



— Boat Report —

FAIRLINE PHANTOM 43AC

Does Fairline's re-entry into the aft-cabin market live up to its exciting promise? We eagerly grabbed the first boat off the line to see for ourselves.



Two of Britain's largest boatbuilders made quite a big splash at September's Southampton Boat Show, in different ways.

Sunseeker launched the UK's largest production motoryacht to date, the mighty 80ft Predator with its £1.75m price tag. But amongst those who still have both feet on the ground it was Fairline's long-awaited re-entry into the aft-cabin market that attracted most interest.

It is plain to see why. The Phantom 43 looks to make a good idea even better, taking a rather less conservative approach to this layout than we have seen before. It combines the practical need for extra accommodation with an appearance which smacks of Fairline's performance Targa range, where the onus is on enjoying the great outdoors in an open cockpit.

We managed to get our hands on the first boat off the production line, and put it through its paces in the Eastern Solent.

Design

As is usual for Fairline, hull and exterior styling is by Bernard Olesinski, while the interior is a combined effort with an in-house design team. Nobody seems to be owning up to the 43AC's rather slab-sided transom, which rumour has it may yet be modified.



That apart, this is a well balanced craft, with easy flowing lines which nevertheless catch the eye, from the topsides, through the curvaceous saloon superstructure and the sweep of the upper helm's screen, to the solid coaming which wraps around the crèche-type aft deck/cockpit.

The hull itself has a medium-to-deep-vee form, around 19° at the transom. Olesinski has been able to do away with tunnels in the bottom sections because the engines are well forward, allowing them to be kept low and at the same time maintaining an efficient shaft angle. This also keeps the planing surface more efficient aft, which is important given the added weight of the cabin and superstructure, let alone the half dozen guests who may be enjoying the aft cockpit area.

Exterior

Boarding is easy, as long as you are stern-to, thanks to a bathing platform which extends the full beam of the boat and twin sets of stairs running easily up to the side decks. The use of teak to finish off the treads and the platform works to good effect, giving the craft an immediate feel of purposefulness and sureness underfoot.

A locker is moulded into the platform, and there is also a tucked-away swim ladder and a shower.

Clockwise from top left: the most striking feature of the Phantom 43 is its aft deck, entered via doors from both side decks and protected when required by a sturdy canopy. Immediately below it is an aft cabin with an angled double berth and en-suite WC. The galley has plenty of lockers, and borrows light from the swept main windscreen. It is out of sight of the saloon, which has a dinette to starboard and another settee to port. The exterior and interior helm stations on the first boat may be modified for the production run. Both toilet compartments are a good size, with separate shower stalls. The forward cabin offers plenty of stowage and headroom.



The stairwells are accompanied by handrails, which do a reasonable job as they are but on subsequent 43s will be let in the moulding. The 10in (25cm) wide side decks are bordered by guardrails which extend almost back to the entertaining area.

At the bow, the Lofrans windlass is half-recessed within a hatch which gives onto a large chain locker. A partition within this would make the space doubly useful, by providing for some separate stowage.

Further deck hardware consists of a set of 12in (30cm) cleats forward, two similar sets at the stern and 10in (25cm) ones amidships.

A seating area above an aft cabin would normally be called an aft deck, but the one on the Phantom 43AC feels more like a cockpit. It can be entered via doors from both side decks, and we were pleased to find that these are reassuringly solid, and designed in such a way that they cannot inadvertently fall open if you lean against them.

A generous U-settee stretches across the transom coaming, with plenty of handrails, and there is a smaller L-shaped settee forward, opposite the helm.

The aft seating can be equipped with a neat two-part wooden table, with hinged flaps which allow anyone seated in the middle to squeeze out without disrupting everybody else. There is a useful array of lockers in the seat-bases, and more let

into the rear of the forward seat mouldings.

The helm seat has a flip-up squab which makes studying the raised instrument pod rather more easy than it might otherwise be, although we understand that this area of the console is to be modified. At the same time, Fairline should perhaps bring the secondary engine gauges, currently stranded a long way forward, into closer proximity.

For larger instrument heads there is plenty of space in the angled fascia immediately adjacent to the wheel, and above this runs a small perspex-covered chart area. On the other side of the companionway, which comes with a useful run of grabrail, is a good-sized moulded-in glovebox.

