

BOAT REPORT

Fletcher Arrowbolt 25 GTS &

British boatbuilders Fletcher have entered into a new alliance with Japanese diesel engine builders Yamaha.

Is it a happy marriage?



Sportscruiser 22 GTS

The 22 GTS and 25 GTS sportscruisers are among the first fruits of a new collaboration between Fletcher International and Yamaha, announced at the Southampton Boat Show last year.

Under this deal, Fletcher build

the boats and are in charge of technical development, whilst Yamaha manufacture the engines and take care of the sales and marketing of complete boat/engine packages.

Although their concept and hull design have always been better

suited to north-European boating conditions, Fletchers have long been playing catch-up with American craft in their detailing and specification, so this fresh impulse could pay dividends.

And with the market for walkaround and fast-fishing

vessels dominated by those whose outboards come factory-supplied, you can see the appeal of a toe-in for Yamaha.

But it is not just about outboards; their diesels also find a ready home in Fletcher's sportscruisers, like the two tested here.



Sportscruiser 22 GTS



Any sportscruiser of this length is going to have a chunky appearance, as the designers look to maximise both cabin and cockpit space. Interior headroom and a secure cockpit mean deep freeboards, and a top-heavy look. Overall, however, the 22 is verging on the sleek. Fletcher have done their best to minimise chunkiness by using graduated relief lines, and the broad contrast stripe (you can choose between two tones of blue or red) below the

rubbing strip has a beneficial lengthening effect. But what happened to the bow locker? There is no smooth deck line forwards to the bow roller, just a recess for a flat hatch. It is compromises like this which hamper otherwise neat styling. Mercruiser provide all the petrol engine options, from the 190hp 4.3L V6 to the 260hp 5.7EFI V8. Yamaha's 165hp ME370STi in-line 4cyl unit, installed in our test boat, is the only diesel option. Stirring the Yamaha does not

take too long, as it gets itself spinning fast enough for the turbocharger to kick in and the 22 GTS is pushed smoothly up onto the plane. Good mid-range torque means it is soon approaching its maximum 3400rpm, which we recorded as 33 knots. The hull is very happy at this speed, as one would expect. Easing the throttle back gave very comfortable 25 knots cruising, and we took an unintrusive noise reading of 84dB(A) in the cockpit. That mid-range torque also

means very confident handling, with no skip-out or propeller ventilation. The boat maintains a good speed through turns, and the steering reacts well to the helmsman's input when you push harder. A more powerful petrol engine will only add to the fun. A driving position that is well forward, coupled with the snub nose, takes some getting used to, especially in a following sea, but you soon gain confidence from the assured ride. The deep cockpit ensures you stay warm and dry.

Cabin

The interior has a Tardis-like quality, giving you more space than you should reasonably expect on a 22-footer, and not apparently at the cost of cockpit area. Effectively, of course, much of the space has been gained by placing the galley facilities in the cockpit. You step down to be met with a good expanse of seating, which as usual can be converted into a decent double berth. The portable toilet under a raised seat cushion to starboard. Light furnishings, and plenty



Cockpit

Fletcher have managed to eke out a spacious cockpit, with two forward seats and a wraparound aft settee, though the latter's myriad cushions will most appeal to jigsaw enthusiasts. Aft of the helm seat is a sink with a fridge in its base, while a fiddly arrangement fits a 'portable' cooker on the port side. Stowage abounds, under those cushions and also in side and floor lockers, and in the



base of the forward seats. In the centre of the transom is a gate for access to the bathing platform.



Bathing platform

In terms of how it works, the bathing platform is fine. It has fender holders, steps, a ski-hook ring and a transom shower. The problem is it looks like an add-on. If the builders wanted a larger one, why didn't they just come up with integrated design to begin with, rather than apparently having to add a second layer afterwards?

Helm

The dashboard is basic, but displays the instrumentation in good order with a simple layout of switches. A compass tops it off, but if you are looking for a digital depth-sounder or tilt-adjustable steering wheel as standard then you will be disappointed. There is no fore-and-aft adjustment in the helm seat either, though the front lip does hinge up so you can adopt a lean-back attitude, with the screen still affording some protection. And in fact the seating position is comfortable, offering very good support, with a footrest helping you wedge yourself in. Yamaha's throttle/gearshift control has a good feel and smooth action.



