

Ernecraft Isis 920

Two en-suite cabins on a 30-footer? Some pretty cunning design has gone into this Irish-built cruiser that comes with a lot, including the illusion of space. **REPORT BY MARK TURLEY**

The Northern Irish yard of Ernecraft has been building boats for many a year, but so far they have mostly catered for the commercial market. As a toe in the water

of the leisure sector, the Isis 920 is very impressive indeed.

When we spotted this 30-footer on the pontoons at the London Boat Show in January,

we admired its unusual take on the wheelhouse look and the novel approaches it takes to fitting the proverbial quart into a pint pot, without making you feel cramped.

We marked its card for a test and started planning a visit to the Emerald Isle, complete with some sampling of the black stuff thrown in – only to discover this wasn't necessary as Ernecraft now have a dealer based in Poole.

DESIGN & BUILD

The design of the Isis is down to naval architect Trevor Whitaker from Queen's University. He has neatly juggled the attributes of quite a deep-vee forebody, to help ensure comfort in a head sea, with fairly flat, efficient aft sections, which at the centreline flattens out almost completely.

A shallow keel has also been incorporated to help with slow speed work. If you opt for a single inboard engine the drivetrain makes use of this, although twin installations are also offered.

The waterline has been kept as long as possible, given the boat's overall length of 30ft, by integrating the bathing platform fully into the hull.

An attractive whaleback shape to the sheer means that forward headroom inside the accommodation has been maximised without needing an over-obtrusive coachroof. It has also allowed a decent-sized window to be

etched into the hull above the gunwale, ensuring there is plenty of natural light below.

The curve of the sheer is tidily picked up by the arched windowline of the wheelhouse, making for an interesting looking boat.

It is pretty practical too, with every square inch of internal volume put to work. The saloon, which incorporates the helm to starboard, is a good size with plenty of sociable seating. It is airy inside, thanks to sunroofs in the deckhead.

Much of the saloon's apparent roominess is due to the fact that the galley, which is a useful size and well appointed, is tucked





above With the 240hp engine fitted, the Isis 920 was extremely steady at all speeds, though occasionally noisy and with quite heavy steering

down at a lower level, rather than in a sideboard as tends to be the norm on this style of boat. Even so, there is still room for two usable cabins with good-sized berths, and they are both en-suite, in so much as they each have private access to the same toilet compartment.

No matter who turns in early or is up with the larks, this arrangement ensures that modesty prevails. And this applies even if guests are camping in the saloon, as the WC has a third entrance door for daytime use!

The fit-out is partly achieved by mouldings and partly by sturdy American cherry joinery, and on the whole it is well executed.

✓✓✓✓✓
The styling is neat and the accommodation is cleverly packed in.

ACCOMMODATION

The wheelhouse/saloon is bright and breezy, not least because of the sliding sunroofs, so even though outside space is not abundant the elements never feel far away.

The main settee to port is complemented by a smaller affair across the way, behind the single helm seat, so there is socialising space for at least half a dozen people in all. The table can be swung out at mealtimes to allow four to dine in comfort, or pushed back to keep the floorspace clear and make it easier to move around.

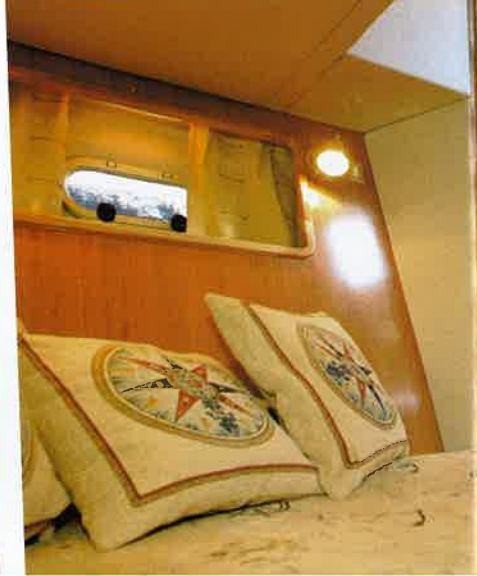
You can convert the larger settee to a useful-sized berth by pulling out the extra cushions that are tucked outboard behind the seat-backs, neatly making use of the void that extends under the sidedeck.

The same space behind the smaller settee opposite incorporates a large, fully lined locker, and the clever utilisation of 'dead' areas continues at the helm, where a useful hanging locker is built into the console itself, and a drinks locker outboard of the seat.

With the console stepped down across several angled fascias, the ready-use switches and gauges are easy to follow. Screen demisters are fitted as standard and there's a small, flat area for a folded chart or pilot book. Spare space for electronics is limited, to say the least, but an extra overhead mounting point is planned to rectify this.

