



BOAT REPORT
CROWN FLETCHER 32

A new name but based on the Suffolk 32/35, the Crown Fletcher was part of a growing band of traditional semi-displacement motorboats on display at the Southampton Show this year. We took an early test on the first of the line.

NEW designs, and indeed new builders, of traditional semi-displacement boats are a rarity, but this year's Southampton Boat Show brought a revival of interest in this area.

The handiest-sized and most talked-about boat of this type was the first 32-footer from the Crown Fletcher Yard in Lowestoft in Suffolk, well respected locally as builders and repairers of commercial fishing craft and lifeboats. We were pleased to be given the chance to test the boat during and after the Show.

Design

When looking for a sea-kindly hull, the best place to start is with folk who earn their living at sea. Crown Fletcher considered that a locally moulded fast-fisher, the Suffolk 32/35 with its full 12ft (3.65m) beam, gave not only the required performance but also the internal volume

The Crown Fletcher's traditional looks extend to the interior. Unusually for a semi-displacement cruiser of this length, it features a second sleeping cabin on the port side (left) opposite the galley (right), as well as a master cabin forward (below right) and large wheelhouse saloon (below).

necessary for a comfortable cruising layout. The all-new superstructure, the interior and engineering detail of the new boat were designed by the respected naval architect John Perryman.

Underwater sections are in true semi-displacement form, with a tight, round bilge incorporating a spray-deflecting knuckle rather than a dedicated chine. A deep run of central keel takes up from the cutting vee of the forebody, with the sections flattening considerably on their way to the transom to give the required lift.

The topsides have been finished with a full-length, varnished spray deflector and rubbing strip above the knuckle. This also beefs up the quarters to protect the always vulnerable transom corners.

The boat on show at Southampton had also been fitted with a GRP/teak bathing platform, but this does not come as standard.

The business-like proportions of the





Crown Fletcher 32

Engine: twin Mermaid Turbo-Four diesels, 200hp at 2600rpm, 4cyl, 4150cc.

Conditions: wind SW Force 4, sea slight. **Load:** fuel 50%, water 75%, crew 5.

rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	trim	sound levels dB(A)		
							saloon	fwdcab	ckpt
1400	8.4	—	—	—	—	1.5	72	69	79
1600	9.2	3.4	15	2.71	474	2.5	73	71	80
1800	10.4	5.0	23	2.08	364	3.0	75	73	82
2000	12.1	7.3	33	1.65	288	4.5	78	76	84
2200	14.1	9.4	43	1.50	262	4.0	79	77	85
2400	16.8	11.8	53	1.42	248	4.0	80	78	86
2600	18.6	14.0	64	1.33	232	4.0	82	81	86
2800	20.9	17.2	78	1.21	212	4.5	84	84	87

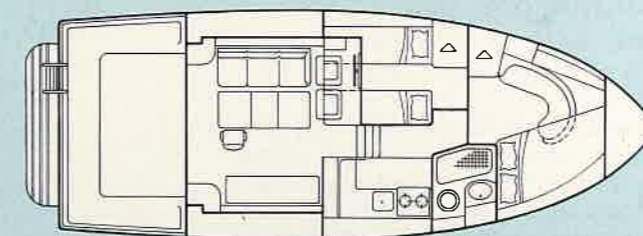
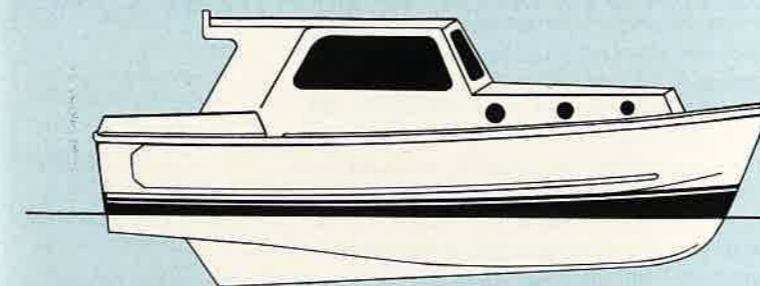
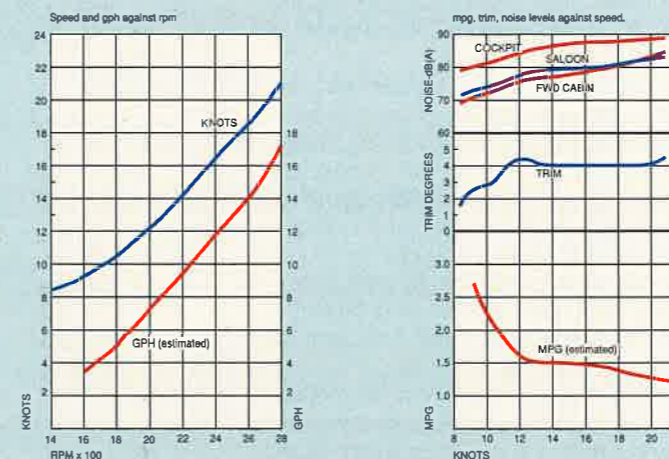
Acceleration: not measured.

