

Boat Report

STOREBRO ROYAL CRUISER 355

From Sweden comes an aft-cabin design which can be a fast offshore cruiser or a lowline riverboat. Take your pick. We tested the flybridge model in the Baltic.





Above: the 355's galley is typical Storebro, with an abundance of mahogany, but a concession to ultimate practicality is the Corian worksurface. Below: the steps to the flybridge (left) are easy to climb and descend, but the downswept corner of the wing could catch your eye in more ways than one. Under the after berth (centre) in the aft cabin (right) you find the Royal Cruiser tools and spares kit, neatly arranged in a moulded tray.



With the new 355, Storebro have come up with a craft for all seasons and all reasons. In its standard form it comes with a flybridge and twin engines, for fast offshore cruising. But take away the flybridge and it becomes a practical inland cruiser (although still capable of sea passages), with single or twin engines and either displacement or planing speed.

Either way, you benefit from the big plus of a Royal Cruiser: an aft cabin. This gives the boat two separate double berths, each with an en-suite toilet, yet with a cockpit rather than raised deck above. And, of course, you have one of the magnificent mahogany interiors which have become the hallmark of these Swedish boats.

Design

The Royal Cruiser 355 is designed by Storebro's long-time partner, German naval architect Winnfried Wilke, who has produced a hull that is medium-to-deep-vee, with a deadrise of 17° at the transom and 22° amidships. The form follows the trend of the 380 and 420 models, away from the company's earlier semi-displacement forms, but with no tunnels for the propellers. Like these bigger



boats, it has just a small sprayrail forward, plus a pronounced downturned flat at the chine.

The above-decks layout is in fact available in three forms. The standard boat — the one we tested — has a flybridge, with helm positions here and down below in the saloon. The other two versions have no flybridge; on one the helm position is in the saloon, whereas on the other (designated the 355 Canal to show its inland capabilities) it is outside on the aft deck, behind a screen. In all cases the radar mast hinges down to reduce the air draught, which without a flybridge is a minimum of just 10ft (3.05m).

Accommodation

The interiors of all three versions are essentially the same, with the principal feature being that aft cabin. The manufacturers class this as a four-berth boat, but the saloon's large settee would make a comfortable occasional single.

You enter the saloon from the aft cockpit or aft deck via a large sliding door. To starboard is the six-person settee, whose forward section flips over to form a forward-facing navigator's seat for two. This a remarkably sensible Royal Cruiser feature which enables the maximum number of passengers



to enjoy a passage in the most comfortable way, and unlikely to get seasick, but we have not seen it on any other make of boat. Do other manufacturers assume their craft travel fast only in good weather, never leaving port when it is cold or raining and the crew have to sit in the saloon?

Under the settee are good-sized storage lockers, one of which contains the manual bilge pump. This, another Storebro special, has a flexible wander suction hose, allowing you to provide back-up pumping in whichever compartment needs it, or clean up spills which are difficult to reach.

To port are three lockers, one of which takes the television on a swing-out pedestal, and another the cocktail cabinet.

Forward of these is the helm position, which has a comfortable swivelling command seat, with adjustable footrest, facing a large and well laid-out console.

Immediately ahead of the superb wood-rimmed wheel is a large chart area, which lifts to give storage for the charts themselves. Two other lockers set in the mahogany top will take things such as binoculars and cameras. In one of these is another standard Royal feature, the boat's identification plate, which has not only the build number engraved on it, but also the engines' serial numbers, propeller sizes, shaft tapers and the vessel's dimensions, including its weight. How many of us have crawled around an engine compartment trying to read tiny numbers on the engine blocks by torchlight?

Ahead again are the engine instruments. Storebro favour twin-lever engine controls, mounted either side of the console, as they believe these give you more precise control, especially when there are two helm stations, but they are happy to fit single-lever controls if the customer prefers.

To the left of the seat, conveniently by the helmsman's elbow, is the main ready-use switch panel, together with the engine key-starts. Below this is the ship's distribution board, behind a hinged door.

The 355's windows are noteworthy. Port and starboard are large opening sections, but instead of relying on felt seals round the sliding panes to keep water out, they open inwards to slide, then have hinged handles at each end to pull them down tight on rubber seals, making them perfectly watertight even in rough conditions.

