

Hardy

Commander

BOAT REPORT

*With its medium vee and its keel, this **aft-cockpit cruiser** is something of a hybrid between a planing boat and a river cruiser. How does that work, exactly?*



Building on the success of their mid-size trawler yacht, the Hardy 36, the consensus was that the Norfolk yard of Hardy Marine could branch out further to fill another niche again: something manageable by two people, large enough and fast enough to make offshore passages but still at home on inland waterways.

With the builders benefiting from renewed enthusiasm following their association with a new parent company, enter the 32ft

Bathing platform

Despite the Commander's clean lines, the builders have opted to give it a traditional feel by eschewing a fully integrated bathing platform in favour of a robust fabrication in stainless steel and teak. Thoughtfully, it is well rounded at the quarters, to make it less vulnerable.

The swim ladder is located to port, rather than straight in front of the central



walk-through from the cockpit, so that in a man-overboard situation the casualty might be

able to clamber aboard even if an inflatable is Snap-davited across the transom.

A shower is provided, and the walk-through step is in fact the gas bottle locker.

Cockpit

Builders of aft-cockpit boats always face a dilemma as to whether to provide fixed seating or not; many owners like to have the option of deploying free-standing furniture, but there are always occasions when it is simpler to be able to perch on something that is already there.

Hardy's answer here is to provide a bit of both. The port side has seat mouldings, which double as lockers, while the starboard side is kept clear. This works extremely well: when required, the saloon table can quickly be moved out and erected here, and a couple of



directors' chairs hiked out the lazaret to complete a most convivial setting.

The lazaret is accessed via a gas-strut-supported hatch in the sole, although when this is raised there is still sufficient deck space to allow people to move around it.



The compartment is cavernous, with just a portion of the wings taken up by equipment such as the calorifier. Duckboards fitted over the bilge help to keep stowed items dry, and they cannot foul the steering gear because this is suitably boxed off.

Further stowage is provided by two wing lockers in the



coamings, with hatches large enough to get umpteen medium-sized fenders through. A manual bilge pump is also incorporated here.

The whole cockpit is well protected by a simple canopy arrangement, supported on a slide-out strut. When the sun shines, the latter readily retracts into the cabin top.

Commander, unveiled at January's London Boat Show.

This aft-cockpit model provides 20 knots-plus of performance from twin inboard diesels, with a keeled hull and a relatively low air draught to enable it to explore restricted waters.

Design & layout

Like its larger sister, the Commander is designed by Andrew Wolstenholme, but its hull is quite different. Rather than round-bilge and semi-displacement, it is of hard-chine form, but with its vee culminating in a substantial keel which extends below the depth of the propellers to give them a measure of protection.

The sections ease from a medium-vee shape amidships to a relatively flat 11° at the transom. The after sections incorporate tunnels, to help keep the engines as low as possible, no mean feat in a twin-engined craft of this size.

The upshot is a hull that is capable of climbing into full planing mode but is also happy to make way at a semi-displacement pace without causing difficulties by wobbling on and off the plane.



Decks

Boarding from an alongside pontoon could not be easier, as a couple of treads are fashioned

into the rubbing strake and gunwale to help you up through the break in the guardrails. Topping a 6in (15cm) height of gunwale, the rails are good and solid, making the 10in (25cm) wide side decks feel very safe.

Access from the cockpit is simple and secure too, with steps up and a decent handrail. The cabin top offers a further handrail to help you steady yourself as you walk forward.

The foredeck is extremely

spacious and uncluttered, and the electric windlass and cleats are raised to the same level as the gunwale in true little-ship style. The chain locker is accessed via the forecabin bulkhead.

Cleats forward, amidships and at the quarters are all of 10in (25cm).



Supplementing the main chine is a prominent knuckle in the topsides, to help keep back any lifting spray. The topsides also include a pronounced strip of moulded rubbing strake, and a good depth of gunwale rather than simply a toerail to the sheer. Both features contribute to the Commander's traditional and purposeful appearance.

