

Absolute 39

Italian newcomer Absolute has its eye on the competitive 40ft market with this stylish sportscruiser, but is it distinctive enough to make waves in such fierce waters? **REPORT BY CARL RICHARDSON**

A new boat name from a new boat dealer? That's not an easy pitch when it comes to savvy UK buyers. However, the boat in question here has something of a pedigree and the dealer seems a bit special too. Why let unfamiliarity come between you and what could be your ideal boat?

The Absolute range of progressive, stylish Italian sterndrive sportscruisers comes from designers previously involved in Gobbi and Atlantis, so their CVs are not in question. The chap who brings them into the UK is a lifeboat man (instant respect for him) who seems to spend his entire working life criss-crossing the Irish Sea (instant respect for the boat) from his base on the Isle of Man to give demonstrations to would-be buyers.

This kind of can-do attitude tells you plenty about the man behind UK dealer Ocean Nautic and quite a bit about the boat. So when an invitation was offered to test the latest 39ft Absolute sportscruiser we headed straight for the Isle of Man... only to find out the test was to be held in Italy.



DESIGN AND BUILD

The Absolute range runs from this new 39 on to a 41 and the 45ft flagship. Having two models so close together in a three boat line up may sound odd, but the technical specifications make sense of it: the 39 is just 37ft (11.3m) long, while the 41 comes in at over 42ft (12.8m).

The Absolutes look the very image of the modern sportscruiser. More than that though, they are the most North European, British even, of Italian sportsboats. That is meant as a compliment, because the end product will find many a fan over here. Italy is not shy of a good designer or two but where Absolute may score bonus points is with its interiors that mix Mediterranean chic with some real warmth, all in a well-proportioned layout. If my memory serves me well, this manages to do what no other builder has on a boat of this length: and that is fit a proper en suite to the guest cabin as well as the forward master. A beam of almost 13ft (4m) – which is at least a foot wider than the competition – might be

one good reason for the 39's extra space and specification.

Outside the style is certainly individual with the 39, like all Absolutes, sporting a forward raked radar arch that starts further aft than most, following the line of the transom and tender garage, something of a luxury on a boat of this length. Aside from these novelties, the 39 cleverly ticks the design must-have boxes, such as the vertical ports cut into the blue top sides, the rising deck mouldings along the stern quarters and some aggressive side screen angles that are, dare I say it, very Sunseeker Portofino.

Another more individual feature of the range is that all of the boats are sterndrive powered. Hardly a surprise on the 39, but for the 45 it is a fact that may raise few eyebrows and perhaps pose a few questions for the deep vee hull from Absolute president, part-owner and designer Sergio Maggi.

On the subject of build, there are precious few places to get inside the guts of the hull with the saloon sole closed off, making it

difficult to give a really thorough assessment. The strengthening, where it is visible, looks on the money: the frames may not look quite as chunky as, say, those found inside a Fairline but nevertheless the finish is perfectly good.

Ultimately, the 39 impresses with its laudable attention to matters of on-deck practicality and safety.

EXTERIOR

Sharing the same LOA and aggressive looks, this Absolute has a very obvious rival in Sunseeker's Portofino 35. Where the boats differ, however, is with the aft cockpit and stern deck sections. Whereas the Portofino goes for the more common aft seating layout in its cockpit, our test boat features a tender garage and sunpad, a fact that places real pressure on the remaining cockpit area. Fortunately the designers have got it absolutely right in their allocation of space,

delivering a raised section of seating perfectly sited in front of the sunpad and alongside the helm, which keeps everyone in close contact. A solid teak table comes as standard, as does the teak sole that runs up from the bathing platform, a fantastic freebie if ever there was one. Also included in the standard inventory is a fridge for the wetbar, although you will have to stump up some extra cash for a grill plate.

A combination of the moulded side screens and the radar arch creates plenty of shelter for those loafing around on a very comfy sunpad, its design creating an incline for your back and a further raised section of headrest, while your feet can brace against a stainless steel rail.