The aft cabin is reached down four steps to port. You have full headroom in the entrance area, where you find a double locker, half with shelves and half open for hanging clothes, and the door to the en-suite toilet, in the aft corner, which has 5ft 11in (1.80m) headroom.

The two single berths run athwartships to starboard, headroom over them being limited by the well in the cockpit above, although still sufficient. Above the aft berth is a large glass hatch, which serves as an escape route, and also gives access to the bathing platform, for informal moonlight dips. Further storage space is provided by three convenient lockers in the forward bulkhead.

The mattresses, here and in the forward cabin, are fully interior-sprung for comfort, with the springs galvanised to stop them rusting. The plywood bases have ventilation holes in them to reduce condensation and mildew.

Lifting the forward base reveals the plastic water tank. Lifting the aft one is like opening a Christmas stocking: to starboard is the calorifier, an emergency tiller and the trim-tab pump; in the centre



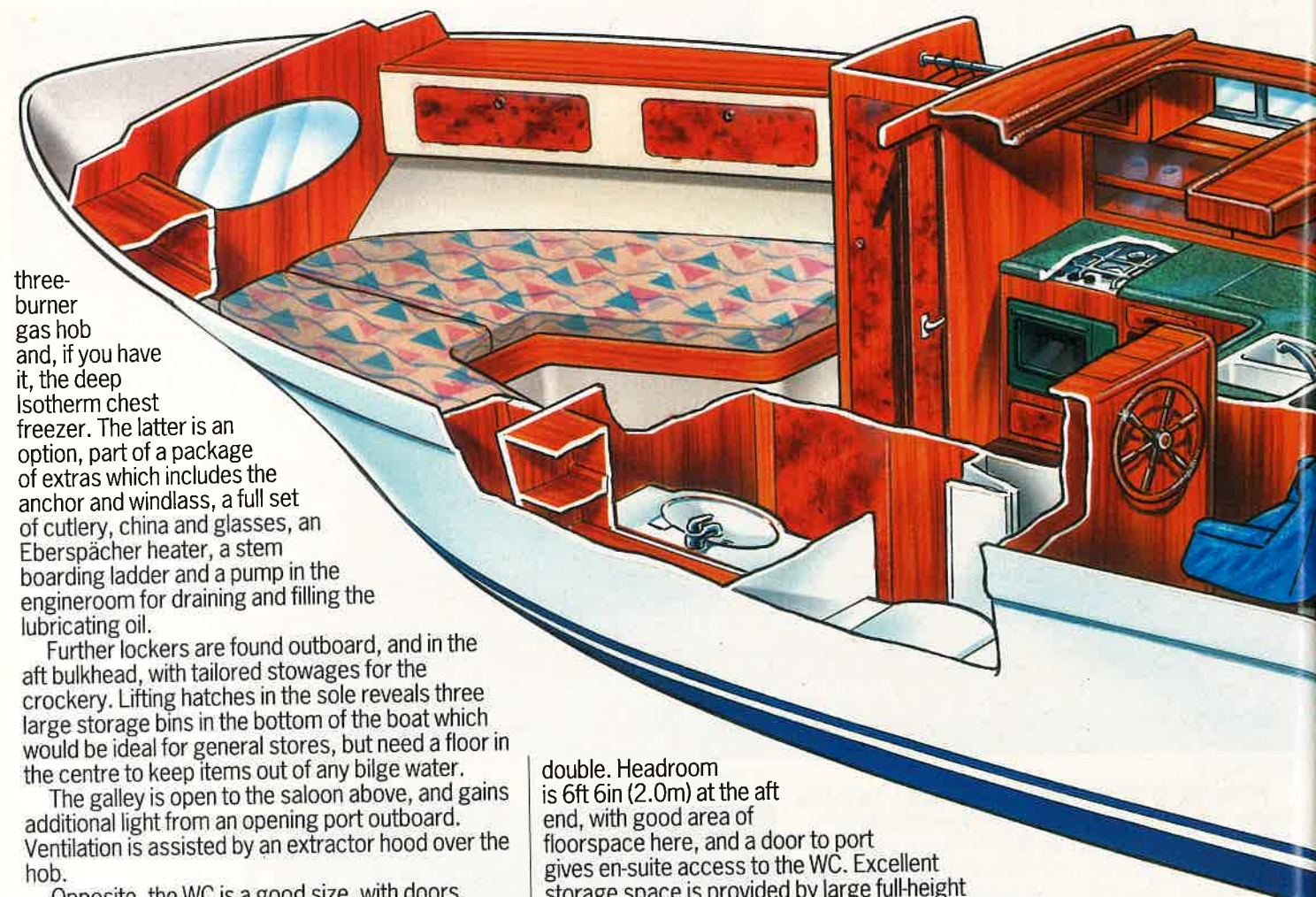
are the four 170Ah batteries, under their own lid and with individual ventilation; to port is the usual Royal Cruiser toolkit, neatly laid out in a moulded GRP tray and including spares for the boat and engines, flares, a first-aid kit and even a gelcoat repair kit. So neat, so simple, so why do we not see it on other boats?

