

Going... 370

First came the Fly, then the Coupe, now Nord West completes the circle with its first ever sportscruiser models – the Sport and the SportsTop

REPORT BY CARL RICHARDSON

Carl says...



It's toy box time! I got to try out Nord West's first ever sportscruiser and it came armed with Volvo Penta's new joystick control for sterndrives. I love this job.



FACTFILE

Nord West 370 SportsTop

LOA: 38ft 8in (11.8m)
PRICE: from £298,617
TOP SPEED: 37.4 knots

FACTFILE

Nord West 370 Sport

LOA: 38ft 8in (11.8m)
PRICE: from £281,750
TOP SPEED: 36.2 knots



This is an exciting model launch for two reasons. To start with, it's Nord West's first sportscruiser, which will be of interest if you're in the market for a top quality 37ft cruiser. And secondly, it also gives us the chance to test Volvo Penta's joystick control for sterndrives, which should be of interest if you like motorboats – so that is all of you then.

Design & build

Nord West's latest 37ft hull has been put to some serious use since its launch 12 months ago, and I'm not just referring to the hammering we gave it on test. Powered by either IPS pods or sterndrives, it has delivered a very capable Flybridge model (tested MBM Oct 2008) and a smart Coupe (MBM May 2009). But the hull's obvious ability to place silly grins on the faces of those on board as it carves through the chop meant that sooner or later this Swedish builder was going to have to create its first ever fully fledged sportscruiser.

Both the open cockpit Sport and SportsTop

versions follow the same layout, with two cabins below decks and a tidy cockpit. Of the two, it is the SportsTop that the eye is drawn to first because, quite simply, it has more going on. A subtle but stylish roof design looks like it has borrowed more than a little from Princess's V series and given that Princess delivers class-leading hardtop designs that's no bad thing.

The SportsTop delivers all of the protection you need with 6ft 2in of headroom but avoids any boxy, heavy-on-the-eye superstructure. Importantly it also remembers that, although we like the idea of a no-canopy zone, we still want to feel like we have access to sun, spray and all the emotions that come from an open boat. So instead of some GRP letterbox above the helm there's a canvas hood that retreats back at the touch of a button, revealing a 6ft-long sun trap. On this size of boat, canvas is definitely the way to

go. As we have seen with Sealine's SC roof design and Princess's V45, canvas delivers lower sound levels, a lighter design in terms of brightness and weight, and a bigger hole – what's not to like? Well, one thing could be the extra £18k you will

have to find over the standard open Sport

From the moment you step aboard everything feels right

model. But because the roof system works so well and is so beautifully engineered, it should still prove to be the most popular choice for buyers.

Hardtop designs aside, both these boats offer up great user-friendly elements. From the moment you board everything feels right. The tall, safe transom gate seals shut with a confident click, tables above and below decks raise and lower at the touch of a button to provide lounging options, while every locker and access panel is fastidiously clean and smooth. The end result is a fitout so tight and so meticulous that it is more akin to



The SportsTop design is subtle on the eye and fastidiously engineered, plus the canvas hood section is effortless to open. The end result is smiles all round





Rich mahogany fitout is warm rather than cool. The galley comes with plenty of kit and storage



Bespoke lockers are a neat feature



12V and 220V systems are clearly laid out



Saloon deckhead is covered in light, both natural and LED



Clever, practical detail work is everywhere



Handy bin under the stairwell

the automotive world – where a new car looks, feels and smells like it has come straight out of a box. Too often new boats look like a gang of grease-covered teenagers that have been whittling wood in the bilges, but on the 370 the finish is immaculate.

There are elements of the design that might not appeal to everyone. As ever with Nord West, the 370 isn't the biggest boat in its class, nor is it the most progressively styled. The hardtop might be suitably cool but the topsides look conservative as do some elements of the cockpit trim. But a bit of understated elegance in a market full of show-offs might not be a bad thing.

Design & build

Another great build from top to bottom from Nord West



Accommodation

Moving below decks is easy with three shallow steps and lots of handholds. Nord West has stuck with its usual mahogany fitout, which exudes plenty of class, rather than a contemporary edge.

