

MOTOR BOATS TESTED

Fairline Targa 38

A beautiful boat with impeccable handling, an inspiring interior and some real fire in its belly, this fabulous Fairline might as well define the word 'sportscruiser'

REPORT BY CARL RICHARDSON

“This is very much a next-generation sportscruiser”

FACT FILE
Fairline Targa 38
LOA: 39ft 10in
PRICE: from
£218,491
ENGINE: Volvo
Penta D4 or D6
TOP SPEED:
35.4 knots



The modern face of cockpit style, the T38 is breathtakingly sharp but also very useable

Who would have thought that one of the leading sportscruiser marques in the world would come from landlocked Oundle (it's near Leicester or something) – certainly not the Italians! The UK has absolutely no right to own this particular kind of boating excellence, which of course makes it all the more sweet. And with Fairline's Targa range currently celebrating 25 years of quite superlative work in the field of looking good on the water, it seems only right and proper that the firm should be launching a new – and very important – boat.

This model is important because it's not 50ft or 65ft, but 38ft, a size that puts it right at the heart of the British boat-buying market. And the 38 also takes Targa back to where it all began, with boats like the pioneering 36 and 33. The question is: can this new boy keep the faith?

Design and build

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Ever since the first Targa stormed onto the market back in the early 1980s, Fairline's game-plan has been evolution rather than revolution. Having succeeded in the tricky task of getting it right first time, this flagship UK yard has been busy tweaking rather than overhauling its sportscruiser range into the boats we see today – with the addition of those now-trademark side screens perhaps the only major divergence over the years.

So it comes as no surprise to find that this new Targa looks, well, like a Targa. There is no hardtop option, meaning that its stablemate the 47 is still the smallest in the range to offer one. Even where you can't see, below the water line, there are no surprises. Legs poke out of the transom rather than IPS under it. Even so, a bit of familiarity is no bad thing though when it comes to the Olesinski name attributed to

the new, deep vee, hull design.

Get up close, though, and this boat's freshness announces itself. Those curvaceous side screens are that bit taller and more defined, and the swept-back radar arch and coamings are now razor sharp (thanks to some precise C&C tool work) and breathtaking in symmetry and style.

So, even if some of the current design fancies are not included, this is still very much a next-generation sportscruiser, the proof being those exciting horizontal ports cut into the boat's topsides. They promise much for the interior.

A sportscruiser, though, is most characterised by its cockpit, and this one is huge. It somehow manages to be minimalist, and yet packed with detail and specification all at once. This is also the area where the designers have made their biggest decision: with no tender garage to push in, they have gone all out on space and seating comfort, foregoing the kind of bulky mouldings that create more space for the mid cabin below decks. If it is a compromise, then it looks like a great one. Because below decks, the two cabin layout hardly struggles for space.

Details define this boat, and at times the intricacy, both practical and stylistic, is quite stunning. But there is a real strength and engineering nous here too. Beneath the glossy veneer, you'll be pleased to know that some impressively solid GRP resides. No hollow mouldings or loose fittings, just the feeling that the entire cockpit has been hewn from the same lump of resin.

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The best bits from 25 years of Targa – and then some

Exterior

In practical terms, right from the off – or the rather the aft – the T38 gets it right. Fairline has listened to owner feedback and extended the bathing platform out and around the quarters to make boarding easy, even with a tender mounted there.



Enjoy the view out from the saloon's horizontal ports

From the neat fold-out transom gate there is a liferaft enclosure beneath the companionway sole, plus a manual bilge point neatly tucked behind a locker door.

The starboard side of the cockpit is scalloped out to present the easiest route up to the side decks. With stanchions that come well aft and intelligently placed grab rails, it's all very assured. On deck, a slight outboard camber to the tall

It ain't cheap, but then this kind of quality has a price

stanchions makes the most of the good width available. Grips cover the chiselled foredeck, and the forward cleats, enclosed by a tall bow stanchion rail, are left with ample space to actually use them.

Because you won't fear using the decks you won't mind being out there – but getting your crew out of that superb cockpit may prove difficult. Space is something to be valued on a boat, and this boat delivers it, while still enabling 10 people to loll around it. That long wet bar will only add to your problems of crew insubordination, but at least there's a pull-out



Every part of this Targa shines out, from the smart, spacious heads to the gloriously cool galley

bin supplied to clear up after them.