This forward part of the cockpit is protected by a stainless steel swept-back screen, complete with a pair of wipers. For those who prefer to helm from outside even in inclement weather, a sturdy canopy can be rigged between the screen and the radar arch.

Interior

Three steps lead down from the cockpit to the saloon, which has the main dinette area to starboard and a smaller L-shaped settee to port, just ahead of the bar and entertainment centre.

There is well-finished storage beneath most of the



seat-bases, and the dinette itself converts into an occasional double berth. All of the wood trim is finished in high-gloss stained cherry, which is striking and warm.

The helm station on our test boat had a rather tight-fitting double seat, which we understand is to be modified to give more legroom. The 43 comes with only Autohelm Tridatas and compasses as standard, but there is plenty of room around the console area to add big-box electronics. A small chart area fills the gap between the helm and the short stairway that leads down to the galley area.

Tucked down largely out of view of the saloon, the galley still borrows plenty of light from the sweep of the screen above. Its layout is most practical, with loads of storage in variously sized cupboards and drawers, as well as plenty of Avonite work surface.

You can opt to have a generator and go all-electric, but the standard arrangement is for a three-burner gas hob with a built-in oven and grill. When not in use, the hob and the one-and-a-half-bowl sink are hidden from view, the former by a slide-out portion of worktop and the latter by a cover which stows in a hidey-hole for teatowels and trays.

There is a good-sized fridge/freezer as standard, with automatic changeover from 12V DC to 240V AC, but for those who also want a pukka freezer, or perhaps a washer/dryer, there is a small utility area accessed through a half-height door opposite. Also in here is slide-out racking for extra bed linen and the like.

A rubbish bin is hidden under the steps up to the saloon, along with the fuel changeover and battery breakers, but one thing that is missing here, as in many cruisers, is an extractor fan for the galley.

The same criticism can be made of the two toilet compartments, where ventilation is limited to an opening port. Apart from this, however, they are well laid-out. In fact they look rather art deco-ish, with angles and curves used to unusual effect, especially for the corner washbasins, and attractive

use of wood for the floors. Stowage is excellent, with well finished cupboards behind mirrored doors.

Both WCs are similarly proportioned, with separate shower cubicles and electric toilets. The forward one can be entered from the lobby or from the forward cabin, whilst the aft one is en-suite to the master cabin, tucked neatly across its starboard corner.

A good-sized central double berth measuring 6ft 4in x 5ft 4in (1.93m x 1.63m) dominates the forward cabin, with plenty of dressing room around it. There is an abundance of clothes storage, thanks to drawers beneath the berth, two large hanging lockers, and useful sets of cupboards running at eye-height along both sides.

Headroom here is most adequate, as it is through

the rest of the boat. The fabric-lined deckhead sports an elegant round hatch, augmenting the natural light let in by two side ports.

The master cabin is well proportioned, and sports a 6ft 3in x 5ft 4in (1.91m x 1.63m) berth angled diagonally across towards the toilet compartment. The berth is flanked by sidetables, while the aftermost area of the cabin has a neat settee.

Again, there is ample storage, provided by two good-sized hanging lockers with fiddled shelving plus a variety of nooks and crannies. A square hatch in the deckhead opens adjacent to the cockpit's rear seating; there are also side ports, but surprisingly Fairline have chosen not to break up the transom with further ports or hatches.

The settee bases and a large hatch beneath the mattress lift to give access to different areas of the hull, as well as to the aft bilge pump and steering gear. There are also hatches to the bilge beneath the loose-laid, bound carpeting, both here and in the forward accommodation.