Across the stern the Absolute looks huge, mainly because it is, but also because the design opens it up with symmetrical entrances to the portside deck or the main cockpit entranceway. Tall flanks do close the bathing platform's outboard edges in, but they also create secure access for side decks. The garage door opens up in a sprightly fashion and inside there is room for a 8ft 9in (2.7m) dinghy. If you intend to house a RIB, you might want to add an optional electric winch and a roller for the bathing platform edge.

Apart from a ludicrously complicated canopy design, practicalities are another strong feature of the deck specification. A hidden compartment under the sunpad cushion provides fender stowage compartments and a neat inlay for a lifebuoy and boathook. The side decks may not be widest, but excellent access, well-positioned grabrails and a high toerail all help. The foredeck is superbly

gripped with none of those shiny bits some builders insist on placing just where you would normally tread.

PERFORMANCE AND HANDLING

Not only does the Absolute look a bit like the Portofino, it rides rather similarly too. Sunseekers tend to run bow up and so does the 39. Fitted with the 310hp Volvo D6 diesels the boat has plenty of weight sat aft but it also has plenty of power, reaching a healthy 36-knot top speed that should translate to something nearer 38 knots in our cooler climate. This kind of performance suggests that the smaller, cheaper D4 option is well worth a look. The 260hp on offer from the lighter four-cylinder engines should still return healthy figures, while perhaps levelling out the trim.

But enough of the maybes. The reality here is a boat that performs with utter composure and verve. Despite its beam the ride is soft over the waves, while the steering's response and drive through the turn remains strong. The bow-up style of ride needs to be harnessed into a head sea, the standard-fit tabs lowering the trim for a more comfortable approach. The tabs can create a certain tenderness above 28 knots, but if you are running in to the kind of sea that requires tabs at 28 knots you probably won't care, will you?

Turning onto a following sea the ride needs no help in conquering the conditions. With thumping great clouds of spray all about us, just one single drop made its way inboard.

Running across the rev range the boat definitely prefers to be above 2400rpm and 18 knots. Once you hit 2500rpm and 20 knots and a bit of tab is added, everything seems to fall into place. From here it is a matter of choosing a cruising speed to suit your mood. Anywhere between 2800rpm and 3200rpm will return plenty of pace without entering the upper, less economic ranges of the engines.

As with most of today's top-drawer sportscruisers, the leg trim has an effect on the



above Cool, clean lines and a seriously sporty feel.



above The vertical portholes are a stylish feature that let light and air wash through the saloon.



above Inspired, practical touches impress.



above Sociability and safety in the cockpit.

below Headrest? Check. Steel rail? Check. Lovely ladies? Check.



below Access all areas: getting to the side decks and engine bay is a doddle.



below Protected by the angular screens and aft-sited radar arch, the cockpit works very well indeed.



balance and poise of the boat, but not so much that it can hurt the ride if you get it wrong. Happy to run between -4 and +2, the legs can be pushed out further still, but while the ride remains perfectly manageable, you lose on performance with a drop in speed.

At the helm, a drop-away style bolster seat might just take two, but more likely it will remain the sole preserve of the skipper. An aggressively angled dash looks the business and matches the boat's style perfectly, delivering a sensible layout with space for a 7in display dead centre. Other features include a neat 'bits' tray under the three-spoke

steering well, but navigators beware – there seems to be no place for a chart to be laid out.

On longer journeys and with the boat trimmed, the seated position should work well and the standing ergonomics are pretty much faultless.



ACCOMMODATION

If the 13ft (4.0m) beam does not affect the performance, it certainly makes itself known below decks where, along with 6ft 3in (1.91m)

headroom, there is a genuine feeling of space when you enter the saloon. Glasswork and linings of a fashionable light green hue (I know it's fashionable because it's the same shade those swankier gastropubs use) and light American oak cabinetry do their bit to open up the accommodation, while the vertical ports that border the saloon are a great interior design feature with a practical sideline in light and ventilation. All six can be opened up when safely at anchor.

