

Boston Whaler 255 Conquest

Build quality and brand loyalty are not in doubt, but how much demand is there for an outboard-engined sports-fisher in the UK?

REPORT BY JOHN WOOD

American boatbuilders Boston Whaler are best known in this country for their range of unsinkable, walkaround sports-fisher craft. But, until now, their larger Conquest cuddy-cabin range haven't made much impact on this side of the pond.

The new 255 aims to change all that. Not only is it the smallest Boston Whaler to boast a proper cuddy, with an overall length of 26ft 11in, but its practical styling and optional hardtop make it ideally suited to British waters.

So far, so good. The one fly in the ointment is that the 255 Conquest is only available with outboard motors. While this is fine for power-hungry, petrol-rich American buyers, UK boaters usually prefer sterndrive petrol or even diesel power for this size of boat.

That said the latest generation of direct-injection two and four-stroke outboard motors are so much cleaner and more economical than the inefficient two-strokes of old that they are rapidly regaining popularity.

DESIGN & BUILD

The benefits of a cuddy cabin on sports-fishing boats are obvious: shelter from the elements, the possibility of overnighting

and the convenience of a toilet.

For designers, the problem is that decks offering easy access right round the boat, so important on this type of craft, impinge on the space available down below. Still, a deep bow ensures that the 255's cuddy is comparatively generous.

Nevertheless, it is the wide aft deck that is the key to the design. It gives you freedom to fish, or serves equally well for watersports.

There is little glitz in the presentation of the 255 Conquest, but it is based on quality materials and workmanship. The fibreglass work is excellent, with plenty of one-piece mouldings for added strength and durability, and locker lids fit well. The standard of fittings is first-rate, and there are plenty of them, including rod-holders, racks and in-deck fishboxes for anglers.

Whaler styling is purposeful. Their cuddy boats cannot replicate the sleek appearance of their open-deck craft, and inevitably have a heavier look. Even so, the 255 is surprisingly attractive, thanks to its clean lines and minimal embellishment.



Clean, purposeful lines and good build quality and workmanship.

ACCOMMODATION

The cabin layout keeps things simple. The forward vee-berths convert into a generous double with the table dropped down and infill cushions deployed. Lifting the after starboard cushion reveals the toilet, and there is a small built-in washbasin with a cold water tap to port.

Open stowage, including rod-holders, is provided around the edges, and there are lined lockers under the side cushions.

That's just about it as far as

fittings go, besides the optional stereo, with remote control at the helm.

There is more than ample standing headroom near the entrance, and sitting headroom forward. Good natural light comes in via a deck hatch and two portholes, and the door from the cockpit is generously wide.

In keeping with Whaler design philosophy, the emphasis is on function rather than

✓✓✓
Functional more than comfortable, but spacious for a cuddy.

comfort. But the quality of the mouldings is first-class, as is the upholstery.

EXTERIOR

The designers have done an excellent job of keeping the cockpit free of unnecessary clutter. There are no sunbeds or cockpit table (even on the options list), but there are two informal

seats, behind the helm and passenger seats, and a folding aft bench.

As well as the engine access hatch, the cockpit sole has three inset fishboxes, with drains and gas strut-supported lids. There is a further draining locker in the base of the passenger seat, a coolbox under the helm seat and, of course, rod stowage. Few owners will need any more storage than this.

The walkways forward to the bow are wide and there are handholds all the way, including stainless steel guardrails. The solid bow locker is capacious and a substantial roller is on hand to aid anchor recovery.

Boarding from the stern is easy, via a transom door from the split bathing platform. An extendable boarding ladder is mounted to starboard.

At the helm, the driver gets a steel wheel as standard, on a tilt-adjuster, plus a footrest and well placed twin throttles. His and his co-driver's seat swivel and slide fore-and-aft to help them get comfortable, although we would prefer more side support.

The entire centre section of the dash is left empty for the owner to fit out with electronic navigation and fish-finding equipment, and at first sight the three standard gauges in the top section look rather mean on a craft of this price. However these SmartCraft instruments perform a multi-functional role, covering full engine information as well as fuel





above A simple cuddy offers good headroom.



above Clutter-free, the cockpit has a folding seat.



above The helmsman's and co-pilot's seats are adjustable for comfort, but offer little side support.

and trip details. It might take you a while to find your preferred settings, but once set up you won't be left wanting for information.

✓✓✓✓
Versatile cockpit with good all-round deck access and stowage.

If you opt for the hardtop, this gives yet more mounting positions for electronics.

ENGINE OPTIONS & ACCESS

Boston Whaler's tie-up with Mercury means their outboard motors are the exclusive power options on the transom. Furthermore, only twin installations are available, in keeping with the offshore capabilities of the 255 Conquest.

