

Kingfisher

Sport 31

A solidly built fast-fisher modified into a flybridge cruiser, this capable boat is full of potential for the customising buyer.



Most of the boats we test have been designed and built specifically for the leisure market. But this one is something of a departure from the norm, having an exclusively workboat pedigree.

The yard of Kingfisher Boats in Falmouth is best known for its strong, well-proven displacement-style fishing boats. However, with the addition to the range of a faster planing hull a few years back, for the Fastcatch 31, they saw the opportunity to build a craft that would appeal to cruising folk too.

We went to Cornwall to spend a day at the yard and take out the very first Sport 31, in some testing conditions outside the Fal Estuary.

Design & layout

Fishermen want plenty of deck space and load-carrying capacity coupled with comfortable seakeeping, but without being restricted on speed. To this end, the 31's underwater sections incorporate a tunnel for the single shaft, helping to keep the decks flush, and (on single-engined versions) a full keel complete with a shoe extension to support the lower rudder bearing and protect the propeller.

The hull has quite a deep vee of around 22° amidships, and the underwater sections all carry some curvature, which tends to minimise uncomfortable slamming.

Designer John Moxham has also been quite canny when it comes to maximising hydrodynamic lift aft, introducing a slight downturn and flattening of the sections quite well forward of the transom, so that the hull will plane easily and ride level but without pushing the bow down.

Check out a hull in construction, and it is immediately apparent why Kingfisher's commercial customers have every confidence in the product. An already hefty lay-up is cross-hatched with myriad top-hat stiffeners, the likes and the size of

which we have rarely seen in a 31-footer. All the yard's hulls come with a Sea Fish Authority Hull Certificate, and the same amount of material will go into vessels destined for the leisure market.

For the cruising version of the boat, Moxham has designed a new, fuller superstructure, complete with a flybridge. Even so, thanks to

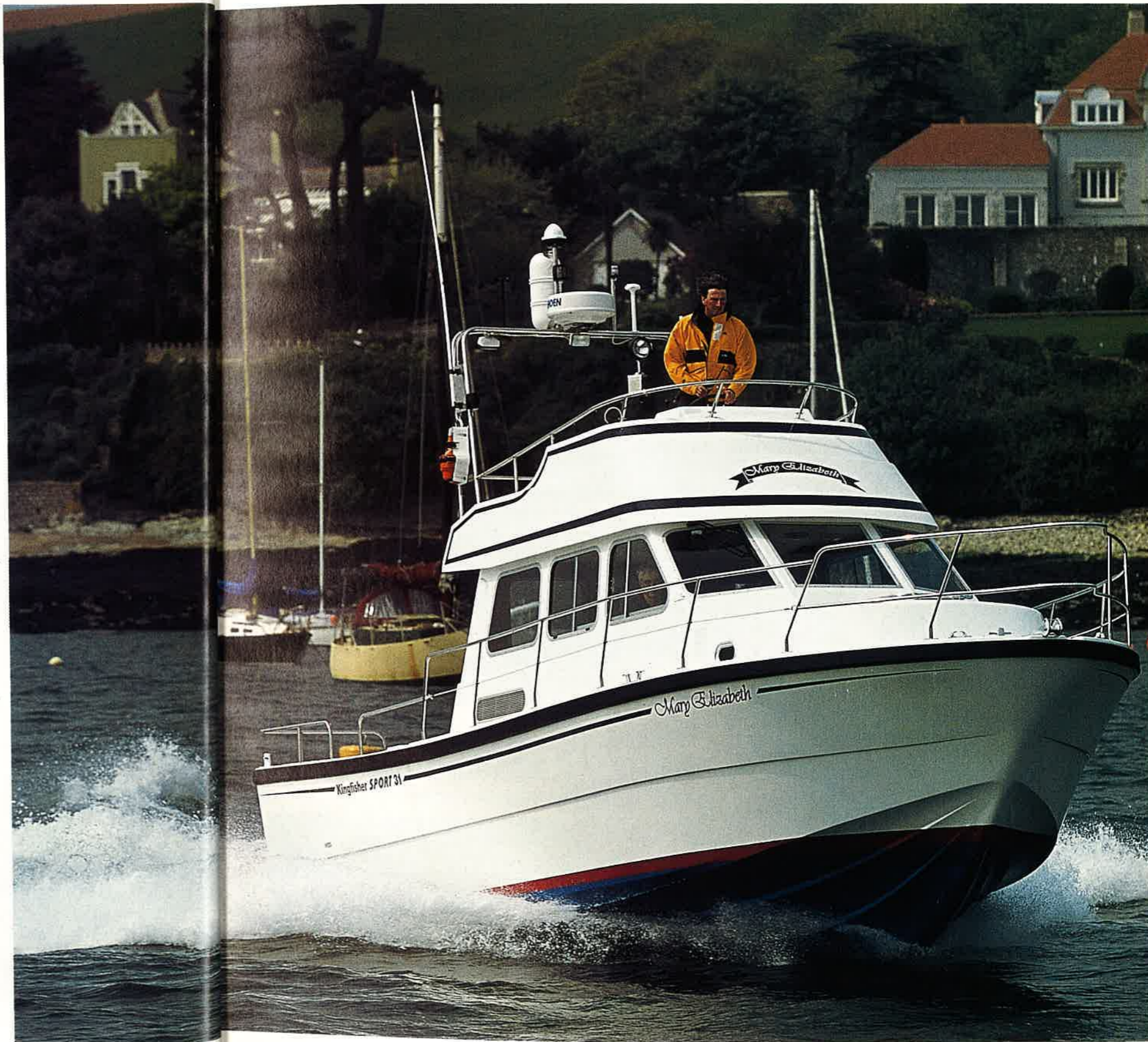
a generous 12ft beam, there is still a huge amount of clear deck space aft, which can either be customised with built-in seating or left clear for the serious sports-fisherman.