In the aft section, a mass of seating is laid on. Seat backs are high and you feel utterly enclosed, even at this, the shallowest section of the cockpit. Fairline has looked to the competition for the cockpit table solution. Like Sunseeker, the firm has created a pull-out table stowed beneath the port bench. But this teak-topped job is far bigger and sturdier than anything we have come across before – and it would be even better if it came as standard, rather than a £1500 option. The teak accent continues to the drinks holders, which add genuine warmth and class.

Perhaps the real star is further forward. The raised seating next to the helm is always a winner on sportscruisers, but Fairline has perfected it, offering grab rails and upholstered pads so, whether standing or sitting, you are guaranteed to enjoy the ride.

Accommodation

For the first time in boat interior history, this woodwork may actually taste as good as it looks. Fairline has used what it calls 'steamed bamboo'

on the galley and table saloon detailing, something I am sure is available at my local Chinese take-away... Whatever, the end result is quite beautiful. From the moment you walk down the teak companionway steps, the cabinetry captivates – while also appealing to your common sense. A handrail of twisted, solid white oak – sturdy to the touch – leads you down, before another rail appears by the galley. This stunning oak scheme appears throughout the boat, though cherry wood is an option, too.

By integrating white mouldings and neutral vinyl with the oak cabinetry, the saloon is kept very light. But it is the windows and ports that really create a sense of space: those long topside windows mean you can actually see out into the wide world when below decks. Above, two more skylights are cut into the coachroof, although one of these is an option. For some après boat, there is a central entertainment panel where a standard-fit 15in flatscreen or optional 20in version can be viewed by all.

The galley has been kept purposefully

TV panel for the master cabin



In the fold: the transom gate...

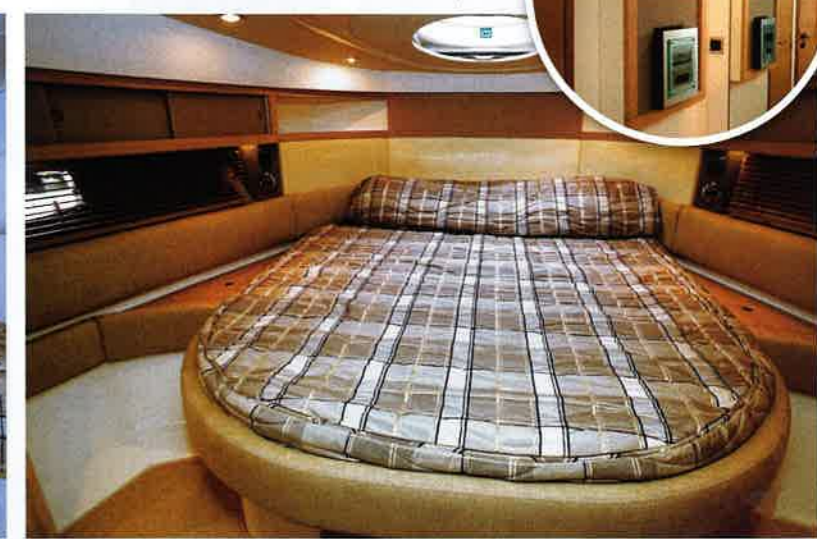
...and table are simple, stylish solutions



A mass of seating makes the cockpit the ideal place to relax, though the table is a £1500 extra



No en suite but the guest cabin offers space, stowage and specification



A huge berth and endless stowage options are the backbone to this stylish master suite



More lateral support when standing would be good, but the extra step (right) is a neat touch

open, its domain marked simply by a subtle change in finish. Ordinarily, builders might try to hide the galley away, but this one is so cool it deserves to be seen. Details like the stainless steel fiddle and graphite counter top lift it above the norm, while the standard gas hob is far more useable than any electric, or worse, alcohol stove. Storage and workspace are plentiful; a great touch is the chopping block inlay where you can cut your limes for the end-of-day G&T.

