

Chaparral

Signature 260

It is assumed that British buyers of this American boat will demand economical cruising. But does a diesel engine belong in a sportscruiser of this length?

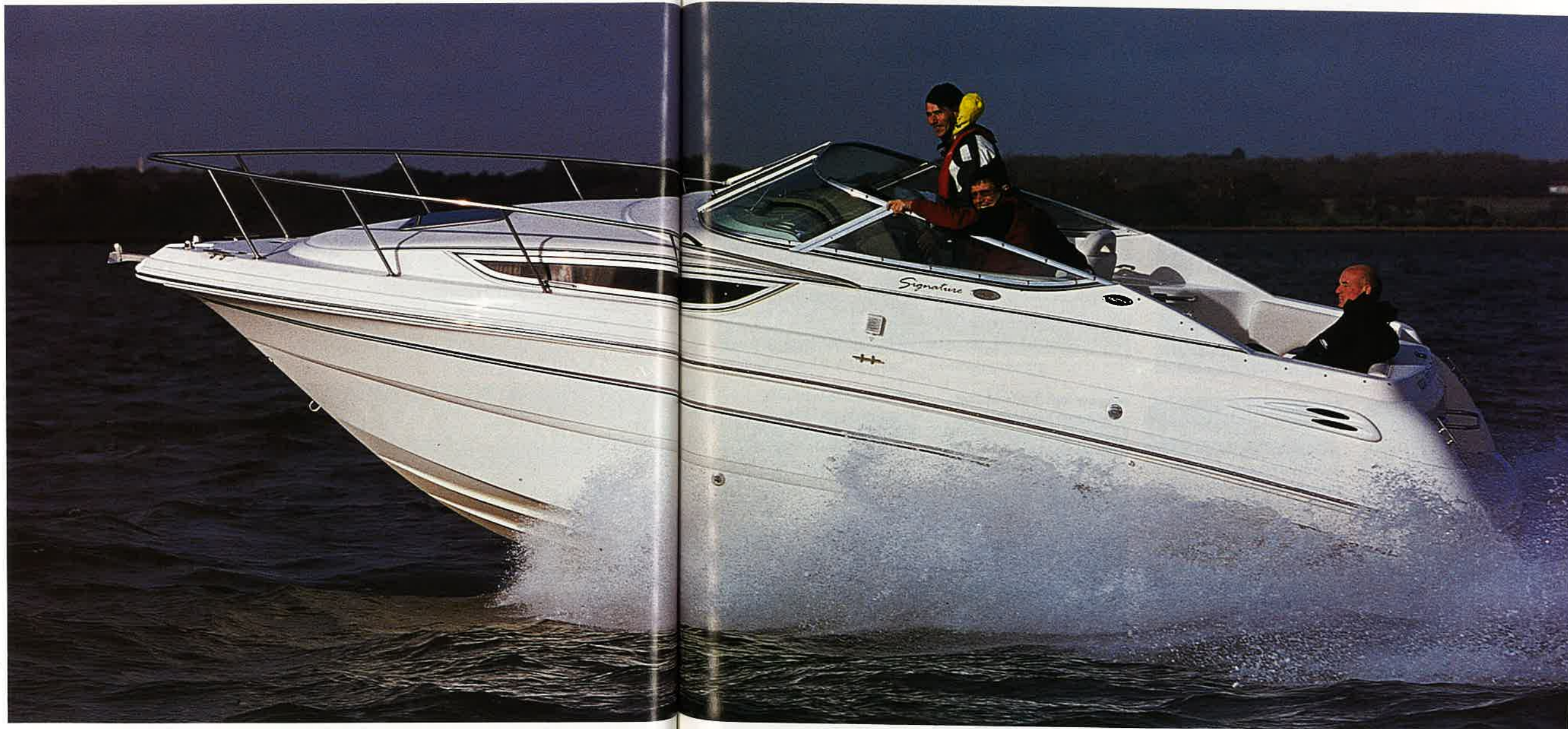
As the price of petrol rises, so diesel engines are finding their way into the enginebays of smaller and smaller cruisers, at least in Europe.