Helping to lift the glamour levels is a skylight cut into the deckhead with an Ocean Air shade and blind, while numerous LED spots look the part too.

The saloon follows a conventional form with a crescent of seating (finished here in optional leather) and a folding table, which drops to make a berth. Opposite lies a well-stocked galley. You get a proper recessed gas hob – the type you can use at sea and everything – a large, brushed steel fridge and what looks like two ovens. But wait, why would you need two ovens? You wouldn't – the second one, higher up, isn't an oven but a waterproof TV to serve the saloon. This is a nice touch, especially as it also acts as a door to a bespoke crockery locker.

With the forward master cabin, toilet and shower compartment exactly the same as those seen on the Flybridge and Coupe versions, it makes sense to focus on the mid cabin which, happily, is a winner. There are larger guest cabins on boats in this class – the Bavaria 35 probably has more overall space – but it is how Nord West uses the available space that impresses. An L-shaped sofa welcomes you in to a cabin with lots of soft linings and

Accommodation

Less space than some 37-footers but packed with detail



timber that create a really cosy environment that you will want to spend time in. The berth is a fixed double, so no twin option, but stowage is good as is the lighting with two ports creating air-flow.

Exterior

For such a practical and thoughtful sort of boatbuilder, one of the surprising issues on Nord West's sportscruiser concerns deck access. The huge wall of GRP that makes the cockpit so safe and secure is part of the reason, requiring a climb up to the side decks from inside. You can also access the side decks from the bathing platform but the system of teak-clad steps feels like a bit of a song and dance, well more of a dance than a song. It's fine once you have the



The saloon's crescent seating is helped out by two stools



Folding table delivers a handrail



The mid cabin is very inviting with a neat sofa and lots of stowage



Carl tries to find an unfinished bit



The forward master lacks an en suite but is a very comfortable cabin nonetheless, with lots of stowage space



Serene toilet and shower compartment



Are they laughing at him or with him? Either way it's a social cockpit with six able to gather close to the helm. The gloss finish can be changed to a natural teak



Transom boot will take five fenders



Side deck access is a little complicated



Bolster position works well with two foot pads



Catching a few rays couldn't be easier



The well-stocked wet-bar is a great addition

hang of it but some may hanker after a less complex routine to reach the foredeck.

Elsewhere my only other ask would be to lose the mahogany capping around the transom. Yes, I know it's a Nord West trademark but it rubs up against the teak fitout in the cockpit. A natural teak finish to the transom would be more in keeping with sportscruiser style and would marry up to the high gloss or natural teak finish to the wet-bar and cockpit table. The gloss looks beautiful with a lovely pronounced grain, but for practicality I would opt for the natural finish, especially on the Sport model, given the likelihood of a salt water soaking from time to time. Either way, the wet-bar is another well-stocked addition to the boat with a fridge, sink, grill and an optional icemaker.

Deck stowage is excellent with a self-draining transom locker and a full-beam lazarette below the cockpit sole, just forward of the enginebay.

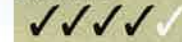
With that £18k charge for the hardtop option, it's worth looking at the canopy design on the Sport in more detail. The hood is well made, with reinforced seams and end sections. It also works

in grab handles around its aft edges to help you down from the side decks when the canopy is up. Split by the radar arch, the canopy side panels are designed to drop out leaving a bimini above the helm and aft cockpit or the whole thing can fold in completely. The stainless steel runners and rails that the canvas sits

on work well but actually folding the thing away is a bit of a chore. If anyone could have designed a user-friendly canopy it was Nord West but even the Swedes seem to have come up a little short here.

Exterior

Tricky decks mar the boat's excellence



Performance & handling

As a flybridge cruiser this hull was sublime on test, but this is the sportscruiser market and the standards set for speed and agility are somewhat

higher. Predictably, though, the hull steps up to the challenge, delivering even faster reactions and improved performance across the rev range.

The main and only real difference between the Sport and SportsTop versions is just how reactive they are. The open Sport is faster off the line and more eager to throw itself into a turn, hitting 20 knots in seven seconds and 25 knots in 10 seconds.