Forward of the saloon, four steps lead down to the galley to starboard, the main toilet compartment to port, and the forward cabin.

The galley is another masterpiece in mahogany, although recent Royal Cruisers have bowed to modern technology and introduced a Corian worktop for better wear; owners can choose the colour. Beneath the worktop are a microwave or gas oven, a large fridge and two small lockers and drawers. Above it there are lids over the sink, the

Above: the forward cabin is en-suite to the main toilet compartment with its separate shower stall. Below: a large sliding door opens the saloon to the aft cockpit. Bottom: the forward end of the six-person settee can be flipped over to create a comfortable forward-facing navigator's seat.





three-burner gas hob and, if you have it, the deep Isotherm chest freezer. The latter is an option, part of a package of extras which includes the anchor and windlass, a full set of cutlery, china and glasses, an Eberspächer heater, a stern boarding ladder and a pump in the engine room for draining and filling the lubricating oil.

Further lockers are found outboard, and in the aft bulkhead, with tailored stowages for the crockery. Lifting hatches in the sole reveals three large storage bins in the bottom of the boat which would be ideal for general stores, but need a floor in the centre to keep items out of any bilge water.

The galley is open to the saloon above, and gains additional light from an opening port outboard. Ventilation is assisted by an extractor hood over the hob.

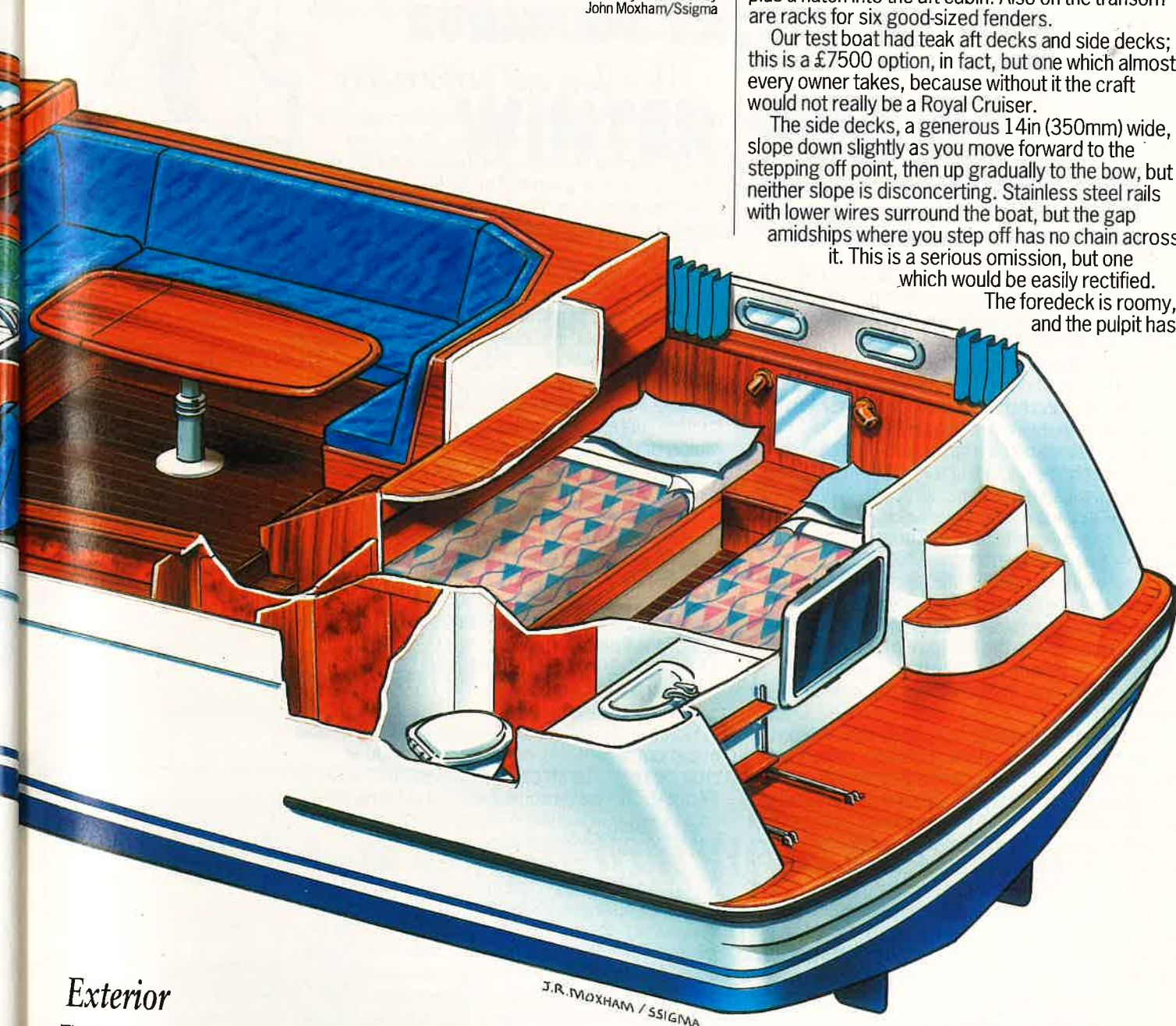
Opposite, the WC is a good size, with doors allowing access either from the galley area or from the forward cabin. The large separate shower stall has double hinged shower doors, a welcome improvement on the usual curtains, and the practical measures continue with a lid covering the electric toilet, a large sink, a good worktop area, several lockers above and below, plus a large fiddled shelf. The finish is moulded GRP trimmed with mahogany. An electrical panel has press-buttons for the shower drain, the toilet flush, a contents warning light for the holding tank and a 12V socket.

