

# Stevens Vlet 1200

Borrowing some shapely style from traditional craft, this Dutch steel cruiser's looks are as sharp as its craftsmanship and engineering. Is there any more comfortable way to go displacement boating? **REPORT BY MARK TURLEY**





**D**utch builders Stevens are on a mission to modernise the look and feel of the steel cruiser, but they're doing so by going back to the future.

The makeover for this stiffly corseted maiden aunt of boating is being achieved by replacing slab-sided hulls with multi-chined forms, based loosely on those of the vlet, the traditional workboat of the Netherlands.

The Vlet models in the range have steadily become more popular than the Cruiser designs, and there's no denying they make a striking first impression. But have snappier and shapelier looks meant doing away with the practical virtues for which this yard is noted? We tested the 1200 to find out.

## DESIGN & BUILD

When giving a boat a more 'traditional' look, there always a danger that it will end up all

brawn and no brain. But Stevens have captured the spirit of the broad-shouldered vlet while keeping the aesthetics sharp and smart.

Much of this is down to achieving a pleasing balance of proportions between the hull and superstructure, and ensuring that the steel fabrication has plenty of detail, such as the stepped gunwale.

The multi-chine shape is more pleasing than most steel topsides, and means the forebody of the hull is fuller, which in turn affords the forecabin more space. Circular ports in the coachroof and coir fendering give the boat even more charm, as well as tending to exaggerate its length.

A three-quarter-length keel houses the stern tube, and if you opt for a twin engine installation each set of sterngear benefits from a similar arrangement, rather than leaving the

propeller shafts to be supported by P-brackets.

An optional bathing platform fabrication (which doubles as a holding tank) lengthens the hull by 40cm.

There are a number of possible layouts for the forward accommodation. Our test boat was fitted out with handsome vee-berths in the forward cabin, a small en-suite WC, and a dinette opposite a galley of liveaboard proportions. Alternatives include having an island double berth in the forecabin, and doing away with the dinette to incorporate a third cabin.

The master suite is aft, of course, and very generous in size, extending the full width of the vessel. It is also better lit than most aft cabins, thanks to the plentiful portholes peppering the topsides.

The central saloon is also light and roomy, and thoughtfully laid out so that people can sit



**below** The forward accommodation can have a dinette or a third cabin opposite the well-equipped galley. There's plenty of sociable seating in the saloon.



**below** Features of the homely interior include good natural light, comfortable settees, well-executed joinery, fiddled surfaces and generous headroom.



facing each other. The settees are extremely comfortable, with plenty of depth, and there always seems to be a fiddled surface to hand on which you can place a mug or glass.

This eye for detail runs through the entire boat, in tandem with well executed joinery and generous 6ft 6in (1.98m) headroom.



## ACCOMMODATION

A solidly built wooden door and hatch, and an easily negotiated companionway give access from the aft deck to the saloon.

The space here invites you to bide awhile in comfort, and at least eight people can do just that without feeling cramped. A television is housed in the sideboard adjacent to the smaller of the two settees, both of which have handy stowage in their bases by way of deep, easily gliding drawers.

When it is time to dine, you will have to shed a few hangers-on, because the lower dinette is realistically only a four-seater. But further stowage is to be found beneath the seating, as well as a neat two-pod rubbish bin that will help you separate recyclables.

The table even has a cutlery drawer thoughtfully built in, and can be dropped to form an occasional extra berth.

The galley opposite is a treat, being as smartly turned out as the rest of the boat but equally offering all the practical attributes you need for lengthy cruises or living aboard.

The appliances are almost domestic-sized, including a four-burner hob. As standard they burn gas, but you can have a generator fitted, as on our test boat, and go all-electric.

There is plenty of fully-lined stowage, as well as a commendable amount of Corona worksurface, finished with a neat wooden fiddle. Natural light is plentiful, and the eye-level portholes will help the cook take in what's going on outside.

The forward cabin enjoys full standing headroom, like the rest of the boat. Storage is excellent, with deep drawers under the berth and a run of lockers across the bulkhead.

