



Left: now available with a 135hp Yanmar diesel as well as a 96hp option, the Skibsplast 700D has a top speed of 25 knots but consumes no more fuel at cruising speeds. Right: a foam-insulated hatch between the forward cockpit seats is removed for access to the engine, whose daily inspection points are easy to reach.

Boat Report

# SKIBSPLAST 700D

*A 135hp inboard diesel gives this no-nonsense Norwegian 23-footer good performance without bank-breaking running costs.*



Far left: the propeller is set partially in a tunnel, and the large rudder within an extension giving additional lift at the stern. Left: the helm position is functional rather than fancy, and the driver's seat hinges forward to make way for a fold-out galley unit.

Petrol outdrive power dominates the small-boat market, but Norwegian builders Skibsplast have departed from the norm in offering a couple of traditional inboard-diesel craft, keeping running costs down while still giving a useful turn of speed. Having reviewed their 20ft 9in (6.4m) 600D model last year (see MBM Sep 94 p52), we waited for the more potent of two engine options to become available before commenting on its big sister, a true weekender, the 700D.

## Design

The midship-engined hull shares the same design concept as the smaller boat, with the propeller running partially in a tunnel, and the drivetrain supported by a chunky skeg that gives a fair amount of protection to the prop and offers a landing for a stainless steel shoe that in turn houses the bottom rudder bearing.

The rudder itself is a sizable affair partially set within a tunnel extension moulded into the transom, this slight bulb no doubt giving additional lift to the stern sections.

The hull shapes up to a medium-vee amidships, flattening in its run aft and loosing the sprayrails into concave panels, giving the running surface a wide, reverse-clinker form. There is plenty of flair and fullness pushed into the topsides at the bow.

The bathing platform is a solid, bolt-on affair, the mid-portion hinging to help you get at the sterngear. The transom has a wide seat-cum-step let into it, across the topside, incorporating a handy locker for warps.

## Exterior

Like many Scandinavian small-boat manufacturers, Skibsplast concentrate more on pragmatics than on streamlined gelcoat and dash. A case in point is their preference for fitting-out in faced plywood rather than relying completely on GRP mouldings; they believe the heavier wood gives extra solidity against family wear and tear, and reduces machinery and hull noise.

Thus the cockpit sole is built out of a deck-faced ply banded with aluminium strip to take the knocks, half a dozen panels giving access to the engine and plentiful stowage areas when lifted. The U-shaped aft seating and the plinths supporting the two forward bucket seats are also constructed rather than moulded.

Cave lockers are located in the cockpit coamings beside these seats, and large lockers and a drawer are let into the box-like plinths. Beneath the central portion of the rear bench are the fuel and water tanks, access to the steering gear and batteries,



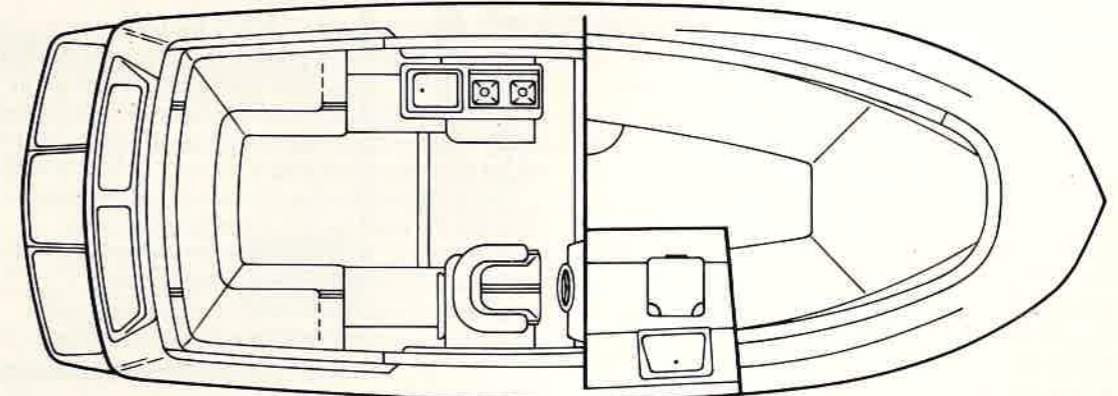
and stowage for the cockpit table. The main battery switch and a manual bilge pump are located under the starboard cushion.

Hinging the single passenger seat forward, clear of its plinth, allows you to fold down the galley unit, which is tucked into the adjacent coaming. It comprises a two-burner alcohol hob and small sink fed from the pressurised coldwater faucet, and the seat-base doubles as a small area of countertop (although it would have made sense to finish this in an easy-wipe Formica rather than in vinyl). Stowage here is limited to the aforementioned seat-base cupboard and drawer, while a fridge can be fitted as an option beneath the helm seat opposite.

If all this seems a touch exposed, the 700D comes complete with a two-part cockpit canopy, whose frame tucks neatly around the transom seat's backrest.

The helm itself is nothing fancy, although we understand it is to be smartened up with a wooden dash. There are engine instruments dead in front of the padded wheel, and short runs of ready-use switches down both sides. The throttle projects from the coaming, and like the wheel falls easily to hand whether you are sitting or standing.

The layout allows room for a compass and some



further instrument heads. Indeed, the higher-specification package offered by Skipsplast's UK agents Wessex Marine includes an Autohelm Bidata log/sounder, compass and a whole host of upgrades. The 700DLE model also runs to a teak-faced sole, mains power, a hot water system, a sunbed extension, the fridge and a stainless steel targa arch, for a £2500 supplement.

The arch, which can be specified as an option in any case, really makes sense, providing a useful handhold when you are boarding or inching along the side decks. Toing and froing from the cockpit is also helped by the inset moulded steps and the wood-topped coaming.