The forward cabin has two vee berths, with the option of an infill mattress to make these into a

double. Headroom is 6ft 6in (2.0m) at the aft end, with good area of floorspace here, and a door to port gives en-suite access to the WC. Excellent storage space is provided by large full-height hanging lockers port and starboard, two large cave lockers with hinged doors either side of the bed, fiddled shelves outboard and three deep lockers under the berth. So often on other boats we find stowage is just paid lip-service, but the 355 is clearly designed for comfortable long-range cruising for two couples or a family.

The sole lifts up to reveal a fully painted-out hull, plus the GRP tube for a bow-thruster. Storebro believe it is sensible to build this tube into every boat, making the subsequent installation of the optional thruster easy — again, a simple piece of logic which other manufacturers should consider.

Clockwise from below: the flybridge helm has covered storage space for charts and oddments, and a perspex anti-glare hood over the instruments. There is room to climb between the engines. Two alternative versions of the 355 have no flybridge.



Cutaway illustration by John Moxham/Sigma

plus a hatch into the aft cabin. Also on the transom are racks for six good-sized fenders.

Our test boat had teak aft decks and side decks; this is a £7500 option, in fact, but one which almost every owner takes, because without it the craft would not really be a Royal Cruiser.

The side decks, a generous 14in (350mm) wide, slope down slightly as you move forward to the stepping off point, then up gradually to the bow, but neither slope is disconcerting. Stainless steel rails with lower wires surround the boat, but the gap amidships where you step off has no chain across it. This is a serious omission, but one which would be easily rectified.