This is a single-cabin boat, but with the facility of making occasional berths out of both interior seating areas: the wheelhouse settee and the lower dinette opposite the galley. Given that the boat has only one helm position, the wheelhouse has been made as versatile as possible, and the deckhead benefits from an extremely well fabricated sliding sunroof which runs almost half its length, allowing any good weather to be enjoyed to the full.

Outside, aft-cockpit boats can suffer from being a little uninspiring, but not so the Commander. The cockpit itself is pleasant and well proportioned, and has some integral

seating, while the side decks are protected by mini-bulwarks, which is a major plus point.

The boat requires around 400hp to reach its design speed of around 25 knots, and Mercruiser, Volvo Penta and Yanmar installations are offered to achieve this. The boat we tested had a pair of 220hp Mercruisers.

Handling & performance

Although to some extent the Commander is a hybrid, with evident planing characteristics and yet the very fullest of keel sections also, the combination should not be defined as semi-displacement.

Given relatively flat conditions, it can clip along at 25 knots, well up and planing, and it stays on the plane as you throttle back to a continuous cruising speed of around 22 knots, with the engines pulling a comfortable 3000rpm.

Only when you dip below this does the hull ease quite happily into semi-displacement mode, with

the usual change in trim, which is best countered by applying a fair amount of tab. Choose your speed, and the hull will sit there.

Drop right back to 1800rpm and this Hardy takes up the advantage of its keel and is equally happy to sit squarely on course at around 8 knots. Not too much spray finds its way up the hull sides, as the

and the stools housed in a cubby-hole beneath the helm seat, leaving this area clear of obstructions.

A pull-out infill squares up the settee to form an occasional 3ft 0in (0.91m) wide berth, with a cave locker in the base.

Those seated here can watch the television set that can be housed in the sideboard opposite, or take advantage of the small bar unit. There is further storage space in this cabinet, under a work surface which benefits from deep, strong fiddles.



Toilet

The moulded toilet compartment is large enough to allow you to have a good wash without knocking your elbows or tripping over your own feet. The shower tray base is good and square, too.

The work surface is inset with a stainless steel basin which livens up the acreage of practical and easily cleanable GRP, and there is a Perspex-fronted cupboard and a useful shelf by way of storage.

A vent and opening port help to keep the compartment fresh.



Wheelhouse/saloon

A single sliding door opens up the wheelhouse/saloon to the cockpit. Although it does not integrate them fully into a single entertaining area, it is sufficiently wide to make a simple business of moving between them.

Inside, headroom is 6ft 3in (1.90m) and there is plenty of light and, if needs be, air. The large sunroof is a very solid, fully toughened, curved glass

(rather than Perspex) fabrication that, as an option, can be opened and closed at the touch of a button. When the weather is less positive, there are side ports which slide open.

The L-shaped settee to starboard can have a wooden table set in front of it and a pair of stools brought out to form a dinette. Usually, though, the same table is likely to find itself deployed opposite the galley,

Helm

The boat's helm position, to port, is equipped with two comfortable and supportive seats, the inboard one of which (the navigator's) can be demounted and stowed away if required. This is a useful idea, allowing two people to be on watch when underway but without cluttering up the saloon when the crew are relaxing in port.

For something which is designed to be pulled apart, the

seat is extremely solid. Similarly robust is the helmsman's wood and stainless steel destroyer-style wheel, which matches the flavour of the boat well.

The console is well laid out, with engine instruments and ready-use switches smack in front of the wheel. The throttle controls are positioned towards the centre of the boat rather than ranged outboard, easy to tend in between nipping out on deck to deploy lines.

A clear area of console on the navigator's side has sufficient



room for mounting larger electronic gear, while overhead there is a less deep panel to take smaller instrument heads; a Tridata log and depth unit is fitted as standard.

