

Mariah

Z308 MCC

It is the biggest sportscruiser yet from a high-specification American range.

Is it a stretch too far? We tried the boat in a typical Solent chop.



Mariah Boats' philosophy would appear to be: never be beaten on specification. They offer well-equipped craft, appealing to those who want to impress.

Brand loyalty amongst their customers would appear to be good, which logically encourages these American builders to offer ever bigger boats, in an attempt to keep pace with their owners' climb up the boating ladder.

Joining the 260, 268 and 280 models in their range of sportscruisers is their biggest boat to date, the Z308 MCC.

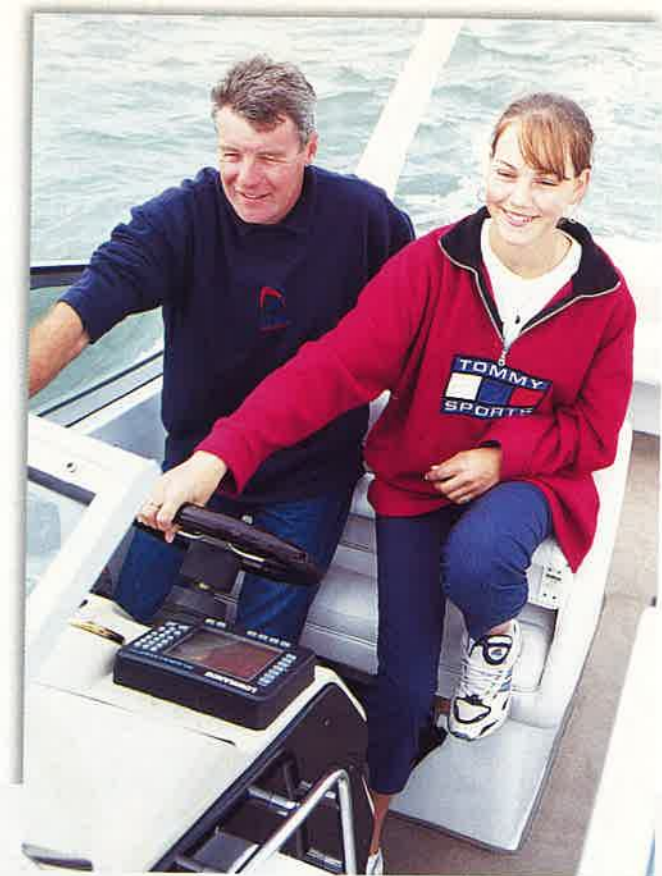
Design & layout

For Mariah owners, looks are important, and the swept lines of the

Z308 confirm its sporting image. The raked radar arch plays its part too, although this is an optional extra.

The stern treatment is less clean, with the raised bathing platform introducing lots of different angles and breaking the flow, albeit addressing the practical need for easy boarding. Although the boat has a deep freeboard, the shallow screen and minimal embellishment reduces the visual effect of this; the Z308 does not look too chunky alongside more overtly sporting craft in the range.

Crucial to any sportscruiser is the balance between cabin space and cockpit space. This boat favours the latter, but not to the extent that the accommodation is cramped, and the large cockpit offers occasional



overnight berths if the optional canvas cover is raised.

Good quality mouldings abound in the accommodation, as we have come to expect of Mariah, and there is a luxurious feel throughout, enhanced by the generous use of wood finishings and by the quality of scatter cushions and other soft furnishings.

The most obvious sign of tight dimensions is the berth in the bows, as Mariah presume that the larger midships berth will be the owners' preferred accommodation.

The builders rate the hull to a maximum of 385hp, with most engine options coming from Mercruiser. Their 275hp 5.7L petrol unit is the base option, with a 330hp 350 Magnum or 350hp MX6.2 MPI as alternative single installations, and twin options running



Helm

Although the helm console is fairly crowded, thanks to the boat's thorough specification, it logically lays out all that the helmsman surveys.

Two rows of Faria instruments, mounted on a woodgrain background, give a comprehensive readout of the engine functions. These include an engine synchroniser, which means you won't be forever trying to balance the throttles. As standard, our test boat also offered keyless ignition, a Raytheon VHF and a Lowrance Globalmap GPS/chartplotter. Several banks of lit rocker-switches control the engine functions.

Besides fore-and-aft power adjustment of the double helm seat, you get a tilt-adjustable wheel for further adaptability and comfort.

When you are seated, the screen offers good weather protection. If you prefer a lean-back driving position, the forward section of the base cushion hinges upwards; this also allows full legroom if you want to stand for close-quarters manoeuvring.



Cockpit

There is a shortage of cockpit stowage, as is typical on this type of craft, but the seating arrangement is very sociable,

offering good configurations for pagemaking, dining or sunbathing.

The combination of a lounge seat forward and a U-shaped settee aft offer generous lazing space, with the

table dropping to make the latter area into a large sunpad when required.

A tidy wet-bar to port will keep the crew supplied with cold drinks, boasting a cooler tray and sink with a

fridge/icemaker and storage bin underneath. The battery master switches are mounted aft of this, for easy access when boarding or leaving the craft through the transom gate to port.



to 210hp Mercruiser 4.3Ls.

If you prefer diesel power, you can choose the twin 165hp Mercruiser 2.8 D-Tronics of our test boat, or 230hp Yanmars.