A few easy steps drop you down to the galley and the multi-doored forward lobby, with space provided for people to come and go without asking the chef to excuse them.

below A spacious cooking area, an 'en suite' WC with three entrances and homely cabins add to the comfort of any cruise.



above Despite its limited room for spare electronics, sliding sunroofs and a movable table make this a pleasant socialising space for up to six people.

The Isis 920's galley design deals neatly with the thorny issues of limited stowage and work surface by incorporating a good-sized double-fronted cupboard outboard of the moulded countertop, leaving a wide and usable surface area for food preparation. Also stationed outboard is the built-in microwave oven, while the hob and the sensible-sized sink both come equipped with hinged covers.

Beneath the counter are a nest of drawers and cupboards plus a fridge, but you lose some of the stowage if you opt for an oven.

You might think that having as many as three doors into the toilet compartment would leave little space for much else, but even here there does not seem to be a shortage of room. There is no separate shower stall, but there is plenty of elbowroom and the ceramic sink is set within a useful worktop, with plenty of cupboard space outboard. The manual toilet is concealed beneath a hinged seat, which not only keeps it tucked out of sight but also gives you extra space when showering.

The midships cabin offers a good-sized berth with sitting headroom and an angled backrest. Adjacent to the entrance there is floor space to stand and dress, and an open hanging locker.

The forward cabin offers slightly more of all these necessities, helped by the way the double berth is offset along the starboard side.

This leaves space for a handy seat and locker space opposite.

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The layout doesn't feel cramped despite what is packed into it.

EXTERIOR

The fully integrated bathing platform allows easy boarding, with the coamings and the door through to the cockpit being a good height and topped with handrails.

The cockpit is not huge, but there is space to set out a few extra seats to accompany the moulded benches on each side of the transom

door. When not in use, these can be stored in the lazaret, although a neater way of hinging the fixed benches clear of the hatch would make life easier, as would a gas strut to help lift the hatch.

The lazaret extends into the enginespace further forward, but benefits from being moulded out so that stowed items do not

below Good sized cabins offer sitting headroom, space to stand and dress, plus a hanging locker.





above The cockpit has space for extra seats. When none are needed, these benches can be stored away.

migrate to the bilge. Although some of the tanks take up space here, there is still plenty of useful stowage for the essential items you just can't do without.

Indeed, storage space is something that has been taken very seriously everywhere, with just about any void pressed into service. Potentially wasted space within the coamings has been fashioned into a number of cave lockers, one of which houses the gas bottles.

Moulded steps give you a leg up to the 7in-wide side decks. These have a lip rather than a bona-fide toerail, and there are no guardrails until you reach the break of the foredeck, so even with grabrails running along the wheelhouse roof they feel a little vulnerable. Deploying fenders is especially tricky, as although some beackets have been provided it is

below A heavy hatch covers the enginebay.



hard to keep a hand on a grabrail while tying them on.

Up at the sharp end, a manual windlass is the standard fit with an electric one as an option. Other deck hardware runs to pairs of 10in cleats fore and aft, and smaller ones amidships.

ENGINE OPTIONS & ACCESS

A good range of diesel engine options are available, largely from Yanmar, with single installations running from 56hp to 240hp plus a couple of twin alternatives that top out at 320hp in total. If it is primarily inland and estuary cruising that beckons, the smallest option will save you £10,000.

below This lazaret provides extra storage.



below Another example of inventive locker room.



The enginebay itself is beneath the saloon, and most checks can be made by hiking up the large hatch in the middle of the sole. This is a pretty hefty affair, though, and a gas strut to help you open it and then to support it would be welcome.

You can also get to both sides of the bay via the lazaret, which is open to it.

Like the adjacent storage area, the enginebay is moulded out, so it is easy to keep clean and provides a good landing for the auxiliaries and tanks. Both the fuel and water supplies are divided between two tanks, although the boat's fuel capacity, which is just 75gal, is not really sufficient for the more potent engine options. There is certainly room to fit larger tankage here, and the builders are looking into providing this improvement in the future.

Overall, the engine installation is neatly executed. It's just a shame that the noise insulation, which is of admirable quality where present, is not more widespread for greater effectiveness.

PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

Our test boat had the largest of the single engine options, so we had 240hp on tap.

The hull tends to sit and behave well no matter how much or little power you use, but we found it could not quite utilise the engine's full quota as it seemed slightly over-propped, achieving only 3100rpm when the engine is rated to 3300rpm.

Even with this apparent defect, we clocked a shade under 20 knots, and the hull was clearly at home in what amounts to full planing mode. Pinch an inch off the prop, and there is no reason not to expect a few more knots.