Indeed, customisation options extend right through the 31, and Kingfisher's proprietor Ron Coote and his team are happy to build and incorporate just about

anything that a buyer wants.

Our test boat was destined for the local Maritime College, and was a little more spartan than many would like. But the standard fit-out will be quite different, for example with more exterior seating and a fully moulded toilet compartment complete with a shower tray.

The accommodation we



encountered boasted a large wheelhouse/saloon area with an extended galley worksurface to take the College's test equipment, and a forward cabin with the WC adjacent. With some thoughtful rejigging, including slightly reducing the galley area, it should be possible to incorporate a further midships cabin, utilising the large void beneath the saloon sole.

Almost any engine configuration can be accommodated, but at the top end the builders recommend a pair of 310hp Perkins-Sabre diesels for a twin installation (in which case the keel is reduced in size), or a 420hp Cummins if it is to be a single engine. Our test boat had the latter option.

Performance & handling

There is little more frustrating, when testing what looks like a good sea boat, than to find sea conditions as flat as a pancake. Fortunately, a strong southwesterly breeze had pushed up a confused steep-sided sea just off the entrance to the Fal, although within the estuary itself we still found shelter enough to complete our performance runs.

Nudging out from the marina

Flybridge

The ladder from the cockpit to the flybridge is to be modified on subsequent boats so that it is slightly less steep, with a measure of curvature incorporated to make it more of a feature.

Up top, the coaming is a good depth and topped with guardrails, so that, even though this is only a 31-footer, you feel



very much 'in' rather than simply 'on' the flybridge. Built into the coaming are a number of handy cave lockers.

There will be plenty of room up here, even when it is fitted out with seating. The plan is to have a double seat at the helm plus a bench built across the aft railings, so that the whole crew can face forward. But the console moulding itself incorporates a small seat on

each side, giving people a chance to cluster around the helm if desired.

We liked the seriousness of the controls, with the larger than average wheel and twin-lever throttles. The top of the console is flat, making it a handy spot to put down a pilot book or chart, although a fiddle to help keep things in situ would not come amiss. There is sufficient space to add electronic navigation aids.