Opting for the vee-berth layout appears to give most flexibility, as it offers guests either two decent-sized singles or, by way of an infill, a double which still leaves plenty of room for dressing. The optional en-suite is small but handy, ensuring that nobody has to traipse back to use the aft cabin's WC.

Both space and storage are even more generous in the aft cabin. A queen-size bed is flanked by a useful mix of cupboards and drawers, and there is sexual equality thanks to his-and-hers dressing tables. The fully-sprung mattress lifts to reveal a handy bulk storage area.

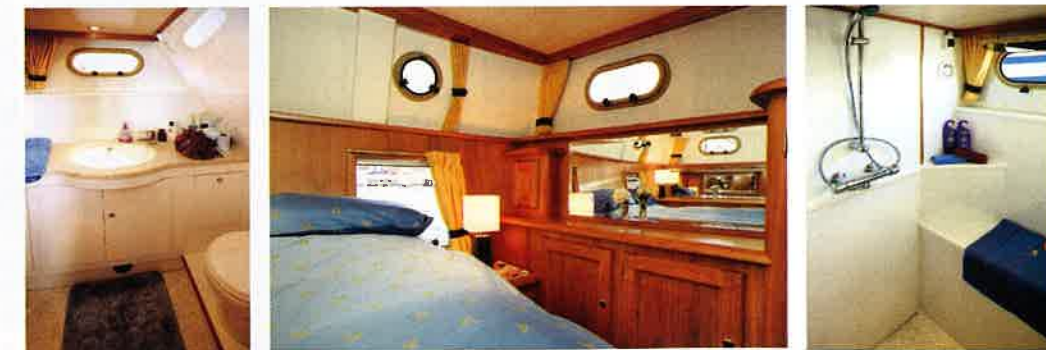
The separate en-suite shower and toilet compartments are a good size, with doors both from the cabin and from the lobby so that guests can use them if no forward WC has been specified.

A screened-off area in the shower room offers them somewhere to hang their clothes and keep them dry while showering. There is also a cupboard here to house the optional washer/dryer.

Another neat idea is the way the aft cabin's door is made to fit the adjacent closet area of the lobby, so that during the day you can leave a clear thoroughfare to the cabin while at the same time hiding the coats.



**below** The excellent master suite has roomy separate en-suite toilet and shower compartments.



**below** In the forward cabin, which is also en-suite, vee-berths seems the most flexible layout option.





## EXTERIOR

One of the great things about a stepped sheer is that it makes a boat easy to board, and here things have been made even simpler by a drop-down ladder designed into the railings.

Once aboard, moving around is facilitated by the generous nature of the side decks, which are bordered by a comforting raised gunwale. There is also a grabrail running right along the coachroof.

The standard deck finish is a non-slip paint,

but teak is available as an extra-cost option.

Besides the central helm seat, the raised aft deck is left clear of seating as standard, enabling buyers to specify what they want: perhaps just a couple of box seats (which will help out with extra storage), or perhaps a full wraparound dinette.

Whatever you choose, the helm area can be battened down by a wheelhouse-style canopy with full headroom, and even on our wintry test day it was possible to stay snug up here.



**above** Liveaboard buyers are likely to opt for an all-electric fit-out, to include a washer/dryer.



**above** Storage solutions throughout the boat are well thought-out, with drawers and lockers including dedicated spaces for crockery and cooled drinks.

**below** Our test boat's engine access meant removing carpets, but the main hatch lifts on a gas strut.



But fold away the fabric and drop the mast and screen, and the boat's air draught is just 9ft (2.7m). The mast can be operated hydraulically if required.

Deck hardware is impressive, by way of large T-shaped bitts fore and aft, but the standard complement of one midships cleat on each side will leave many buyers wanting to specify an extra set to help spread the load. Along similar lines, it would be prudent to ask for the standard manual windlass to be upgraded to the optional electric one.