Ahead of the wheel is a Perspex-covered chart area helpfully bordered with a fiddle. It is just a pity that the wooden return outboard, where the tab controls are fitted, does not benefit from the same detail, which would make it a further useful shelf.



Forward cabin

The boat's only permanent cabin is laid-out with vee-berths, which can then take an infill to make them into a double. Whereas on some

boats you need the infill just to make the single berths a decent width, here they are good and wide in themselves, measuring 2ft 8in (0.81m) at the shoulder by 6ft 3in (1.90m) long, with plenty of room towards their feet.

Galley

Two steps lead down from the wheelhouse/saloon to the lower accommodation, with grabrails lending a steadying hand. The treads hinge up to reveal stowage space below.

The galley to starboard is full of angled fixtures and fittings, for all the right practical reasons: best use is made of every inch of space, and everything can be opened and accessed without jamming up

against something else.

Appointments include a two-burner hob and a built-in oven/grill, with a fridge opposite under a twin-bowl sink. There is also a truly useful-sized and well positioned rubbish bin.

This still leaves room for a reasonable amount of clear work surface together with a good array of storage, ranging from a pan cupboard built-in beneath the cooker to lockers at eye height. An opening port provides extra ventilation.



Dinette

The cosy lower dinette is nicely tucked away out of sight of the saloon, so you can make your morning cuppa and tuck into a bowl of cereal without padding round in full view of the rest of the marina when not looking your best.

A pull-out portion of the base of the U-shaped settee allows a cushion infill to be inserted,

double bank of chines do a good job of keeping water clear at all speeds.

Ease the throttles further still, and 1200rpm will find you at river speed. With 800rpm being tickover, there are still plenty of revs to come off for pottering and manoeuvring.

Our main sea trials were conducted on a rather lacklustre day off Great Yarmouth in Norfolk, but an earlier demonstration weekend arranged by the Hardy dealers at Largs in Ayrshire offered some tough sea conditions, given the short, hard fetch that can build up between the islands. This gave a considerable amount of positive feedback, with the hull making clean, comfortable work of pushing through the water.

Overpowering on downwind legs, at something like 26-27 knots, meant the keel began to twitch, but the simple answer was to throttle back slightly.

The less exciting day's run on the East Coast brought only slight seas, and the hull quickly dispensed with any wash we could find when planing through these, responding easily to the wheel. Rather eerily, we found the boat turned all-but dead flat at

making this area into an occasional extra berth.

Outboard is a run of cave lockers, while the lockers within the seat bases are well finished and have false bottoms to keep items off the hull sides.

The bound carpet lifts to reveal a number of hatches let in the sole, allowing access to the bilge and seacocks and, on our test boat, the holding tank which is an optional extra.



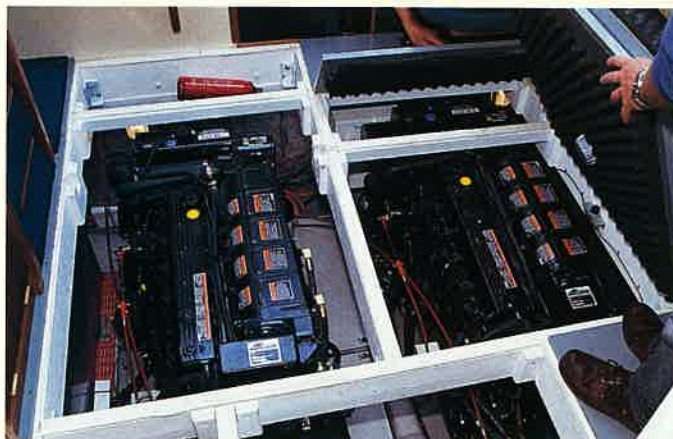
Engine room

A bound carpet covers what is a well thought-out jigsaw of close-fitted but easily lifted engineroom hatches in the saloon sole.