The SportsTop is only a couple of seconds behind and while it might not be quite as lightning quick to respond, on balance I actually preferred its more measured and intuitive feedback at the helm. Both boats share the same window line, and with its roof open the SportsTop barely loses any of the fun associated with an open boat.

Both test boats were fitted with the 300hp D4 sterndrive engines. IPS is available but from my experience this hull runs faster, more efficiently and just plain better on drives, plus with the new Aquamatic joystick (see separate panel) you now have the option of one-touch mooring control.

The SportsTop model we tested had already clocked up a good few hours compared to the Sport version and its well-run-in turbo diesels delivered the day's best figures of 37.4 knots, a massive 6 knots up on the IPS-powered boat.

Running above 30 knots, the only mild criticism of the ride quality would be the hardness sometimes felt from the chine. This chine is what creates much of the lift for the heavier Flybridge model and its shoulder can be felt if the sea catches it. But you have to give credit to this hull design, if you take the chop on the nose the ride remains very smooth, while a following sea barely registers as you power on.

If you've ever wondered what difference the extra weight of a flybridge makes on a hull, this test gave us a straightforward set of figures to draw comparison from. The sportscruiser's top speed was a good few knots up on the Flybridge 370 fitted with the same engines, drives and fuel load. In terms of percentages

The Sport model is faster off the line

creates much of the lift for the heavier Flybridge



Helm is offered in a tan finish as well as graphite

there is a clear 10% advantage across the rev range for the sportcruiser models, on both speed and fuel economy.

From the two-seater helm, the bolster position works best. A teak footpad under the console helps you into a natural, comfortable leaning pose and you can also stand up fully by using another pad under the helm seat to brace





Aquamatic joystick control

Using the same technology as the IPS system, Volvo Penta's Aquamatic joystick control option for its sterndrives has been eagerly awaited by owners and the industry alike. Yes, Cummins MerCruiser Diesel beat Volvo to it with its Axis system launched last year but Volvo still rules the marine roost when it comes to the number of boats that use its engines, so, while there is no retro-fit option for existing owners, this is still the big one.

The same DP outdrive legs sit at the back of the 370's transom, and peeking into the engineroom the only change appears to be the addition of a discreet black CPU box. This is the brains of the operation, enabling the electronic, fly-by-wire steering that allows the legs to move independently of one another. It is this independent steerage that delivers full rotational, sideways and multi-directional control. On a sterndrive boat that means, in theory, you reach boathandling utopia while doing away with the need and the cost of a bow thruster. And let's face it, fewer holes – especially big ones below the water line – is always a good thing on a boat.

So, all the sterndrive joystick system has to do is work as well as the IPS version and it's goodbye berthing blues, hello mooring masterclass. Only it doesn't, not really. It makes a lot more fuss about manoeuvring, with fairly harsh gear changes and lots of thrust for little motion.

The boat does not turn as intuitively as IPS either. The beauty of a pod drive system is that a boat seems to turn right under your feet with very little deviation. The sterndrive version turns from further aft with a typical sterndrive swing, while the boat can wander off its station, possibly due to all the thrust being kicked up.

To be clear though, the Aquamatic joystick does do a job. It will move the boat sideways, it's easy to operate and the conventional steering and throttle feedback feels and responds just like a standard system, but it's just not as intuitive or smooth as IPS.

Ordinarily you would forgive it this slight drop in performance but seeing as it costs the same amount as IPS I don't think I can. It's the cost issue that perhaps disappoints most. Volvo Penta had a chance to really deliver something ground-breaking here, something new and exciting for the masses who populate the sterndrive market, but by making it so expensive, surely it has missed a trick?

If the price can be lowered – it currently stands at around £20,000 to add the joystick technology – its popularity will go up. If it stays the same I would recommend you invest in some one-to-one sterndrive tuition and enjoy the fact that you can happily spin your boat around using helm and alone.



Aquamatic joystick looks the same as IPS but it doesn't feel the same



No retro-fit option but joystick installation is clean and simple

your legs. With its long foredeck, the seated helm position does feel slightly remote but the visibility forward is always good with the standard-fit trim tabs working well. Given the 370's handling prowess, I'd like to see a side support for the helm seat but the fact that you can get four or five people sat up around the helm, with the raised and supportive bench opposite, is great stuff.