Shape and substance are what add the warmth mentioned earlier. Any spare surfaces are covered in oak. Bulkheads curve, sculpted

below Vertical portholes and American light oak cabinetry really open up the space below decks. There is an unmistakable feel of quality here.



deck heads add interest and hardly a trace of bare GRP is to be found. The standard finish for the saloon seating is a washable material, but the optional dimpled leather hide (£1875) looks and feels a winner. Cushions for the U-shape bench pull out to present flow-coated stowage bins, while more precious articles can be packed away in eye-line lockers.

An option worth considering is the oak entertainment panel that fastens itself to the rounded 'feature' bulkhead. This centralises the audio and visual systems and positions them so that you and your guests get a bird's eye-view from the sofa.

Another standard oak cabinet hides away the galley's counter-sunk hob and sink with more stowage below plus another fridge. The hob is an electric-only option so you either wait until you're marina bound or fit a genset.

Although the forward master quarters are usually the biggest cabins, the difficulty normally revolves around how well the builders have done with the guest cabin amidships. To its credit, Absolute has come up with a great compromise between space and specification. As well as the en suite, you have more standing headroom than usual, with the 6ft 4in clearance extending much further into the room than most. Stowage is good and the twin-bunk-to-double-berth layout chosen is, for me, the best option for a guest cabin. Access into the en suite toilet and shower room is fine and the clean, stylish compartment has its own porthole.

The forward master cabin and its en suite are larger and enjoy more stowage, as you

might expect. Long overhead lockers, under-berth drawers and a large hanging locker mean that longer cruises should require few stops to the local laundromat.

The interior finish is impressive, with LED mood lighting, illuminated light switches, stitched leather trim around the berths, and even fiddled edges to surfaces, a rare bonus allowing you to actually put things on them!

Like most boats in this class, Absolute has neglected to offer any compartments for the plentiful lockers. This, like your crockery, flies in the face of the boat's sporting ability.



ENGINE OPTIONS AND ACCESS

As already mentioned, the all-Volvo line-up of 260hp four-cylinder D4s and 310hp D6s suits the boat's intentions very well. Whether my gut feeling that the smaller engines may be the best option for the 39 is right needs to be tested on the water, and I hope the UK dealer offers us the chance.

Where the smaller engines will surely have the edge on their six-cylinder counterparts is on engine room space. When compared to sportscruisers with a traditional cockpit seating plan, tender garaged boats have a trickier time accommodating the engines on two counts. The first is due to the low set sole of the garage severely inhibiting the clearance above the engines, the second is quick, easy access for repairs or maintenance.



above Tender garage means poor engine clearance.

On access, Absolute has gone for the usual companionway hatch with stainless steel step down to the bilge level. The hatchway itself seems unnecessarily tight considering there appears to be the space to make it wider.

Once inside, a GRP tread plate runs across the front of the engines and even with a 5kW generator fitted there is room to move across them. The finish is quite busy down here, something may well change on later boats when cable runs, plumbing and pumps will be better organised. Fuel pre-filters are accessible, but because of that poor clearance above the engines you need to approach the raw water filters from on high. Fortunately



Absolute has created a three-piece sole for the tender garage, making it far easier to remove.

below Immaculate design and shape in the saloon.



below The twin-bunk-to-double-berth option is a winner.



below Quality materials, meticulous workmanship and fiddled edges too, so cups stay put.



below Absolute's fine design detail is again evident in the warm and inviting master suite.



SPECIFICATION AND VALUE

If there is one part of the market that takes no prisoners, and offers an unbelievably strong group of challengers vying for our affections, it is the market for 40ft sportscruisers. Name any marque, and you can guarantee that it will boast a fast, capable, drop-dead stylish offering at this level. Fairline, Princess, Sealine, Sunseeker, Windy... all present and correct. But the Italians have a habit of coming up with great boats with the rather useful and attractive addition of low pricing. So can the Absolute steal a march on its rivals with some good old-fashioned value for money?