The foredeck is roomy, and the pulpit has

Exterior

The key design feature of the 355 is the aft deck arrangement, first conceived by Wilke ten years ago, for the Royal 36, and since taken up by other companies.

The main problem with an aft-cabin boat is that, in achieving headroom down below, you can end up with a high, open, windswept aft deck. The Wilke solution is to keep the basic deck height to a minimum in the first place, and then to lower it still further over the area of the berths below, to form a well. This is just enough to allow you to sit on the side portions, with your feet in the well, or stand in the well, and get something of the reassuring feeling of a conventional aft cockpit. Low GRP dodgers all round complete the protection.

The starboard raised area doubles as a large locker, with stowage for the stern anchor that is obligatory in Scandinavia, where bows-to mooring is the norm. Other methods of mooring are taken care of by 12in (300mm) aluminium bollards forward, midships and aft.

Teak-treaded steps aft from the aft deck, to starboard, lead down to a full-width integral bathing platform. This has a hinged boarding ladder to port,

Storebro Royal Cruiser 355

Engines twin Volvo TAMD63P diesels, 355hp at 2800rpm, 6cyl, 5.46lt.

Conditions wind SE Force 2, sea calm. Load fuel 50%, water 100%, crew 2.

sound levels dB(A)									
rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range*	trim	saloon	aftcab	ckpt flybg
1250	9.7	3.6	16	2.69	473	1.5	73	82	77 68
1500	10.5	7.1	32	1.48	260	4.5	76	84	79 72
1750	14.0	10.6	48	1.32	232	5.5	78	84	81 76
2000	19.0	14.8	67	1.28	225	5.0	80	89	83 78
2250	23.5	19.4	88	1.21	213	4.5	81	90	84 78
2500	26.8	24.3	110	1.10	194	4.5	82	91	86 77
2750	30.8	30.9	140	0.99	174	4.5	84	93	89 77
2850	31.4	32.3	147	0.97	171	4.5	84	94	89 77
Acceleration 0-20 knots, 9.95sec (* allows 20% margin)									

Loa 35ft 4in (10.76m)

Beam 12ft 3in (3.75m)

Draught 3ft 4in (1.02m)

Displacement 6.5 tonnes

Fuel capacity 220gal (990lt)

Water capacity 90gal (405lt)

Price from £159,130 ex VAT with single 216hp Volvo KAMD42, without flybridge; £208,436 ex VAT as tested

a removable centre section, with an optional hinge-down ladder, essential if anchored by the stern and boarding over the bow, as is common in Sweden. A hatch gives access to a spacious locker, where you find the Lofrans electric windlass. The anchor stows in an automatic launcher, set in a hawsepipe in the stem; a chain stopper is fitted as standard, to prevent the anchor deploying accidentally. The chain stows in a separate locker beneath a floor, allowing the space above to be used for ropes and fenders, with no risk of tangling or jamming. The gas bottle is also sited here, in a moulded GRP box.

The coachroof has a recess in it, for a sunlounger. There are also moulded recesses in the flybridge apron for the horn and the navigation lights, typically thoughtful touches.

The flybridge itself is reached via easy-rising steps from the aft deck. Up here you find two bucket seats forward and two bench seats behind, with comfortable room for five people in total.

The helmsman faces a large, comprehensively equipped console, including a wood-rimmed wheel, engine repeater instruments, an echo-sounder and log, trim-tab gauges and a helm indicator, plus room for a GPS receiver and plotter. Three recesses with transparent perspex covers will take a VHF, a radar and the cellphone without which no self-respecting Swede would be seen in public. There is also covered space for folded charts and binoculars (we were pleased to see the lids have rubber strips to stop them chattering at speed) and a good perspex hood over the main instrument panel, to deflect glare and rain.

To the right of the helm is a panel with switches for the horn, windlass, stereo speaker, bilge pump alarm, searchlight control and a 12V socket.

A good practical touch is the removable panel in the floor of the flybridge, to allow for engine removal should it be necessary. Similarly useful is the hinged radar mast/wing, which can quickly be lowered for road transport or for negotiating low bridges.

