Boat Report

FALCON 275

The 275 is a direct replacement for the six-year-old Falcon 27. To find out how much has changed, we enlisted the help of owners who have upgraded from the original model.

When MBM Cruising Club members Lyn and Steven Terry scoured the new and secondhand markets for a replacement for their much-cruised Falcon 27, *Diva*, they ended up simply plumping for the latest update of the same model, the 275. They had always extolled the virtues of the craft, but why replace like with like? How much does the new boat take after her older sister, and to what extent has she been improved?

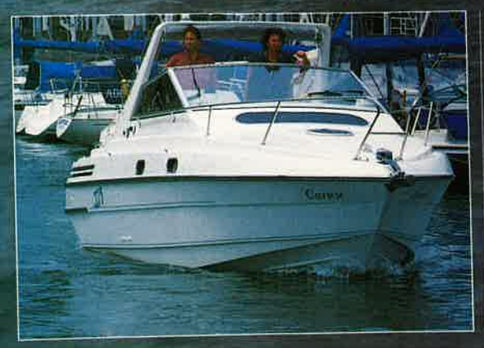
Design

The main modifications to Andrew Wolstenholme's six-year-old original design are a major rejigging of the cockpit moulding and a number of interior changes, namely switching around the galley, which allows better access to the midships cabin, and raising the screen coaming a few inches to give more headroom throughout.

The topsides, hull and coachroof lines remain much the same, except at the rear. Here the transom has been pushed back and given a pleasing athwartships curve; the extra space in the cockpit is obviously a bonus, yet the few inches pinched off the integral bathing platform are not missed. A second minor but most useful modification is the moulding of flat steps into the aft extensions to the topsides, breaking up what was a long stretch from the pontoon to the platform when boarding from alongside.

The angular screen is retained; many manufacturers have opted for curved screens over the past few years, only to find that the latest fad is a return to this more slab-sided style. It is aluminium-framed as standard, although a rather smart stainless steel version is offered as an option, with matching deck hardware.

The hull itself is medium-to-deep-vee, running at a steady 21° from midships to transom, incorporating a wide chine-flat and two sets of sprayrails.



Pottering on the Hamble River (left) or at speed in Southampton Water (background photograph), the 275 cuts a dash and is acknowledged by owners to be a welcome improvement on the popular 27. In particular, the cockpit layout (top right) is more sociable, with guests all able to sit facing each other.

Exterior

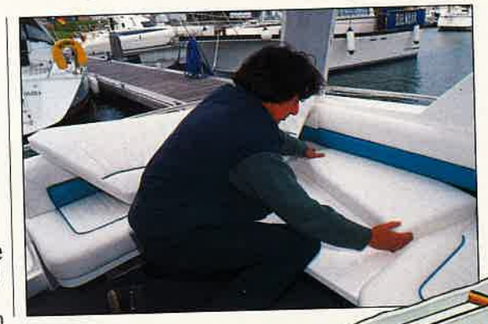
The 27's cockpit layout comprised a large L-settee aft with a generous single (or cramped double) helm seat forward, opposite a further single seat. The 275's new layout, whilst still split, is certainly more sociable, with everybody able to sit facing each other. There is more seating towards the helm, by way of a shorter L-settee adjacent to a single-person bucket seat for the skipper, and the aft area has a U-shaped dinette which you can convert into a sunbed by pulling out an extension piece from within the port coaming. There are grabrails across the seat-backs and coaming sides.

The moulded table stows beneath the settee, and

the rest of the under-seat space is left open for loose stowage; there is a retaining bar to keep things in situ across the expanse of the transom, but we felt a few actual lockers would help. Although the vented gas bottle compartment beneath the forward settee has some surplus room, there is little extra battened-down storage, especially if the moulded-in wet-bar abaft the helm seat is set up in earnest, with the locker space in the coaming beneath being compromised by the inclusion of the optional fridge.

Having said that, the owners of *Caruso* seem quite happy with the arrangement of cockpit stowage, and everything from canopy sidescreens to tools and flares has been found a home. Fenders are housed in a rack moulded into the transom.