Going the other way and knocking off the power slightly, we settled to a comfortable 16-knot cruising speed, while easing back further to 12-13 knots the hull still ran cleanly without going nose-up or awkward.

The helm station offers a good view right round, although one annoyance was the wipers didn't take a deep enough bite out the screen. Our main misgiving concerned the test boat's unduly heavy steering, but we were assured this was due to experimenting with a different hydraulic system, and that the problem is being rectified.

The hull's attitude over the water makes for a pleasant, comfortable ride, and it is happy to push along at any angle to the waves without showing any quirkiness. However, with the size of the engine compartment acting as a sound box, noise levels in the wheelhouse are quite high at speed.

Pull back until you are right down in displacement mode and the hull tracks steadily while staying responsive to the helm. Clearly, besides being suitable for seawork, the Isis 920 would be equally happy on the inland waterways.

Whichever use you put the boat to, if you have a single engine we would recommend having the optional bow-thruster fitted for £2429. Although the Ernecraft turns nicely

and is not too prone to blowing around, it would benefit from the extra manoeuvrability in confined spaces.

SPECIFICATION & VALUE

There was a time when wanting a shaftdrive boat with a practical extended wheelhouse left you with very little choice in the market, but now there is a healthy array to select from. That's great for us buyers, but for the boatbuilders, it means competitive pricing is absolutely vital.

The 920's basic specification is fine as far as it goes, including items such as shorepower connections and basic electronics. However, we think boats of this nature require a heating system (because the advantage of a wheelhouse boat is that it can be used right through the year) and a bow-thruster (for easier close-quarters manoeuvring where a single engine is an option).

Other 'essentials' which unfortunately appear on the options list include delivery and antifouling.

At nearly £124,000 as tested with a potent single diesel, the Ernecraft Isis stacks up reasonably in comparison with other boats in its part of the market. However, neither is it giving too much away when you consider

that it is up against some well-liked contenders, such as the Nimbus 320 and Sea Saga 29HT.

Verdict

Ernecraft have worked hard to keep their pricing competitive, as well as to innovate to attract attention, so this could prove a popular model.

The Isis 920's 'galley down' arrangement offers something different from many rivals by keeping the wheelhouse/saloon less cluttered, and the cabins' cunning en-suite arrangement works surprisingly well.

The hull will be equally happy cruising inland or in coastal waters, though its steering, prop selection and noise insulation could be improved.

MBM RATING **7/10**

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Ernecraft Isis 920 technical data



specifications

BUILD	glass reinforced plastic
RCD	design category B
LENGTH OVERALL	30ft 0in (9.20m)
HULL LENGTH	29ft 8in (9.10m)
BEAM	10ft 6in (3.20m)
DRAUGHT	2ft 6in (0.76m)
AIR DRAUGHT	8ft 3in (2.50m)
DISPLACEMENT	4.0 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	75gal (340lt)
WATER CAPACITY	39gal (176lt)

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	7in
HEADROOM IN WHEELHOUSE/SALOON	6ft 2in
MIDSHIPS CABIN BERTH	6ft 8in x 4ft 0in

performance

engines single Yanmar 4LHA-STP diesel							
configuration 4cyl, 3.45lt, 240hp at 3300rpm							
conditions wind northwesterly Force 4, sea slight							
load fuel 25%, water 50%, crew 3							
rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	noise	
1500	-	-	-	-	-	72	
2200	9.0	4.0	18	2.25	135	83	
2500	12.2	5.3	24	2.30	138	84	
2800	16.0	7.7	35	2.10	126	85	
3100	19.7	10	45	1.97	118	87	

Range figures above are in miles, with 20% margin. Noise figures are in dB(A), recorded in the wheelhouse.

prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with single 240hp Yanmar diesel	£114,359
BOW-THRUSTER	£2,429
SHOREPOWER FITTINGS	standard
HEATING	£2,487
TEAK INTERIOR FLOORING	£1,098
ELECTRIC WINDLASS	£1,406
ANTIFOULING	£798
DELIVERY	£1,200

BOAT AS TESTED £123,777

ENQUIRIES

Solent Boat Sales, Rockley Point Boatyard, Napier Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 4LZ.

Tel: 01202 668585. www.ernecraft.com

the rivals



NIMBUS 320 COUPÉ

from £129,800

A benchmark model from the celebrated Swedish builders of extended-wheelhouse boats. Tel: 01590 677955. www.offshorepowerboats.com



LANDAU 29

from £102,800

Something a little different in terms of hull design, but still with two cabins and comfortable accommodation. Tel: 01208 862666. www.selectyachts.co.uk



SEA SAGA 29HT

from £98,200

Plenty of room both inside and out, not least in the open-backed wheelhouse version, and a good price too. Tel: 01202 700702. www.wessexmarine.com