

FACT FILE
Sabre 34
LOA: 39ft (11.9m)
PRICE: from
£260,730
TOP SPEED:
31 knots

**MOTOR
BOATS TESTED**

Sabre 34 Express

Behind these traditional looks lies a gutsy performer that oozes gentleman's yacht-style quality. Could this be the perfect executive cruiser?

REPORT BY MARK TURLEY

Downeasters are to Americans what pilot boats are to the Brits. Both have workaday roots and not only do they look like they mean business, they deliver it too. Sabre Yachts is one of the best-known yards for these smart, wheelhouse-centric craft. Based on Maine lobster boats, the company's latest 34 model has softer, more rounded lines than earlier examples. However, reputations need to be built on more solid foundations than looks alone. And a

truly blustery spring tide day on the Solent provided ideal conditions for discovering whether our American cousins' idea of a sea-friendly craft is the same as ours.

Design & build

Pigeonholing American boats in terms of length – especially when it comes to this type of vessel – is something of a thankless task. Not least, that's because on this side of the Atlantic we tend to

gauge a boat's usefulness by the amount that can be crammed into it. Americans, on the other hand, don't mind paying for extra elbow room with their creature comforts. The 34 Express, which is in fact 39ft (11.9m) once you add in the anchor and bathing platforms, is a case in point. The below decks accommodation is, basically, one large en suite cabin. The generous berth, set squarely across the fore part of the cabin, opens onto the settee area adjacent to the companionway. To be fair, a dividing curtain

is provided and the settee can be made up to provide an extra berth, but it's more of a luxurious hotel suite – complete with sofa and coffee table – rather than a Travelodge-style room with a simple bed and a closet.

However, any analogy to a classy hotel only applies to the feeling of space. When you consider the fitout, we are talking gentleman's yacht, with wall-to-wall woodwork executed to a high, but unfussy standard. The hotel theme continues as there is no galley down below. Instead, this has been sited up in the wheelhouse, tucked behind the helm station and opposite the

“The hull feels like it's running on rails”

main dinette. The wheelhouse is fully enclosed, with a solid bulkhead shutting off the cockpit area; the alternative would be to leave the back open and enclose it, as necessary, with a canopy. The latter is fine if you boat where balmy days outnumber gloomy ones, but clearly the solid partition provides more

full-on protection. In any case there's plenty of light and fresh air, since half the windows around the wheelhouse open out. There are also a couple of hatches in the deckhead, providing more light.

The general level of build and fitout is good. The yard has gone all out and put in plenty of quality

Design & build

More elbow room than cabins, but purposeful looks



materials and good workmanship is present throughout. Combine this with a tough hull geared towards the serious end of leisure boating, and you've got a delightful, no-nonsense performer.

Accommodation

The obvious benefit of the fully enclosed wheelhouse is that it feels more snug and protected than a canopy. It also suits the smart galley arrangement, which comprises a sink, a two-ring hob and microwave oven.

A generator set is included, so you don't have to rely on shorepower alone for cooking. There

is a nest of drawers and a couple of cupboards for stowage, but serious cooks needing more room will have to look further afield and snaffle some of the locker space in the seat base opposite, which already houses the fridge.

You can increase seating at the L-shaped dinette by sliding the backrest of the co-pilot's armchair forward, which in effect makes something of a chaise longue. It's just a pity the rear face of the backrest isn't more padded.

The adjustable helm seat nearby can also be rotated to face the table, which is a nice design touch, but it's still not quite close enough for easy eating. The area outboard of this seat, below the window, looks redundant and it would have been useful to find some sort of coaming here, so the skipper could squirrel away those essential bits and pieces.

A run of four, easy-to-negotiate steps lead below. The treads are hinged to provide useful extra stowage on top of the plethora of cupboards situated throughout the saloon area and the generous double berth up forward. The louvered locker doors are something of



You get a great all-round view from the wheelhouse, thanks to those large windows. The skipper and co-pilot's chairs are both comfortable and fully adjustable

a hallmark for the yard and everywhere you look cupboards are fully lined, and countertops are always finished with fiddles.

A curtain can be used to separate the cabin area from the saloon portion and although the comfortable L-shaped sofa can be made up into a shortish berth, this looks like the ideal place to socialise, rather than crashing out. Here, the low-level table creates an ambience more suited to coffee and cocktails, than dinner.

The layout's generous nature extends to the toilet compartment, which has a separate shower

cubicle. The electric toilet, extractor fan and holding tank come as standard. In addition to the plentiful lockers, further stowage can be found in drawers beneath the berth. There's also a bulk

storage area and a useful second fridge housed under here too, plus a handy built-in tool kit. A flat-screen TV, mounted so it can be viewed from both the settee and the berth, is part of the standard spec.

Accommodation

Comfort and space but no dedicated sleeping cabin



Exterior

There can't be many other boats of this size where the narrowest part of the side decks is a generous 17in (43cm). And since these side decks are bordered by deep varnished toe rails and solid guardrails, this is a supremely easy and safe boat to crew.

