

BOAT REPORT Aquador 26DC & 26HT • open-cockpit or hardtop sportscruiser • built in

Finland • four berths • single 260hp Volvo Penta diesel • 33 knots • £83,401 as tested

Aquador 26DC & 26HT

Compact sportscruisers don't come any better looking than this versatile Finn. But is its beauty more than skin deep? And should you opt for the open or closed version? **REPORT BY MARK TURLEY**



When it comes to building solid, fun, practical boats, the Scandinavians know a thing or two. Not only do they have access to some of the best boating areas in Europe, but their short season and changeable weather ensure that they like to make hay when the sun does shine.

The upshot is that, although many of their boats are moderate in size, they are big on comfort, versatility and above all quality.

The Finnish-built Aquador 26 is a prime example, packing a surprising amount of accommodation into a compact, good-looking and well specified diesel sports cruiser package.

Interestingly, it can be ordered either in open-cockpit guise, as the 26DC, or, at no extra cost, with a semi-enclosing hardtop, in which case it is called the 26HT.

The respective layouts are all but identical; presumably, the extra build cost involved in the latter's well-proportioned GRP moulding, with its twin sliding hatches, offsets the cost of the former's canvas canopy.

We borrowed one of each version, to assess which is best suited to British conditions.



accommodation Lockers to starboard and the WC to port separate the forward and quarter berths.



dinette Ahead of the removable table, fold-out steps lead up through a large hatch onto the foredeck.



DESIGN & BUILD

For the past couple of years, Aquadors have been built by Bella Boats, one of Finland's most successful yards (Bella also market a full range of boats of their own, although not in the UK).

The hull is a beamy affair to say the least, with 10ft of width on a hull length of 25ft. The upshot of this is not just plenty of interior volume but a medium-vee underwater shape geared towards efficient planing.

The design wastes little of this beam, keeping the working width of the side decks slight and providing a neat hatch and step arrangement in the cabin's coachroof for access to the foredeck.

One result is an extremely roomy cockpit, for a craft of this size, with a pleasant raised dinette set over the engine box, and no fewer than three forward-facing seats across the helm.

The galley is also up here in the cockpit, half tucked under the co-pilot's seat to port, and this in turn leaves the cabin free for a good sized convertible dinette as well as an extendable double quarter-berth, partly running under the starboard side of the cockpit. A small toilet compartment with an optional shower completes the accommodation.

The interior is nicely trimmed with cherry wood, and we were pleased to find that all those tucked away stowage spaces, such as under-seat lockers, are lined; in fact, a full integral moulding is incorporated into the hull's structure.

✓✓✓✓
A good layout packed in without being cramped or looking bulky.

ACCOMMODATION

The cabin offers a little less than full standing headroom, just adequate for ducking to and from the WC or the snug-like dinette.

The latter converts to a generous double, and a second couple can be accommodated, in slightly cosier fashion, in the quarter berth to starboard.

The two sleeping areas are separated simply by a small hanging locker and cupboard. Additional clothes and kitbags can be stowed in the fully lined lockers in the dinette seat-base, and a nice point of detail is the handy fiddled shelf running along each side.

The toilet compartment is a largely moulded affair, with just sufficient room for undertaking basic ablutions. A holding tank is included in the standard specification,

but if you want hot water or a shower drain system then they are listed as extras.

✓✓✓✓
Very usable space with good-sized berths and reasonable stowage.

EXTERIOR

During our tests we had five people in the cockpit, and all were able to sit comfortably and move around easily without getting in each other's way. In fact, we suspect that adding another couple would still not have made it feel crowded.

In part, this is down to the fact that the helm arrangement alone takes care of three, leaving ample space for the remainder of the crew at the dinette. The seat cushions here are wide, and therefore inviting to lounge on, as well as providing a useful amount of open

and enclosed stowage underneath.

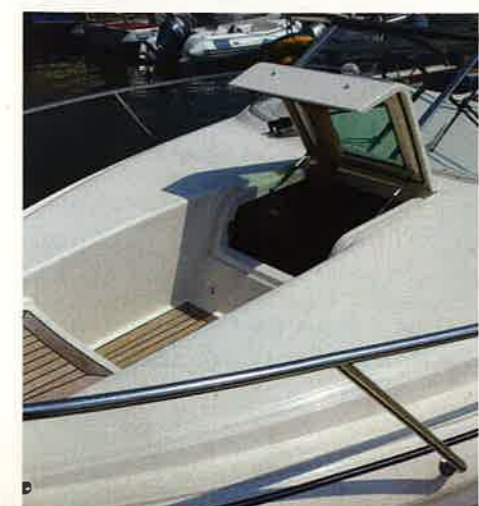
Across the way, the galley is perhaps not grand enough to prepare a full à la carte, but has everything necessary to knock up breakfast and simple meals. These can be cooked on a two-burner diesel-fired hob, which is exposed only when the port-side helm seat is hinged forward, its base also adding an extra length of worksurface.

