The Johnson 65 is a classy motoryacht which seems to offer acres of deck space, as well as a high level of equipment and sumptuous interior furnishing.

Boat Report

JOHNSON 65

This well-engineered Taiwanese motoryacht offers a huge volume of accommodation. To find out whether it is as practical as it is comfortable, we joined one on passage from the Solent to the Thames.

Top: the master cabin is huge, helped by the boat's generous beam. Above: a through-the-keyhole view aft from the forward lobby. Below: you can walk into the engineroom from an aft lobby.

One of the most active markets worldwide is that for the 65ft motoryacht, a boat which is big enough to sleep eight comfortably and entertain half a dozen more, yet small enough to be handled by the owners without the need for a crew, and which combines speed for fast coastal passages with range and seaworthiness for serious cruising.

The major UK boatbuilders all have successful models in this category, but they face strong competition from elsewhere. Our test of the British-designed, Taiwanese-built Johnson 65 gave us the opportunity to see whether this newcomer is more than just a pretty face.

It also gave us the opportunity to join a 200-mile non-stop delivery trip with a 20-knot cruising speed, 1900hp under our feet and enough electronics to take us around the world.

Design

The Johnson is a product of the Bill Dixon Design Office. Bill learned his trade alongside the legendary Angus Primrose, and took over the reins when his mentor was tragically lost at sea. Since that time, the output of the office has expanded rapidly, to include both sail and powered craft, from 30ft to 160ft (10m-50m).

It was some five years ago that Bill was asked to design the first of what was then a new range of motoryachts aimed at markets around the world. With its blend of European styling and solid Taiwanese construction, the Johnson 63 became an immediate success; more than 40 have been sold to date, with the principal market being the USA, followed by Europe.

In 1994 the bathing platform was extended by 2ft (0.6m) to make the boat more versatile for the storage and deployment of tenders and watersports toys. The Johnson 65 came into being, joining a range which also includes a 42 and a 56, with a 72 soon to be launched.

The 65 itself has a medium-vee form, with a deadrise of 20° amidships flattening out to 16° at the stern. The bottom panels are convex, for stiffness and better head-sea performance, and have two sprayrails, plus a broad chine-flat with a pronounced down-angle.

The topsides have a considerable amount of flare over their whole length, which not only improves spray-deflection but, more significantly, gives the boat extra beam. The moderate-vee deadrise of the bottom sections already give more width at the waterline than the boat's deeper-vee rivals; the flare further increases this, giving the Johnson a beam of 19ft 0in (5.79m), compared to the 17ft 3in (5.25m) of an equivalent Fairline or Princess. This transforms the volume of the accommodation, permitting a more expansive, square saloon, and wider cabins.

Of course, there is a trade off. A wider beam means more power is required to push the boat along, and also adversely affects seakeeping in some ways. How the Johnson coped with this, we would find out in our delivery trip.

Accommodation

Many major British builders seem to believe that all boats must have an aft cockpit somewhere down near the waterline, which puts its occupants cheek-by-nostril to a couple of thousand horsepower of diesel and throws away massive accommodation potential — all the cabins have to be forward of the engineroom, smaller and closer together.

In contrast, the Johnson has an aft-cabin layout. The master cabin here is a huge full-width compartment, which even boasts its own nursery/study/utility room alongside.

There are plenty of other advantages to the arrangement. A clear 15ft of engineroom gives the owners privacy from the three guest cabins forward. Access to the engineroom is through a walk-in door from the lower lobby aft, rather than a crawl through the lazaret from the cockpit, which certainly encourages regular machinery checks on long passages. Finally, the extra space forward allows a double crew cabin to be located at the bow (although the 65 can be handled by just the owners, many will not wish to do so, and a captain or stewardess does not want to be living under the cockpit).

You enter the saloon from the aft deck, via steps down and a sliding door. To starboard is an eight-person settee with stowage underneath it, to port a large sideboard with ample locker space. From here, curved stairs lead down to the aft cabin, and two steps lead up forward to the galley, the helm position to starboard and a six-person dinette to port.

The joinery on our test boat was in maple throughout, either solid or veneer, straight grain and burr or bird's-eye. This is a £12,500 extra; teak, oak or ash being the standard options. The quality was superb, as we have come to expect from the craftsmen from the best Taiwanese yards.

