

# BOAT REPORT BRISTER 35

A spacious interior, an air draught well under 7ft and a VAT-inclusive price tag of £57,500. Is this Aquafibre-based river cruiser too good to be true?

BASED at Wroxham on the Norfolk Broads, the family-run concern of Bristercraft build inland waterways cruisers both for private owners and for their own fleet of hirecraft. Hulls are bought in from neighbouring Aquafibre (the specialist moulding subsidiary of Broom Boats) and fitted out to order, allowing the completed boat to reflect individual taste.

Three boats are offered, a 28, a 35 and a 38-footer, the second of which first saw the light of day only last year. The boat we tested was destined for the charter fleet; a sister ship will be on display at the brand new Inland Boat Show in Nottingham (see p66).

## Design

Six years ago, a good deal of work was carried out by the Broads and Thames water authorities, in conjunction with a number of boatbuilders, to produce guidelines for low-wash hull forms, in an effort to reduce riverbed disturbance and bank erosion. The conclusions favoured a fine entry, a full midships section and a fine run to the stern.

Designers, builders and hirefleet operators have been taking heed, and there is now a tendency to produce displacement vessels with such underwater hull forms, while maintaining the bluff topsides at the bow and full-width transoms





aft, and the toerails have their fair share of fender beackets along them. Permanent rubber D-fendering runs right around, towards gunwale height, with further mid-topside strips protecting the transom and quarters.

The rear access door to the accommodation is sited in its own self-draining well. The stainless steel lined and vented locker to port of this houses two 13kg gas bottles.

The large two-part canopy can open most of the main cabin to the elements, and is surprisingly easy to slide. The fairly weighty structures ride easily on sets of sailboat mainsheet track.

## Interior

Access to the accommodation is either via the rear door to the aft cabin or through the port-hand sliding canopy and down moulded steps directly into the saloon.

The latter has 6ft 4in (1.93m) headroom pretty well throughout. The moulding runs around to the helm station, and incorporates a small corner seat adjacent to the double helm seat.

The wheel and single-lever throttle are offset just sufficiently to allow the skipper to stand to one side of the central portion of the coachroof, which is fixed, and steer with head and shoulders

above the waterline to maximise living space.

This 35-footer designed for Aquafibre by Andrew Wolstenholme follows these guidelines, and is topped off by a low superstructure incorporating a two-part sliding canopy over the internal helm and saloon area.

A central run of 10in (24cm) keel develops from the forefoot, providing a landing for the galvanised channel bar that protects the prop, and in turn supports the rudder.

## Exterior

With 10½in (26cm) sidedecks bordered by a toerail, and the whole coachroof fitted with stainless steel grabrails, well positioned for adults and children alike, there is little cause to worry when moving around. All deck areas have a moulded non-slip finish.

The pulpit-enclosed foredeck has a stowage slot for the more usually carried mudweight rather than any pretence of an anchor housing. Even so, it would help to have a small locker here, and on the aft deck, to take warps which are not in use.

There are pairs of 10in (25cm) cleats fore and

**The 35's interior layout is dominated by the large, opening mid section with the galley (left) located aft of the L-shaped seating area (above), and the helm forward of this, complete with its double seat atop the enginebox. Forward of this again, a full cabin in the bows (right) enjoys en-suite facilities and can be configured either with vee berths or with a double.**



through the open canopy — an enjoyable stance in any case, and beneficial while manoeuvring. The seated position is as about as high as feasible given the headroom, and gives good visibility. Only the quarters are a little obscured by bulkheads, and with the cabin doors open there is a clear view astern.

The rest of the forward area of the saloon is taken up by a decent-sized L-shaped settee, biased to starboard. If owners felt the need for extra sleeping arrangements, in addition to the two separate cabins, there is no reason why this cannot be adapted. Adjacent is wardrobe-cum-cupboard and bar storage, and opposite is a larger sideboard, the after end of which incorporates a useful-sized 12V/gas fridge (in this case, plumbed for gas only).

Towards the rear of this main cabin area is the galley, with a single bowl drainer and a built-in four-burner hob, grill and oven of domestic proportions. Pressurised hot and cold water to the basin is supplemented by a separate drinking water feed, run through a filter. All this equipment is gas-fired, and there are rather obvious shut-off taps adjacent to each appliance for the benefit of charterers, but these would be positioned more discreetly on a vessel built for private ownership.

Specific ventilation for the cooking area is by way of a vertical opening window, but we have seen few boats with more through-deckhead vents. Each and every compartment is duly catered for.