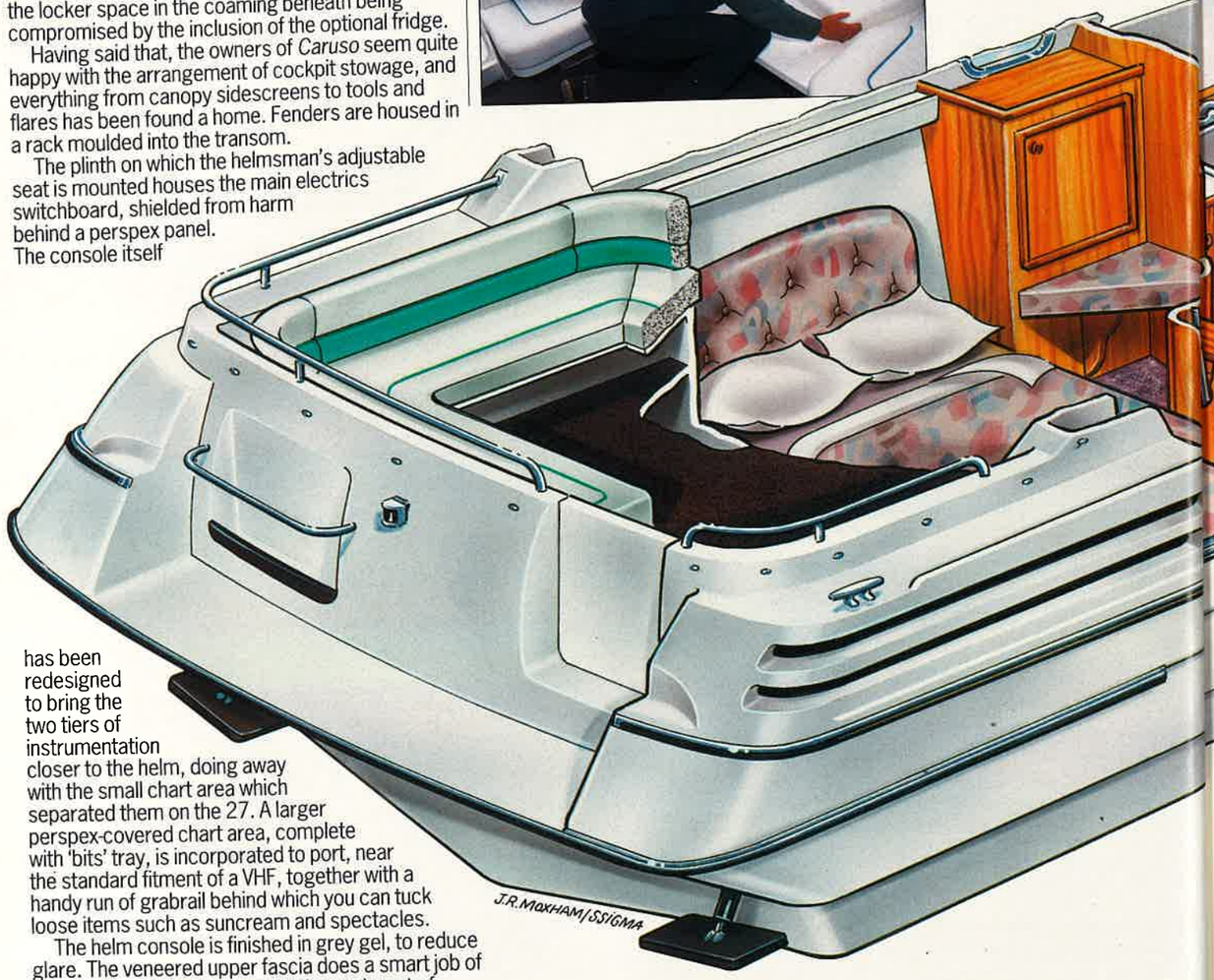
The plinth on which the helmsman's adjustable seat is mounted houses the main electrics switchboard, shielded from harm behind a perspex panel.