From the SportsTop helm, an open sunroof really delivers that open boat feel at sea, while with the roof closed there is zero vibration or wind noise. On the turn you will lose the horizon but with a bit of care before the manoeuvre, coupled with the boat's agility, you won't be in the dark for long.

Performance & handling

Hull steps up to sportscruiser standard



Specification & value

It may be because I have just returned from spending 10 hours on the water but when I consider the 370 in terms of value for money, I can only think of cold beers. There's that Belgian one that is 'reassuringly expensive' and the Danish brew that tells us it is 'probably the best in the world'.

The 370 certainly has a reassuringly premium price tag, but its build quality and the standard of kit it comes with are class-leading.

Any builder that makes a concerted effort to include all the elements it knows its buyers will want within a standard package is alright by me. The only thing you will really need to choose is some navigational kit and a boat name.

Specification & value

Probably the best standard spec in the world



MBM verdict

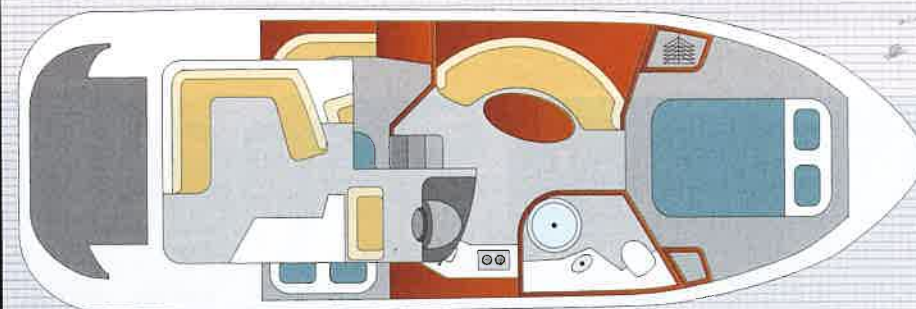
Right now, in the sub-superyacht world of boat design and build, no yard is better at producing top-quality, beautifully finished craft than Nord West. That's a simple fact. So while these two sportscruisers might not deliver the same edgy punch of, say, a Sessa, these 37-footers are unparalleled in terms of build quality, which is where it really matters.

Between the two models on test the SportsTop is the better boat, simply because it makes more sense more of the time.

8/10



Nord West 370 SportsTop technical data



specifications

BUILD	GRP
RCD	Category B
LENGTH OVERALL	38ft 8in (11.8m)
BEAM	11ft 6in (3.5m)
DRAUGHT	3ft 10in (1.2m)
AIR DRAUGHT	11ft 9in (3.6m)
DISPLACEMENT	9 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	175gal (800lt)
WATER CAPACITY	95gal (435lt)

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	9in (22cm)
BELOW DECKS HEADROOM	6ft 1in (1.8m)

performance

Engines	twin Volvo Penta D4-300					
Configuration	4cyl 3.7lt 300hp @ 3500rpm					
Conditions	wind southerly, Force 3, sea state slight					
Load	fuel 98% to water 100% to crew 2					
Rpm	knots	lph	gph	mpg	range	noise
2200	14.6	49	10.7	1.36	191	81
2500	20.5	53	11.6	1.76	247	80
2800	25.3	69	15.1	1.67	234	79
3000	29.5	78	17.2	1.82	240	80
3300	34.3	97	21.3	1.61	225	79
3500	37.4	114	25.1	1.49	208	82

Figures quoted on SportsTop. Range figures quoted 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) and were taken in the cockpit with the hardtop closed.

prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with twin 260hp diesels (Sport)	£273,317
with twin 300hp diesels (Sport)	£281,750
with twin 300hp diesels (SportsTop)	£298,617
JOYSTICK UPGRADE	£20,909
TEAK COCKPIT & FOREDECK	standard
BOW THRUSTER	standard
DIESEL HEATING	standard
GENERATOR (3KW)	£9785

BOATS AS TESTED

370 SPORT	£302,406
370 SPORTSTOP	£338,440

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