

Larson

Cabrio 777 & 857

Which of these two budget-conscious sportscruisers works best?

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PHOTOS: WILLIAM PAYNE

The brief...



Larson's latest Cabrios are just about the most economic way of getting yourself on the water in a brand new sportscruiser. But which boat really offers the best value? **Nick**

CABRIO 777 LOA: 25ft 6in (7.77m)

PRICE: from £68,704

TOP SPEED: 36 knots

CABRIO 857 LOA: 28ft 11in (8.57m)

PRICE: from £76,067

TOP SPEED: 35 knots

BUILDERS: Larson Boats

ENQUIRIES Tel: 01932 242977

www.gibbsmarine.co.uk

CABRIO 857

Sixteen thousand pounds. That's how much you'd save buying Larson's new Cabrio 777 over the Sea Ray 260 we tested back in October. But is the budget sportscruiser a credible alternative to premium offerings, or would you be better off upgrading to Larson's larger sister boat for a few thousand more? We head to Gibbs Marine in Poole to find out.

A bright and breezy October morning finds us climbing all over Larson's brand new Cabrio 777 and Cabrio 857. The family resemblance is

more identical twin than sibling similarity. Both sport the same crisp modern styling and distinctive kick back line to the base of the windscreen. Narrow, sharp engine vents echo the design of the cabin windows, the distinctive edgy shapes made possible by Larson's new vacuum moulding. Visually, only the 857's optional radar arch sets them apart.

On their transoms, neat aft-facing bench seats offer a great place to chill out, and the blue bands on the hulls add a touch of class – these don't look like budget boats. Step

on board and the similarities continue. The standard fit cockpit wet bar is the same on both, but the 857 gains a fridge instead of a carry-on cool box. The helm positions are identical. The only obvious difference is the 857's extra cockpit space. It has a C-shaped seating area instead of two opposing bench seats.

Down below, the layouts are similarly hard to separate and quite conventional. A converting dinette forward, galley to port, heads to starboard and a crawl-in mid cabin all look the same, they even share the same galley unit. The

857 simply offers that bit more space, though it is hard to actually find where that bit is.

Neat touches common to both include dinette backrests that detach to make the double berth infill, dedicated storage in the mid cabin for the cockpit table and sun cushions while the well-equipped galley sports a double-burner hob, microwave and, unusually, a standard fit coffee maker.

Bar the sombre grey plastic finish to the galley and dinette table, the interiors look good. Light neutral colours accentuate the

"You won't confuse either boat for generic sportscruisers"



CABRIO 777



COCKPIT FORWARD

"Aft-facing bench seats offer a great place to chill out"



777 AFT COCKPIT



777 COOL BOX



857 AFT COCKPIT



857 WET BAR

Exteriors

The styling is crisp and modern

The aft-facing transom seat is an attractive and fun feature on both boats. The 857 has

the better cockpit specification with more seating and a wet bar fridge. Both boats though feature aft seats that fold flat against the coaming for water sports, fishing or just more space. Pop-up fender cleats are a nice detail and while through-the-screen access is the only way to the foredeck, chunky handrails aid progress.

From the helm

Identical twin helms with lots of support

Clear and well arranged with plenty of space and a large flat panel for an 8in chartplotter right in front of the helmsman where it's needed. The adjustable seat, lift-up bolster, adjustable steering wheel and angled foot plate allow for a personal and supportive driving position. The throttle and trim tab controls are also thoughtfully located.



HELM



FORWARD CABIN



STOWAGE



HEADS

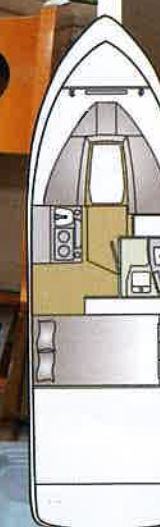
Interiors

Detail and light give a welcome lift

Conventionally laid out but with some useful features, such as infill cushions that integrate into the dinette backrests (saving on stowage) and the standard fit coffee maker in the galley. The deep floor section at the galley gives great headroom. Look closely, though, and fit and finish can reflect the budget status of these boats.



MID CABIN AND GALLEY



LOOKING AFT



"It responds instantly to the throttle"

CABRIO 777



Performance & handling

We're on board the 777 first. The MerCruiser 350 Magnum burbles quietly as we slip gently through Poole Harbour in convoy with the 857. It's here we notice a neat trick: at 2,500rpm with the leg trimmed right in and a little help from the tabs, the 777 will actually plane at just 10 knots, surfing past the Sandbanks ferry and out into the Channel. The driving position is excellent – with the lift-up bolster raised, the helmsman can wedge himself against the angled footplate, secure and in control.

With a good force four gusting six, we have the conditions to find out whether that budget experience extends to the drive. The 777



CABRIO 857



responds instantly to the throttle, surging forward with vigour. We're beating out through a confused sea as we blast through the wash of the 857 in a huge plume of spray which the gusty wind hurls straight back at us.

The 777 cuts through the water with the incisive thrust of a deep vee hull – the only problem is that it seems to be digging in a little too deep at high speed, the nose burying itself into the taller, rolling swell. In fairness, the average weekend cruiser would be unlikely to be attacking the churning sea quite as vigorously as we are. But as we duck under another sheet of solid spray, there's no doubt that we're having a very wet ride.

Swapping over to the 857 is a revelation. With

the same engine, it's a little slower onto the plane and it doesn't double back on itself after a handful of lock with quite the same eager enthusiasm. However, it feels so well-balanced, riding on the back foot and throwing spray out wide as we hurtle over the rolling swell at 30 knots, flying level and landing confidently.