We were less happy with the side decks, which are narrow at 4.5in (12.5cm) wide and have no guiding lip of toerail. Forward, things are more secure, with handrails set in the coachroof and a low run of pulpit.

Deck hardware includes a wood-topped anchor chain locker, but no bow roller as standard. Adequate 7.5in (19cm) cleats are provided forward and at the quarters, but nothing amidships.

## Interior

Accessed through a sliding perspex door, the cabin has stooped standing headroom over most of its area, including the separate toilet compartment to starboard, and plenty of sitting headroom over the vee-dinette.

An infill for the dinette pivots out from one of the side benches to create a 6ft 1in x 5ft 0in (1.86m x 1.52m) berth, although the width towards its foot is more pinched. Stowage is simply down to painted-out seat-base lockers and the wide shelves formed outboard of the settee by the backrests. A large opening hatch provides ventilation, and supplements the daylight from the fixed side ports.

The toilet compartment is appointed with a sea toilet, a moulded sink and some outboard countertop with a measure of stowage beneath. Legroom is a mite tight. A screw-down opening vent is set in the windowline.

The fit-out through the cabin is, like the rest of the boat, light on frills but functional and comfortable.

## Engines

Two engine options are offered, both turbocharged, intercooled four-cylinder units from Yanmar, at 96hp and 135hp. The latter, as on our recent test boat, is the workhorse of the two, with a swept volume of 3500cc against the former's 1800cc.

The drivetrain is straight through, with no recourse to a V-drive gearbox to reduce shaft angle, via a conventional stuffing box arrangement down to a four-bladed prop. This is 'traditional' engineering, in an attempt to reduce installation and servicing costs.

A loose-fitted hatch over the enginebay, between the forward cockpit seats, has to be lifted clear to get at the engine. With either Yanmar, daily inspection points are accessible, although major service items may need more dexterity and patience. Both the hatch and the compartment's sides are foam-insulated, and an omission we noted on the 600D, the lack of a raw-water strainer, has now been rectified.

A second loose-fitting hatch just abaft the engine compartment reveals the shaft log, exhaust muffler and an easily serviced fuel/water separator,

together with the water pressure pump. The fuel tank beneath the aft seat has a stopcock.

## Handling and performance

Our first encounter with the 700D came with the smaller power unit, which we felt made a very competent package, if a little under-engined. We managed 21.5 knots flat-out, a useful 17 knots at 3300rpm and a lazy 12 knots after pulling back to 2800rpm. Expect fuel consumption in the middle band to be around 3.0-3.5gph (15lph).

Speeds around the low to mid-teens rarely suit hulls of this or any other size, leaving them perched on the hump of their own wakes. Use of trim gave a steady, well-braced ride rather than digging itself into a hollow or pushing on past the hump.

The more potent engine installation meant a flatter angle of incidence still, happily lifting straight to any speed we chose without the slightest fuss. The extra 50hp pushes top speed up to 25 knots at 3400rpm, and easing back to 2800rpm gives an 18.5-knot ride which boat and crew would be happy to endure all day. We nudged the throttle either side of this mark, and found 3200rpm gave 22.6 knots and 2500rpm clocked a level-riding 15 knots.

Interestingly enough, from empirical fuel consumption data, the 2800rpm setting on the 135hp gives equivalent consumption per mile to the smaller engine, which is having to work harder.

In terms of noise there is little between the two installations. At our preferred cruising speed in the high-teens we recorded 83dB(A) towards the helm in both cases, with very little vibration.

The larger-engined boat was more obviously responsive to the throttle, and quicker off the mark, taking us from rest to 20 knots in 7sec, which is good by any standards. Winding on the helm at higher speeds pushed her around smartly, although the not inconsiderable rudder size requires a heavy hand and a slight tweak back on the throttle to get the best hard turns. A reduction in blade area would almost certainly ease this, without detracting from her steadiness at slower speeds.

There is none of the wanderlust to which outdrive boats are often prone. And of course there is plenty of steerage with the box knocked into neutral, making manoeuvring a sedate affair, although the stern 'kick' of paddlewheel effect is somewhat diminished by the tunnel and appendages.

Pushing through the short chop and swell around the approaches to Poole, the hull remained well mannered, finding a comfortable, steady trim angle with only the slightest tendency to lean into the wind. Trim tabs are an option rather than a necessity.

## Conclusions

A main attraction of the 700D is the low running costs associated with inboard diesel power, but the boat still gives useful, safe performance with good handling. A no-frills approach applies throughout the fit-out, which in these days of gloss and packaging will be a breath of fresh air to some.

The Skipsplast makes its mark by adequately covering the main bases: a practical layout for limited cruising, on a hull which is different but performs as it should. The smaller engine installation is adequate for most activities, but if your boating requires you to cover reasonable distances quickly then the larger option will make an easy time of it. □

## Skipsplast 700D

**Loa** 23ft 3in (7.10m).  
**Hull length** 22ft 0in (6.71m).  
**Beam** 8ft 2in (2.50m).  
**Draught** 2ft 5in (0.75m).  
**Displacement** 1.6 tons.  
**Fuel** 33gal (1.50lt).  
**Water** 15gal (70lt).  
**Engine** Yanmar 4LH1HT 135hp diesel.  
**Price** from £31,995 ex VAT with a 96hp Yanmar; £33,495 as tested with a 135hp Yanmar; £35,995 for 700DLE with higher specification.  
**Builders** Skipsplast A/S, 4660 Evje, Norway.  
**Tel:** (47) 37 93 03 33.  
**UK distributors** Wessex Marine, Salters Marina, Salters Way, Lilliput, Poole, Dorset BH14 8JR.  
**Tel:** 01202 700702.