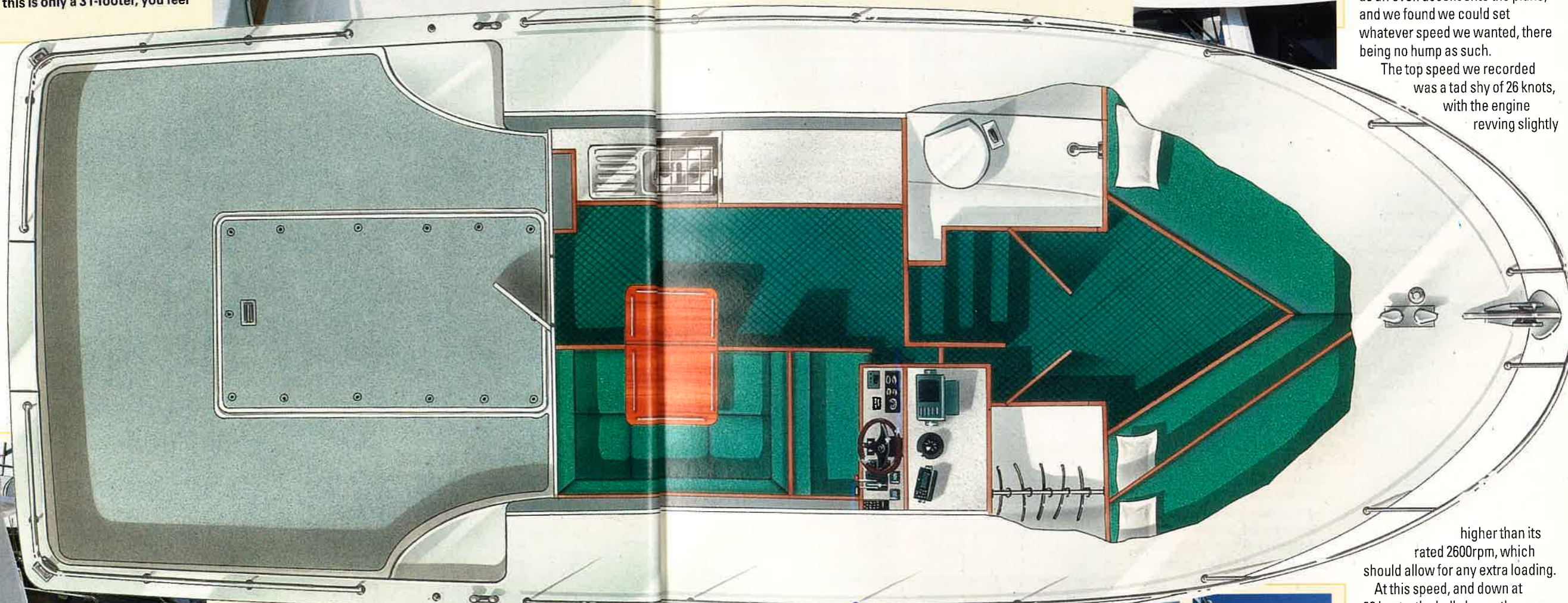


quickly confirmed that there is plenty of boat in the water to help counteract the fair bulk of hull and superstructure, which would otherwise be vulnerable to any crosswind that is going.

Our subsequent low-speed passage past the moorings necessitated the minimum of work on the wheel, as the keel kept us on track.

Once clear of the speed limit, the hull lived up to its promise by giving us an even ascent onto the plane, and we found we could set whatever speed we wanted, there being no hump as such.

The top speed we recorded was a tad shy of 26 knots, with the engine revving slightly



Cockpit

The cockpit, which extends the full beam of the vessel, takes up no less than a third of the boat's overall length, 10ft 6in (3.2m) if it to be precise. It was left completely clear on our test boat, but future buyers will have the 'standard' option of L-shaped seating around both

quarters, complete with underseat lockers.

On later boats, too, the large transom door will lead out onto a teak and stainless steel bathing platform. And the builders will be happy to incorporate similar doors in the rail-adorned topsides, to allow easy access straight from the pontoon when alongside.

The large, dogged-down,

watertight hatch in the sole does not reveal a lazaret as we first supposed, but is there to facilitate major engine repairs should they ever prove

necessary. Hence, the main on-deck stowage is going to be in the seat-bases, while the gas-bottle locker is tucked into the port coaming.



