

— Boat Report —

RICO MARLIN

*From a good new British boatbuilder comes an outdrive
30-footer ideally suited to the good old British climate.*



This outdrive-powered 30-footer from a new name in British boatbuilding, unveiled at last year's Southampton Boat Show, is well prepared for the vagaries of the weather. It has a fully enclosed wheelhouse and practical open-plan accommodation in anticipation of the worst, but also a spacious and well protected cockpit to allow you to make the most of more clement conditions.

Its versatility is demonstrated by the fact that versions are being built for leisure use and for commercial applications.

A visit to Rico Powerboats' base in Plymouth enabled us to try out a pre-production model of the carefully conceived 30-knot cruiser, and to talk through some of the detail modifications that are in hand following successful sea trials, including an

alternative layout with a midships cabin, and a full-width sliding sunroof over the wheelhouse.

Design

The Rico name might be unfamiliar, but the builder and designer have plenty of experience between them. The former, Peter Short, has been involved in one-off and production building for more than 20 years, while the latter, John Moxham, is a highly regarded naval architect full of innovative ideas.

The Marlin's underwater lines flatten from a no-compromise deep vee of 29° amidships to a still-keen 22° at the transom. There are no fewer than four pairs of sprayrails, the inner sets fading on their run aft, as does the chine flat, which for the greater part of the hull's length cuts its planing surface straight into the topside. The sprayrails have a slight angled spread, which heightens their effective planing area to produce additional lift.

There is some canny design work at the transom, too. Whilst its topsides are moulded with a stepped return to protect the outdrive legs, the bulk above is devoted fully to the cockpit, not simply pushed out as a bathing platform. A swim ladder drops straight down from the transom coaming, and a stainless steel and teak platform is offered as an option.

Exterior

With no bathing platform, you board the Marlin by climbing over the topsides. On many boats this is awkward, but here the simple expediency of a short clip-on ladder provides a helpful leg-up. There are plenty of grabrails in the vicinity to lend a hand, and then it is simply a matter of stepping down the moulded steps in the cockpit coaming.

The cockpit layout is simple, with wide cushioned seating running right around the deep coaming, which is topped off with handrails. On our test boat the areas beneath the seats had not been enclosed, although moulded lockers are to be incorporated on

subsequent cruising craft (those intended for commercial use will usually be devoid of seating).

The side decks, no less than 12in (30cm) wide, are moulded with an adequate non-slip finish, and you are further protected on the one hand by a single-railed guardrail that runs well back towards the cockpit, and on the other by a handhold along the superstructure. The complete expanse of coachroof has the same non-slip surface.

The foredeck is equipped with a Lofrans windlass feeding into a chain locker accessible only through the forecabin; a deck hatch would have allowed for some extra stowage. There are adequate-sized 10in (25cm) cleats, including a pair for springs.

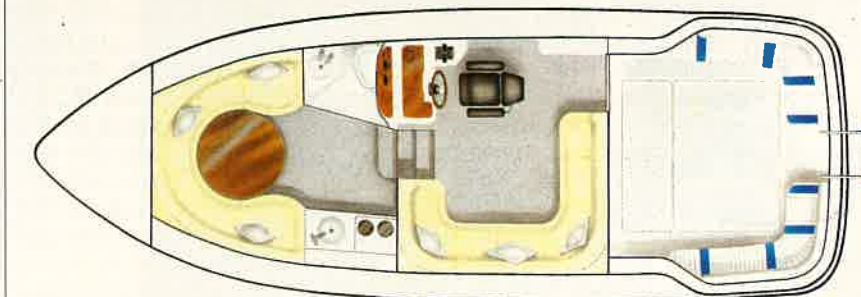
Lockers either side of the entrance to the wheelhouse from the cockpit house the gas bottles and the mains-ring fusebox. The wheelhouse bulkhead itself incorporates a stout, no-nonsense half-glazed door and a couple of businesslike ports, helping to give good all-round visibility from the interior helm.

Interior

Clockwise from left: towards the rear of the saloon is a hatch giving access to the fuel tanks and bulk stowage space. A long settee to port provides plenty of seating capacity, and the large sliding windows offer a good view and ventilation. The cockpit has cushioned seating around a safe, deep coaming topped with handrails. On this version of the Marlin, the galley is also down here, although on the midship-cabin and dinette are on a low level forward, so as not to clutter the saloon. Engine options chiefly involve twin-diesel installations, this case Mercruisers. Heading out from Plymouth, we clocked a top speed of 32.5 knots, with our radar gun, and acceleration of 0-20 knots in just over 10 seconds.

The wheelhouse/saloon has a generous L-settee to port, but no table. Rather than overcrowd this upper level, the layout leaves it clear of obstructions and instead incorporates a dinette in the lower cabin area, forward. On the boat we tested, the galley is also down here, although on the midship-cabin version this will be relocated to the wheelhouse, in place of the rear section of the settee.

The helm to starboard has a fully adjustable armchair-type seat, with the vertical wheel and throttles comfortably positioned. The console is tiered, with the engine instrumentation furthest away, leaving the expanse immediately in front of the wheel for a goodly array of electronics which are easy to view and use. Ready-use switches and tab rockers are conveniently located, with the main breaker panel tucked beneath the console. All in all there is just the right spread to the layout, although a



flat area for a folded chart and some trays for odds and ends would not go amiss.

Back towards the door is a useful-sized cupboard, and a hatch within the sole which gives access to the tank space and an area of bulk stowage. Also down here are the fuel cocks and fuel/water separators, all easy to get at, together with the battery charger.