A fairly comprehensive standard specification means that the £206,470 (inc VAT) price for a D4-powered boat and £218,561 (inc VAT) for the D6 is a fairly attractive starting point, not least considering that figure includes teak decking to the cockpit and bathing platform that could easily put £5000 on the final outlay with other builders.

That said, you will still need to build the £2605 canopy set into your calculations, a bow-thruster may be wanted, as would the optional holding tank. I would also like to see an option for a larger water tank, as 50gals on a boat with two bathrooms won't go far.

Remembering that this is a 37ft boat, albeit one with twin en suite cabins, a price tag of around £210,000 means that life will not be easy for the Absolute (good as it undeniably is), as our rivals panel below illustrates. And with Atlantis due to launch its own 39 model any day now, this market is gearing up for one

hell of a fight – one where the only guaranteed winner should be you, the buyer.

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In a fierce market, this is good value, but the add-ons do add up.

Verdict



A stylish, surefooted newcomer to the sportscruiser dog-fight, firing off its arsenal of cockpit features plus an interior surprisingly in-tune with UK tastes. Let battle commence.

MBM RATING 8/10



Absolute 39 technical data



specifications

BUILD	Glass Reinforced Plastic
RCD	Category B (12 people)
LENGTH OVERALL	37ft 2in (11.31m)
HULL LENGTH	36ft 2in (11.0m)
BEAM	12ft 11in
DRAUGHT	3ft 1in (0.9m)
DISPLACEMENT	TBA
FUEL CAPACITY	165gal (750lt)
WATER CAPACITY	52gal (235lt)

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDEDECKS	7in
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 3in
BERTH	6ft 3in

performance

ENGINES	twin Volvo Penta D6310dp diesels
CONFIGURATION	6cyl 5.5lt 310hp @ 3600rpm
CONDITIONS	(Wind) Westerly Force 3 (Sea state) slight/moderate

LOAD	fuel 60% water 50% crew 6
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Rpm	knots	gph	mpg	range	noise
2500	20.2	10	2.02	266	74
2600	22.1	11	2.00	264	75
2800	25.8	14	1.78	234	74
3000	28.6	17	1.68	221	77
3200	31.1	22	1.41	186	77
3400	33.5	25	1.34	177	78
3600	35.6	27	1.31	173	79

Range figures quoted above are in miles based on standard fuel tanks and include a 20% margin. GPH & MPG refer to imperial gallons. These figures may vary due to weather conditions, air, water, engine temperature, crew numbers, hull fouling, fuel quality and other issues. Noise readings are in dB(A) and were taken in the saloon.

prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with 260hp Volvo Penta D4 diesels	£206,470
	as tested
WITH 310HP VOLVO PENTA D6 DIESELS	£218,561
BOW-THRUSTER	£2816
CANOPY	£2605
LEATHER INTERIOR	£1875
HOLDING TANK	£1414
BOAT AS TESTED	£227,271

ENQUIRIES Ocean Nautic Tel: 01624 627752 www.oceanautic.com, e-mail sales@oceanautic.com

the rivals



SUNSEEKER 35 PORTOFINO
From £245,075

A former MBM group test winner and the Absolute's obvious rival, its performance outstrips the Italian, but so does the price. Tel: 01202 666060. www.sunseeker.com



SEALINE S38
£208,237

More for less here if you want plenty of interior and cockpit space, but no loo for the guest cabin. Tel: 01489 885115. www.sealine.com



ATLANTIS 39
£215,025

Absolute's Italian rivals try to grab back some limelight. Debuting at Southampton, expect plenty of style and innovation. Tel: 01932 242977. www.gibbsmarine.co.uk