Decks

From the cockpit, there are moulded steps up to the side decks, which at 16in (40cm) wide are easy and safe to walk along. Even so, it would have been nice to find an inboard handrail to augment the guardrail; the yard say they are going to address this.

Up at the bow, there is a bow roller feeding through to an integral chain locker, but an anchor winch has to be specified as an extra, and there is no foredeck hatch.

Deck hardware comprises a no-nonsense bollard forward, plus midships and stern cleats of the 11in (28cm) variety.



higher than its rated 2600rpm, which should allow for any extra loading.

At this speed, and down at 22 knots, the hull shares the slightly twitchy characteristics that are inherent in practically all fast craft with large keels. This is not a problem as such, simply something to be aware of. The Kingfisher was happy to be put through hard turns and thrown around without becoming over-sensitive; unlike a straightforward vee-bottom boat, which leans characteristically inwards, the keel kept it pretty upright.

Between 2200rpm and 2400rpm is where the hull will be happiest when it comes to passagemaking, clearly capable of keeping on

going at 19-22 knots through pretty well anything — and, what is more, in comfort.

The 31 lived up to the builders' promise by offering an exceptionally soft ride in what was a messy, awkward sea. Even when we pushed it rather harder than one might like on one occasion, and became airborne, it landed without any degree of slamming or complaint.

Due to the conditions on the day, and the fact that the flybridge helm seat had yet to be fitted, we did most our driving from the interior helm. From here you get good visibility all round, although with the amount of water flying about it would have been advantageous to have more than just the one wiper fitted.

Noise levels were on the high side, not least because of the fairly cavernous, drum-like spaces of the engineroom and midships lazaret, which had yet to be finished with sound insulation. This should be improved upon in later craft.

Back in tickover, that is 700rpm, we trolled back to the berth at a steady 4.5 knots, so no nudging in and out of gear will be necessary to keep down to a speed limit. As for close-quarters manoeuvring, the boat answers wheel and throttle sharply enough but is quite hefty and beamy; to make life easier, you might want to consider specifying a bow-thruster.

Conclusions

The Kingfisher 31 is clearly not your run-of-the-mill production boat. But if you are looking for



Saloon

A wheelhouse-type door, rather than a sliding patio affair, gives access from the cockpit through into the open-plan saloon, with its galley and interior helm position. Headroom inside is most adequate at 6ft 3in (1.91m).

Since the owners need plenty of room for people to move about, the central walk-through between galley and dinette has been kept as wide as possible on our test boat, so the latter's seating is a bit pinched. But there is sufficient space to specify it slightly larger and more comfortable, and we would expect other buyers to do so.

The voids within the seat-bases have cut-outs to make them into lockers, although it would have been nice to have found these surfaces slightly better finished, and either painted or varnished.

The solidly built teak-faced joinery is otherwise well executed — a good example being the table, finished with sensible fiddles and engineered to drop to form an extra berth.



Galley

On our test boat, the galley was more expansive than most prospective owners might specify, being fitted out to maximise the available countertop for the Maritime College's computer equipment. That said, crews will

appreciate the space this layout affords, both in terms of usable worksurface and the myriad drawers and cupboards beneath. A few smaller cave lockers is all we would add.

Appointments include a combined hob and oven, a single-drainer sink and a large fridge/freezer. Ventilation is provided by an opening port.



Forward cabin

Our test boat had the forecabin arranged with lengthy 6ft 10in (2.10m) bunks to starboard, plus a slightly shorter single berth across the way. This is all well and good, but the very limited headroom between the lower and upper bunk would need to be addressed if the former is to be used in earnest.

Stowage is down to a hanging locker and the voids beneath the bunk bases, which, as with the saloon lockers, would benefit from some finishing.

Even with three berths, the cabin is pretty roomy, and enjoys plenty of headroom.



Toilet

To port, the toilet compartment is a good size, with ventilation via an opening port.

On our test boat it still lacked the final moulding, which will incorporate a shower tray and a basin complete with stowage underneath.



Interior helm

The saloon helm position is really a one-plus-one rather than a full two-seater, in so much as there is room for one person to sit, while the other perches. The seating position might also be a little tight to the wheel if you are long-limbed, but the controls are well placed.