The foredeck locker shows the same practical attention, split between a compartment for the chain and an especially commodious one for lines and fenders. On the other hand, the cockpit lazarette isn't as large as it appears, due to the

hull's prop tunnels pushing up and the fuel tank encroaching in. However, it is still very useful, and it's supplemented by the under-seat storage and cupboard located near the chunky transom door.

The seat in question is the rear-facing one and, as an added option, a further flip-up bench across the transom can be fitted to provide face-to-face seating.

Exterior

Practical, with plenty of space to move around



Engine sizes & access

Engine options start at 310hp, and although probably adequate, this is a hull that's a whole heap more than adequate and thus deserves a larger helping of horsepower.

If funds allow, dig a little deeper (around £10K deeper, in fact) and either plump for Volvo's D6 units at 370hp apiece or, as here, specify Yanmar's finely tuned 380hp jobs, which really get the hull singing.

A large gas-strut supported hatch in the wheelhouse sole, plus a set of steps, get you down onto the treadplate between the engines to view the raw water strainers and primary fuel filters. However, the proximity of the cockpit sole

restricts access to the oil filler caps and it's something of a squeeze to get past the generator – set to the rear – in order to access the service items on the outboard side of the engines.

Back on the plus side, however, the engineering is both chunky and tidily executed. The electrics are all cleverly protected behind panels, and water sensors are incorporated in the fuel system as a standard precaution. The engineers have also done a very good job of insulating the entire compartment.

This has been made easier through the installation of sophisticated electric control systems. As a result, general noise stands much less chance of winding its way out along coax cable routes.

Slide the backrest of the co-pilot's chair forward for more seating

This chair converts into a chaise longue

The smart wheelhouse galley is neat and compact

Performance & handling

Lording it at the helm of this boat is great fun, especially when all hell's being let loose outside, thanks to a near gale in the Solent. In fact, you could be in a boat 10ft or so longer and still not get such a composed ride as this. Sure, there is plenty of water flying but then there is no shortage of wiper power. And given the great view out, it's easy to keep tabs on things. In addition, the hull feels like it's running on rails, so the skipper stays very much in charge of speed and direction. Indeed, for much of the time we pushed along at 25 knots, which was good going given the conditions, and there was never a moment of unease from the hull or crew.

Grabrails surround the wheelhouse

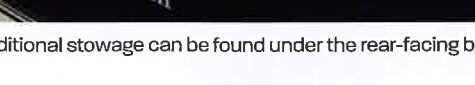
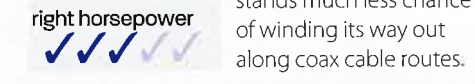
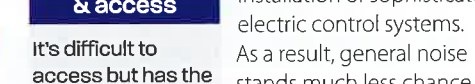
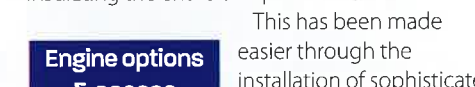
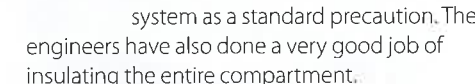
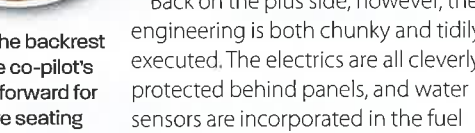
Side decks rarely are as wide as this

A good-sized toilet and shower compartment

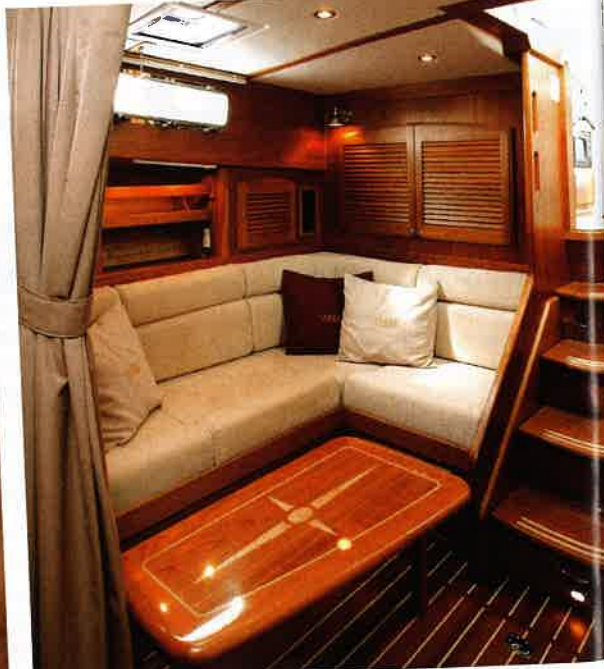
Additional stowage can be found under the rear-facing bench seating

The forward berth is like a luxurious hotel room

It's difficult to access but has the right horsepower



Behind the curtain the wood-panelled master cabin is sumptuous and spacious



The cocktail 'lounge' converts into a small and cosy double



A good-sized toilet and shower compartment



Additional stowage can be found under the rear-facing bench seating



Side decks rarely are as wide as this

BOAT REPORT

SABRE 34 EXPRESS

The only handling point we did pick up on was during a tight turn. You'll definitely need to wind on more helm than you initially think, as the hull gets round so far and then appears to stick. This is a function of the prop tunnels that we've encountered before. All you need is an extra bit of right or left-hand down to give the rudders that bit more bite.