Cutaway illustration by John Moxham/SSigma

The console itself has been redesigned to bring the two tiers of instrumentation closer to the helm, doing away with the small chart area which separated them on the 27. A larger perspex-covered chart area, complete with 'bits' tray, is incorporated to port, near the standard fitment of a VHF, together with a handy run of grabrail behind which you can tuck loose items such as suncream and spectacles.

The helm console is finished in grey gel, to reduce glare. The veneered upper fascia does a smart job of housing the engine instrumentation and a set of Robertson speed/log and echo-sounder heads, below a wet-card compass. Closer to the wooden wheel are the ready-use switches and trim controls, with room left for further electronics. The throttles are angled on their own plinth extension, and readily to hand whether you are sitting or standing. Steven heartily endorses the improvements to the layout here, and we would agree.

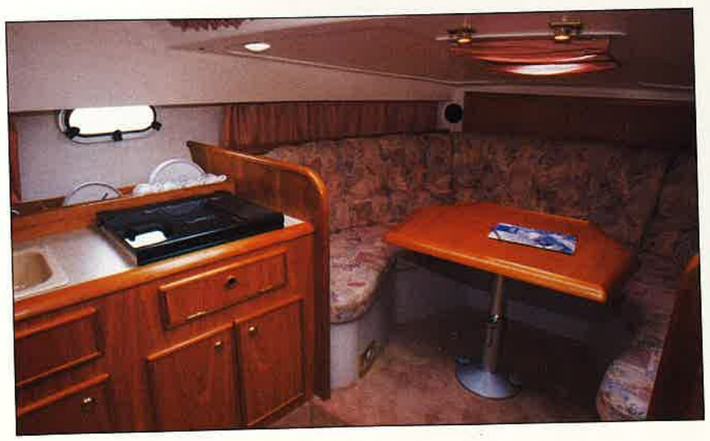


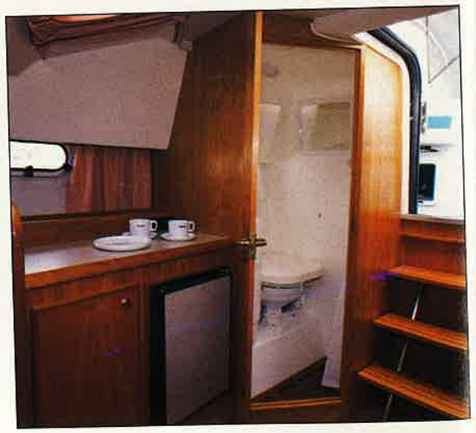
A well-braced step to starboard helps you up onto the 6in (15cm) side decks. The cockpit arch is fitted with a grabrail on each side, which gives way forward to what is best described as a pilot rail, running along the coachroof coaming to the point where it needs to be hopped over, enclosing a flat area of safe non-slip foredeck. This configuration is very much the curate's egg, offering a well-braced handrail where you really need it but denying you the security of a retaining guardrail; Falcon do offer a more conventional pulpit arrangement as an option.

An electric windlass feeds down into a non-segmented locker, accessed from the foredeck. There is just a single 10in (25cm) cleat at the bow, but if that sounds awkward for setting springs there is no need to worry: a pair of smaller ones are incorporated into the toerail forward, in addition to a pair of 8in (20cm) ones aft.

The framed cockpit canopy, included as standard, clips up and stows neatly against the GRP arch when not in use.

Top: you can convert the cockpit dinette into a sunbed by pulling out an extension from the coaming. Left: the facing galley and sideboard swap places on the updated design. Right: power comes from single or twin Volvos, petrol or diesel.





Interior

The curved sliding companionway hatch, in one piece and robustly constructed, locks open automatically, which is a useful safety detail. Down below, the main difference in layout from the 27 to the 275 is the swapping over of the facing galley and sideboard areas, which as Lyn points out has somehow increased both stowage and worksurface.