For many, we suspect, the choice of engines will be largely a budgetary exercise. Four-stroke F115 XLPTs are the cheapest option at £14,734, two-stroke 150 CXL Optimaxes are the mid-priced choice at

£20,297, whilst four-stroke F225 AETXs will set you back £31,683.

The engines themselves are easy to get at by standing on one side of the split bathing platform or by leaning over the transom to remove the covers. The centre panel in the aft cockpit sole hinges up on a single gas strut to give access to the fuel tank, twin batteries and oil reservoirs.

✓✓✓
Twin outboard options are in keeping with the boat's capabilities.

PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

The 225 Conquest is capable of handling up to 450hp. The photographs show twin 200hp Yamahas on the transom, but the 150hp Mercury Optimax motors fitted to our test

boat offer a good compromise between performance and economy.

A top speed of just under 40 knots and good pick up from standstill make the boat fun to drive. In warm but wet conditions, we were driving a hardtop model, and the open boat would probably do an extra few knots. We accelerated from 0-26 knots in 7.9sec.

The hull handles smoothly, with no indication of skip-out or ventilation at the props, and the engines have plenty of mid-range power to pull through turns and accelerate away. Placid waters did not test the hull to anywhere near its limits, but we headed through the wash from some larger craft and it remained unperturbed.

✓✓✓
Fun to drive, with a smooth ride and surprisingly little noise.

Thanks to the hull's foam liner and the smooth running of the engines, this is also a quiet craft to ride in.

left Our test boat had the optional hardtop, likely to be attractive to UK buyers

SPECIFICATION & VALUE

Whalers come with a good reputation, founded on their unsinkable guarantee, and enhanced by solid build and traditional lines.

That pedigree comes with a price tag, though, and this is not a cheap craft. For the same outlay, you could order a larger sports cruiser, but if a sports-fisher is what you are after then this boat will look after you both on the water and in the back pocket.

The Boston Whaler name, and classic styling that does not date, usually keep depreciation down to glacial speeds.

However, the outboard engines could adversely affect residual values on a craft of this size so don't expect miracles.

✓✓✓
Whaler pedigree comes at a price. Outboards might limit future value.

Verdict

The 255 Conquest is a fine boat. It more than lives up to Boston Whaler's reputation for industrial strength build quality and sure-footed sea-keeping. It is also quick, attractive and blessed with a cuddy cabin, useful in the UK's less than perfect weather.

In theory it would make an excellent boat for a number of different pastimes. However, in practice, the fit-out is so sport-specific and the price so steep compared to its sports cruiser opposition that we expect most buyers will prefer to have a rod in their hand than skis on their feet.

And, however good the new outboards may be, we still think it will be hard to overcome British buyers' prejudice.

In the end it comes down to how badly you want that Whaler name, and everything it stands for. If you take the plunge, you won't be disappointed. Just don't look at the cheque when you sign it.

MBM RATING 7/10
 ✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓

Boston Whaler 255 Conquest technical data



specifications

BUILD	glass-reinforced plastic
RCD	design category B
LENGTH OVERALL	26ft 11in (8.20m)
BEAM	8ft 9in (2.66m)
DRAUGHT	1ft 4in (0.40m)
DISPLACEMENT	2.2 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	125gal (567lt)

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	8in
HEADROOM IN CABIN	5ft 9in
CUDDY CABIN BERTH	6ft 0in x 2ft 2in

prices

STANDARD BOAT excluding engines	£46,854
with twin 150hp Mercury CXL Optimax	£67,151
FISHING PACKAGE	£1,495
ANCHOR WINDLASS	£1,590
HARDTOP WITH ELECTRONICS BOX	£4,286
HARDTOP WEATHER CURTAIN	£1,231
PORTABLE TOILET WITH PUMP-OUT & OVERBOARD DISCHARGE	£585
PORCELAIN TOILET WITH PUMP-OUT & MACERATOR	£1,466
BUTANE STOVE	£160
SHOREPOWER CONNECTION	£859
STEREO RADIO & CD PLAYER	£733
SUNTOP WITH BOOT	£1,023
SUNTOP WEATHER CURTAIN	£909
BOAT AS TESTED	£75,431

ENQUIRIES Dorset Yacht Co, Lake Drive, Hamworthy, Poole, Dorset BH15 4DT. Tel: 01202 674531. www.bostonwhaler.co.uk

the rivals



SEASWIRL STRIPER 2601
 £49,500 with twin 150 outboards
 New to the UK market, and available with an open helm or hardtop.
 Tel: 01634 843576.
 www.medwaybridgemarina.co.uk



WELLCRAFT 270 COASTAL
 £66,000 with twin 150 outboards
 Similar in style and heritage to the Boston Whaler, offering a comfortable cabin.
 Tel: 01634 843576.
 www.medwaybridgemarina.co.uk



WHITE SHARK 265
 from £65,000
 New model with a clever cabin design and a wider engine selection.
 Tel: 01932 358000.
 www.yamaha-motor.co.uk