The interior design on this boat is by Carolyn Holmes of London, and the services of her design studio will be part of the standard package for all Johnson 65 owners, allowing them to customise the

Above: the galley is open-plan between the interior helm and the saloon, with space for a domestic-sized fridge/freezer. Below left: one of the guest cabins is so big that room has been found for a third bunk. Below: the master toilet compartment is a veritable hall of mirrors.

What's this? A third helm position, no less, secreted in the deckhouse wing on the aft deck for use when manoeuvring astern.

interior in a way that few rival makes can offer.

On this boat the galley was open-plan, extensively equipped and with ample worktop area. Alternative layouts allow for a separate galley down below, in place of one of the cabins, for owners with crews and extensive entertaining requirements.

The helm station has a single command seat facing a well laid-out and fully-equipped L-shaped console. Engine instruments and navigation equipment are ahead of the helmsman, while to his right is a vast electrical distribution panel with breakers, ready-use switches and warning lights for all the DC circuits.

One of many examples of Johnson's safety-conscious approach is the bilge-pumping arrangements. The boat is divided into three watertight compartments, each of which contains two electric pumps and one manual. One set of warning lights on the panel indicates when a pump is running, while a further set indicates when there is a high water level in any compartment. So should a pump fail, or any damage be severe enough that the pumps cannot cope, you will be alerted.

A similarly impressive AC panel is located alongside the stairs down to the forward accommodation.

Here, each of the three guest cabins has its own WC. The forward VIP cabin has a central double berth, lockers and drawers, plus a remarkable 7ft 6in (2.30m) headroom. The other two have twin berths, and just to demonstrate how much room there is up here, the UK importers have added a third berth in one of them.

The double cabin's en-suite facilities include a PAR electric toilet and a separate shower stall. Extractor fans are a welcome feature in the toilet compartments throughout the boat, as are the doors in front of the portlights, either closing them off for privacy in a busy marina or letting in a welcoming stream of light.

Rolling back the carpet in the VIP cabin reveals a superb teak-and-holly sole that it seems a shame to cover up. A hatch gives excellent access to many of the plumbing services and pipework, including the Rule electric bilge pump, with its two float-switches, the shower sump tank, the freshwater tank, the WC holding tank and the macerator pump. Also located here is the extra 500gal fuel tank, which has sight-gauges and, pleasingly, automatic shut-off valves to prevent leaks. We were impressed by the flexible pipework, all heavy-duty reinforced rubber rather than the clear PVC tubing we so often find.

Back at the aft end of the boat, a lobby area at the bottom of the stairs has doors to the master cabin, the engineroom, the laundry closet and a mystery room, whose function is limited only by the imagination of the owners; it could be a child's bedroom, a utility room or even a study, but again it demonstrates the amount of space on board.

Similarly, the master cabin is huge, with ample headroom and storage space. Its en-suite toilet compartment to starboard has a separate shower stall, but could incorporate a bath if required.

Engines

Power options range from a pair of 735hp Detroit Diesels, through 900hp Detroits and 1000hp MTUs, to 1100hp MANs. Depending on your choice, maximum speed is 25-33 knots. Our test boat had the 900hp 12V92TA Detroits, in standard form, though DDEC electronic engine management is available with these.

As you enter the under-saloon engineroom, you quickly get the feeling that this is going to be a good installation. The three-quarter-height door from the aft lobby feels solid, with double-thickness sound insulation and double rubber seals. Headroom inside varies from 5ft (1.50m) to 6ft (1.80m), with a good rubber non-slip surface on the boards beneath your feet. Well-placed handrails and stanchions help you move around, and they have insulated sleeves over them to prevent you grabbing hot metal.

The fuel system is an engineer's dream, with everything mounted on the aft bulkhead for ease of access. Double Racor filters for each engine and generator, with changeover valves, allow you to clean one filter without shutting down the engine. A fuel manifold allows you to switch suction and return for each engine from either tank. A most unusual feature is a row of vacuum gauges on each fuel supply line, to measure the pressure in the lines. If a filter should start to block, the pressure in the line will drop, giving advance warning of a problem.

Access to sternglands, seawater inlets and filters is excellent. Water pumps, air-conditioning units and generators are easy to reach.

The DC electrics are of particular note. Each engine has two 200Ah 12V batteries, making a 200Ah 24V system; domestic services are powered by a further two 200Ah cells; the bow-thruster and stern-thruster (yes, we did say stern-thruster) each have their own dedicated 200Ah 24V banks, mounted close to them to avoid power-drop down the cables; and, finally, each generator has its own 120Ah 12V starter battery.

