

Monterey 290CR

Florida-based Monterey has added a dollop of – dare we say it – true Brit aggression to the recipe for its latest sportscruiser. But will this sleek 32-footer be to European tastes? **REPORT BY CARL RICHARDSON**

Motorboat marques may not always enjoy the brand identity enjoyed by car manufacturers, but there are some contrasting style ideas to be found each side of the boat-building pond, with European and US yards both quite particular about how things should be. Which makes Monterey's latest 30ft

sportscruiser a very interesting boat. This Florida yard has ousted the soft, inoffensive curves that distinguish American cruisers and brought in the kind of hard-edged aggression that Sunseeker has pretty much made its own through the years. Add to that the UK importers' wonderful penchant for sticking beefy Yanmar turbo diesels in their boats, and

what we have here could well be the first US cruiser over 25ft to test European builders for some time. So can the rest of the boat, especially the interior, keep pace?

DESIGN & BUILD

If you want on-water innovation, then Sealine's clever 29SC might be the boat for

you. However, sat next to the brutish aggression of the Monterey 290, it might look like a boat about to be bullied.

The angular design carries from the standard-fit radar arch to the foredeck and down to the spray rail and chine at the water line. It's hardly ground breaking, as a 15-year-old Sunseeker Portofino 31 moored slap bang next to us at Hamble Point Marina ably demonstrated, but the point is that this is a style that works, conveying a feeling of strength that complements the sportscruiser attitude.

Other reasons for this boat's sense of presence are less subjective. With a waterline length of 28ft 10in, the Monterey is simply one of the biggest boats in its class (though sadly this still doesn't allow for any meaningful side decks) stretching out to over 32ft once the

integral slab of bathing platform has been taken into account. The traditional hand-laid construction, doubling up around the chines and rails, again wins no awards for innovation, but the 290 always feels reassuringly solid underfoot. One of the few places to check out the bilge finish is in the engine bay: it looks good, but what looks better is the angle of bilge, suggesting an excellent deep vee carrying right aft.

Exterior detail also impresses. As well as the option of blue, red or the black gelcoat shown here, the stern features stainless steel blades cut into the flanks and a neatly sculpted transom.

After all this visual feasting, the senses stall slightly on boarding. Fortunately the cockpit stays the right side of understated cool, as

does the typically American open plan layout below decks, offering four berths and impressive amounts of space. Neither is close to the thoughtful specification of the aforementioned Sealine, but the 290 goes about its business well enough.

Aside from the omission of side decks, the only minor complaint comes from the integrity of the five-piece angular



It's not too clever, but it is big, muscular and it looks the business.

windshield. It may well last the course, but it feels flimsy compared to the chunky fixed variety.

ACCOMMODATION

If you are going to move up to twin engine cruising, the chances are you are looking





above Simplicity means space for the Monterey's breathe-easy main cabin. The extended saloon seat is a good innovation, especially with the berth made up.

to use your boat more and to stay aboard more, so interior design and comfort rate as real priorities.

On most European cruisers of a similar size, you will be offered a separate mid-cabin. The Monterey, however, sticks to the US style, keeping it simple and open plan with a wide low opening for the mid cabin. The payoff is a real feeling of 'breathe-easy' space that would surely diminish were a cabin door added.

How highly you value the privacy of a proper mid-cabin door will no doubt decide how much you like this layout. But rather than rue the loss of a separate cabin, you might instead rejoice in a second mini-saloon perfect for children to go about their business while you are left to enjoy the main cabin. The mid cabin provides seated headroom, plus spot lighting and two ports, to keep the guests in touch with the cockpit or the outside world.

Adding to the feeling of space, the colour scheme throughout the interior is kept neutral, with cream vinyl covering most surfaces and the odd dash of cherry cabinetry

helping to warm the mood. The forward J-shape seating is comfortable and can be sectioned off to form a double berth by dropping the table down – and a handy section of seating aft of the curtain remains in use.

The one noticeable issue is stowage space. Sure, there are the bins under the forward seating, but clean, dry storage for clothing is at a premium. Sat at the cabin entrance, the galley's cherry module includes a microwave, sink and fridge but leaves little workspace for any serious culinary action, while the finish behind cupboard doors is quite basic. Similarly the simple toilet/shower compartment does enough for the job in hand, its main benefit being 6ft 4in (1.93m) of headroom.

Access below decks is safe and simple. A grab rail is perfectly sited to aid your descent and light and battery switches are positioned right

at the entrance along with a CD player, which fires two speakers in the cabin and two more in the cockpit.

