

Tester says...



The sub-40ft flybridge market is crying out for new, fresh ideas, so I couldn't wait to see if the Meridian 341 was up to the challenge

MOTOR BOATS TESTED

Meridian 341

The sub-40ft flybridge market is small but competitive, so how will this new American model fare? **REPORT BY JUSTIN OLESINSKI**

“You constantly feel like it needs an extra push”

FACT FILE
Meridian 341
LOA: 35ft 10in (10.9m)
PRICE: from £245,761
TOP SPEED: 24.8 knots

You can count the number of new flybridge boats below 40ft (12.2m) on one hand. So this fact alone makes Brunswick's decision to introduce the new and very comfy-looking 341 seem like a good idea.

The Meridian name may be relatively unknown in the UK but over the last few years it has

enjoyed success in Europe, and coming from the mighty Brunswick stable it's not exactly lacking in support or expertise. On paper the 341, starting at £245,000, looks good, with beefy shaftdrive power and all the on-board luxuries accounted for, but how will it fare in a fiercely competitive market that includes Sealine and Jeanneau?

Design & build

The 341's overall length is just shy of 36ft (11m) but it's the boat's 12ft 6in (3.8m) beam, on par with the likes of the Princess 42 and the Fairline Phantom 40, that really stands out. This

adds enough volume for an impressive two-cabin interior, incorporating a double berth forward, a shower room and convertible twin to starboard, a galley-up arrangement and decent-sized saloon and cockpit.

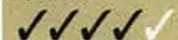
To help maximise the saloon, the superstructure stretches forward, shortening the coachroof, and the long tinted side screens stretch the profile out, making the best of a difficult design brief. The forward screens look a little dated, consisting of three flat sections instead of the usual two curved screens, but it is small sacrifices like this that can help the builder make significant savings on the price.

One area where there has been no scrimping is the lay up. This 341 weighs in at more than nine

tonnes fully loaded – more than the Sealine F37 and Jeanneau Prestige 36, which are both 3ft longer. US boats are usually well spec'd and the Meridian 341 has an impressive list of standard equipment, including the Ultra-Flow Comfort system, which integrates the air-conditioning into the headlining to help deliver a balanced temperature. Also welcome is a carbon monoxide detection system situated inside the saloon and just below the flybridge stairs.

Design & build

Impressive build and that all-important 40ft feel



There is good news on a practical level as the main electrical panel and battery switches are conveniently located in a cupboard by the cockpit doors and anti-rattle seals line the door frames.

Exterior

This boat is clearly designed for warmer climes, a fact backed up by the optional full-height flybridge canopies and air-con pack. However,

the air-con's warm setting offers a cosy dimension to cold winter evenings. Even without the extras, the deep flybridge offers good wind protection.

The cockpit, which is small compared to the flybridge, is a standard arrangement with a 2ft-deep bathing platform that spans the boat's full beam, allowing for easy boarding. There's a neat small hatch in the bathing platform that

lifts up to reveal a gully where you can hook up to shorepower, which helps to keep the platform clear from tripping hazards. Another nice feature is the way the drains run through the boat and exit beneath the waterline, thus eliminating the horrible black drain stains that you see so often on topsides.



A very stylish and surprisingly big flybridge is packed with comfortable seating and expensive detail



Chrome instruments look good



The fab flybridge can be locked off with an optional hatch, but down below cockpit space is tight



With the interior space totally maximised it does mean that the side decks, at only 7 inches, are on the narrow side, which does make for a rather tricky route to the deck, although the grabrails are located in all the right places and the toerail is deep enough to help keep you on course.

Exterior
A good flybridge makes up for a small cockpit
✓✓✓✓✓

Accommodation

The monster beam delivers a truly panoramic saloon and manages to include the 40ft levels of accommodation this market demands with very few compromises. The saloon offers good headroom and the free-standing single seats to port give this area a luxurious feel compared to some of the more basic finishes around. And should you like to put your feet up the starboard

sofa converts into two irresistibly comfortable reclining chairs. In order to create more headroom in the mid cabin, the designers have kept the galley up at saloon level, a bonus if you tend to do a lot of cooking on board. The helm is comfortable with superb vision and the helm seat is adjustable fore and aft. One hangover of its US design is that the lower helm is optional; this would be a necessity for most UK boaters. If, however, you like to be on the flybridge through thick and thin then the lower helm area becomes a side unit which provides greater headroom in the mid cabin. Adjacent to the helm, the galley is well equipped with a two-burner ceramic hob, a large square sink to port and plenty of work space. A combination oven/microwave sits at the forward end of the galley and beneath it is a



