

MOTOR  
BOATS **TESTED**

# Nord West 420

We've had an eye for a Swedish beauty ever since we tested Nord West's 390 flybridge – but could the new, three-cabin, IPS-ready 420 top even that?

REPORT BY CARL RICHARDSON

“It fine tunes, exceeds and expands on its smaller sibling in almost every way”



**FACT FILE**  
Nord West 420  
LOA: 43ft (13.5m)  
PRICE: £332,968  
TOP SPEED:  
33.4 knots





The 420's layout means that the U-shaped sofa doubles as a dinette and lounge, but there is no escaping the fact that social space is down on some 42ft cruisers

A few years ago at MBM we went all dewy eyed and started whispering sweet nothings at Swedish boat builder Nord West. The reason for our gushing was its excellent 390 flybridge cruiser, a boat that thrilled with a mix of traditionalist finish and cutting edge handling. We said then it was the best boat you had never heard of, and quite possibly the best full stop. Then Nord West told us about an upcoming 420 and dropped into the conversation that it would be even better than the 390 – but could it be true?

## Design & Build

The 420 looks very much the 390's big sister and continues the 'galley up' layout that allows more space for cabins below decks. But this new boat fine tunes, exceeds and expands on its smaller sibling in almost every way. So while the 390 shoe horned in three cabins, the 420 delivers the same number with improved space and specification, plus you now get two excellent toilet and shower rooms, one en suite to the forward master.

We at MBM are thrilled that Nord West has stuck to its guns on this internal layout, as there are

precious few three-cabin boats around at this size. The only arguable loss is the wow factor of saloon acreage seen on, say, the longer and beamier Princess 42. But Nord West follows its own path and how it chooses to walk it, or rather sprint along it, is very different too.

Having succeeded with stern drives on its 390, Nord West has again shunned the traditional view that flybridge boats should run on shafts, by embracing Volvo Penta's IPS drive system. With the only option to IPS a cheaper stern drive installation, the 420 must be the only non-shaft driven cruiser in this market.

This individualism does not affect matters of style or contemporary boating needs. The 420 is the most shapely, intricate and accommodating vessel that the yard has ever produced, born out of a mix of owner feedback and a builder striving for perfection. Nord West might name Benny Martinsson as its owner but this is a man who does not believe in building boats from behind a desk. As the chief designer, head of production, general grafter and no doubt reliable maker of coffee, each boat is deeply personal to Benny, and the same goes for the rest of his proud team. You really get the sense that each Nord West has been crafted rather than merely produced, with quite astonishing levels of detail on display. As one British lady, who recently signed on the dotted line for a 420, remarked, 'I love the man's boats but it's a good job he doesn't run a restaurant, he has no idea on quantity control!' Maybe not but we wager you would eat there every night.

But the remark is a fair observation. Those places where you wish there was a tread pad or grab rail as you make your way around the deck, the 420 has those fitted. Or below decks where you would like a coat hanger or reading light, it has those too.

Its relationship with materials, especially timber, is quite wonderful. On most boats today, teak means a thin laminate you pay extra for and merely walk on; on a Nord West it comes as standard and is to be cherished and admired. Hand-picked in Burma, this rich, soft wood covers most of the deck and brings a real warmth and quality. The same care and attention goes into the interior mahogany. The stainless steel work is sublime, too; rails are heavy gauge while the window frames and saloon door are quite immaculate in form and function. And then there is the glass fibre.

Nord West uses a three-section flybridge, deck and hull system made up of a double laminate sandwich construction, with Divinylac used to reinforce and insulate. The bit you get to see is a smooth finish to the bilge and an epoxy-coated hull. Like the fabulous Botnia Targas – another boat builder to shun shafts – the hull design looks quite ordinary with its three spray rails and conventional vee flattening aft, but behind it lies a rock solid GRP bed.

Massive lay up weights – around 40-50% more than other, high-quality yards – are beefed up further across chines and the keel, where uni-directional matting is overlaid.

## Design & build

A real masterclass in boat building and finish



## Exterior

Pretty much the only design criticism of the 390 was the slightly tricky – and we really are reaching here – side deck access from the cockpit. This has been addressed on the 420 by integrating steps into the deck without exposing the cockpit's highly protected environment.

The 420 is one of the few modern flybridge boats we can think of that allows you safe passage around the entire deck area with the canopies up, and it is certainly the best. This great all-round access starts when you first board, care of an extended bathing platform. Teak laid, it offers a huge, very safe

working space. Along the transom more teak-capped lockers line up for your stowage pleasure, able to swallow fenders, ropes and pretty much anything else you might need on deck.

