



BOAT REPORT

Rio 700

Squeezing a midships berth into a 24ft sportcruiser is not easy. So has Italian styling flair been compromised in the process?

Recent moves by UK sportscruiser importers to cushion their businesses against exchange-rate fluctuations by adding European-built craft to their otherwise American portfolios has been good news for buyers, broadening their choice.

Italian boatbuilders have been major beneficiaries, with their clean styling adding some verve to the market. In the case of the Rio 700, the amount of internal space is exceptional too.

Design & layout

Italian design flair is tested to its limits when it comes to producing a compact sportscruiser, where space in both the cabin and the



cockpit is necessarily limited. The requirements of an internal layout that incorporates a midships berth as well as a convertible forward dinette are always going to make cutting-edge external styling difficult.

For this 24-footer, a broad beam carried as far forward as possible and a snub bow is the typical answer, to maximise interior volume. Although the bow pulpit extension is integrated into the overall lines, sitting above the rubbing rail it still appears as an afterthought.

The treatment at the transom is far tidier, although this does mean a narrow bathing platform.

Raised gunwales are inevitable, so the 700 does have a slightly top-heavy appearance, though the screen integrates into the styling and provides good protection for the cockpit.

Petrol engine options are a 190hp Mercruiser 4.3L or a 210hp Mercruiser 4.3L EFI, while the only diesel alternative is Volvo Penta's 150hp AD31P. Our test boat had the more potent of the petrol units.

Performance & handling

The 4.3 EFI looks lost in the engineroom, but does not lose out when it comes to performance. This is far from the quickest boat you will drive, but it suits the Rio's hull and offers plenty of fun.

Pick-up is fairly quick, and the boat is soon up onto the

Decks

There are no side decks, so steps set into the moulding to port of the helm console give access forward, through the centre section of the screen.

However, anchor work should be limited as an electric windlass is part of the standard fit-out.



Galley

The galley moulding, to port near the cabin entranceway, is a good size for a 24ft boat, with plenty of stowage.

A fridge and a single-burner stove are in the middle, while the sink is set in the forward end of the moulding, with stowage underneath and a

splash screen to separate it from the dinette. There is no hot-water option.

The moulding incorporates open stowage units, and a full-size cupboard can be found in the base nearest the door, though neither this nor the one under the sink has any shelving. The finish on the inside of the cupboards leaves something to be desired.

Main cabin

The large companionway door slides across under the helm console to allow you to step down into the cabin.

Headroom is generous around the galley area, and an immediate impression is how spacious the interior is for a small boat, especially as the designers have not skimped on cockpit size. Light woods add to the roomy feel, and two contrasting shades of blue are used for the upholstery.

Plenty of light comes in through the side windows and

deck hatch, and through the cockpit door if it is left open. The cabin roof, a one-piece moulding, reflects the light, augmenting the effect of the large mirror in the bow.

Forward, the dinette has the familiar layout: a table (which can also be mounted in the cockpit) which can be dropped in between the seating to make up a good-sized double berth.

There are lockers under the port and starboard cushions, both with GRP liners, and open stowage behind the seat-back cushions. Finish is not perfect, with a few rough edges and exposed screwheads.



Toilet

Headroom in the WC is a little more restricted than in the galley, but still very good for a craft of this size.

A sink is set into a moulded unit, with a large cupboard underneath, and the toilet is mounted at an angle to help



increase the usable space.

Fittings include a toilet-roll holder and a towel rail. The side window has a ventilation opening set into it, and there is a mirror above this.

Midships cabin

The midships berth is a generous single, with an open locker at its foot. But access is a little limited, as you have to crawl in from alongside the companionway steps, and there is no curtain for privacy.

If not used as a formal berth, this area will serve as excellent supplementary stowage.



Helm

The console has no frills in specification or layout, but good, effective design.

The engine instrumentation, mounted on a wood-effect backing, covers the basics, with the strange exception of a speedometer. A compass comes as standard, but a

depth-sounder is an optional extra. A tidy switch panel deals with the electrical functions.

Buyers used to American craft will be disappointed by the lack of adjustability for the steering wheel and the double helm seat, which will compromise comfort for some. However, a footrest helps those of average build.



Cockpit

The cockpit has L-shaped fixed seating to starboard and a lift-up bench to port.

The latter, which will take two people, is a tidy design that allows you to create a wide walkway from the transom



forwards. However, this leaves the cockpit unbalanced, with all the seating set to starboard.

Stowage is limited to the open spaces under the aft part of the L-settee, with a retaining

lip underneath. Twin battery switches are just inside the transom door to port, and further forward on the same side is a holder for the single gas cylinder.

Engineroom

Access to the engine compartment is through cockpit floor panels, which are supported on gas struts.

The installation is well executed, with plenty of space around the engine, which could be fitted out by owners to provide extra stowage.

Remote fuel filters are standard, twin batteries are mounted to port and the engine compartment is insulated with sound-deadening material. The fire-extinguisher mounted here on the petrol-engined 700s is one of three on board.



Bathing platform

The bathing platform is fairly narrow, and the integrated styling means that, when moored alongside, you have to step round or over the wraparound freeboard.

The swing-down boarding ladder, mounted to port, is necessary as the platform is raised well above the water level.

Built-in fender holders and a transom door offer something of a big-boat feel. A transom shower is a £210 option.



plane. Mid-range performance is very acceptable, and good enough to keep you comfortably planing in tight turns, where the hull comes round smoothly no hull skip-out or propeller ventilation.

Straight-line tracking is true, and response to the steering wheel quick and accurate.

The hull can easily cope with more power, so with this installation it is safe and predictable, ideal for the newcomer to the sport.

Conclusions

The Italian builders of the Rio 700 have met the challenge of designing a two-cabin 24-footer in an interesting way.

Rio 700

BUILD

glass-reinforced plastic

RECREATIONAL CRAFT DIRECTIVE

Design Category B: Offshore (offshore voyages in wind up to Force 8)

DIMENSIONS

LOA

23ft 7in (7.20m)

BEAM

8ft 11in (2.62m)

DRAUGHT

1ft 7in (0.46m)

DISPLACEMENT

4343lb (1970kg)

FUEL CAPACITY

57gal (260lt)

ENGINE

210hp Mercruiser 4.3EFI petrol

PRICE

£33,100 inc VAT as tested

SUPPLIERS

Gibbs Marine Sales, Russell Road, Shepperton, Middlesex TW17 9UX. Tel: 01932 242977.

BUILDERS

Rio Boats, Via San Giovanni, 4 24060 Villongo, Italy.



The sense of style for which they are renowned has been suppressed slightly, but the boat's interior space is exceptional. Build quality is not all it could be, with some rough edges and exposed finishes, but then the 700 is significantly cheaper than other craft in its class.

Through all this, its performance and handling mark it out as a sportsboat rather than just a sportscruiser.

Owners of larger craft who are fed up with paying for permanent berths or looking to trail a boat to new cruising grounds should take a closer look. Especially if they are unwilling to sacrifice performance or accommodation. □