Taking their traditional positions fore and aft of the saloon are the two cabins. The mid guest cabin does not manage an en suite, but it

does offer more space than you think, with some decent clearance above the twin berths. It's packed with lockers and drawers, and the berths themselves are innovative, with a scissor action that pulls one across to form a double berth. It's the best solution to the twin-to-double problem we've seen to date, and very easy to convert.

With three ports, light is allowed to pour in, and spending time here would certainly be no chore.

That leaves the forward master cabin, complete with en suite access to a toilet and shower compartment that is so impressively roomy, it takes the sting out of the lack of one aft. A separate shower cubicle is the real plus, offering a proper area to wash away the salt.

Back in the master cabin, the plan seems to have been to fill the space with a berth and storage compartments – fair enough, given that you will use this cabin to sleep and stow clothes in. The berth looks to be the same size as that of the 47, while lockers surround you. The

light oak works its magic again, keeping everything light and a large overhead hatch (complete with the Ocean Air blinds enjoyed across the whole boat) does its bit. A great touch

is the berth-side cubbyholes, perfect for leaving books, jewellery and the telly remote when you turn in.

Engine options and access

Having discounted an IPS option for the Targa 38, Fairline has instead plumped for Volvo Penta's D-series DP sterndrives. The standard boat comes with the feisty 260hp 4cyl D4 diesels; up-rated options are the 6cyl 310hp and supercharged 350hp. This is the perfect range for a boat of this size and type, and, as our test boat came with the larger six-cylinder lumps, there is no question about access being inhibited.

With no tender garage to get in the way, access is very good. If Fairline had cut a smaller service hatch into the large, hydraulically driven, main hatch, it would be excellent.

Once opened up, you are struck by how orderly everything appears. It might not quite be up to Windy standards in terms of finish (but it is close), on thought, detail and sheer tidiness it beats all. There are steps down, a neat tread cover sits above the engine room blowers, the D-series engines have belt guards covering their fronts and fuel cut offs are neatly marked. Lacking are

those loose-hanging cable runs, or the sharp plywood edges to forgotten pumps and fittings that tear at your trousers. In short, here you have space to move, work and clean, even with a 6kW genset fitted.

Performance and handling

One of these days Mr Olesinski may design a bad hull, or maybe just a fairly good one. But not today. The T38 handles beautifully – almost telepathically. Fancy a cruise over the channel? The deep-vee hull will play the part of comfortable grand tourer, and feel bigger than its 39 feet. Or perhaps you're after quick blast round the next headland for lunch? In that case, the hull responds eagerly to helm and throttle, happier to be above 25 knots than below. This boat loves to turn, as our photographer William Payne has so vividly captured.

Once onto the plane, the legs are best set between -1 and +2 for optimum performance; at +4 the legs lose some thrust. Honestly, you can get it all wrong on the leg controls and still look right to the observing public, as the hull is happy to grip the water.

As we have found with the D-series engines, every rev counts; even the last 200rpm add a couple of knots – not that we advocating thrashing these boats. Sound meter readings were very good to boot, on a par with its obvious competitor, the Absolute 39.

During our more jobbish manoeuvres, the side screens showed their worth. This is anything but a wet boat, but the spray kicked up by the bows and on by the breeze was well contained.

The helm itself is finished in a blue that is both bright but deep enough to soak up any reflection. Rpm counters and the plotter screen are left close up, exactly where you want them, while the engine instruments and compass are set at eye level. There is even a chart table (well, this is a British sports cruiser).

A trait that we have seen on other D6 310hp-powered boats is a slightly bow-up ride at lower planing speeds. The T38 definitely likes to run at 25 knots and above – not a problem given the hull's ability, but it does raise a few questions about engine choice.

The 310hp D6 is a fine engine; smooth and quick to respond. Its problem is the power-to-weight ratio. At around 670kg, the D6s are not light, and there is a strong argument to drop a couple of cylinders and save yourself both weight and money. Those pokey D4s chip in at over 100kg less, and although not as refined as the six cylinder, will provide close to the same

performance. Of course you could just opt for the top-of-the-line supercharged D6-350s and be done with it!

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Fun when you want it, capable when you need it

Specification and value

With prices starting at under £220,000, the T38 is well in touch with the market. Sunseeker's similarly sized Portofino, for instance, comes in at around £244,000. If you are considering the £234,941 D6-310, we suggest you take some time to try out the D4 option first. If performance is, as we reckon, only a few knots different, then a saving of some £15,000 is not to be sniffed at, especially when Fairline offers such a large options list.

