

# Boat Report

## SAGAR

### MINI-LUXE 40

*Workmanlike outside, a throwback to a bygone age inside, this continental barge-style steel cruiser would be ideal for liveaboard waterways explorers. And its price will not break the bank.*

Sagar's robust Mini-Luxe cruisers are styled on traditional continental barges, with rectangular accommodation spaces making maximum use of their overall dimensions. For practical long-distance cruising, note the all-round decks, the large steel mooring bollards and the combination of rubber and rope fendering.

Every now and then, a boat captures our imagination. It need not be the largest, fastest or most luxurious, just the best suited for its purpose, whether that be idling down a placid river or powering through the worst offshore conditions.

Just such a craft is the steel Sagar Mini-Luxe 40, which we first set eyes on at the Nottingham Boat Show in May, moored discreetly but confidently in the middle of a line of narrowboats and GRP cruisers.

By coincidence, one day earlier we had received an enquiry from a couple in New Zealand who asked us to advise them on a boat suitable for taking them across the English Channel and into the continental waterway network for extended cruising. As we discussed this, the principal characteristics emerged: steel construction to take knocks in the canals, a single diesel engine for reliable and economical performance, a propeller well protected behind a deep keel, and aft-cabin layout for maximum privacy when travelling with guests.

We then had to tell them that this described practically every Dutch cruiser, but very few British boats. By the end of our first day at Nottingham, however, we were reaching for the fax to tell them we had revised that opinion.

Sagar have been building steel boats at Brighouse in Yorkshire for 20 years. They are a versatile company, and having produced everything from narrowboats to wide-beam seagoing cruisers, with restaurant boats, inspection launches and classic-style launches in between.

The Mini-Luxe range is styled on the traditional continental barge, with an upright stem, vertical topsides and a rectangular wheelhouse and coachroof. The form makes maximum use of the overall dimensions of the boat, and is designed to fit into any wide lock and under all bridges on the major navigations in the UK and Europe.

The range comprises six models, from 33ft (10m) to 57ft (17m), with a standard beam of 10ft 6in (3.20m) except for the biggest boat which is 2ft wider. Two styles of stern are available, either with an open well-deck or with an aft cabin. The draught of these designs ranges from 2ft 6in (0.75m) to 2ft 9in (0.85m), and their air draught from 8ft 6in (2.60m) with the wheelhouse up to 6ft 6in (1.98m) with it folded down.



We tested the aft-cabin version of the Mini-Luxe 40, which has four berths in two separate cabins, plus two settee/berths in the saloon.

### Design

The Sagar's steelwork is massive. There is a 25mm (1in) thick by 300mm (12in) wide keel plate. The shallow-vee bottom is in 8mm plate, the hull sides in 6mm, and the wheelhouse and coachroof are 4mm thick. This all adds up to a hefty 17 tonnes finished weight, enough to give you confidence on any waterway.

The engineroom has bulkheads fore and aft, in 4mm plate, dividing the boat into three watertight compartments. A weedhatch gives access to the propeller in the event of it being fouled.

All steel is 43A grade, shotblasted and epoxy-primed. The finish of the plating and welds is smooth and fair, but still with a workmanlike feel.

The boat was designed in-house. It is reckoned to







be seaworthy up to Force 3-4 for Channel crossings, and the company's many years' experience of building wide-beam boats for liveaboard or long-distance cruising have produced a layout which is practical but still welcoming.

The basic layout is standard throughout the range but, as every boat is built as a one-off, variations requested by buyers can be accommodated.

## Interior

The styling throughout the boat is turn-of-the-century P&O, with Victorian bathroom fittings, round brass portholes with engraved glass stars, cream wooden bulkheads and teak trim (other woods can be substituted if a customer prefers). The result is both



pleasing and practical, and domestic-style radiators\* provides central heating.

Standing up from the level of the cabin-tops, the wheelhouse gives a superb 360° view. The helm seat has a clever swivelling design, which swings into the corner and out of the way when you are alongside.