We were impressed with the standard of finish in these out-of-sight areas, the interior of the hull being 'flow-coated' with gelcoat and all pipework and cabling fastidiously secured out of harm's way. Also good to see were the stainless steel strips bordering areas of high wear, for example around the hatch and stair treads.

The voids in the base of the settee offer plenty of lined storage, and the design is to be modified to incorporate a sliding section which can be pulled out to make a double berth. At present, the only sleeping area is the convertible forward dinette, whose circular table drops to create a generous double measuring 6ft 2in x 5ft 6in (1.89m x 1.68m), with storage beneath.

On this version of the Marlin, the galley is set to port on the lower level, with a toilet/shower compartment opposite. The former is ably appointed, with a large fridge, a twin-burner hob, a stainless steel sink and a reasonable cache of stowage outboard, although work surface is rather more limited. The latter is part-moulded and of reasonable size and height for ablutions, with a modicum of lined dry storage.

Headroom is good throughout the accommodation, with 6ft 3in (1.91m) in the wheelhouse, where the deckhead is inset with spotlights. Sliding side windows give ventilation up here, while the lower area has a suitable number of opening ports.

Engines

There is a wide choice of outdrive installations from the Mercruiser and Volvo stables. The emphasis is on twin-diesel configurations, although there are single diesels (Mercruiser's 270hp D7.3L and Volvo's 230hp KAD 42B) listed, and twin 205hp petrols are also an option.

Our test boat was fitted with a pair of 180hp D3.6L/180 Mercruiser diesels coupled to Bravo 3 legs with contra-rotating props.

Access to the compartment could not be easier. A large after section of cockpit sole lifts on a pair of gas-struts to allow for a cursory inspection, while a smaller section further forward hinges up to give you standing room inside. Conveniently, it is still possible to move around the cockpit when this forward section is closed.

The well-found installation appears tight for the purposes of regular checks and maintenance, but in fact everything is easy to get at, even in the outboard areas and towards transom. The battery boxes and isolators fall beneath the forward hatch, and the Rule submersible bilge pump is also accessible here; the fuel/water separators are in the tank space beneath the saloon.

A single-layer foam insulates the forward bulkhead and the sides of the compartment.

Performance and handling

Whilst the sheltering benefits of a wheelhouse are self-evident, enclosed driving positions can easily be

claustrophobic and make the skipper unduly anxious. But the Marlin offers excellent all-round visibility, with one of the most useful depths of view we have encountered between bow and coachroof. The helm position is comfortable and offers fingertip control, making this a relaxing boat to pilot.

We hardly had the weather conditions for our test which would draw any spray inboard, but the hull looks to give a dry ride and the screen is anyway serviced by a sturdy pair of wipers, although not self-parking ones.

For once, the waters beyond Plymouth Sound's breakwater had only a limited swell, so we were unable to assess the boat's seakeeping in poor conditions. However, the deep forward sections made short work of larger washes from fishing and naval craft, the hull being easily steered in and out rather than caught in the tramlines.

When you apply plenty of helm the boat banks steadily and easily, with the contra-rotating props making life particularly easy; just wind them out level and forget them.

Performance figures are useful. A 3000rpm setting gives a shade under 24 knots for passage cruising, 3300rpm equates to 28.4 knots for some extra pace, and a full-throttle 3800rpm turns in 32.5 knots. Backing right down to 2400rpm, the hull was happy to sit nicely on the level at 13.5 knots. The Marlin is no slouch in the acceleration department either, making 20 knots from rest in just over 10 seconds.

Our existing data on Mercruiser D3.6L diesels indicates fuel consumption of around 11gph (50lph) at 3000rpm, 14gph (63lph) at 3300rpm and 20gph (91lph) with the taps wide open. The former figures would give a cruising range of well over 200 miles.

Whether it was due to the clean indirect injection or the fillet designed into the wheelhouse top in an attempt to stop a vortex building up behind it, the cockpit remained commendably clear of fumes — an important consideration for what is the only exterior seating area. We were less happy with noise levels here, which were as high as 87dB(A) even at 3000rpm, although in fairness this was probably higher than it might have been due to the bedding down of the engine hatches, which were in the process of being modified.

In the wheelhouse/saloon with the door shut, the sound was less intrusive, hovering around 78dB(A).

Conclusions

Subsequent boats off the line will benefit from a number of planned modifications, notably the sliding sunroof and the option of a midships cabin, but as it was were most enthusiastic after our first acquaintance with the Rico Marlin.

Its layout makes sense for people who want to go boating without worrying about the weather. Its performance was a treat, with the twin 180hp Mercruisers a good match for the comfortably riding hull. Its finish might not cut such a dash as that associated with other marques, but its fit-out is thorough, sturdy and well executed, both where it is visible and where it is not.

These are not the easiest times to launch new boats onto the market, especially in a size and cost bracket which appears to have been especially hard-hit by recession, so it is good to see the emergence of a conscientious boatbuilder offering such a useful 30-footer at such a keen price. □

Rico Marlin

Loa 29ft 10in (9.14m).
Beam 10ft 6in (3.23m).
Draught 3ft 0in (0.91m) with drives down.
Air draught 9ft 3in (2.82m).
Displacement 3.75 tons.
Fuel capacity 140gal (635lt).
Water capacity 25gal (114lt).
Engines twin Mercruiser D3.6L/B3 180hp diesels.
Price from £56,213 ex VAT with twin 205hp petrols; £66,003 as tested.
Builders Rico Powerboats, Breakwater Works, Breakwater Road, Plymouth, Devon PL9 7HJ.
Tel: 01 752 402525.