An angled fascia gives a good view of the engine gauges, and has room for quite a few smaller instrument heads. Larger pieces of electronics can either be mounted on the flat area in front of the screen or overhead.

Set behind a knee-height panel are the circuit-breakers, while the main battery switches are tucked down in one of the dinette's seat lockers.

Engineroom

For day-to-day checks and servicing, access to the engine is simply a matter of easing down through a hatch in the saloon sole and making your way through the large midships lazaret, which contains the calorifier and water tank.

In the compartment itself, there is ample crawling space round the engine and room enough to get at all the main service items — front, back, top and sides. The raw-water strainer is actually at the far side from the entrance, which means squeezing round the 'donkey', but then you need to make your way down to the aft bulkhead in any case to check the primary fuel filter.

Outboard lie the fuel tanks, unusually made of GRP (with a



special modified resin base) rather than alloy or stainless steel. Also here are the battery boxes, while the steering gear is safely protected but still accessible.

The installation appeared robust in the extreme. On our test boat the compartment had yet to be finished off with any sound insulation, but it was flowcoated; even after some scrabbling around on hands and knees we came out unscathed, so the builders have done a conscientious job of removing snaggy GRP.

For any serious maintenance work, the cockpit sole incorporates a large watertight hatch.



something on the small side, but nevertheless built to cover credible distances without being upset by the weather, then it is worth a closer look.

There is no mistaking that this is a well-found craft, with an extremely capable hull. Some aspects of the fit-out have yet to be tweaked to give a polished overall impression, but we have little doubt that these will be completed in the same robust but well executed manner as the rest of the boat.

If the thought of having just a single engine is worrying, it is worth noting that this is the norm for most of the boats ordered by the fishing fraternity, who work their boats harder in a week than most of us do in a year. Furthermore, with the extra room this leaves below decks, it allows very real potential to squeeze in a midships cabin.

There is no doubting the seakindliness of the hull, and the soft ride it offers when it comes to pushing on through touch-and-go conditions. And when conditions are more friendly there is the potential for a better than semi-displacement turn of speed, even if you have to watch for that usual keel-induced tenderness when giving the engine its head. We suspect that a twin-engined 31, with less of a keel, is likely to get round this.

Overall, this is a boat to be trusted, with a less glitzy fit-out than we are used to from mainstream leisure boat builders, but still with every convenience and a useful amount of space. □

BUILD

glass-reinforced plastic

RECREATIONAL CRAFT DIRECTIVE

Design Category B: Offshore (offshore voyages in wind up to Force 8) to be confirmed

DIMENSIONS

LOA

31ft 0in (9.45m)

HULL LENGTH

31ft 0in (9.45m)

BEAM

12ft 0in (3.66m)

DRAUGHT

3ft 1in (0.98m)

AIR DRAUGHT

11ft 6in (3.50m)

DISPLACEMENT

5.4 tons

FUEL CAPACITY

200gal (910lt)

WATER CAPACITY

50gal (227lt)

ENGINE

Cummins Diamond 6CTA8.3-M2 6cyl 8.3lt diesel 420hp at 2600rpm

PRICE

£151,390 inc VAT as standard

BUILDERS

Kingfisher Boats, Bickland Industrial Park, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 4TA. Tel: 01326 377200.



Kingfisher Sport 31

PERFORMANCE & FUEL CONSUMPTION sound levels dB(A)

rpm	knots#	gph†	lph†	mpg†	range*	trim	saloon	flybridge	cockpit
1200	7.3	2.0	9	3.65	584	0.5	76	76	86
1600	8.7	4.4	20	1.98	319	3.5	79	79	87
1800	12.2	6.6	30	1.85	296	5.0	79	79	88
2000	15.1	8.6	39	1.76	281	6.0	80	80	88
2200	18.8	10.7	49	1.76	281	6.0	80	80	88
2400	22.1	12.8	58	1.73	277	5.5	82	80	90
2600	24.3	15.6	71	1.56	250	5.0	82	82	91
2750	25.9	19.3	88	1.34	214	5.0	84	83	93

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

CONDITIONS wind southwesterly Force 4, sea slight

LOAD fuel 50%, water 100%, crew 4