof open, the wheelhouse offers comfortable seating and helming.



To give as much interior volume as possible, the side decks have been whittled down to the bare minimum, so you need to be pretty agile when venturing forward. On the plus side, they are at least provided with a good run of inboard handrails.

The pulpit picks up where the handrails leave off, and the foredeck area is flat to work on. There is no bow roller, although the locker is a good size.

Deck hardware is good for a craft of this size, comprising three 8in cleats on each side.

ENGINE OPTIONS & ACCESS

Our test boat was fitted with one of Volvo Penta's AD41 diesels, which nowadays is quite a hefty unit for its 200hp output. Other diesel options will crank up the power as far as 285hp, and there are Mercruiser and Volvo petrol alternatives covering a similar powerband.

Access to the engine compartment could not be simpler: you just heave up the hatch in the cockpit sole and it is supported on a pair of gas struts.

It's quite a large hatch, extending right back to the transom, which allows you to get right round the engine, as well as to the bell-housing.

The only engine service item that might prove a little awkward is the raw-water pump impeller, so you might have to invest in a

'puller'. The only crucial off-engine point, the primary fuel/water filter, is easy to check.

PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

Being heavy, and bereft of supercharging, the 6cyl AD41 takes a bit of time to get onto the plane. In fact, 0-20 knots in just over 12 seconds is not at all bad; it's just that we have got used to quicker response times from the very latest diesels.

Once up and running, the hull/engine package will happily push you along at whatever pace you find comfortable. A setting of 3000rpm gives an easy 21 knots, while 3500rpm offers 26 knots. Full throttle produced a shade over 31 knots, which the hull seemed happy with, travelling smoothly

and nipping in and out of banking turns without twitching or acting up. Visibility from the helm is good, as is the layout of the controls. Any trim imbalance due to windage on the relatively high-sided superstructure can be rectified easily using the trim tabs that are fitted as standard.

On this sort of boat, windage is also a factor when it comes to berthing, so many potential buyers will want to factor-in the optional bow-thruster.

✓✓✓✓✓
Ordinary performance but the hull's handling is well-mannered.

SPECIFICATION & VALUE

The standard specification of a boat of this size cannot be expected to include a heating system, but most Scandinavian builders throw one in (clearly, their home market expects it), and Bella are no exception.

Less good news is that you have to fork out extra if you want hot water or shorepower.

However, even taking these into account, the 26 Fantino is fairly priced compared with similar-sized craft, with a useful standard inventory including trim tabs, twin wipers,

screen demisters, cockpit cushions and a Raymarine Bidata depth/speed instrument.

✓✓✓✓✓
Practical standard spec, without too many trimmings.

Verdict

The 26 Fantino is a good example of what Scandinavian boatbuilders do best: small weekenders offering plenty of room and comfort, both alongside and underway, without being over-fussy.

The formula works in their home markets, and is appreciated just as much in British waters.

We'd like to see a little more attention given to the boat's finish in a few tucked-away areas, but it performs nicely and offers a clean ride, at a fair price.

MBM RATING

✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓ 8/10



Bella Falcon 26 Fantino technical data



specifications

BUILD	glass reinforced plastic
RCD	design category C
LENGTH OVERALL	26ft 9in (8.17m)
HULL LENGTH	24ft 4in (7.41m)
BEAM	8ft 6in (2.60m)
DRAUGHT	2ft 9in (0.85m)
DISPLACEMENT	2.5 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	55gal (250lt)
WATER CAPACITY	15gal (70lt)

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	4in
WHEELHOUSE HEADROOM	5ft 11in
FORWARD BERTH	6ft 2in x 5ft 3in

performance

engines single Volvo Penta AD41/DP diesel.			
configuration 6cyl, 3.6lt, 200hp at 3800rpm.			
conditions wind westerly Force 3, sea slight.			
load fuel 50%, water 100%, crew 2.			
rpm	knots	gph	noise
2800	18.0	4.4	79
3000	21.1	5.5	81
3500	26.0	7.2	84
3900	31.5	9.6	86

Noise figures are in dB(A), recorded in the wheelhouse. acceleration 0-20 knots in 12sec.

prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with single Volvo Penta AD41/DP diesel	£57,225
HOT WATER SYSTEM	£860
ANTIFOULING	£500
BOAT AS TESTED	£58,585

ENQUIRIES TL Harvey Ltd, Whitworth Close, Darlaston, West Midlands, WS10 8LJ. Tel: 0121 568 8837. www.bellaboats.fi



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