The helmsman faces a man-size wooden wheel, a simple instrument panel and the essential rudder indicator. The throttle control is styled in keeping with the boat's barge image, with a polished brass casing and machined brass lever (Sagar fabricated their own top and lever to go on a standard single-lever mechanism). Aft are two rear seats, with a clever lift-up flap between them which can make them into a four-person bench seat.

The wheelhouse has a wooden framework and a separate two-part roof, made of aluminium on wooden beams, to keep it light enough to lift. The forward and aft sections of the framework can be dropped independently for ventilation, or you can drop the whole structure for passing under a low bridge, in which case you lift the roof off completely.

Steps lead down from the wheelhouse to the saloon, forward, and to the aft cabin.

The cosy aft cabin has a double berth to port and an en-suite toilet compartment to starboard with a separate shower area. Two half-height doors give the occupants private access to the aft deck.

The saloon feels like a lounge on an early passenger liner. The space is open-plan, with the

galley forward to starboard, a simple four-person dining table opposite and double settees aft, the port one converting into a berth. Midships, to starboard, is a solid-fuel heater, to make winter evenings cosier, although on the practical side an Alde gas-fired boiler for the central heating is neatly placed in the galley's aft bulkhead. The wide space under the side decks is cleverly utilised for extensive bookshelves.

Again the finish is cream bulkheads, this time with trim in iroko. Well-placed wooden posts provide necessary handholds in what is a large open space for a boat that might encounter heavy wash on busy continental rivers. Light comes from round portholes, and from a traditional pigeon-box in the cabin-top which lets in a remarkable amount of light, and can be opened for ventilation.

The galley is compact but well-equipped, with a four-burner gas hob, oven and grill, and an extractor overhead. The worktop is a reasonable size, incorporating a sink and drainer, with a fridge below. Crockery stowages above and two lockers below provide limited storage.

Forward of the saloon are a cabin and toilet with a cleverly designed two-door arrangement; you can either close off the cabin and leave access to the toilet from the saloon, or close off both and have the bathroom en-suite. The cabin has a double berth to starboard, plus two narrow hanging lockers, and a brass-framed glass hatch gives access to the foredeck.

Headroom in the saloon and forward cabin is a generous 6ft 4in (1.93m), with the aft cabin having 6ft 1in (1.85m).

## Engine

The Mini-Luxe 40 is powered by a 60hp Leyland diesel, giving up to 8 knots.

The engineroom is under the wheelhouse, accessed by lifting hatches in the sole and the steps down to the aft cabin. The engine itself is encased in a separate wooden box lined with soundproofing, and there is further soundproofing under the sole.

A 70gal (320lt) steel fuel tank runs across the forward bulkhead, and there is a 100gal (450lt) stainless steel water tank on each side, plus a 70gal holding tank. Access to the fuel filter and inlet strainer is excellent.

You can leave more space in the engineroom if the water tanks are sited forward, and on some boats the company do this, creating a small workshop area.

## Exterior

Out on deck, the workmanlike theme continues with an excellent layout for serious river and canal work. Side decks 12in (300mm) wide make it safe and quick to walk around the whole boat, with a bulwark which varies from 3in (75mm) high at the stern, where it is topped by pulpit rails, to 24in (600mm) at the bow. Inboard handrails run along the cabin-top, which like the decks is painted with non-slip.

The aft deck is big enough for working ropes, and the foredeck for rope and anchor handling. Massive steel bollards forward, midships and aft take care of lines, and will hold the boat in even the most turbulent of locks. The midships bollards cleverly double as raised fillers for the water tank (port) and fuel tank (starboard).

On the foredeck are two lockers. The port one is big enough to swallow three 15kg gas bottles, while

the starboard one gives access to the chain locker. The anchor stows in a hawse pipe, and is handled by a Vetus windlass.

At gunwale level, the whole boat is protected by 3in (75mm) diameter round rubber fendering located in steel cheeks.