A feature of Nord West boats is how they use their cockpits. There is no one level, open aft deck here, but a wall of transom to protect the boat, the flybridge overhang completing the job. A very smart door breaks the transom coaming and leads into what we can't really describe as a cockpit. Cockpits are usually bland, utilitarian places with the odd blob of GRP seating, but what we have here is an outdoor extension of the saloon. All that protection from the elements allows a superyacht-smart deck, dripping with teak, mahogany and stainless steel, plus LED lights above and below to add mood. A large L-shape bench wraps around the port quarter, the sculpted base of the table set before it cleverly acting as a handrail. When the sun is out you have a shaded, luxurious sanctuary. When the clouds gather a simple canopy system goes to work,



The Nord West's functional lower helm feels right

allowing you to continue your stay. The canopies work so well that you can keep them up underway without any fuss. Underneath all this is a full-beam lazarette able to swallow chairs, bikes, tenders and outboards.

If you do want to get up close and personal with the elements, head to the flybridge where proper moulded steps have now been worked in to ease access. It is not the biggest fly in the 42ft cruiser world but you won't care, because it works so damn well. First off, the three bucket seats across the front are the comfiest and most natural to actually sit on in this class. The bucket seats can be turned to face the circular seating aft, the richly varnished teak table dropping at the touch of a button to form a sunpad. A wet-bar between them can be fitted with an optional

and very smart stainless steel fronted bar fridge and a grill.

As ever safety and practicality are priorities up here and handrails are in abundance, along with deep coamings. >>>

## Exterior

Superyacht-level luxury with oodles of practicality



The 'galley up' layout means it's easy to transport food outside



One of the two toilet compartments



The sumptuous master cabin is a place you won't mind retiring to, with a huge bed and loads of storage



Headroom in the port guest cabin is excellent





A sheltered aft deck allows the use of teak and mahogany, making it feel like an extension of the interior

## Accommodation

The galley up layout, in which the galley is on the saloon level of the Nord West, is what separates it from the modern mainstream flybridge boat.

What you gain in sleeping quarters below you lose in loafing space in the saloon; your priorities will decide where you are prepared to

compromise, but whatever your needs you simply cannot fault Nord West on its finish. Even the most modern minds will feel moved by the rich, beautifully crafted and perfectly matched mahogany that covers every spare inch of the interior, only breaking off for the one stainless steel window frame and the teak and holly sole. Three different lighting zones set the tone, with the main lights softened by hidden mood lighting or lamps.

As the only seating in the saloon, the U-shape sofa needs to work as a dinette and lounge, which thankfully it just about does. Raised up off

the saloon sole, you get a great view out, while in the evening the cabinetry really comes alive in a wonderfully boaty way. Six could just about squeeze around the teak table for lunch, with four having a more civilised time. Stretching out with a full complement of crew will be tricky, which is

“Whatever your needs, you simply cannot fault Nord West on its finish”

why the cockpit is so important as an all-weather social retreat.

With this is mind specific

drawers for crockery and glassware are set at the saloon entrance so those inside or out can get at them. As a reflection of Nord West's eye for detail, each boat comes with a full complement of glasses, crockery and cutlery – and when we say full, we mean an amount that would allow a two-week cruise to pass without washing up even being considered.

On such a two-week cruise, each of the three cabins should keep its occupants very happy. The two guest quarters lying either side of the companionway staircase run to an impressive standard. The ideal twin-to-double berth is used,

requiring no additional cushions, a chair is neatly worked in, stowage is excellent with lockers of all sizes including hanging, while good lighting does the rest. However the port side cabin will be reserved for your favourite crew member – the one who helps wash down the boat at the end of play – as its enjoys far more standing headroom.

The master cabin with its en suite, exactly mirrored in the day toilet, is of course the most impressive. Wrapped up in mahogany and sporting a long berth, this is a cabin you really won't mind retiring to. His and hers stowage includes wardrobes, lockers and shelving while an intelligent amount of space has been left at the foot of the long double berth as a changing area. Portholes are set on teak bases, reading lights are nicely shaded, shelving is abundant where you need it and your route to the raised berth is civilised. Good detail and design run to the toilet and shower compartments. Finished in white, but anything but stark, teak again works its magic by covering grates and detail work. Circular, pull-around cubicles make for a decent shower and stowage is incredible.

Stowage space of every kind is a real highlight onboard the 420, from the cabins to the well-stocked galley with its two fridges and various lockers, to the bar hidden under the saloon table. It is clever, thoughtful stuff.