The main exhausts exit underwater, with massive GRP silencers in the lines. In addition there are bypass outlets to take the exhaust out through the transom at low speeds, to avoid problems with back-pressure, and these also have silencers.

The fire-extinguishing system shuts down the main engines and generators in the event of a blaze.

In all, it is an engineroom of the highest standard, one styled on a small ship rather than a motoryacht.

Deck

The Johnson's aft deck is laid teak, to a high standard, its side decks GRP. Some 12in (300mm)

Night & day

Our passage-plan for a delivery trip on the Johnson 65 took us from Shamrock Quay in Southampton to Chelsea Harbour in London, a distance of approximately 190 miles. In early October, it would be light from around 0600 to 1900, so at an average speed of around 20 knots, we should make it in daylight if we started at dawn.

Our skipper was Robert Avis, Operations Director of Johnson Yachts UK, who had been intending to do the journey with just his brother as crew until we hitched a ride.

We knew in advance that a prompt start would be essential, as we would be punching the tide up the Thames, making for a long last leg, and one we definitely did not want to do in the dark. The first change of plan came the evening before, when air-draught calculations showed that it would be touch-and-go getting under Westminster and Albert bridges in London except at low water; this meant we had to arrive by around 1500, and a dawn start made this chancy, so Robert opted to leave at midnight.

The first leg would now be in darkness, and hence at reduced speed, but these were familiar waters, visibility was forecast good, and there were three watchkeepers available.

Robert ran through the safety procedures on board, showing us the location of the fire-extinguishers, escape hatches, lifejackets and liferaft. He also pointed out a few less obvious things, such as the switch for the main saloon lights, located just where you would lean when looking over the chart table and just waiting to flood the helm position with unwanted glare. Finally we went through the routine check procedures to be carried out every hour: engineroom, steering gear, sterngear, cabin checks and bilges.

Getting underway was so simple, the bow and stern thrusters easing us out effortlessly from the pontoon. Moving off down Southampton Water, we picked up speed to 10 knots, which was to be our night-time cruising speed.

Once clear of the Solent, two of us turned in. We soon discovered that some quirk of resonance made the bedhead of the port guest cabin, up against the engineroom bulkhead, one of the noisiest spots on board!

At least, if you are woken with a shake, the dimmer-switch for the bedside lights enables you to move about without disturbing another sleeper. But not so good is the electric toilet, whose grinding banshee wail nullifies that particular benefit; vacuflush toilets would seem a better bet. Also we encountered a common problem on planing boats, with the forward toilet failing to suck in flushing water when the boat was at speed.

Back upstairs, we immediately announced our presence by leaning against the aforementioned lightswitch. Even worse, however, was that the display of warning lights on the DC electrical panel alongside the helm, about which we had been so complimentary in the daylight, was now dazzling in its brightness. The short-term solution was a towel draped over the panel; a more permanent answer would be a dimmer-switch for these.

Meanwhile, the boat was slipping along easily before a moderate sea, with the autopilot coping well. Visibility from the helm position was good, especially aft, where it is often restricted on a large boat such as this. We were less happy with the tinted windscreens, which had their usual dimming effect on the lights of other ships.

Walking aft to carry out our routine checks, we immediately renewed our acquaintance with the two steps down to the saloon. These should be marked, or fitted with a handrail alongside to warn you to hold on (in fact, for regular long passagemaking, more grabrails should be provided throughout the boat). Likewise, red lights under the stair treads would have been useful as we made our way down to the aft lobby.

However, to balance this, the engineroom itself has a door-operated switch, so that the lights inside come on automatically as you enter. It is such a simple idea, yet so useful. Also essential were the ear-defenders hung outside the door. Inside, all the systems are easily accessible, including the fuel line vacuum gauges; how reassuring it is to know you would be able to spot a filter blockage early.

Inspection of the steering gear is carried out by lifting out a panel alongside the bedhead in the master cabin. As we groped around in here for leaks, we realised that the bare terminals we had nearly touched were on the back of the AC domestic sockets in the face of the panel, and would be live if the generator was running — not a healthy state of affairs.

Back up at the helm, we settled down and waited for dawn. At 0600 Beachy Head was abeam, and the black seas were turning grey. It was time to open up the throttles to 20 knots.

At this speed, the autopilot was less happy. The heading was swinging up to 20° to either side on occasions, in what are still only moderate quartering seas. Raising the trim-tabs brought the bow up slightly and improved matters. One plus point we noted was that very few exhaust fumes were being sucked back into the saloon, as is often the problem when there is a following wind.