And just in case all this practical detail leads you to suppose there is no room on the Mini-Luxe for relaxing, the cabin-tops forward and aft are large enough to hold a party on — with raised lips all round to stop the bottles rolling off.

## Handling and performance

Out on the River Trent, the 40 proved comfortable and easy to drive. Manoeuvring is good, with the big rudder giving good turning performance, but we would suggest a bow-thruster is a must if you are to use this boat for any serious cruising, as it is long and has a large windage.

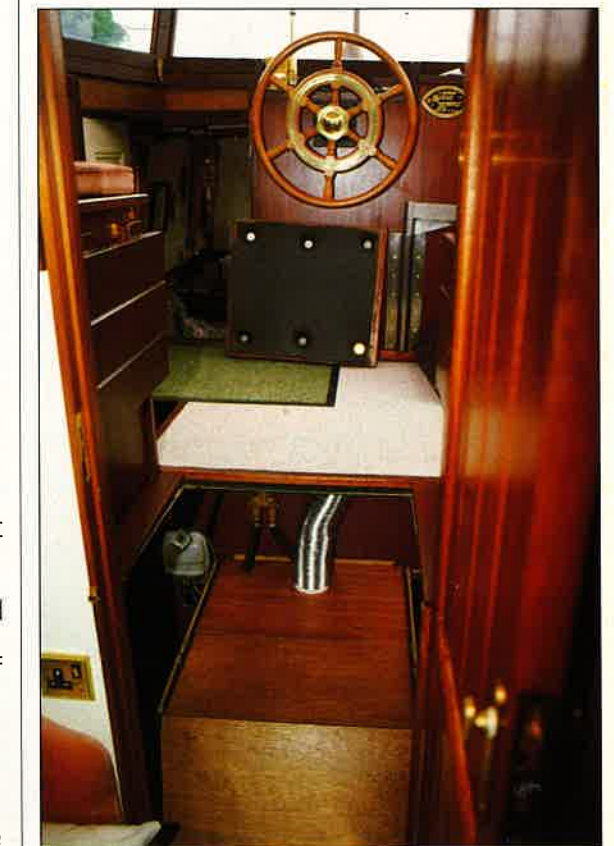
At the Thames-legal speed of 5mph (8kph), noise levels were a relaxed 70dB(A) in the wheelhouse, 71dB(A) in the cabin and 66dB(A) in the saloon. Pushing up to 7mph (11kph), things were noisier, with 77dB(A) recorded in the wheelhouse, 81dB(A) in the aft cabin and 70dB(A) in the saloon.

The maximum speed we recorded was 8mph (13kph) or 7 knots. The builders claim 8 knots would probably be achieved in open water, but you would not want to run at this speed for too long.

## Conclusions

The Mini-Luxe 40 has many good features, but probably the greatest attraction to most people will be its price. It is not much more expensive than some 29ft GRP cruisers, and considerably less so than any continental equivalents; the Pound's weakness against the Deutschmark sees to that.

For anyone contemplating serious inland cruising, in the UK or abroad, a trip to Yorkshire could pay dividends. □



## Sagar Mini-Luxe 40

Loa 40ft 0in (12.20m).  
Beam 10ft 6in (3.20m).  
Draught 2ft 6in (0.76m).  
Air draught 8ft 6in (2.60m) with wheelhouse up; 6ft 6in (1.98m) with wheelhouse down.  
Displacement 17 tons.  
Fuel capacity 70gal (320lt).  
Water capacity 200gal (900lt).  
Engine 60hp Leyland diesel.  
Price from £59,498 ex VAT; £54,931 for aft-deck version.  
Builders Sagar Marine, Victoria Works, Wharfe Street, Brighouse, Yorkshire HD6 1PP.  
Tel: 01484 714541.

Above left: interior styling is turn-of-the-century P&O, trimmed with a choice of woods. Left: on test on the River Trent in Nottingham. Right: the engine is encased in a separate soundproofed box under the wheelhouse sole.