



Boat Report

SEAWARD 29

The latest Nelson-based semi-displacement design from Guernsey actually offers up to 28 knots with 230hp diesels.



Left: Seaward's version of the Nelson 28/29 has ample headroom and space to walk through the saloon. Above: the settee's backrest hinges up to create twin bunk-berths (above). Above right: forward are a galley and double cabin. Right: cockpit seating is provided by a transom bench and the engineboxes.



Guernsey-based Seaward Marine have established a reputation for building tough, no-nonsense, seagoing craft, in keeping with the often wild waters round their island. Based on semi-displacement hulls from the Nelson stable, these have proved popular with private owners wanting all-weather cruising boats, as well as with harbour authorities, pilots and police forces requiring reliable 24-hours-a-day patrol boats.

The latest addition neatly fills the obvious gap in a range which includes 23ft, 25ft, 38ft, 42ft and 45ft models. It made its debut at the Southampton Boat Show, where we took it out for a test run.

Design

The 29 is based on the Nelson 28/29 hull, which we tested some years ago in its Landguard 28 guise (see MBM Jan 91 p66). Designed, as are all Nelsons, by TT Boat Designs on the Isle of Wight, this embodies all the features which have made these craft renowned the world over.

The true semi-displacement boat is not simply a hard-chine hull driven at below planing speeds. It has a round-bilge form, with deep, sharp sections forward to cut through the waves, rapidly levelling out to give an almost flat run aft, to provide lift at high speeds and prevent the stern digging in. A full-length deep keel provides directional stability when running in front of the waves, with the forefoot cut away to prevent broaching. The keel projects below the sterngear, giving some protection to the propellers if you should touch bottom.

Above the waterline, a pronounced sheer forward prevents the bow burying in head seas, while flare keeps the foredeck dry. A full-length knuckle, capped with teak badging, further reduces the spray, throwing it out and back, away from the windscreen. The beam has been increased, to give the extra internal space required for a cruising boat, without compromising seakeeping.

Normally, semi-displacement boats are designed for a top speed of 18-20 knots, their strength being the ability to keep this up in worse conditions than a planing hull could, rather than the ability to sprint in fair weather. This is true of the standard Seaward 29, with its 140hp Yanmars, but the boat we tested had the latest 230hp Yanmar 4LH STE diesels, giving a claimed 28 knots.

Exterior

On the pontoons, the Seaward's blue hull and purposeful white superstructure sets it apart from its racier neighbours. It has the air of a professional's boat. The impression is strengthened by the teak rubbing-strakes, transom badging and all-round rubber D-fendering, but these items are not just cosmetic; they contribute to the strength and durability of the boat.

When you step aboard, the feeling of security continues, with high cockpit coamings, sturdy stainless steel bollards and Treadmaster on the decks, giving the only true non-slip finish in all conditions. This is in fact an extra, but one that is well worthwhile in place of the standard painted non-slip.

Well-placed handrails make getting in and out of the cockpit safe and easy, aided by further inboard rails on the cabin top and coachroof. The side decks are a good 9in (225mm) wide, with a raised gunwale lip, though the substantial engine air inlet cowls on

the cabin sides can catch your feet as you walk forward. The guardrails are a good height, at 28in (700mm), but are wires rather than solid rails.

Mooring is handled by stainless steel bollards forward and aft, and aluminium ones amidships. The Bruce anchor stows in a stemhead fitting, and is handled by an electric windlass. A sturdy pulpit rings the foredeck.

At the stern is an optional bathing platform and ladder, aft of a roomy cockpit with a full-width seat across the transom and extra seating on the engineboxes. The stern seat lifts in sections to reveal good storage space beneath, and extra lockers are set in the cockpit sides.

Extensive further stowage is available beneath the sole, where you have room for fenders and a liferaft, plus access to the inside of the hull. Substantial recessed locking arrangements keep the lids watertight, maintaining the self-draining cockpit.

Interior

Access to the saloon is via a clever split-height door. The top three-quarters hinge right back over the engineboxes, giving a clearer width to walk through, and also allowing the partial opening of the accommodation for ventilation.

Inside, Seaward have come up with an improvement on previous layouts for this hull. Accepting that this is basically a 2+2 boat, they have avoided the temptation to provide a double berth in the saloon as well as in the forward cabin, and have instead gone for a Pullman arrangement, with a single settee/berth to port whose backrest will hinge up to form a second single berth when required. Even with four berths in use, it is still possible to walk through the boat.