✓✓✓✓✓
Open-plan layout delivers plenty of space but little stowage.

EXTERIOR

Without doing anything particularly special, Monterey has created a clean, highly useable cockpit that ticks all the boxes and should wear very well. Subtle colour details – the majority of the cockpit is finished in a softer tone of champagne white – contrast nicely with the optional black gelcoat. The stylish simplicity of two facing benches, a long wet bar and raised helm area is textbook sportscruiser, while practical touches such as well-positioned grab rails and steps up to the side coaming impressed us too.

The seating is comfortable, the upholstery looks like it should run the course and there are always cup holders positioned near by. For those balmy summer evenings, courtesy lighting encircles the GRP cockpit liner and spots beam down from the arch. Snap-in carpets can be added for extra underfoot comfort.

As a centre of social life on the boat, the wet bar that runs along the port side is a bit light on features, with just a sink to keep guests happy. Its bitty finish also clashes with the

clean style everywhere else. The blend of lacquered plastic locker doors fitted to a GRP carcass does not quite match up and, as the only ones visible onboard, screw heads stand out, and not in a good way.

However the wide steps up to the deck, which form part of the helm console, are about as good as they get: a large gripped platform at the top gives you space and time to consider your next move. Once through the opening screen, the payoff for those angular looks is a level foredeck, well gripped and safe to work from. A small anchor locker hatchway means no fender storage is available forward, so you will have to rely on the boot in the transom. If requested, an electric windlass can be fitted by the importer.

Canopies are the bane of many a boater, but it is worth mentioning that Monterey's canopies work better than most and, when new, at least, even keep the rain out. Like others they provide full headroom in the cockpit when the weather turns, but it is their ease of deployment that really impresses.

✓✓✓✓✓
A simple but effective cockpit is lifted by a great helm.



above Foredeck access is well worked, as is the helm position with its sporty-looking dash and seats.

ENGINE OPTIONS & ACCESS

With diesel power not registering on boats much under 40ft in the States, importer Southwater Marine long ago decided to install high-quality Yanmar diesels on arrival. That means this boat gets the engines it deserves.

It also delivers some impressive engineering, including well-placed fuel filters, strainers and 3M sound insulation. The original US battery installation does fasten the three banks down securely, but could do with some protective boxes. Total access comes at the touch of a button, the whole aft cockpit lifting up on two rams. A single back-up service hatch is also supplied, allowing access in the event of a 12V failure.

The twin four-cylinder Yanmars leave plenty of space around the bay, with enough room for spares storage or even a genset. Southwater's

recent tie up with Volvo Penta means that the firm now offers the option of 210hp-260hp D4s.

✓✓✓✓✓
UK installation delivers the right engines for the task in hand.

PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

The Monterey rides exactly how it looks, with strength, purpose and agility. It exudes a real toughness, helped by the low throb of the Yanmars, which serves as a massive confidence booster at the helm. It might not feel quite as dynamic or nimble as some in this class – the grip of the deep vee hull returns a classically weighty, controlled ride – but equally the Monterey will carve a deliciously tight turn with exactly the right amount of heel to leave you smiling and satisfied.

The boat's poise is such that you can throw in plenty of helm all the way up to its 36 knot top speed. Some of this ability rests with the longer Bravo II, rather than the standard single-propped Bravo I, outdrives and their twin, counter-rotating props. The thought of a hull this competent being matched up to Volvo's exhilarating D-series DP outdrives is a tasty proposition indeed.

Although the weather on our test day never asked any serious questions, it is fair to say that the Monterey is one of the most

accomplished cruisers in its class. You really feel that here is a boat you can go places on. So once you're done with the anti-social behaviour, simply set the throttles at 2700rpm, watch the speedometer settle at 25 knots and let the boat power along, pushing any spray well outboard while you sit safe in the knowledge that you are enjoying both speed and economy in equally impressive measures. You can of course cruise with more urgency if you like, and 30 knots still feels like a very comfortable rate. Much more than this, though, and you are sucking a lot more fuel through those Yanmars.

Our only other advice is to keep the leg trim down to 25%, as any more has a negative effect on performance figures. That said, the handling remains utterly reliable.

For the skipper, the Monterey delivers that rarity of a seated position that actually feels right. Two bolster seats provide real comfort in spite of the fact that there is no adjustment. If you do use the bolster, the screen still does a great job of deflecting wind and the Mercruiser

Below Aside from its sleeping duties the mid-cabin is a great social retreat.