This is our only gripe. The Fairline ain't cheap but then this kind of quality has a price. But surely items like the cockpit table, anti-fouling and the extra saloon skylight could be part of the deal?

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High quality on show here, so not a high price tag

Verdict

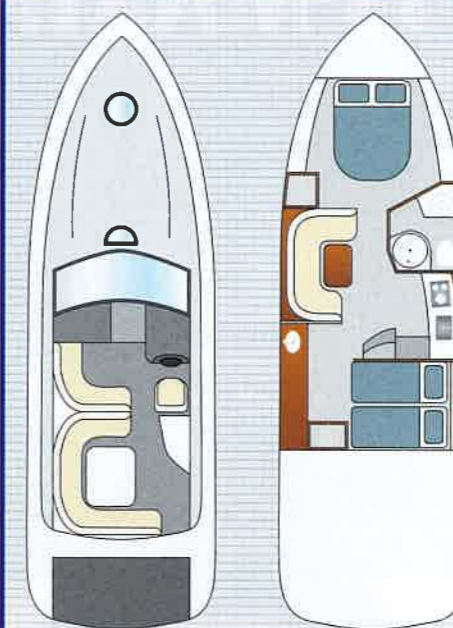
Is this the best Targa yet? Possibly, but the question itself is academic. The simple fact is that this is yet another great Targa, and its perfectionist attitude to on-board life makes it the best boat in its class. Bar none.

MBM rating

9/10

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Fairline Targa 38 technical data



specifications

BUILD	GRP
RCD	Category B
LENGTH OVERALL	39ft 10in (11.9m)
HULL LENGTH	38ft 1in (11.6m)
BEAM	12ft 0in (3.6m)
DRAUGHT (drives down)	3ft 6in (1.1m)
DISPLACEMENT	7.6tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	140gal (636lt)
WATER CAPACITY	65gal (296lt)

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDEDECKS	7in (18cm)
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 2in (1.88m)
HEADROOM IN MASTER CABIN	6ft 1in (1.85m)
MASTER CABIN BERTH	6ft 4 x 5ft 0in

performance

Engines	Volvo Penta D6EVC-310 DP
Configuration	6cyl 5.5lt 310hp @ 3600rpm
Conditions	wind S'y, Force 2, sea state slight
Load	50%, water 25%, crew 3

rpm	knots	gph	mpg	range	noise
2600	20.2	11	1.84	205	74
2800	23.5	14	1.68	188	75
3000	27.1	17	1.60	180	77
3200	30	22	1.36	152	78
3400	32.8	25	1.31	147	78
3500	34.2	26	1.31	147	79
3600	35.4	27	1.30	145	79

Range figures in miles, based on standard fuel tanks and include a 20% margin. Noise readings are in dB(A) and were taken in the saloon.

prices

STANDARD BOAT with 260hp D4 diesels	inc VAT £218,491
with 310hp D6 diesels	£234,941
ANTIFOULING	£1199
HEATING	£5362
BOW-THRUSTER	£6044
TEAK DECKING	£2473
HOLDING TANK	£2522
COCKPIT TABLE	£1791
BLUE HULL	£881

BOAT AS TESTED £256,762

ENQUIRIES Fairline Boats. Tel: 01832 273661, www.fairline.com

the rivals



ABSOLUTE 39

From £206,470 approx
This new kid's twin en suites have assured plenty of limelight. Has a tender garage, so cockpit is more condensed. Detail can't match the T38. Tel: 01624 627752 www.oceannautic.com



SUNSEEKER PORTOFINO

From £244,000 approx
The badge says 35, but this is a 38ft boat with all the trimmings. Top performance and finish – but needs an update to match the T38. Tel: 01202 381111 www.sunseeker.com



ATLANTIS 39

From £215,000 approx
Avant-garde, but has form beaten back function? Intricate cockpit with plenty of choice and modern, edgy interior are stand-out features. Tel: 01932 224977 www.gibbsmarine.co.uk



Access all areas: the engine bay is about as shipshape as you will find, while deck safety shines out