Opposite the settee to starboard is a further single seat, plus a locker unit. Forward are two helm seats, with the driver's position to port and the navigator's to starboard.

The console is simple but complete, with the two Yanmar instrument panels plus a row of ready-use switches. A green light indicates when the automatic electric bilge pump is running, and a neat but effective vertical array of press-button circuit-breakers is recessed into the port side of the companionway leading down to the forecabin. There are twin Morse MT single-lever engine controls, and a small fiddled chart top with a hinged lid.

Headroom in the saloon is an ample 6ft 3in (1.90m). The side windows slide open for ventilation and communication with the crew on deck, and a welcome detail is the provision of deep perspex drip-channels to catch leaks and condensation. Another good idea is the moulded wooden rails which run full length beneath the windows, providing excellent grabholds and doubling as fiddles for the narrow outboard shelves.

Two steps lead down to the forward cabin, where headroom is 5ft 10in (1.78m), adequate for what is only an occasional living area.

To starboard is a compact galley with a two-burner gas hob, grill and oven, a good-size sink and three medium-sized lockers (the fridge is located under the navigator's seat). Opposite is a similarly compact but adequate WC, with a toilet, a sink, a shower and hot-and-cold water via an engine calorifier.

Forward are twin vee-berths, with an infill making them into a double. Good stowage is offered by

lockers under the berths, plus full-length shelves outboard and a locker in the forward bulkhead; a watertight hatch in the back of this gives access to the chain locker.

Joinery throughout the boat is in teak, all to an excellent standard, and not just where it shows.

Engines

The engines are mounted partly under the cockpit and partly under the saloon. They drive conventional shafts through what appears to be a steep angle, but is apparently acceptable, and certainly works.

Previous builders using this hull have opted for V-drives, but these have made the boats stern-heavy, and have restricted access to the shafts and sternglands. Seaward have gone the conventional gearbox route, and produced a better-handling boat as a result.

Access from the cockpit is gained by lifting hinged lids, which allow you to reach most of the service items, plus the couplings, sternglands and inlet strainers. To get at the front of the engines you lift up the settee-bases in the saloon. The installation is neat and tidy, with all-round noise insulation.

Performance & handling

Out on trial, the 29 handled superbly. At low speeds around the marina, the large rudders, positive steering and precise engine controls allow easy manoeuvring. Out on Southampton Water, the Yanmars quickly bring the boat up to speed.

The maximum speed we recorded on our radar gun was 27.7 knots at 3600rpm, with 90% fuel, 10% water and three crew, which would suggest an easy 28 knots at half-load. Dropping down to 3000rpm gave 23 knots, and to 2500rpm gave 16 knots.

Trim is on the high side, at 5.5°, but this is how Nelson hulls like to run, and the optional trim-tabs can easily take a degree off this in heavy head-seas, as well as allowing port and starboard trim. The boat turns tight and quickly, even at maximum speed, with no sign of the rudders stalling.

We could find no serious waves to tax the Seaward, but our previous tests on similar boats have confirmed the qualities of the hull design in all weathers. Range at cruising speed is 275 miles, making this a versatile Channel-crossing boat.

The view from the tall helm seat is good, though we had to stretch to reach the windscreen wiper switches. Seaward tailor the helm position to suit each owner, so this should not be a problem.

The noise from the Yanmars is acceptable at cruising speeds, though at maximum revs it starts to intrude, as is inevitable with the engineboxes partly in the saloon. More substantial soundproofing might help. In the saloon we recorded 77dB(A) at 2500rpm, 81dB(A) at 3000rpm and 86dB(A) at 3600rpm; in the forward cabin these figures were 80dB(A), 83dB(A) and 86dB(A) respectively, while out in the cockpit they were 82dB(A), 85dB(A) and 88dB(A).

Conclusions

Clearly the 29 is a worthy new member of the Seaward family. Three have already been sold, with one going to Japan, so it would seem that discerning buyers the world over are getting the Guernsey feeling. □

Seaward 29

Loa 29ft 4in (8.94m).
Beam 10ft 0in (3.05m).
Draught 2ft 9in (0.84m).
Displacement 6 tonnes.

Fuel capacity
186gal (845lt).
Power twin 230hp Yanmar
4LH STE diesels.

Price £99,732 ex VAT with
140hp Yanmars; £109,013
with 230hp Yanmars.
Builders Seaward Marine,
Hure Mare Industrial Estate,
Vale, Guernsey, Channel
Islands GY3 5UB.

Tel: 01481 45353.