One final thing. We know it's boring and we know that nobody really buys a boat for the amazing finish in the bilge or engine bay (as this boat has) but please, for the love of god and all that is good about boat building, take a look behind the aft locker in the port guest cabin where the electrical systems are laid out. We shall say no more on the matter.

## Accommodation

Rare and wonderful three cabin interior with sublime finish



## Engine options and access

The 420 is a one-engine gal, with Volvo Penta's D6 the unit of choice. In sterndrive guise the usual peerless quality of Nord West engineering and finish is in full effect. Stainless steel tanks are mounted perfectly, further forward, out of sight, and just right for maintaining ride quality. Aluminium tread plates come with integrated enclosures for spares and tools, there is a step down of course, the generator sits snugly to one side, the bilge is simply perfect and no one takes more care over cable runs and conduits than these guys. In the full-beam lazarette there is even a teak box to hide cable work.

The trouble is that many of you will be thinking about the IPS installation and its joystick control rather than the 350hp sterndrives, and, by comparison, the IPS installation is not nearly as impressive. In truth, we are yet to come across one that is on a flybridge boat. The positioning of



The flybridge isn't huge but it really works, plenty of handrails and deep coamings show a commitment to detail and safety

the engines means that access from the aft is the only clear way in, whereas all the hatches open from the front. On the 420 this means sliding in between the engines and doing away with all those trimmings at the front. The gap where you lower yourself in is wide, and the finish is still better than most, it's just a bit disappointing after the glorious sterndrive installation.

## Engine options & access

If only IPS access was as good as sterndrive



## Performance and handling

We have come in for a bit of stick recently over our coverage of IPS, so we suppose we are about to come in for some more, because we love the 420 with drives that face 'the wrong way'.

It has been muttered that we are wrong to recommend IPS drives because if you hit an underwater object hard, they may fail. That may be so – a bit like a shaftdrive's P-brackets failing by pushing through a hull. In truth, if you do cruise in an area restricted by tides, IPS probably isn't the best option for you, but the trouble is that if we tested every boat on the basis of an underwater impact it would make for some pretty ugly reading, and the new drive system has so many virtues, aptly displayed by the 420.

This boat, designed with IPS in mind, provides the best evidence yet of IPS's ability. As a taller flybridge boat, the ride is beautifully balanced, the acceleration is effortless with no wallow, while the ride is silky smooth, with hardly any

drop in speed as you glide into an elegant and exciting turn. With the twin 370hp IPS 500s, the 33.4-knot top speed comes on with so little effort it is dreamlike. Meanwhile, 25 knots makes for seriously laid-back cruising, both on the senses and the wallet. You would have to add another 100hp per engine to get a similar performance from a shaftdriven boat, with all the extra outlay that would bring, while cruising economy (22-26 knots) is up around 30% over shafts.

At the 25-knot cruising speed, the hushed, 74dB(A) tones of the saloon make a mockery of the civilised Princess 42 well beaten with its 79dB(A). The sterndrive 420 runs the IPS version close on sound levels and actually beats it by a knot flat out, but it is debatable whether the same ice-cool, precise handling is retained.

There is no doubt that, compared to a shaftdrive boat, noise and vibration are massively reduced. This is a key reason why Nord West has gone down the sterndrive and, more latterly, IPS route.

The Swedes really use their boats. With their minimal tidal range, taking the boat out is more akin to taking the car. Safely ensconced in the saloon, having a chat about what you are planning to order at your restaurant destination and pushing along at 30 knots is not something you can do with shafts.

All this and we haven't even got to the best bit yet. The joystick control will be the making of IPS. On the 420 it enabled us to poke in and around places you would not normally dare to venture. Drifting sideways and spinning on an axis are possible using engines alone but it is so much easier with the joystick. In reality, all this showboating means that you can retain complete control in a strong blow or tide and conquer a boater's only real worry, the dreaded tricky mooring.

Added extra: the smart stainless-steel fronted bar fridge and grill



The large bathing platform makes hopping aboard easy, then moulded steps take you up to the flybridge



Sink into these comfy bucket seats and you won't want to get up again



420's improved side access



## BOAT REPORT

### NORD WEST 420

Testing over calm waters, it is not possible to say exactly how well this hull will perform in big seas but its phenomenal composure, thin chines and sheer agility promise much.

From either helm, life is good. Those great buckets up top are incredibly comfy and the helm itself is a work of marine art. At the lower helm, the fixed bench may be a problem for some, but the natural trim is so good you won't have a problem seeing over the bow, or anywhere else, thanks to generally excellent all-round visibility.