A run of deeply fiddled cave lockers set within the coaming are especially handy for holding the likes of tea, coffee and mugs, augmenting the cupboard and nest of drawers adjacent to the fridge and sink.

There is ample room to stand here, both in the hardtop version of the boat and in the open version with its canopy fully deployed. Sitting headroom at the dinette is similarly good, making this an extremely hospitable cockpit even when it is battened down.

At the helm, space for flush mounting a GPS or plotter is a little limited, partly because a useful-sized glovebox is moulded in. However, finding the required room would

foredeck The well offers security as you work.



not be difficult, especially if the bracket-mounted compass could be incorporated into the main dash instead of sticking out like a sore thumb next to the wheel.

The rest of the ergonomics are good, with the controls well placed. The seat squab hinges up for those who like to stand up for a better view while manoeuvring; in the hardtop version of the boat, you can pop your head out by sliding back the overhead hatch.

Although the side decks are not exactly generous, there is sufficient width for nimbler crewmembers to make use of them, with plenty of handholds available. Access to the foredeck, however, is via a couple of steps up and through the good sized hatch in the cabin.

The well in the foredeck offers plenty of security while you sit and sort out lines and fenders. There is a chain locker, but no integral bow-roller, which seems an odd omission on a largely well specified boat.

Other deck hardware is well specified, with 10in (25cm) cleats fore and aft, and 8in

galley The cockpit has a hob, sink and fridge.



Aquador 26DC & 26HT technical data



specifications

BUILD	glass-reinforced plastic
RCD	design category C
LENGTH OVERALL	26ft 10in (8.25m)
HULL LENGTH	25ft 6in (7.78m)
BEAM	10ft 0in (3.05m)
DRAUGHT	2ft 11in (0.90m)
DISPLACEMENT	3.0 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	66gal (300lt)
WATER CAPACITY	13gal (60lt)

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	0ft 6in
INTERIOR HEADROOM	5ft 8in
DINETTE BERTH	6ft 6in x 5ft 10in
MIDSHIPS CABIN BERTH	7ft 0in x 3ft 10in

performance

engines single Volvo Penta KAD44P/DP sterndrive. configuration 6cyl, 3.6lt, 260hp at 3800rpm. conditions wind southerly Force 3, sea slight. load fuel 25%, water nil, crew 4.

rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	noise
2000	9.7	—	—	—	—	—
2400	14.5	4.6	21	3.15	167	78
2800	22.0	6.0	27	3.67	194	80
3200	27.4	7.5	34	3.63	192	82
3500	30.6	9.2	42	3.33	176	83
3700	33.0	12.3	56	2.68	142	84

Range figures above are in miles, with 20% margin. acceleration 0-20 knots in 14.5sec; Noise figures are in dB(A), 0-25 knots in 19.0sec recorded in the cockpit.

prices

STANDARD BOAT with single Volvo Penta KAD 44P/DP (includes teak cockpit and bathing platform decking, Wallas diesel heating and hob, fridge, demisters, log/depth-sounder, trim tabs, holding tank)	inc VAT £80,482
DELIVERY, ANTI-FOULING & COMMISSIONING	£2,919
BOW-THRUSTER	£2,002
ELECTRIC WINDLASS	£1,169
HOT WATER SYSTEM	£906
SHOWER DRAIN	£316
SUNPAD FILLER CUSHIONS	£200
BOAT AS TESTED	£83,401

ENQUIRIES Sea Ventures Ltd, Lympington Yacht Haven, Lympington, Hampshire SO41 3QD. Tel: 01590 672472.

the rivals



NIMBUS 26 NOVA
from £83,000 inc VAT
More a walkaround than a sportscruiser, it offers plenty of open-plan deck space while still squeezing in full overnighting accommodation via convertible vee-berths and a separate toilet compartment. Tel: 01590 677955. www.nimbusboats.com



CRANCHI PERLA 25
from £57,930 inc VAT
A true mini-cruiser in true Italian style. Again, there is no hardtop version, but you'll find plenty of room both above and below decks, with sleeping accommodation for four. Tel: 023 9220 1506. www.cranchi.it



FINNMASTER 7050
from £49,660 inc VAT
Full protection is offered by virtue of a sunroofed wheelhouse, and this runs through to an open-plan sleeping area forward, with a separate toilet compartment and a useful galley. Tel: 01324 665071. www.finnmarin.fi

(20cm) ones amidships. Fenders find plenty of space in a locker across the transom, and the yard have taken the trouble to fix wooden taffrails at the main 'wear' points on the aft coaming.

In addition, full teak cockpit decking comes as standard, although it is not the tidiest of jobs, and a little more diligence with the caulking gun would not have gone amiss.