This is a boat that exceeds the sum of its parts, any notion of budget boating banished in an instant. It feels planted, capable, solid and, dare we say it, expensive. Where the 777 warned us that we were pushing our luck, the 857 urges us on, flattening the sea and flattering the driver.

Later, as we scoot back through Poole Harbour, taking advantage of the winter speed de-restriction to catch the bridge lift, flying in formation at an illicit-feeling 20 knots, we reflect on what we've discovered.

The 777 does all that could reasonably be expected of a budget 26-footer: it's smart, quick and handles reasonably, provided you stay within its limits or are prepared for a soaking. But if ever there were a riposte to the age-old adage that "size doesn't matter", the 857 is it. That extra length beam and weight in an otherwise identical boat transforms "good enough" to "better than you'd dare hope".

Technical data

KEY DIMENSIONS

Cabrio 777

BUILD	GRP
RCD	C
LENGTH OVERALL	25ft 6in (7.77m)
BEAM	8ft 6in (2.59m)
DRAUGHT	2ft 11in (0.89m)
DISPLACEMENT	2.92 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	70gal (318lt)
WATER CAPACITY	15.8gal (72lt)
HEADROOM IN CABIN	6ft 11in (1.86m)
BERTH DINETTE	6ft x 5ft (1.83m x 1.52m)
BERTH MID CABIN	6ft 2in x 4ft (1.88m x 1.22m)

Cabrio 857

BUILD	GRP
RCD	C
LENGTH OVERALL	28ft 1in (8.57m)
BEAM	8ft 10in (2.69m)
DRAUGHT	3ft (0.91m)
DISPLACEMENT	3.32 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	70gal (318lt)
WATER CAPACITY	15.8gal (72lt)
HEADROOM IN CABIN	6ft 3in (1.91m)
BERTH DINETTE	6ft 4in x 5ft (1.93m x 1.52m)
BERTH MID CABIN	6ft 3in x 4ft (1.91m x 1.22m)

PERFORMANCE

ENGINE (BOTH BOATS)	MerCruiser 350 Magnum (300hp) with Bravo Three outdrive
CONFIGURATION	V8 5.7 litre petrol engine twin prop outdrive
CONDITIONS	WSW force four gusting six, sea state moderate to rough
LOAD	0% water 100% fuel 2 crew

Cabrio 777

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	LPH	MPG	RANGE
3,000	17	26	5.7	3.0	168
4,000	27	48	10.5	2.6	145
5,000	36	94	20.5	1.8	101

Cabrio 857

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	LPH	MPG	RANGE
3,000	16	26	5.7	2.8	157
4,000	26	48	10.5	2.5	140
5,000	35	94	20.5	1.7	95

Range figures quoted above are in miles based on standard fuel tanks and include a 20% margin. GPH & MPG refer to Imperial gallons. These figures may vary due to weather conditions, air, water, engine temperature, crew numbers, hull fouling, fuel quality and other issues.

PRICES

STANDARD BOAT INC VAT	777	857
MerCruiser 5.0I MPI B3	£68,704	N/A
MerCruiser 350 Magnum B3	£70,542	£76,067
MerCruiser 377 Magnum B3	£73,646	£85,170
MerCruiser 8.2 Magnum B3	N/A	£88,296
MerCruiser twin 4.3I	N/A	£87,445

BOAT AS TESTED

777 £79,293 857 £89,687

Specification & value

The 777 and 857 are affordable boats, but that doesn't mean they're basic. Both get the following features as standard: pop-up fender cleats, that lovely aft-facing transom seat,



cockpit wet bar, chunky handrails, double-burner hob, microwave, a coffee maker in the galley (see left), hot and cold pressurised water, sea toilet, and a stereo with cockpit remote control.

A £3,500 Convenience Package adds

a foredeck sunpad, electric anchor winch, remote control searchlight, and a rather cheap-looking set of cockpit carpets.

Add the Cockpit Camper Package, shore power, trim tabs and the few other essentials fitted to our test boat and you'll still be on the water in the 777 for under £80,000.

The folding arch you can see on the 857 is an option on either model. It costs around £5,000 and can be used for hanging the canopies or mounting a radar.

But we've saved the best until last. Like the idea of the budget 777 but want the grace, space and offshore pace of the larger, heavier and far more capable 857? Well, it will cost you just £5,500 extra. Unless you need to tow (the smaller boat just squeezes beneath UK towing width restrictions) or really want the additional handling agility, then it's a no-brainer.

BOAT REPORT

LARSON CABRIO 777 & 857



Engine bay

Engine hatches don't open as wide as we'd like, but once in there, access is good to the 350 Mag fitted to both boats. Some odd details preside in the bay, such as the already peeling tape around the fuel tank and the strangely sited float switch for the electric bilge pump – the pump is in the right place beneath the engine, but the water level would need to be 6in deep before it activated.

Meet the family



BIGGER

Larson Cabrio 927 from £133,229
LOA 30ft 5in (9.27m)

Similar styling to the smaller Cabrios, but larger size allows separate double berth forward, increasing sleeping accommodation to six.

THE VERDICT

Proof positive that cheap doesn't have to be nasty, the 777 does all you could reasonably ask of it. But big sister 857 gives so much more for so little extra, that it's hard to make a compelling case against upgrading.

Cabrio 777

Cabrio 857



The rivals



Bayliner 255 SB from £69,396

LOA 25ft 1in (7.65m)
King of the budget cruisers offers sharp styling but feels a little sparse. Undercut (just) by the Larson Cabrio 777.



Glastron 289 from £83,426

LOA 28ft 10in (8.8m)
Keenly priced all-rounder, but it lacks the razor-sharp styling of the Larson Cabrio 857.