Justin toughs it out on the reclining seats

cherrywood-panelled Norcold fridge/freezer. From here three steps lead you down to the forward double cabin, where good headroom and wide doors give the area an open feel. The 6ft 5in headroom in the shower room is impressive and accessible from both the forward cabin and the companionway. Meridian has excelled here in managing to fit a separate, luxury-sized shower stall instead of the standard small circular showers found on most boats under 45ft. The mid cabin can be set up as

Accommodation
Excellent layout is helped out by a generous beam
✓✓✓✓✓

two singles, suitable for one adult and one child or a 6ft 4in x 4ft 8in double berth that stretches athwartships. Or this cabin could be used as a single adult berth with a sofa to port.



The saloon is a very sociable area with deep, comfortable, facing seats



Optional lower helm works brilliantly, but limits headroom below

Engine options & access

Engine access is in the saloon via three adjoining hatches; the idea being that the outer two can be opened to check the filters without having to lift the main centre hatch. This may sound sensible but a single hatch on gas struts would have been a better solution. Even the best hatches aren't 100% airtight and over time the engines will draw air in around them, leaving dirt stains around the carpet joins.

The generator is situated under the cockpit floor in the separate lazarette and there is plenty of room down here to store canopies and fenders.

To push this boat around, Meridian offers just the one engine option, although it's not exactly lacking in horses. Twin 6cyl CMD (Cummins MerCruiser Diesel) 330hp inboard diesels running on shafts should be more than capable of powering the 341, especially given that many boats in this class use 4cyl lumps. On test,

Engine options & access
Big engines, but, seemingly not big enough?
✓✓✓✓✓

however, it proved insufficient. There are rumours that the uprated 370hp Cummins will soon be available but that seems to be missing the point – that 660hp should be enough.

Performance & handling

Nine tonnes is heavy, but 660hp is a lot of oomph. For comfortable cruising, boats prefer a bit of weight in them so this mix of power and displacement should deliver a heady mix. Instead it only delivers a headache.

The ride quality from both the saloon and the flybridge is comfortable and smooth but you constantly feel like it needs an extra push. Boats of this length should still have a little of the devil in them, turning in sharply and responding well to helm and throttle. This boat, however, meanders to just under 25 knots, a good six knots off the target speed for a boat of this size, so it isn't competitive in today's market. With extra kit and crew on board that figure will drop even further.

The boat gets up and on to the plane at around 2500rpm and 13 knots but it is difficult to keep the hull happy and composed much below 20 knots. This means realistically your cruising performance range sits between 20 to 22 knots, which is far too narrow a window on longer trips with variable sea conditions. The steering also proves to be fairly heavy and slow, but since this is a cruiser it's also safe and controlled at the same time.

From the lower helm visibility poses another problem as the extra beam presents a difficult surface to trim down as the boat powers up on to the plane. However, once up and running it does settle down to offer one of the best all-round views we have experienced from a flybridge boat's lower helm, aided by those long,



It's a shame Meridian hasn't opted for a single hatch on gas struts...



Anti-rattle seals have been added to the door frames



The boat's beam means there's a lot of room to move



... instead it has gone for separate hatches that do offer easy service checks



The 341's fitout is high quality, but the price is low



The mid cabin berth can be converted into a great double



The shower stall is luxury-size



The huge beam means that this boat has a massive forward master cabin to enjoy

BOAT REPORT

MERIDIAN 341

lower side windows and the narrow flybridge stairwell moulding. With the engines sitting directly beneath the saloon, noise levels are much higher than you find on a sterndrive boat of this size, but the dB(A) figures that were recorded show that the boat is, in fact, only slightly above average on noise.

Performance & handling

Poor performance makes for pretty a sluggish ride



Let's finish on a high note, though. Back at port the D.O.C. System – where the bow and stern thrusters work together off one joystick – makes for wonderfully easy close quarter work.