Just a couple of feet of this needs to be turned back so you can lift the smallish central section aft, which then enables you to view the compartment, check the bilge and inspect the raw-water strainers and primary filters. When you want to check the freshwater header tanks, a similar process is undertaken at the forward end.

For anything more, such as drawing the dipsticks, it is a matter of rolling up the carpet and lifting a further couple of hatches, which then enables you good access pretty well right round the engines.

Only the outboard side of the starboard unit was awkward in our test boat's Mercruiser installation, being a bit



tight to the fuel tank, but there was still sufficient room to get at the only service item here, the oil filter.

Aft, the shaft logs could be inspected and manipulated quite readily and even though



these six-cylinder engines extend quite far forward there was a useful amount of space ahead of them to get at the belts and water pumps; it just depends on the builders being wary of where auxiliaries are positioned on the forward bulkhead.

Battery boxes take up the area between the engines, and an electric pump services the bilge.

Eggbox-type foam insulation is fitted to most surfaces, except the outboard fuel tanks.

speed, rather than banking as would be the norm with a simple planing hull.

When manoeuvring, the rudders allow the hull to be spun round in just about its own length before the engines are even brought into play. The drive can be dropped in and out to give gentle nudges rather than aggressive acceleration.

Visibility from the helm is good all

round, and even though the bow does lift a fair bit it does not obscure the view ahead. Each of the three screen sections is serviced by a dual-speed wiper, and of course the second helm seat usefully enables another pair of eyes to keep a good watch.

Noise levels in the wheelhouse remain below 80dB(A) at practically any rpm setting.

Hardy Commander

PERFORMANCE & FUEL CONSUMPTION

sound levels dB(A)

rpm	knots [#]	gph [†]	lph [†]	mpg [†]	range*	trim	saloon	fwdcab	cockpit
2000	9.0	6.6	30	1.36	209	3.0	72	70	83
2200	12.5	8.4	38	1.49	229	4.0	74	73	83
2400	14.0	10.1	46	1.39	214	5.0	75	74	84
2600	16.8	11.9	54	1.41	217	6.0	76	75	86
2800	18.5	13.6	62	1.36	209	6.0	78	76	87
3000	22.0	15.4	70	1.43	220	5.5	79	77	88
3200	23.6	18.9	86	1.24	192	5.5	80	78	88
3400	25.0	24.0	110	1.04	160	5.0	81	80	88

Measured by GPS. † Calculated from engine manufacturers' figures. * Allows 20% margin.

CONDITIONS wind northerly Force 3, sea slight

LOAD fuel 100%, water 100%, crew 3



Conclusions

The advent of a versatile shaft-driven wheelhouse cruiser of just over 30ft is good news for potential owners, as this sector of the market is none too crowded. For what is many people's ideal of half-inland, half-coastal cruising, the Commander's overall design and layout works well.

Its single-cabin layout makes the boat ideal for cruising à deux, although the easy conversion of

the dinettes allows further crew to find a welcoming berth if required. There is plenty of room to entertain, and the cockpit we found particularly useful, given its half-seated nature.

Add sturdy, nicely finished build quality and, as far as we could ascertain, well mannered performance, and this should prove a popular model from a builder exhibiting a lot of fresh ideas.

BUILD

glass-reinforced plastic

RCD

build category B

DIMENSIONS

LOA

33ft 9in (10.29m)

BEAM

11ft 8in (3.55m)

DRAUGHT

3ft 1in (0.93m)

AIR DRAUGHT

8ft 11in (2.72m)

DISPLACEMENT

6.5 tons

FUEL CAPACITY

192gal (872lt)

WATER CAPACITY

75gal (340lt)

ENGINES

twin Mercruiser D4.2Ls

6cyl 4.2lt diesels

220hp at 3600rpm

PRICE

£138,125 inc VAT as standard

SUPPLIERS

Brundall Bay Marine Sales,
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BUILDERS

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