Breakfast meant it was time to start the generator and fire up the sophisticated combination grill/microwave/oven to make some toast. There was an immediate problem: the oven will operate only if its clock is set, and the clock cancels every time the power is cut. Resetting it involved detailed scrutiny of the instruction manual! Apart from a simpler oven, the galley could do with something to brace yourself against, and a warning not to bang your forehead against the overhead lockers.

Passing Dover at 0830, we were up on the flybridge watching the ferries safely criss-crossing our path, while the skipper had the helm below. On the horizon we see the spray of an approaching hovercraft, travelling at about 45 knots. Subconsciously, we eased the throttles forward to get out of its way, just as the man down below did the same. After a few minutes we started to think maybe we were not going to make it, again a millisecond before he did the same. We shut down the throttles, to be on the safe side, and altered course so that Dover Harbour Control knew we had seen the problem.

The leg round to the Thames was largely uneventful. There was a thump as we hit a semisubmerged bread basket off Margate, but no apparent damage.

We swept majestically under Tower Bridge, waving regally to the tourists. Then it was nail-biting time as we gauged our height under the bridges. Woolwich Control did not help matters by warning of height restrictions due to scaffolding under some of the arches.

As we closed on Westminster Bridge, with the flood tide underneath us, the crewmember with the most inland waterways experience earned his keep by climbing onto the radar arch and expertly predicting the necessary clearance above our mast. We got through with at least one metre to spare.

Ultimately, it was not air draught that was the problem. As we reached the waiting pontoon outside Chelsea Harbour, the skipper was informed that the 19ft 6in maximum breadth of the entrance lock does not take into account the 6in of the door mechanism which projects at gunwale level. We beat a hasty retreat to our waiting taxi, leaving him wondering whether that extra-wide 19ft beam really is such a good idea.

wide, the latter have a 3in (75mm) gunwale lip and 3ft (900mm) high guardrails all round, with a lower stainless steel wire. The hinge-down gangway sections amidships are neat, but strong.

Forward, you find a very clever fender stowage, made of hinged stainless steel tubing, which lifts up when the fenders are in it, but drops down out of the way when they are taken out for use.

Massive 15in (375mm) stainless steel bollards, four on each side, take care of mooring. Anchoring is handled by a stainless steel Danforth in a stemhead fitting. We were impressed by the chain stopper, but less so by the chain locker, which is roomy and deep, with two hatches, but has no floor, and no bulkhead to separate chain from ropes.

Also up on the foredeck is the hatch giving access to the crew's quarters. These are compact but sufficient, with two single berths, full headroom, a shower and toilet, and would be ideal for obstreperous kids.

The aft deck, dominated by the flybridge overhang, has plenty of space for removable seating around a table, plus transom benches with stowage underneath. Hatches in the deckhouse wings open to reveal a freshwater and saltwater deckwash, the engine fuel cut-offs (located on their respective sides but unmarked, which could be misleading in an emergency) and, to port, a third helm position, useful when stern-to docking, and simple to install with the Microcommander controls fitted to the 65.

Also here are controls for the bow and stern thrusters. The value of bow thrusters are beginning to be appreciated by experienced skippers, but stern-thrusters are a definite novelty. However, they are just as useful on a vessel of this size, especially if cruising shorthanded.

A staircase to port leads up to the flybridge, with its full complement of settees and loungers, plus a wet-bar and icemaker. On a more practical level, the helm console is fully-equipped, with duplicates of most of the instruments down below, including the bilge-pump indicators.

At the stern is a huge bathing platform, with room to stow a tender or personal watercraft, which can be launched using the hydraulic passerelle.

Handling & performance

We carried out our performance trials in Southampton Water, on a day when the sea was calm and the vessel at half-load condition (bear in mind that our test boat was fully equipped, with two generators, air-conditioning, watermaker and so on, which brought its displacement up from the basic 32 tonnes to an estimated 35 tonnes). We then filled up with fuel and water for the passage round to London, on which there was enough of a chop to get a good feel of the 65's capabilities.

Our radar gun measured a straight-line maximum of 26 knots. At this speed, the manufacturers' estimated fuel consumption for the 900hp Detroits is 80gph (362lph), giving a consumption of 0.33mpg, and range with a 20% fuel reserve of 325 miles. Dropping back to 23 knots improves these figures to 55gph (249lph), 0.41mpg, and 410 miles, while at our cruising speed of 19 knots the figures are 40gph (181lph), 0.48mpg, and 477 miles respectively.