The ground tackle itself feeds through a tidy hawse pipe in the stem, down to a truly cavernous chain locker. Some



compartmentalising of this would be beneficial, to keep deck gear separate from the chain.

## ENGINE OPTIONS & ACCESS

The base engine option is a single 141hp Volvo Penta TAMD41H diesel, but there are several alternative installations available, so you can either increase the power or specify twins, up to a pair of 135hp Perkins Sabre units.

The choice depends on where you plan to do your boating. For UK river dwellers there is little point in buying extra horsepower that won't be used; for those interested in extended coastal and continental waterways cruising a more potent installation is sensible.

Whichever way you skin it, however, this is a displacement boat, with a speed cap imposed by its hull shape and weight.

Our test boat had a 6lt Perkins-Sabre unit which had been given a commercial rating of 185hp rather than its usual 225hp — a canny move which should give its owners the best of all worlds, allowing the boat to maintain a useful speed for long periods without straining the engine, while keeping a bit of power in reserve.

The yard are going to incorporate hatches

**below** The console can house lots of instruments.



directly in the carpeted saloon sole, so that access to the engine space is simply a matter of hiking these up. If you prefer an unadulterated run of carpet, like the owners of this boat, you will have to roll up the carpet and then open plywood hatches, but this does not take much, the main one being on a gas strut.

Where there's just the one engine fitted, plus a sizeable generator, there is plenty of room to get right round everything and reach all the necessary service and inspection points. The raw-water strainers (there are two, with a crossover) and the primary fuel filters are sited forward and high up, to make them readily accessible.

The fuel tank runs across the front of the compartment, with the water tanks tucked into the wings. Most areas are covered in a foam insulation, and great care has been taken to seal around cables and pipes as they exit the compartment, in an attempt to stop engine noise from working its way through the boat.

We like the fact that the bilge areas are easy to get to, and that the keel section is

encapsulated separately so it's easier to keep it, and the bilge pump, clean and clear of debris.

The steps to the aft lobby hinge up to give full access to the sternland.

## PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

It had been our intention to take the boat from its home on the upper reaches of the River Thames down to the estuary, to fully acquaint ourselves with the hull's capabilities in open waters. Unfortunately, lock closures were running behind schedule and we had to make do with a gentle meander on non-tidal waters.

However, from previous encounters with Vlet designs we can vouch for their seakeeping. Their beamy form, relatively low centre of gravity and decent run of steadying keel ensure they are comfortable passagemakers which can keep up a steady 7-7½ knots without being fazed.

The engine revs required to maintain this

kind of cruising speed are 1600-1800rpm, within the engine's most economical fuel consumption band. Push any harder, though, and your mpg figures will take a hammering as the hull struggles to move shedloads of water out of its way.

For this reason, if much coastal work is envisaged we would like to see a larger fuel tank fitted. The standard 100gal capacity is fine if you are drawing 3gph, but your range will be cut considerably if the conditions wind this up to 5gph.

On the other side of the coin, there are plenty of lower rpm settings to run on, which is ideal for river work. At just above tickover you get usable speed with the bare minimum of wash.

The five-bladed propeller gives plenty of bite, not least when it comes to 'applying the brakes' in astern, and the hull is responsive to both throttle and helm, quickly steadying up on minor course adjustments.

It is also capable of being turned in its own length using just a couple of nudges of the gearshift at low revs. Given the limited space available in most marinas, though, it is handy

**below** The strainers, filter, ancillaries and sternland are easy to reach, and noise insulation is good.



**below** A central helm seat dominates the aft deck, with other furniture and teak decking optional.



**below** Folding or dropping the mast reduces air draught to 9ft, and the wide side decks are easily negotiated.





to know that both bow and stern-thrusters are on the options list.

The screen benefits from no fewer than three wipers, and the console will take a decent amount of instrumentation, though only a depth-sounder comes as standard.

✓✓✓✓✓  
Easy to manoeuvre, steady and economical if you don't try to push.