In its native USA, the Chaparral Signature 260 is still more likely to be fitted with a small or big-block V8. But on this side of the pond, the 230hp Volvo Penta KAD43 outdrive is being installed for UK buyers.

There are still petrol options, but we tested the diesel version of this four-berth sportscruiser.

Design & layout

Although maintaining a sporting feel, the 260 is designed to maximise on-board space.



This is reflected in the styling, with deep freeboards, a raised coachroof and a broad beam retained a good way forward. However, a wide contrast stripe tries its best to break up the boat's slab sides, and a shallow screen keeps its overall height as low as possible.

The stern treatment is rather at odds with the overall styling, as

the rather narrow, integrated bathing platform is supplemented by a far deeper add-on structure.

Step on board, and it is hard to believe that this craft is less than 26ft long. Normally with this size of boat the designers have to make a compromise between cabin and cockpit space. However, Chaparral have divided the area equally, eking out every square

inch within what is a standard sportscruiser layout, with forward and midships sleeping areas down below.

If you are not committed to the reduced costs of running the KAD43 diesel, or lack the capital at the outset, then petrol options range from a 250hp Volvo Penta 5.7GSDP to a 320hp Mercruiser 6.2MX MPI.



Bathing platform

This is a good example of function getting the better of form, with this particular boat sporting the optional extension to the integrated bathing platform. This deep, full-width structure is mounted at a lower level, to improve usability, although it does nothing for the boat's styling.

With lots of area available, there is no problem boarding from either water or dock, or preparing to take to the water for diving or other watersports. The aft section has a swing-down boarding ladder which stows out of the way, whilst the integrated section has two recessed, draining stowage lockers and access to the shower. There is also stowage for two fenders on the transom.



Enginebay

The base of the cockpit's aft seat can be hinged back into the transom, and the forward seat base hinged down, to allow access to the enginebay.

A very neat job has been made of installing the Volvo Penta KAD43 in the UK. It does take up most of the bay, and the holding tank has to be removed to fit it, but the work is carried out to a good standard.

There is access either side of the engine and all the main services are easily accessible.



Cockpit

Despite the space allocated to the cabin, the cockpit is not as cramped as you might expect. Its simple layout ensures its spaciousness, and the adaptability of the aft seating will be a real boon to owners, not impinging when it

is not needed.

You are aware of a slight limitation in length only at the forward seat, where the mode is to have a reclining sunbed format. Chaparral have opted for an L-shaped layout and, with a low back, which still retains sociability with the after area's facing bench seats.

Between these benches can



Helm



The helm is well presented, with the instruments in easy view, and the ergonomic layout placing the switchgear on panels either side of the tilt-adjustable steering wheel. A remote control for the stereo sits just below the right panel. A

compass tops the dashboard.

Although there is a Volvo Penta product in the enginebay, the Chaparral-branded engine gauges are retained, calling for a converter on the rev-counter which still needed calibration on our test boat. Trim tabs are standard.

With plenty of adjustment to the helm seat and steering

wheel and a forward seat bolster that can tilt for when you prefer a lean-back standing position, the helm suits all sizes. There is no footrest but the seat offers plenty of support.

The throttle is conveniently placed, although it would benefit from a forearm rest for more accurate control.

Cabin

There is plenty of space down below, this being the main asset of the boat. You will probably come out of the cabin wanting to check the name badge to ensure you are really on a 26-footer.

The layout is conventional, with a dinette forward that converts into vee-berths, a galley to port, a WC to starboard, plus a midships double berth.

A recessed floor around the galley ensures there is plenty of headroom in this area.

The dinette has open stowage behind the back cushions of the seating and

lined lockers under the seats. A hanging locker to starboard complements these, with a shelf on top for odds and ends. When making up the berth, the table drops and the back

cushion at the apex hinges up to allow some extra legroom, a nice design touch.