How slow a boat can go may not seem an important consideration, but vessels of this size and type may spend long periods in restricted channels, so the tickover speed of their big diesels is significant. The slowest we could record with both engines in gear was 6.8 knots, which is probably too high. To get below this, you would have to drop one engine into neutral. The alternative is to specify gearboxes with trolling valves, which give a limited slip to the clutches at slow speeds.

Noise levels through most of the boat were excellent, registering a maximum of 75dB(A) in the saloon, but those in the master cabin were too high for comfort at speed, reaching 91dB(A); it was not clear whether this was caused either by propeller noise or exhaust. For anyone out on deck and on the flybridge, the underwater silencers do their job very well, muffling the bark of the two-stroke engines.

Conclusions

The Johnson 65 is a worthy challenger in the motoryacht market, its interior finish the equal of most of its rivals and its engineering better in many ways.

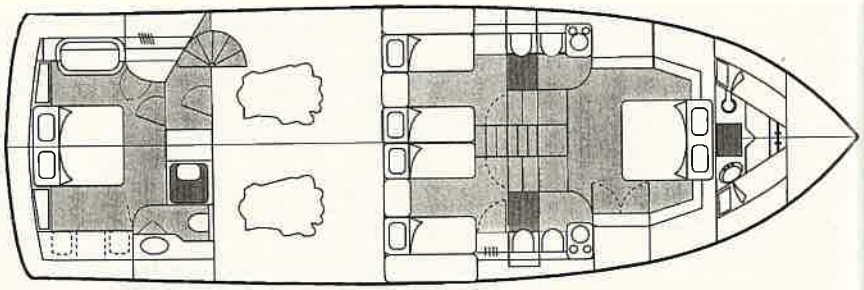
The extra space created by the aft-cabin layout puts it well ahead of most in the amount of accommodation it offers, and the price reflects its level of equipment. A clincher for many will be that you can use Johnson's interior design service to customise the interior styling to your own taste. □

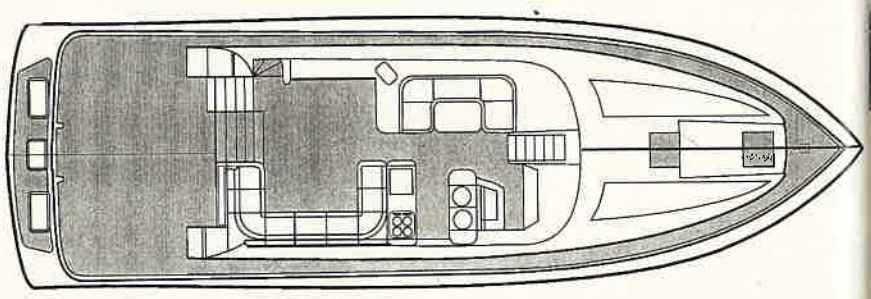
Builders

Johnson Yachts, 15 Hsin Yeh Road, Ta-Fa District, Koahsiung Hsien, Taiwan. Tel: (886) 07 7872005.

Suppliers

Johnson Yachts UK, 141 Kensington Church Street, London W8 7LP. Tel: 0171 221 9777.





Johnson 65

Engines twin Detroit Diesel 12V-71As, 900hp at 2300rpm, 12cyl, 13.97lt.

Conditions wind N Force 3-4, sea slight. *Load* fuel 75%, water 50%, crew 4.

							sound levels dB(A)				
rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range*	trim	saloon	aftcab	fwdcab	ckpt	flybg
1000	10.1	—	—	—	—	1.0	63	69	64	73	59
1200	11.0	14.0	64	0.79	785	1.5	69	78	68	75	62
1400	12.4	20.8	94	0.60	596	2.5	69	79	69	77	67
1600	14.9	29.0	132	0.51	514	3.5	70	82	71	78	67
1800	19.0	39.8	181	0.48	477	4.0	72	85	75	80	68
2000	22.5	54.8	249	0.41	410	4.0	75	89	78	84	70
2200	25.9	79.6	362	0.33	325	4.0	75	91	79	86	74

Acceleration 0-20 knots, 13.1sec (*allows 20% margin)

Loa
65ft 0in (19.80m)

Beam
19ft 0in (5.79m)

Draught
5ft 0in (1.52m)

Air draught
19ft 8in (6.00m)

Displacement
32-35 tonnes

Fuel capacity
1250gal (5675lt)

Water capacity
425gal (1925lt)

Price
from £650,000 ex VAT; £835,000 as tested