However, our main criticism is that the cockpit lacks any scuppers for draining itself after a wash-down or a rain shower. Clearly the cockpit sole is quite close to the waterline, but surely some sort of

✓✓✓✓
A well protected cockpit with plenty of space all around.

overboard discharge must be possible rather than leaving water to trickle into the bilge?

ENGINE OPTIONS & ACCESS

The price list shows a useful set of single engine options, all from the Volvo Penta stable. Our test boat had the mid-range diesel option, a 260hp KAD44P with a DuoProp outdrive leg.

For buyers preferring petrol, a slightly less potent option than the 320hp 5.7lt GXi would not go amiss, trimming the boat's initial cost while still offering adequate performance under most circumstances.

Access to the enginespace could not be much simpler. You hinge back the transom bench, and then the dinette sole, which allows you to get right round the engine for daily checks while kneeling in the cockpit.

Should you have to clamber down into the compartment, there is no treadplate provided, so be careful of any slops in the bilge.

The bilge benefits from being lined with a moulding, and the rest of the compartment is covered with no-nonsense aluminium-faced noise insulation.

Outboard of the engine itself are ancillaries such as the battery boxes and pumps, plus space for the optional calorifier. The fuel tank is located in its own

✓✓✓✓
Good access and a tidy installation. It's a pity there is no treadplate.

separate bay just forward of the main compartment, and accessed by a separate hatch.

PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

If boats offer good protection from the elements, you tend to push them harder. When we found the Aquador hull giving the odd knock and clonk at what we imagined was around 20 knots, we wondered why — until we noticed we were actually making 30 knots.

Further to the boat's credit, this was while driving the open 26DC, not the more enclosed 26HT. The screen is particularly good on the DC, not only offering excellent protection but



helm Ergonomics are good, but space is limited.



engineroom Daily checkpoints are easy to reach.



handholds A grabrail extends around the screen.



stowage A transom locker is handy for fenders.

giving nothing away in terms of visibility; it is one you are quite happy to stay tucked behind, rather than continually wanting to peer over the top.

The top speed we recorded in the DC model, with the KAD44 diesel, was slightly down on what was expected, at 33 knots. The engine, barely out of its wrapping, was short of a hundred revs.

Ease back to 2800rpm and you get 22 knots, which not only makes for a very comfortable ride but exceedingly economic cruising, gobbling up around four miles for every gallon. Noise levels are pretty economic too.

Handling is clean, and positive in response to both wheel and throttle. Whilst clearly not made of sportsboat stuff, the hull is happy to be pushed about and is generally forgiving, making this an unfussy, predictable boat to drive.

Off the plane, it is happy to keep on course without a lot of pandering to the wheel. For close-quarters manoeuvring, it has all the vices and virtues you would expect from a single sterndrive installation.

Given that a good shove, or someone handy with a fender, will get a boat of this size out of any hole, we would not bother to specify the

✓✓✓✓
Clean handling, albeit with a harder ride than we had envisaged.

optional bow-thruster on the DC model. The HT, which clearly has greater windage, might benefit from it.

SPECIFICATION & VALUE

Just before we went to press the pound was falling against the Euro, and, along with other boats imported from European countries, the Aquador line-up was subject to a price hike.

This took the basic price of the boat we tested, with a 260hp KAD44P diesel, a smidgeon above £80,000, which might seem a lot for a 26-footer, even one that offers such a level of weekend comfort.

But there are ways to lessen the load. To our mind, the 230hp KAD43P at a saving of nearly £4000, should still provide performance enough if easy cruising is the name of the game. Or you could settle for the petrol version; then the price tag is just over £70,000, and you surely won't be short of speed with 315hp on tap.

The boat's standard specification is pretty good, not least because the heating is thrown in and there is a basic electronics package to get you started. But it's still a cold flannel rubdown unless you splash out for the hot water and shower options.

More hospitably, both versions of the boat are priced equally, so it is just a matter of paying your money and taking your choice.

✓✓✓✓
A good standard inventory, but then you are paying for it.

Verdict

Sea Ventures, Aquador's UK distributors, have already done very well with this boat, and it is not hard to see why. The bottom line is that it looks, feels and behaves like a bigger craft than its 26ft hull length suggests.

You could happily spend a weekend cruising along the coast, safe in the knowledge that it will be comfortable, swift and sturdy enough to cope with most things you or the British weather can throw at it.

It's not as quite as quick or nimble as we hoped, and the price is on the steep side, but the smart fit-out and impressive level of practical detail and standard equipment does help compensate.

Should you choose the open or hardtop version? Well, unless you are a come-hell-or-high-water type of boater, we reckon the former is marginally the better bet. It looks prettier, has a less confined cockpit and still manages to keep its passengers dry in all but the foulest conditions.

MBM RATING 7/10