Engines

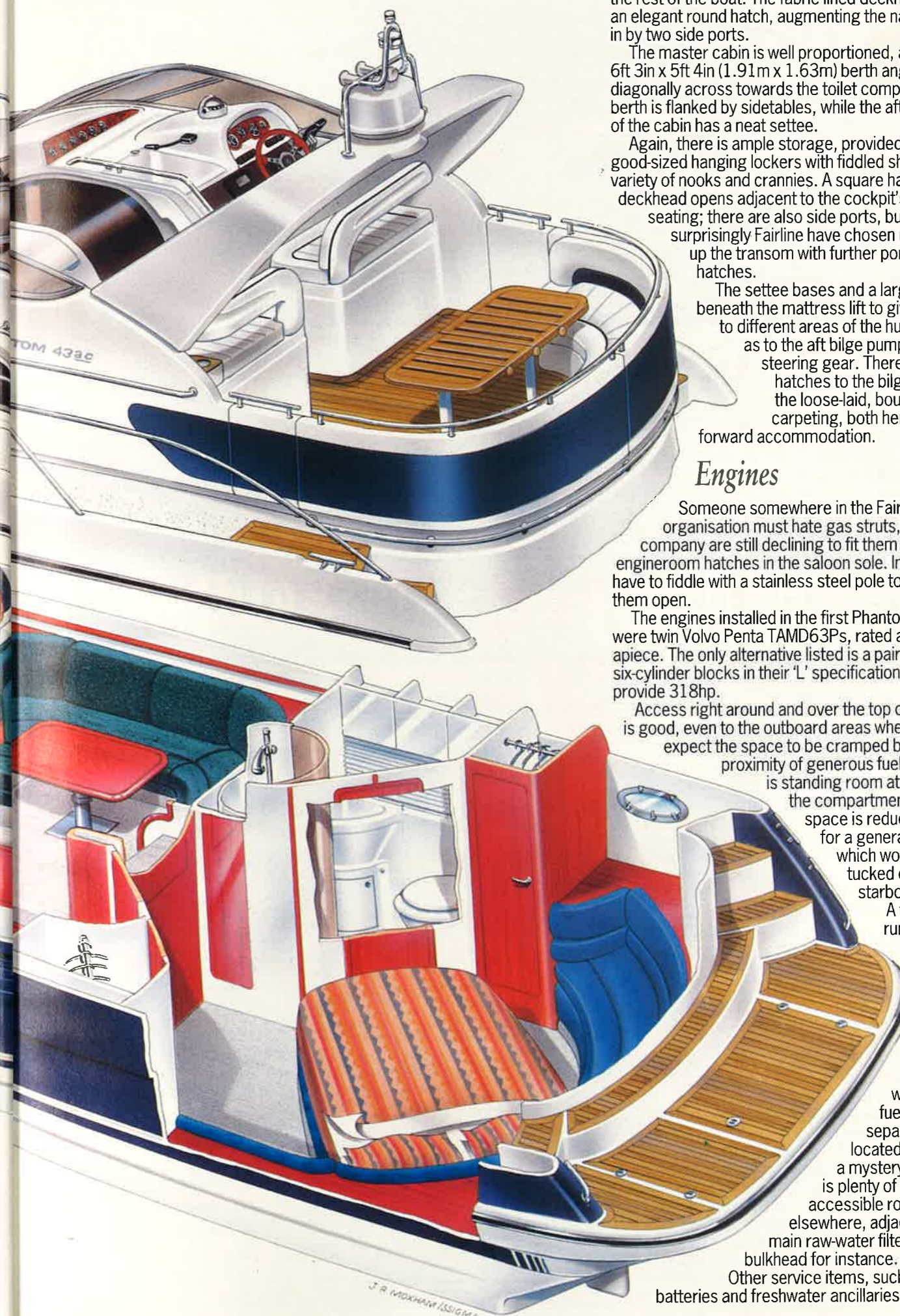
Someone somewhere in the Fairline organisation must hate gas struts, because the company are still declining to fit them to engineroom hatches in the saloon sole. Instead, you have to fiddle with a stainless steel pole to keep them open.

The engines installed in the first Phantom 43AC were twin Volvo Penta TAMD63Ps, rated at 370hp apiece. The only alternative listed is a pair of the same six-cylinder blocks in their 'L' specification, which provide 318hp.

Access right around and over the top of the engines is good, even to the outboard areas where you might expect the space to be cramped by the proximity of generous fuel tanks. There is standing room at the head of the compartment, although space is reduced if you opt for a generator set, which would be tucked over to starboard.

A treadplate runs between the engines, so you can squeeze between them if you are not too portly. But why the fuel/water separators are located here remains a mystery, when there is plenty of more accessible room elsewhere, adjacent to the main raw-water filters on the aft bulkhead for instance.

Other service items, such as the batteries and freshwater ancillaries, are easy to





Left: with its aft-cabin layout, the 43AC is seen as a belated replacement for the Fairline 36 Turbo. But its rather slab-sided transom alludes to the fact that it is a bigger, grander boat.

get at, although the same cannot be said for the sternglands, which are a stretch away beneath the aft cabin. An attempt has been made to redress this by sinking small removable plates in the sole (the starboard one is actually set in the shower tray), but whether these are large enough is questionable.