Fletcher Sportscruiser 22 GTS

BUILD	glass-reinforced plastic
RCD	Design Category C: Inshore (voyages in coastal waters and estuaries in wind up to Force 6)
DIMENSIONS	
LOA	21ft 4in (6.50m)
BEAM	8ft 2in (2.50m)
DRAUGHT	2ft 9in (0.83m)
DISPLACEMENT	3968lb (1800kg)
FUEL CAPACITY	60gal (272lt)
ENGINES	165hp Yamaha ME370STi diesel
PRICE	£31,999 inc VAT
SUPPLIERS	Yamaha Motor (UK) Ltd, Sopwith Drive, Weybridge, Surrey KT13 0UZ. Tel: 01932 358000.
BUILDERS	Fletcher International, Cannock Road, Chase Terrace, Burntwood, Staffordshire WS7 8GB. Tel: 01543 279999.

Engineroom

The enginecover forms part of the aft seating arrangement. The hatch is supported on a pole when raised, there being no gas struts, but it gives good access to what is a very tidy installation of the Yamaha diesel. Engine services are alongside, and you have to move the seat cushions for access. Battery isolators are to starboard, on the front of the seat-base.



of daylight filtering through the entranceway, portholes and deck hatch, add to a spacious feel, as do the mirrors at the bow and on the starboard midships bulkhead. A few rough edges need to be addressed in the finish. Stowage is in three unlined lockers under the seats, and open lockers behind the back cushions. Over the central well there is decent headroom for a boat of this size, although inevitably the cabin floor is stepped to achieve this.

Arrowbolt 25 GTS

In the conception of the 25 GTS, the emphasis appears to have been on ensuring the styling is right. Sure enough, this is a good-looking boat with a strong presence on the water.

There is a good balance in the design, and the lines flow smoothly from bow to stern, helped by a well proportioned windscreen.

Our test boat came with the most expensive engine option, Yamaha's 240hp ME420STi diesel.

Alternatively you can opt for a 165hp diesel from Yamaha or Mercruiser, or one of several Mercruiser petrol options, from the 190hp 4.3L to the 260hp 5.7EFI.

Performance and handling have always been a strong hand for Fletcher, and even at this hull length and weight, and with diesel power, they remain so on the GTS25. There is a slight delay while you get the engine spinning over fast enough for the turbocharger to kick in, but then pick-up is solid.

With 75hp more than its smaller sister, this is of course a quicker boat, with a top speed of 41 knots at 3800rpm. There is torque aplenty, ensuring the boat powers through turns, and we experienced no prop ventilation or hull skip-out in tighter turns in calm water.

The steering has good response, so the 25 can be driven hard. In a good sea, we managed to get the hull out of the water a few times, but everything was always in full control and the landings cushioned. You soon gain confidence in the craft's abilities, and in the ride, so you can fully enjoy yourself.



Galley

The galley features an alcohol-burning stove, a fridge and a stainless steel sink served by a pressurised cold water system. It is set on two levels,

which limits the amount of workspace available.

The base of the sink has a cupboard, and there are open lockers above and behind. We would have preferred doors on these, to keep the contents secure if the going gets rough.



Cockpit

On boarding, you notice how high in the boat you stand, as the raised floor leaves the

cockpit feeling fairly exposed. But this has also allowed for a real feeling of spaciousness.

The layout offers good seating capacity, doubling easily as sunbathing space, in

an open and sociable way that links the fore and aft sections well.

The reclining forward passenger seat shows that, despite some indications to the contrary as far as specification is concerned, Fletcher are keeping an eye on what the opposition are producing in their designs. On our test boat you could not make the aft seating into a sunlounger, but subsequent boats will have removable backrests for this purpose.

Plus points include cavernous lockers on both sides of the enginebay. Side lockers complement these to complete excellent stowage provision.

Cabin

Although we could point to a few rough edges, the cabin is both functional and comfortable.

The entrance to the cabin is a bit tight, with a steep drop. Inside, although the builders have stepped the floor to offer as much headroom as possible, it is still at a premium.

The layout has the familiar forward vee-berth which converts to seating round a

table in the day, with a hanging cupboard and toilet compartment to starboard and the galley to port. Aft of these is a midships double berth which is accessible from behind the removable companionway steps.

The latter will inevitably serve as a practical throw-it-all place. It is a bit tight on headroom, but has a port light and will be popular with children.