Specification & value

It would be churlish to suggest that a 35ft boat costing £295,000 is in any way cheap but walking around this fully spec'd Meridian 341, it certainly looks and feels worthy of that price tag. The starting price of £250,000 is bang on what the competition is asking but few will be able to offer the level of quality and space seen here.

As a boat primarily designed for a different climate and cruising culture, some items that might usually be standard are charged for, but the fact that you need to add £9000 for the lower helm is neither here nor there, if the overall price is good.

The £18,000 generator and air-con pack cost is, however, proportionately severe for a boat of this size and price, so perhaps a retrofit diesel heater might be the best bet.

Brunswick has clearly worked hard to keep this boat affordable while still delivering on high end build, finish and material selection. That said, if we had to make a choice, we'd rather a slightly lower spec if it meant a better performing hull.

Specification & value

Competitively priced, the 341 is a well spec'd boat



MBM verdict

You get plenty of boat for your buck here with a luxurious specification, a seriously comfortable interior and a good flybridge to entice buyers in.

However, the Meridian's disappointing performance is an unavoidable issue that needs to be resolved if this boat is to compete with some extremely good market leaders.

MBM rating



6/10

Meridian 341 technical data



specifications

BUILD	GRP
RCD	B
LENGTH OVERALL	35ft 10in (10.9m)
BEAM	12ft 6in (3.8m)
DRAUGHT	3ft 4in (1m)
DISPLACEMENT	8.28 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	208gal (946lt)
WATER CAPACITY	75gal (341lt)

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	7in (18cm)
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 7in (2m)
HEADROOM IN FORWARD BERTH	6ft 5in (1.95m)
MASTER CABIN BERTH	6ft 5in x 5ft 4in (1.97m x 1.64m)

performance

Engines	twin Cummins QSB-330hp diesels
Configuration	6cyl 8.9lt 330hp @ 2800rpm
Conditions	wind Force 4, sea state smooth
Load	fuel 100% water 100% crew 3

Rpm	knots	lpg	gph	mpg	range	noise
2100	9.2	62	16.4	0.6	140	79
2300	12	78	20.6	0.6	145	82
2500	13.5	90	23.8	0.6	141	83
2800	22.4	92	24.6	0.9	230	85
2900	24.8	96	25.4	1.0	244	86

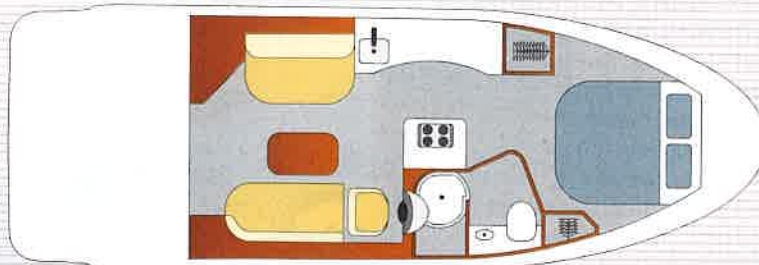
Range figures quoted above are in miles based on standard fuel tanks and include a 20% margin. GPH & MPG refer to imperial gallons. These figures may vary due to weather conditions, air, water, engine temperature, crew numbers, hull fouling, fuel quality and other issues. Noise readings in dB(A) were taken at the lower helm with the patio doors closed.

prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with twin Cummins QSL9 330HP diesels	£245,761
LOWER HELM STATION	£7668
AIR-CONDITIONING	£7032
7kW GENERATOR	£11,893

BOAT AS TESTED £313,000

ENQUIRIES MGM Boats Tel: (00353) (0)12802020 www.mgmboats.com



the rivals



NORTHWEST 370

From £281,608
Tested Oct 08 this 37-footer blew us away with its superior design, build quality and performance. A benchmark for all sub 40ft-flybridges.
www.nordwest.se



AQUALUM 35

From £175,000
Much smaller in volume than the Meridian but with far better performance and a European interior, the Aqualum 35 is an interesting alternative.
www.bluehorizons.co.uk



SEALINE F37

From £228,761
This classic sub 40ft flybridge design, with a two cabin, practical layout has lasted the test of time. Launched a decade ago, it's still in production.
www.sealine.com