Below Such a well-worked cockpit deserves a better-stocked wetbar.

below Neat UK diesel installation is tidy and (more importantly) powerful.

below Great deck stowage; the transom boot takes five fenders and warps.



controls stay within reach, although they really are a tad agricultural compared to today's electronic affairs.

Another dip in sophistication comes with the engines. Even with 3M's insulation lining, the roar from the Yanmars is noticeable when compared to velvety Volvo D4s. But otherwise on board life is tranquil. Whether running before or into the wind, the hull retains a smoothness over the waves and rarely can be made to slam.

An eye-catching dash is set out with a narrow vertical strip that huddles all the instruments together, leaving loads of space



Superb: a quality, capable ride. This boat demands to be used.

each side for extra navigation aids and the luxury of indicators for the standard fit trim tabs.

SPECIFICATION & VALUE

Gaze over the price lists and you might think that 30ft sports cruisers are available for well under £100,000, which they are as long as you are prepared to pump unleaded into your tanks. MBM's own 'Buyer's guide' suggests the same, those canny boat dealers supplying us with base petrol engine prices that bear little relation to the reality of the UK market.

No, research tells us that £120,000 is what you need to enter this diesel-fuelled world. Which is another reason why Southwater Marine's engine fitting works for you. The firm has more control over the costing of the boat, can look at the market and put together a no-nonsense £106,000 inc VAT price tag that covers most of the bases.

There are some minuses, of course. You don't get the sheer effort of thought we admired on the Sealine S29's cruising inventory, and in places the build quality is primitive. Remember that in addition you will have to pay extra for the coloured gelcoat and for a bow-thruster, which you may well decide



Dealer power here in the UK adds up to a strong package.

is superfluous anyway. Better to invest your cash in that famine-struck wetbar.



Verdict

A superb sports cruiser that simply hangs together really well. It won't win prizes for on-water innovation, and the finish inside could be better, but when you have a package that looks great, handles superbly and costs less than most, who cares?

MBM RATING

8/10



Monterey 290CR technical data



specifications

| | |
|----------------|-------------------------------|
| BUILD | Glass Reinforced Plastic |
| RCD | design category B (10 people) |
| LENGTH OVERALL | 32ft 5in (9.9m) |
| BEAM | 10ft 2in (3.2m) |
| DRAUGHT | 3ft 1in (0.95m) leg down |
| DISPLACEMENT | 4.5 tonnes |
| FUEL CAPACITY | 118gal (537lt) |
| WATER CAPACITY | 32gal (144lt) |

key dimensions

| | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| HEADROOM IN MAIN CABIN | 6ft 2in |
| MASTER CABIN BERTH | 6ft 2in x 5ft 2in |
| MIDSHIPS CABIN BERTH | 6ft 2in x 4ft 4in |

performance

engines twin Yanmar 4LHA 240STZP 240hp diesels
configuration 4cyl, 3.45lt, 240hp at 3500rpm
conditions wind south easterly Force 3. Sea state slight.
load fuel 75%, water 25%, crew two

| rpm | knots | gph | lph | mpg | range | noise |
|------|-------|------|-----|------|-------|-------|
| 2300 | 19.5 | 8.8 | 40 | 2.21 | 208 | 79 |
| 2500 | 22.6 | 10.6 | 48 | 2.13 | 201 | 81 |
| 2700 | 24.8 | 13.1 | 60 | 1.89 | 179 | 82 |
| 3000 | 30.0 | 17.6 | 80 | 1.70 | 160 | 85 |
| 3300 | 34.2 | 22.8 | 104 | 1.50 | 142 | 85 |
| 3500 | 36.2 | 24.6 | 112 | 1.47 | 138 | 86 |

Range figures above are in miles, based on standard fuel tanks, with 20% margin.
 Noise figures are in dB(A), recorded in the main cabin.

prices

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| STANDARD BOAT | inc VAT |
| with twin 240hp Yanmars | £106,000 |
| COLOURED HULL (three colours available) | £1060 |
| CANOPIES | as standard |
| TRIM TABS | as standard |
| ELECTRIC WINDLASS | £1400 |
| COCKPIT CARPET | £530 |
| MACERATOR PUMP | £440 |
| BOAT AS TESTED | £109,430 |

ENQUIRIES Southwater Marine, Hamble Point Marina, Hamble, Hants SO31 4NB. Tel: 023 8045 2255.
www.southwater.com

the rivals



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