The galley, with its built-in three-burner hob and grill with adjacent sink, now lies to port; the main run of worksurface is to starboard, with a fridge housed beneath. Cupboards are plentiful, with fiddled shelving and dedicated areas for crockery and bottle stowage.

The modified layout allows rather easier access to the separate midships cabin, to the immediate left of the companionway. This incorporates a 6ft 4in x 3ft 8in (1.93 x 1.16m) berth, and a useful-sized redesigned hanging locker beside the dressing area. Natural light and ventilation are courtesy of a large opening hatch to the cockpit and a side port, and headroom is slightly improved in

Falcon 275

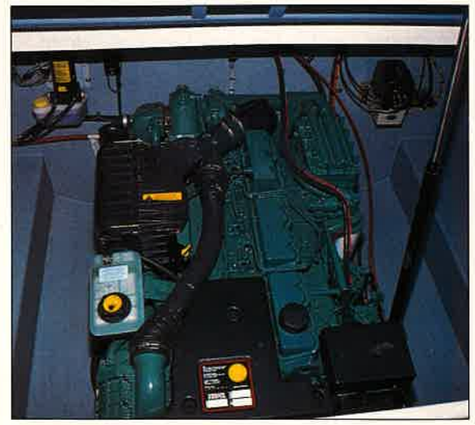
Engines twin Volvo AD31XD/DP diesels, 150hp at 4000rpm, 4cyl, 2.4lt.

Conditions wind SW Force 3, sea slight. *Load* fuel 30%, water 50%, crew 2.

							sound levels dB(A)		
rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range*	trim	helm	cockpit	cabin
2000	8.5	3.7	17	2.30	147	—	77	81	—
2500	12.4	6.2	28	2.00	128	—	80	84	—
3000	21.0	8.0	36	2.65	168	—	81	85	—
3200	24.5	9.2	42	2.66	170	—	81	86	81
3500	26.7	10.5	48	2.54	163	—	83	88	—
4000	33.6	14.1	64	2.38	152	—	86	90	—

Acceleration 0-20 knots, 13.6sec (*allows 20% margin)

Loa
27ft 8in (8.44m)
Hull length
25ft 8in (7.85m)
Beam
9ft 8in (2.95m)
Draught
3ft 3in (1.00m)
Displacement
3.4 tonnes
Fuel capacity
80gal (363lt)
Water capacity
35gal (159lt)
Price
£62,779 as tested



comparison with the earlier boat.

The standing area of the main cabin also has most adequate headroom. The horseshoe-shaped dinette's seating is deep and comfortable, and at night the table can be dropped, and its backrest removed, to create a 6ft 1in x 5ft 0in (1.86m x 1.52m) double. A gap behind the backrest swallows your bedding during the day, and underseat lockers are painted-out and benefit from having hinged lids, a detail which really makes a difference. Ahead of the dinette is a small locker with a sliding hatch.

The fully-moulded toilet compartment, tucked to starboard, has a partially covered sea toilet (a holding tank is optional), a sink and a grating-covered shower tray. There is a modicum of dry storage beneath the sink, although a separate cupboard for washbags would not go amiss. An opening port provides ventilation.

The joinery throughout the accommodation is well executed and heavily constructed in cherry, for a warm but not too dark look.

Engines

The Falcon 27 we tested six years ago (see MBM Jun 89 p50) had twin 205hp Volvo V6 petrol engines, the most potent of the options available, giving a top speed of just over 38 knots. Petrols are still very much available, starting with a pair of 150hp four-cylinder SX Volvos, but the two 275s we looked at were both powered by diesels from the same manufacturers.

The boat we borrowed from UK distributors P J Yachts at Port Solent had a single 230hp KAD42/DP, and the Terrys' *Caruso* a pair of Volvo AD31XP units, also on Duoprop legs, rated to 150hp apiece.

Steve opted for diesels this time, in preference to his previous boat's AQ151 petrols, partly for reasons of reliability and expense but also because he had encountered problems obtaining petrol on certain cruises. Weekending in the Solent had been fine, but in the West Country and the Channel Isles they had come unstuck.