#### Performance & handling

Nord West know-how lets IPS come of age



#### Specification and value

The Nord West specification should become legendary, it may even become part of common boating language: "Your boat is so well equipped it's Nord West". We exaggerate (a bit), but these people know how to kit out a cruiser, from the cutlery, coat hooks and TV antenna to the inverter, teak and Eberspacher heating. It's all standard and it's all very impressive. Sterndrive boats get a bow thruster included too, and on the belt and braces side of boating life Nord Wests come with the best battery banks around.

Nord West only sells direct to its customers, so a trip out to the factory is called for. Each boat is then commissioned and made ready for collection from the yard with a full handover, technical review and fuel tanks included.

#### Specification & value

Do they even have an options list?



For a comparatively small builder, when compared to the goliaths it's up against, pricing is competitive and resale value, based on the 390, will be strong.

## Verdict

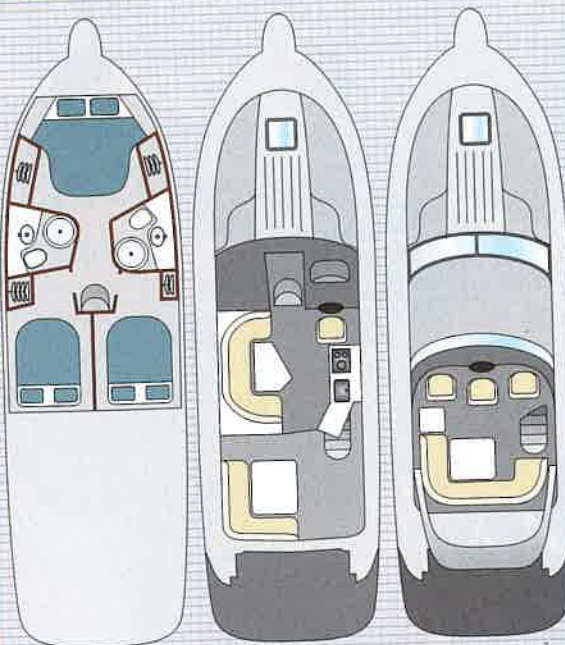
Teetering on the edge of a perfect 10, the Nord West takes the modern cruising dish and adds its own very special flavour. In a world of high production and turnover, this boat comes as a shot in the arm to all who appreciate craft and credibility. The fact that it also happens to be a damn good, three-cabin boat is a mere bonus.

9/10

MBM rating



## Nord West 420 technical data



#### performance

Engines	Twin Volvo Penta IPS 500						
Configuration	6cyl 5.5lt 370hp @ 3500rpm						
Conditions	wind SW'ly, Force 2, sea state slight						
Load	Fuel 50%, water 75%, crew 4						
Rpm	knots	drtrt	gph	mpg	range	noise	
2600	18.8	66	14.5	1.4	395	74	
2800	22.5	78	17.1	1.3	370	74	
3000	26	94	20.6	1.3	370	74	
3300	29.8	128	28.1	1.1	230	77	
3550	33.4	150	33.0	1.0	210	79	

Range figures 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 members; hull fouling; fuel quantity and other issues. Noise readings are in dB (A) and were taken in the saloon.



#### key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDEDECKS	10in
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 3in

#### specifications

BUILD	GRP
RCD	Category B
LENGTH OVERALL	43ft 0in (13.5m)
HULL LENGTH	42ft 0in (12.8m)
BEAM	12ft 0in (3.9m)
DRAUGHT	3ft 11in (1.3m)
AIR DRAUGHT	11ft 6in
DISPLACEMENT	12 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	264gal (1200lt)
WATER CAPACITY	110gal (500lt)

#### prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with 310hp D6 EVC sterndrives	£332,968 as tested
With 370hp IPS 500	£351,248
BOW-THRUSTER	STD
TEAK DECKING	STD
TRIM TABS	STD
HEATING & DEMISTERS	STD
BOAT AS TESTED	£332,968

ENQUIRIES Nord West (UK) Tel: 01692 630000  
www.nordwest.se.com. e-mail: info@nordwest.se

#### the rivals



##### PRINCESS 42

**From £305,323**  
A bigger boat and perfectly proportioned, the P42 will appeal to those wanting to stretch out a bit more. Two cabins, superb finish. Tel: 01752 600657  
www.princess.co.uk



##### RODMAN R41

**From £308,453**  
Modern cruiser space coupled with three cabins and IPS option. Price is keen but production build is not up to Nord West quality. Tel: 02380 450025  
www.ancasta.com



##### SEALINE 42/5

**From £313,339**  
Sealine offers a three-cabin option to go with plenty of other clever features, like the extending cockpit. 2007 promises improved finish. Tel: 01562 749100  
www.sealine.com