You would expect the midships cabin to be a little tight on space on a 25-footer

but, with good height at the head of the berth, lit during daytime by an opening window into the cockpit, it has a spacious feel and offers a good-sized berth.



be placed the cockpit table, or this can be used as an infill with cushions to form a good-sized sunbed. Alternatively, hinging the aft seat base back and the forward seat base down makes the after part of the cockpit into an open area suitable for fishing.

The cockpit also benefits from a bar area with sink and pressurised water. Under this is a locker where the battery master switch and manual bilge pump are mounted. Further aft is an open low-level locker, the top of which forms a step into the boat if boarding from the side at this point. The transom door opens back onto this.



Galley

The galley is a modular unit but still integrates well with the light and spacious cabin.

It offers plenty of stowage, with cupboards on two levels at the back and an open shelf on top. The electrical panel occupies the left of the unit with the radio/cassette player mounted below this. A stainless steel sink with mixer

taps and a single-burner stove sit in a good expanse of worktop and below these are mounted the fridge with a locker on each side. The right-hand one incorporates cutlery stowage.

The fridge is one of the option upgrades on the UK-supplied boats, which also adds a shorepower facility.

The window above the galley ensures the area is lit well during the day.

Toilet

Our test boat's toilet compartment, opposite the galley, benefited from a specification upgrade, with a porcelain pump-out toilet serviced by a macerator and holding tank.

There is not quite standing headroom, but the modular unit offers decent space, incorporating plenty of stowage in lockers above and below the basin, which benefits from a mixer head on a wander lead.

A mirror and grabrail complete the fit-out.



Foredeck

With the cabin and cockpit areas being maximised there is no space left over for side decks.

Instead, access to the bow is through the opening centre section of the screen, using the step recessed into the side of the dash moulding. Bow rails offer a low handhold forwards to the anchor locker. There is a bow roller to aid anchor recovery.



Performance & handling

One of the reasons why diesel power is finding favour in this size of craft are the enhancements in performance. Even so, the 230hp KAD43 still has some way to go before it matches the pick-up off the mark of a petrol engine.

As with any diesel, the engine must get into its stride before the horsepower and torque kick in. But once stirred and underway, pulling 3600rpm gives a perfectly

adequate top speed of 34 knots.

Ease the throttles for a fast cruise, and 3000rpm sees 26 knots, whilst a very relaxed 2500rpm records 21 knots. Furthermore, the bonus comes when you suss the fuel consumption as, at 3000rpm, you should see a consumption of only 7gph (31lph).

Cockpit noise is scarcely intrusive at 81dB(A), 80dB(A) and 79dB(A) respectively.

The 260 gave us a competent ride through the Solent waves on the day of our test, and it was possible

to keep going at full speed with no slamming from the hull.

We found the handling less sharp, with a restricted right-hand lock and a readiness to bank on left turns. This, and a lack of feel at the helm, meant it was less possible to make use of the good torque of the engine through the turns.

Conclusions

The Signature 260 manages to combine excellent spaciousness, both above and below decks, with some very tidy design features.



Chaparral Signature 260

BUILD

glass-reinforced plastic

RCD

design category B

DIMENSIONS

LOA

25ft 7in (7.80m) excluding bathing platform extension

BEAM

8ft 6in (2.59m)

DRAUGHT

2ft 9in (0.84m) with drive down

DISPLACEMENT

5977lb (2711kg)

FUEL CAPACITY

68.3gal (310lt)

ENGINES

230hp Volvo Penta KAD43DP

PRICE

from £63,359 inc VAT; £72,249 as tested

SUPPLIERS

Blue Water Horizons, Ferryman's Way, off Portland Road, Weymouth, Dorset. DT4 9YU. Tel: 01305 782080.

BUILDERS

Chaparral, P O Drawer 928, 300 Industrial Park Boulevard, Nashville, Georgia 31639, USA. Tel: +1 912 686 7481.

Only the styling has been somewhat compromised, as although the builders have worked hard to provide sporting lines, there is a lot of bulk to disguise.

Despite all the space on board, and the good ride quality, some buyers will still be looking for more hull length when paying more than £70,000. So perhaps the petrol V8 for which the Chaparral was designed would make it a better all-round boat, given a cheaper purchase price as part of the equation? □