Performance & handling

When you push forward the twin throttles, pick-up from standstill is very good, and the Z308 gets quickly onto the plane, the turbos

cutting in early to minimise the inevitable diesel delay.

Running the D-tronics up to 3800rpm, we recorded a top speed of just over 28 knots. You get a comfortable fast cruising speed of 24.5 knots at 3500rpm, and if you want to take things at a more relaxed pace you can ease back to 3000rpm for 17.5 knots.

Even at top speed, cockpit noise was very acceptable.

Previous Mariahs have been notable for their responsive handling, reacting to demands from the helm quickly and accurately. Unfortunately, the builders have been unable to translate these characteristics fully into their longest hull to date. Whilst the Z308 handles no worse than its competitors in the sportscruiser market, neither does it set itself apart.

It comes round well in the turns, and tracks competently on a course, but is not the easiest of drives. On tight turns to starboard, there is a breaking point where the hull slips out, though this is easily caught and controlled.

We also found the boat very susceptible to trim; it is best to adjust this on the engine trim (the controls are quick and sensitive) rather than the trim tabs. Running



Galley

The galley to port offers generous headroom, stowage and specification. A microwave comes as standard, to complement the single-burner stove, and a good-sized fridge is set in the base moulding.

The worksurface extends aft, with additional cupboard stowage above it. So as not to waste valuable cupboard space, there is a bin conveniently located in the step up to the cockpit.

Decks

With cockpit and interior space making the most of the boat's beam, there are no side decks. Foredeck access is through the centre opening section of the windscreen.

A flat section of non-slip coachroof gives easy access to the anchor locker. Also on the standard specification are a bow light and swivelling docking lights.



Forward cabin

Though not the most spacious for a craft of this length, the cabin is still very comfortable.

The maximum sleeping length of the forward berth is achieved by lying diagonally across, as the width of the boat at this point is limited. An entertainments centre in the bow comprises a radio/CD player and a television/video.

Stowage abounds, not only under the seats and in the open area behind the seat backs, but also in eye-level cupboards along each side of the forward part of the cabin. There is also a cedar-lined hanging locker.

Plenty of natural daylight can enter the cabin, and after dark well-placed spotlights take over the illuminations.



Midships cabin

There is good height over the head of the generous midships berth, and stowage in three lockers at its foot is complemented by an open locker for small items.

A curtain gives privacy from the rest of the accommodation, as this berth is likely to be used as the main cabin. A hatch to the cockpit gives natural daylight, spotlights can be lit at night, and there is even a set of speakers for the stereo system.



BOAT REPORT

into the wind, we were trimming the bow up to reduce the spray thrown up from a typical Solent chop, but overdo this and some porpoising can be induced.

Conclusions

Given that the basic inventory is very strong, with the 308 available only in Mariah's enhanced Z specification, few buyers will need to look at the short options list. A high level of trim and fit-out, and an inverter, icemaker and microwave, all find a home in the standard boat.

Existing Mariah owners will be used to this, but they might expect a little more from this model's handling and performance, even allowing for the extra bulk of the hull. Accept the extra running cost of twin petrol engines, and some magic might return.

However, this, and Mariah's continuing Achilles heel of awkward engine access, are the only real weaknesses in a craft that will be very pleasing to own, not least for the standard of living available on board. □



Bathing platform

Though it appears something of an afterthought in the overall styling of the craft, the bathing platform is a practical one. It is deep enough, and extends aft of the flanks to allow easy boarding from alongside.

Grabhandles abound, there is a shower for washing off seawater, and the pull-out, swing-down boarding ladder is stowed out of the way under a

hatch to port. A large locker, accessed through a hatch retained by gas struts, will take care of fenders and warps.



Toilet

The fully lined WC has a porcelain marine toilet with manual pump-out to a holding tank. A tidy feature is the shower seat that can be set above the toilet, compensating for the lack of full standing headroom.

The moulding incorporates good stowage, and the specification includes a full complement of bathroom fittings. The looroll holder is mounted on the back of the under-sink cupboard door, so you do not have to worry about soaking it when you use the shower.



Mariah Z308

BUILD

glass-reinforced plastic

RCD

build category C

DIMENSIONS

LOA

30ft 7in (9.32m)

BEAM

8ft 10in (2.69m)

DRAUGHT

3ft 6in (1.07m) with drive down
2ft 2in (0.66m) with drive up

DISPLACEMENT

8720 lb (3955kg)

FUEL CAPACITY

97gal (439lt)

ENGINES

twin Mercruiser 2.8L D-tronics
4cyl 2.8lt diesels
165hp at 3800rpm

PRICE

from £63,262 inc VAT
£86,081 as tested

SUPPLIERS

Southwater Marine,
Hamble Point Marina, School
Lane, Hamble, Hampshire
SO31 5NB.
Tel: 023 8045 2255.

BUILDERS

Mariah Boats,
10231 Sugar Creek Road, Benton,
Illinois 62812-5300, USA.
Tel: +1 618 435 5300.



Engine room

The side and aft cockpit seats hinge down to facilitate engine access, which is achieved by lifting out the panels in the sole. This is the only major design weakness on the Z308, as it would be far simpler if the panels were hinged and used gas struts.

Inside the engine bay, the standard of fit out is good, as is access to all services.