Furnishings are pleasing to the eye, and even run to

some scatter cushions. Plenty of daylight enters the cabin through the four portholes and the deck hatch.



A stereo unit and the electrical panel are mounted on the side of the hanging locker, which is a decent size. There are no lockers under the berths.

Engine room



The centre section of the cockpit's aft sunbed/settee hinges up to give very good engine access. There is no power lift or gas strut, but a simple pole to support the engine cover in the raised position.

The installation is to a good standard, and through the side lockers you can get at all the engine services. Battery and fuel isolators are readily accessible, too.

Bathing platform



The teak-decked bathing platform looks good, although it is a little tricky to board from alongside. A swing-down boarding ladder helps you in and out of the water, but the platform itself is not set particularly high.

You can rinse off with the transom shower, and the handy fender-holders will save you scrabbling around in lockers when entering harbour.

For a manufacturer with a good watersports tradition, a tow-ring is a notable absentee from the fittings.

Toilet



The WC is constructed of moulded units which incorporate the sea toilet and wash basin, but offer little stowage. A shower, which would be a standard fitment for most builders, is missing here.

You have to stoop in the compartment, but that is normal on a sportscruiser of this size.

Helm

Helm instrumentation is presented on two walnut-backed pods, which also offer some free space for additional gauges or compact navigation aids. A small bank of switches below these control the limited electronics which come as part of the standard package.

This brings us neatly to one of the failings of the 25 GTS: although it is by far the more expensive boat of the two tested here, it has more specification shortcomings than its smaller sister. There is no lift-up forward cushion or fore-and-aft adjustment for the helm seat, no tilt-adjustability of the steering wheel, no digital depth-sounder and no VHF set.

However, the basics are right, as the driving seat is supportive and the throttle falls easily to hand, offering a good driving position for those of average height.



Fletcher Arrowbolt 25 GTS

BUILD

glass-reinforced plastic

RCD

Design Category C: Inshore (voyages in coastal waters and estuaries in wind up to Force 6)

DIMENSIONS

LOA

24ft 8in (7.49m)

BEAM

8ft 2in (2.50m)

DRAUGHT

3ft 2in (0.96m)

DISPLACEMENT

5071lb (2300kg)

FUEL CAPACITY

60gal (272lt)

ENGINES

240hp Yamaha ME420STi diesel

PRICE

£44,999 inc VAT

SUPPLIERS

Yamaha Motor (UK) Ltd, Sopwith Drive, Weybridge, Surrey KT13 0UZ. Tel: 01932 358000.

BUILDERS

Fletcher International, Cannock Road, Chase Terrace, Burntwood, Staffordshire WS7 8GB. Tel: 01543 279999.

Conclusions

For over 30 years now, Fletcher have survived a constant onslaught from across the Atlantic, proudly flying the Union Jack and setting a steady course through many a troubled economic sea. They have just about become synonymous with sportsboating in the UK.

We want so much to say that these are the best sportscruisers in all aspects, especially the key ones of design, performance and value for money. We cannot, as there are just too many oddities in

the execution of these two craft for them to count amongst the best.

Even since our test, attention to detail has been sharpened up, with particular attention paid to cosmetic trim, upholstery, standardised fixings and moulding joints where mastic is used. But, whilst the concepts and hulls are fine, execution and fit-out is not quite there yet. These craft still look pricey for what they offer.

The cost of the diesel engines in the boats we tested does not help,

of course. Whilst we understand Yamaha looking to fit their excellent diesels across the Fletcher range, does this type of engine really belong in 22ft and 25ft sportscruisers, especially ones that come with a performance heritage?

Yamaha will claim that the diesel power window is stretching ever downwards, which is true, but we would say that 22ft is still some way from it when you apply cost guidelines. In terms of what you get for your money, both the 22 and 25 look a bit more reasonable with the cheaper Mercruiser petrol option in the enginebay.

Of the two models, the 22 GTS is perhaps the most up-to-date in its conception and design, offering a very good combination of cabin and cockpit space, the snuggler cockpit, and good seakeeping and handling for its size. The 25 GTS reflects the more traditional cuddy-cabin approach of concentrating on looks and making the best of the accommodation within that constraint.

As such, the former will appeal to those who want a balance of everything, the latter to those who are more interested in looking good and going fast than in practical features.