Not so good is the forward-swept corner of the wing, which may be a nice piece of styling but is liable to catch you right in the eye when you go down the steps. It should be raised or rounded off.

Engines

The power options are all Volvo inboard diesels. These start with a single 216hp KAMD42 or twin 139hp TAMD31s, for speeds up to 14 knots, and continue through twin KAMD42s for 25 knots to twin 355hp TAMD63s giving 31 knots. Our test boat had the most potent installation.

The engines are mounted under the saloon, and accessed via lift-out hatches. There is easy room to climb down, and space to work.

A plywood board mounted on the aft bulkhead carries the two Racor fuel filters, and the sea-inlet strainers. Getting at the inboard filters is straightforward, but reaching the outboard fuel filter would be a struggle. A large area at the forward end is designed to take the optional 5kW generator; also at the front is the pump and hose for the optional oil filler and pump-out system.

To reduce vibration, the sole is made of special plywood panels sandwiched together with an aircraft-specification glue. To the underside of this is bonded a lead-impregnated rubber sheet, followed by 30mm foam soundproofing, foil-faced to prevent the absorption of diesel or oil. Further

soundproofing is used on the bulkheads and tanks. The soles are carried on aluminium bearers, which gives a neat, lightweight result.

Handling and performance

We took our test boat out from Storebro's base at Vastervik on Sweden's east coast. Driving out through narrow channels and then around the local islands gave us a good feel of the boat's handling at both slow speeds and fast, but we could not find any waves to help us assess its seakeeping.

The twin-lever Volvo controls give a good feel for throttles and gearshifts, enabling you to control more than 700hp smoothly. Inside the marina, the 355 responded to either gears or rudders for turns; out in the channel, it tracked an easy straight course at medium speeds.

Once we reached the sea, opening the throttles produced an initial gentle acceleration, then a sudden surge as the turbos cut in, and the boat rose rapidly onto the plane. Our test runs confirmed a 0-20 knots time of less than 10 seconds, remarkable for any cruiser.

The top speed we recorded on our radar gun was 31.4 knots, with half fuel and two crew, which corresponds almost exactly with Storebro's quoted 31 knots. At this speed the engines were 50 revs over their maximum quoted 2800rpm. Easy cruising speeds were 27 knots at 2500rpm, or 23 knots at 2200rpm. Fuel consumption was 0.97mpg at 31 knots, 1.10mpg at 27 knots and 1.23mpg at 23 knots, giving a range of 170nm, 195nm or 220nm respectively.

Noise levels in the saloon reached an acceptable maximum of 84dB(A), dropping to 81dB(A) at cruising revs. The aft cabin, however, had up to 94dB(A). This was a combination of exhaust noise and propeller noise, even though Storebro use four-bladed props to help reduce the latter.

Outside, the aft deck was also quite noisy, with a maximum of 89dB(A), despite underwater exhausts which run down the transom in GRP mouldings. At the cruising speed the level is acceptable here, at 84dB(A), and on the flybridge it is fine, reaching no more than 77dB(A) even at maximum speed.

Handling in the calm conditions was excellent, though you have to be careful how you use the trim tabs, which are large and powerful. If you come onto the plane with too much applied, or an imbalance, the boat will sheer off to one side. The technique is to make sure they are both right up when you accelerate. Once you are up and running, if you are using the tabs to level the boat athwartships, take care not to overdo them. Only the slightest amount of tab is needed, in normal running, to bring the bow-up trim down from 5° to a more acceptable 4.5°.

Conclusions

This latest Royal Cruiser follows in the family footsteps, with a high standard of construction and interior finish, plus a layout which makes full use of the available space, giving you two separate cabins, each with en-suite facilities, in only a 35ft boat.

The price may be higher than you would pay for a British equivalent, but not excessively so, helped by the fact that the krona is as weak as the pound. In any case, the premium value remains throughout the boat's life. The 355 will be at the Southampton Boat Show, so go along and see for yourself. □

Builders

Storebro AB, S-590 83
Storebro, Sweden.
Tel: (46) 0492 19500.

UK dealers

Paul Hadley Boat Sales,
Northney Marina, Hayling
Island, Hampshire PO11 0NH.
Tel: 01705 461672.