The helm itself, like the rest of the boat, is very generous in terms of console space, with room

for two large radar/plotter screens exactly where you need them: tucked under your nose on a raised, angled dash. Nothing is too far away and controls and switches fall readily to hand.

Performance & handling

It has a solid ride and a useful turn of speed



Specification and value

Even with the favourable exchange rate, the 34 Express remains a top-dollar boat, but Sabre don't cut corners on quality workmanship or materials.

Furthermore, its base spec is geared for the American market, as it includes an all-electric galley, reverse-cycle aircon and the gen set required to fire up these items. A windlass would be good to see on the standard inventory, but

you'll only need an extra £10K to get an up-specced boat. Going beyond bare necessities, extras, such as the coaming taffrails and teak cockpit, will really set the boat off.

Specification & value

Quality comes at a price but the strong pound helps



Verdict

Boats are usually about compromise, especially when it comes to utilising every last square inch. But in this instance, Sabre has bowed out of juggling one cabin against another. The result is a boat earmarked for grown-ups – two to be precise – who recognise that space and quality are equal partners. There is certainly no compromise, however, when it comes to the boat's handling. It's as composed through the rough as it is at rest alongside.

8/10

MBM rating



Sabre 34 Express technical data

specifications

BUILD	GRP
RCD	B
LENGTH OVERALL	39ft 2in (11.92m)
HULL LENGTH	34ft 6in (10.60)
BEAM	13ft 3in (3.85m)
DRAUGHT	3ft 0in (0.92m)
DISPLACEMENT	8.6 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	206gal (938lt)
WATER CAPACITY	50gal (225lt)



key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDEDECKS	17in (43cm)
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 3in (1.91m)
FORECABIN BERTH	6ft 8in x 5ft 0in (2.03 x 1.52m)

performance

Engines	twin Yanmar 6LY3-UTP 380hp diesels					
Configuration	6cyl, 5.8lt, 380hp @3300rpm					
conditions	Wind NE'ly, Force 6, sea rough					
Load	fuel 60%, water 30%, crew 2					
Rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	noise
1500	8.5	3.3	15	2.58	425	67
2000	13.5	10.2	46	1.32	218	71
2500	20.4	15.2	69	1.34	221	75
2800	25.2	18.8	85	1.34	221	77
3000	27.6	22.9	104	1.21	199	80
3340	30.0	29.5	134	1.01	168	81

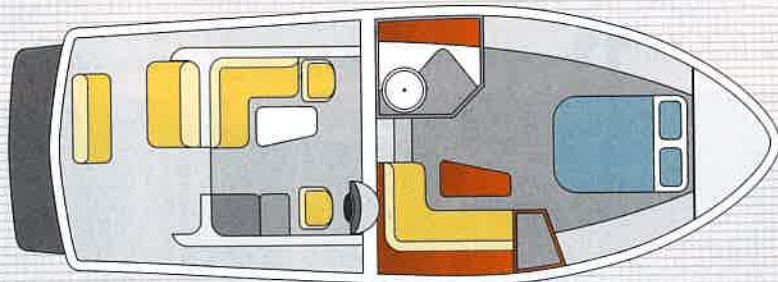
Range figures quoted in miles based on standard fuel tanks and include a 20% margin. GPH & MPG refer to imperial gallons. Figures may vary due to weather, air, water, engine temperature, crew numbers, hull fouling and fuel quality. Noise readings were taken in the wheelhouse.

prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
With twin Yanmar 380hp diesels	£260,730
BOW-THRUSTER	£3862
COLOURED HULL/DECK	£3710
TEAK DECKING	£5257
ELECTRIC WINDLASS	£2443
HEATING/AIR CON	standard
TRIM TABS	standard
COMMISSIONING & ANTIFOUL	standard

BOAT AS TESTED	£279,679
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ENQUIRIES Sea Ventures, Lymington Yacht Haven.
Tel: 01590 672472. www.sea-ventures.co.uk



the rivals



SEAWARD 35

From £263,000
Excellent sea boat in the more semi-displacement style, so it's not as voluminous as some. Smallish cockpit but separate forecabin.
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www.seawardboat.com



MENORQUIN 120

From £251,000
The Mediterranean take on the wheelhouse concept with lots of character and quality built in. A surprising turn of speed and two pleasant cabins.
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NIMBUS 380 COUPE

From £242,000
Large, sociable cockpit with a full-on cruising galley in the airy wheelhouse. Two cabins and plenty of practical Scandinavian touches.
Tel: 01590 677955
www.offshorepowerboats.co.uk