Access to the engine compartment is as on the 27, with a large electrohydraulic ram opening an almost full-width hatch. With both twin and single installations, access is good right around the engines and to the ancillaries tucked up outboard; the forward end of the compartment has plenty of standing room.

The stainless steel fuel tank is just forward of the compartment, with the fuel/water separators located on the bulkhead. The braided fuel lines incorporate solenoid fuel shut-offs activated from the helm ignition.

The battery switches are tucked away beneath the cockpit settee. A mains ring is included in the 275's standard fit-out, as is a battery charger; the calorifier to port is provided with an immersion also.

The bilge is serviced by a rather small-capacity Rule submersible pump, and there is another of these beneath the cabin sole; a manual unit is listed as an option. The whole compartment is finished in flame-retardant resin, with two 2.0kg extinguishers fitted to the deckhead. Noise insulation is fitted only to the hatch itself.

In general the installations we inspected were very much of the same high calibre we remember from the 27, still supremely tidy and well engineered. Plenty of attention has been given to the safety of pipes and cables, and the bilge pump and transducer heads are safely boxed in so as not to be inadvertently kicked and damaged.

Performance and handling

When we took out P J Yachts' demonstrator boat for some initial performance tests, the approaches around Portsmouth Harbour were kicking up an unpredictable hole-ridden slop, as the waves set up by a southerly, compounded by reflected ones, pushed from deep to shoal areas.

Even so, the 275's medium-to-deep vee allowed us to floor the single KAD42/DP-powered boat to flat-out, giving an across-wave or downhill top speed of 31 knots, with the hull making commendably easy work of it. Pushing back into the seas, the boat was happy to muscle over the largest of lumps at 23 knots, at 3000rpm. For heavier work still, we trimmed the tabs and the leg right in and nudged along, on the plane, at 15 knots down at 2600rpm — just ahead of the revs at which the KAD42's compressor would intrude.

For fast cruising, 3500rpm gave 27.5 knots, and at this setting you should expect to consume 8.6gph (39lph). At 23 knots and 3000rpm, this will improve to around 6.6gph (30lph). Noise levels in the cockpit hovered around 85dB(A), which does not sound particularly quiet but was not too bothersome.

A subsequent sortie on the Terrys' twin-AD31XP/DP *Caruso* gave a top speed of 33.6 knots. For normal cruising, Steven sets the throttles at 3200rpm to maintain a fuel-conscious 23 knots on around 9gph (42lph), giving over 2.5mpg and a useful range from a not very large tankage. Noise levels were again reasonable for cruising.

For handling and ride comfort, Steve is very happy with his choice of twin diesels over petrols. He thinks the boat sits tighter and more evenly on and through the water, while the different torque characteristics (for the same power) make for a constant, better balanced throughput of drive from the Duoprop.

The driving position is comfortable and the screen gives excellent protection and visibility, being serviced by two useful-sized self-parking wipers. In any case, the helm is not much troubled by spray.

Conclusions

When we first looked over the 275 at the Southampton Boat Show last September, we could immediately identify some changes from the 27, but it took two expert Falconers to help us really appreciate the significant difference these modifications have made to what was already a neat, well-found boat.

The various design tweaks make this, as far as Steve and Lyn Terry are concerned, a completely new boat, with an even better build quality than before, an observation with which we would agree. The upshot is a very usable 27-footer, capable of performance cruising with four aboard in a good degree of comfort.

Whether you plump for the very adequate single 230hp diesel option or shoulder the £6000 difference and go for a twin installation is down to personal preference, and depth of pocket. But we agree with Steve that the boat really does motor very nicely with the latter. □

Builders

Falcon Sports Boats Ltd, Griffin Lane, Norwich, Norfolk NR7 0SL. Tel: 01603 35516.

Suppliers

P J Yachts Ltd, Port Solent, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO6 4TJ. Tel: 01705 201920.