We were pleased to find the fuel tanks not only lagged with foam to contain noise levels but also equipped with shut-offs remotely controlled from the interior helm.

An automatic bilge pump lies towards the aft end of the compartment, while a manual unit is located near the exterior helm.

Handling & performance

The day of our trial saw a freshening breeze pick up from the south, producing a testing lump as we gathered speed and fuel consumption data around the approaches to the Eastern Solent.

Once they hit the shallower water off Portsmouth, the waves produced some fairly sharp rollers, which the 43 was happy to bowl over in any which way. Most of the test team ducked below at this point, due to the onset of rain, and failed to emerge again even after the squall had passed, concluding that it was just as comfortable below.

Up in the cockpit, the full screen gives a useful amount of protection from wind and spray, but we generally preferred to look over it by perching on the helm seat's upturned squab. The controls fall readily to hand, although Fairline concede that the siting of the throttles can be improved, as some people have found them a little tight to the screen.

Down below, the layout of the controls is good, with the exception that the secondary engine instruments such as oil, temperature and voltage gauges seem unnecessarily distant from the helmsman's line of sight. Exterior visibility is interrupted only dead astern; the boat's quarters are easy to keep an eye on, which is arguably more important.

The hull pushes easily onto the plane, answers smoothly to the wheel and appears well mannered at both high and low speeds. Its natural angle of incidence is about 5° without any use of the trim tabs, which was comfortable enough for the conditions; as one would expect, a touch of tab to lower the bow was beneficial when pushing into them.

Flat-out we achieved 28 knots plus, at 2800rpm, while dropping back a little to 2600rpm still gave nearly 25 knots. For best economy pare off another 200rpm, to nudge along at an easy

22.2 knots while consuming 20gph (91lph).

Noise levels throughout the boat were good. At cruising revs we measured a comfortable 77-78dB(A) in the cockpit and an unobtrusive 80dB(A) in the saloon. For an aft-cabin boat, there was a distinct lack of vibration and noise emanating from the propellers.

Bear in mind that our speed and fuel consumption figures were taken with a fairly well-laden boat, albeit without a full cruising inventory.

Conclusions

Although their Phantom 43AC must be seen to some extent as a replacement for the much-loved 36 Turbo, Fairline have avoided simply trying to emulate it. This is a grander craft, not least because of its bigger size and price, which really lifts it into a different league.

We have had no fewer than four sorties since the first boat hit the water just before its Southampton debut, and on each occasion we liked the boat more than before. The accommodation is well appointed, making full advantage of the twin-cabin layout, and the cockpit-style aft deck works. Add to this a smart fit-out, a standard of engineering which is hard to fault, and an easy manner when underway, and there really is plenty to get excited about.

This design will undoubtedly be a huge success for Fairline, in a size bracket which has seen few revelations of late.

Builders

Fairline Boats plc, Oundle, Peterborough PE8 5PA. Tel: 01832 273661.

Suppliers

PJ Yacht Sales & Charter Ltd, 16 The Slipway, Port Solent, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO6 4TR. Tel: 01705 201920.

Fairline Phantom 43AC

Engines twin Volvo Penta TAMD63P diesels, 370hp at 2800rpm, 6cyl, 5.5lt.

Conditions wind S Force 4-5. Load fuel 75%, water 100%, crew 6.

							sound levels dB(A)		
rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range*	trim	saloon	aftcab	aftdck
1400	10.0	5.6	26	1.78	414	2.5	72	79	71
1600	10.9	9.1	42	1.20	278	3.0	73	79	72
1800	13.8	12.3	56	1.12	260	4.5	74	79	71
2000	15.6	15.0	68	1.04	241	5.0	78	80	74
2200	18.7	17.9	81	1.04	241	5.5	79	82	76
2400	22.2	20.0	91	1.11	258	5.0	80	84	77
2600	24.7	23.9	109	1.03	240	5.0	80	86	78
2800	28.5	32.5	148	0.88	203	5.0	81	85	78

Acceleration 0-20 knots, 13.2sec

(* allows 20% margin)

Loa 44ft 7in (13.60m)

Hull length 43ft 1in (13.13m)

Beam 13ft 6in (4.11m)

Draught 3ft 7in (1.09m)

Air draught 16ft 1in (4.90m)

Displacement 12.2 tonnes

Fuel capacity 290gal (1318lt)

Water capacity 101gal (460lt)

Price from £188,178 ex VAT