Both sleeping cabins have en-suite facilities of very reasonable proportions, with lower moulded portions which double as shower trays and upper bulkheads in Formica. The toilets discharge straight into holding tanks, and are flushed through with water drawn from the river. These pumps and the shower-draining ones are Jabsco Water Puppies, so there has been no stinting on the quality of the hardware.

When operating a hirefleet, maintenance can be a running battle against the wiles of the general public, and the yard see to it that everything can be got at through removable panels. So the toilet compartments have access covers to the hidden plumbing.

The aft cabin has a 6ft 4in x 4ft 0in (1.92m x 1.22m) double berth to starboard, the foot of which runs under the aft deck. There is an adequate run of drawers and a hanging locker opposite. Beneath the berth is the water tank (in stainless steel, as are all the tanks), and the pressure pump complete with accumulator.

Depending upon the sleeping arrangements, the forecabin can either be left with a vee arrangement, the berths measuring 6ft 6in x 2ft 5in (2.00m x 0.73m) apiece, or turned into a roomy double. Drawers are let into the bunk sides, and the wardrobe is tucked the other side of the door, in the main saloon, a seat being incorporated within the cabin instead. A cave locker towards the foot of the vee completes the day-to-day storage, whilst the void not taken up by the drawers forward can be used for spares.

We found every bunk-base sealed with varnish, all floors and bearers painted, and every cut-out of a GRP moulding sanded smooth and clear of resin-hardened barbs. All-in-all, a very thorough job has been made of the finish.

Furthermore, whether boats are destined for the charter fleet or not, the fit-out is sturdy and equipment is good by any standards. Although

not excessively plush, the accommodation offers practical comfort with an eye on easy cleaning and maintenance. The specification includes a 3.2kW Eberspacher heating system, while the saloon seating (which has a gate-leg table when acting as a dinette) has a spring-loaded base.

## Engine

To maximise the living area, the engine compartment is sited well forward, with the enginebox forming the plinth for the helm seat. This hinges back to give good access to day-to-day service points such as the raw-water filter, the fuel shut-off and filter, with a section of sole unscrewing to facilitate maintenance of the gearbox and shaft log. A removable panel in the forward toilet compartment does the same for the front of the engine.

In the case of our test boat, power came from a Perkins 4108 diesel developing 51hp. However, this unit has now been dropped, and the standard unit in future boats will be the four-cylinder 42hp MC42 model.

The shaft is around 15ft (4.47m) long, which would normally require a couple of intermediate bearings. But, given the awkwardness of fitting these in the confines of the keel section, and the inevitable mess associated with grease bearings, Bristercraft run the shaft through a suitably engineered pipe with three cutless bearings. This tube is kept full of water, to lubricate the rubber cutlasses, via a water feed from the engine cooling system and natural ingress at the propeller end — a neat piece of engineering which has served the yard well over the past five years.

Outboard of the engine are a calorifier, battery boxes and switches, and the 40gal (180lt) stainless steel fuel tank. An electric bilge pump is sited towards the aft run of keel and the enginebox is lined with loaded-plastic insulation. In all, it is a tidy installation.

## Performance and handling

For pushing along at the 6mph limit set by most waterway authorities, you can expect to use little more than half-throttle, around 1600rpm. This is easy on the ear and the pocket, for you can run for about two and a half hours on a gallon of diesel, with noise levels only 72dB(A) in the saloon and lower still in the two sleeping cabins.

The extra power on tap is useful when some current is encountered, and for quick bursts while manoeuvring; at full-throttle, 2800rpm, a speed of around 9mph would be expected.

We were surprised by the 35's responsiveness. We could turn it around in its own length in one sweep, by starting the turn slowly and easing up the throttle. The run of keel helps to defeat any wanderlust and maintains a bite on the water. There was even steerage astern if we were not too heavy-handed.

## Conclusions

We enjoyed our day on the Brister 35. It is a well thought-out, sturdily engineered but in no way spartan inland cruiser which should serve for many a year. The professional yet friendly yard offers good build quality, with a specification that can be raised to any degree of luxury. □

## Brister 35

**Loa** 35ft 0in (10.67m).

**Beam** 12ft 1in (3.68m).

**Draught** 2ft 8in (0.80m).

**Air draught** 6ft 8in (2.03m).

**Fuel** 40gal (180lt).

**Water** 75gal (340lt).

**Price** £49,000 ex VAT as tested.

**Builders** Bristercraft, The Rhond, Wroxham, Norfolk NR12 8UE. Tel: 0603 783783.