### SPECIFICATION & VALUE

If you compare the 1200 Vlet's baseline price with those of its rivals, be they steel or GRP, it's an attractive starting point. That is because Stevens structure their pricing so that buyers can take an affordable boat and customise up to a specification that suits them.

Given that this type of boat can end up being used for anything from river pottering to liveaboard cruising, this makes good sense, ensuring that customers really get the boat they want, rather than having the boatyard trying to second-guess them and loading up the bill in the process.

The other side of the coin is that taking your pick from the mighty extras list — including some items you might have expected to be standard — is likely to push up the overall price quite considerably. Bringing our test boat up to the owner's required spec cost a meaty £90,000.

The net result is that the boat's final price is toe-to-toe with a number of its competitors. But its value for money is boosted by its level of design detail and by Stevens' high

standard of workmanship, both in steel and wood, and quality of engineering.

✓✓✓✓✓  
Choose carefully from the options, and you get a boat that suits you.

## Verdict

Stevens have turned a bit of a design corner in recent years, sharpening up the look of their boats, both inside and out.

But there has been no compromise on liveaboard comfort, in terms of space or quality of fit-out. And the engineering remains as practical as the ambience is welcoming.

There are not many boats on which you immediately feel so much at home. If you like to spend long periods cruising, and are happy to do so at displacement speeds, you will struggle to find a more appealing environment.

We were reluctant to go back ashore.

**MBM RATING**

**9/10**



## Stevens Vlet 1200 technical data



### specifications

BUILD	steel
RCD	design category B
LENGTH OVERALL	41ft 8in (12.7m)
HULL LENGTH	40ft 4in (12.3m)
BEAM	13ft 4in (4.10m)
DRAUGHT	3ft 9in (1.15m)
AIR DRAUGHT	9ft 0in (2.74m)
DISPLACEMENT	16.8 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	100gal (450lt)
WATER CAPACITY	100gal (450lt)

### key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	1ft 7in
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 6in
AFT CABIN BERTH	6ft 8in x 5ft 0in

### performance

engines single Perkins-Sabre M225Ti diesel  
configuration 6cyl, 6.0lt, 185hp at 2500rpm  
conditions wind southeasterly Force 3, sea calm  
load fuel 25%, water 50%, crew 3

rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	noise
600	3.9	—	—	—	—	59
1000	5.4	1.0	5	5.40	432	60
1400	6.4	2.1	9	3.08	246	78
1600	7.2	3.0	14	2.40	192	76
1800	7.6	5.5	25	1.38	110	76
2100	8.3	8.1	37	1.02	82	78

Range figures above are in miles, with 20% margin.  
Noise figures are in dB(A), recorded in the saloon.

### prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with single 185hp Perkins Sabre diesel	£229,000
BOW-THRUSTER	£5,300
STERN-THRUSTER	£4,900
GENERATOR	£11,750
HEATING	standard
TEAK AFT DECKING	£7,000
HYDRAULIC MAST	£1,900
ELECTRIC WINDLASS	£1,460
ELECTRONICS PACK	POA
BOAT AS TESTED	£318,000

ENQUIRIES Boat Showrooms of London, Shepperton Marina, Felix Lane, Shepperton, Middlesex TW17 8NS.  
Tel: 01932 243722. [www.boatshowrooms.com](http://www.boatshowrooms.com)

### the rivals



#### LINSSEN GS410

from £265,000

Quite a little ship, from one of Holland's premier boatbuilders.  
Tel: 01590 673312.  
[www.berthongroup.co.uk](http://www.berthongroup.co.uk)



#### AQUANAUT DRIFTER AK 1350

from £267,700

A slightly larger vessel, so there is room for two fully en-suite cabins.  
Tel: 01628 773177.  
[www.thamesboatsales.co.uk](http://www.thamesboatsales.co.uk)



#### BROOM 42CL

from £260,000

GRP rather than steel, but from the British kings of aft-cabin boats.  
Tel: 01603 712334.  
[www.broom-boats.co.uk](http://www.broom-boats.co.uk)