Loa	34ft 2in (10.4m)	Displacement	6.75 tonnes
Hull length	32ft 0in (9.75m)	Fuel capacity	175gal (788lt)
Beam	12ft 0in (3.66m)	Water capacity	100gal (450lt)
Draught	3ft 6in (1.07m)		

Price: £104,000 ex VAT to standard specification; £107,867 with bathing platform and teak-laid cockpit.

Builders: Crown Fletcher Boatbuilders, Sea Lake Road, Harbour Road, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 3LZ. Tel: 0502 574951.

UK agents: Newhaven Marina Yacht Sales, The Yacht Harbour, Newhaven, Sussex BN9 9BY. Tel: 0273 513881.



superstructure, carefully offset off by the custom-built portholes in the coachroof, allow full standing headroom throughout and a safe, deep well in the rear cockpit. A short extension to the pilothouse allows the rear door to be left open even on rainy days, and offers a landing for the optional cockpit canopy.

Exterior

Boarding from the pontoon could not be easier. The break in the twin wire guardrails coincides with the lowest part of the side deck, from where it is a couple of easy steps down into the cockpit.

Both at this juncture and over the transom to the bathing platform, the builders have fitted plenty of substantial handholds, and there is further quality stainless steel work running along the pilothouse and lower coachroof. A bordering handrail to the cockpit coaming is to be fitted, but the boat we tested had been finished somewhat hurriedly in order to get it to the show and this was one of a number of finishing touches which had yet to be made.

The cockpit itself is furnished with deep locker seats in a U-shaped arrangement. These will swallow all day-to-day equipment plus a couple of gas bottles set in their own drained locker, and

With its blue hull and workboat lines, there is no mistaking the businesslike origins and potential of the Crown Fletcher.

also sited here is a manual bilge pump with a manifold allowing it to service the three main compartments.

Bulk items, deflated dinghies and the like, can be stowed in the under-cockpit lazaret which is accessed via two hatches supported on gas-struts. Also down here is the reserve fuel tank, complete with a decent-sized inspection plate, and access to the steering gear, which had yet to be boxed in. Further lockers are let into the pilothouse coamings, adjacent to the steps up to the side decks.

Measuring 13in (33cm) wide, the side decks are covered in Treadmaster non-slip. The same finish is used in the cockpit, but the test boat featured teak on this surface.

The foredeck is bordered by a solid pulpit, as opposed to the stanchions and wires protecting the side decks, and is fitted as standard with a manual windlass to handle the 35lb QCR anchor. There is no locker here, and the chain can be inspected only via a hatch in the forecabin. At the stemhead, the bow roller had been fabricated with a large eye through which to feed a mooring hawser if lying to a buoy or piling.

Moulded plinths, running in with the toerail, keep the foredeck 10in (25cm) bits and midship cleats clear of feet, and no-nonsense D-section fendering to the gunwale completes the exterior inventory.

Interior

A central door leads into the saloon-cum-pilothouse, but when the weather permits the full width can be opened into the cockpit, adjacent sections double-hinging to fold clear.

This simple, neat idea changes the whole character of the boat, especially when entertaining, allowing the cushioned cockpit locker seats to supplement the single good-sized settee in the saloon itself. With the optional full-cockpit canopy in place, inclement weather or chilly evenings need not be a problem either.

The settee folds out to form a large double berth, with lined storage space underneath. Further furnishings include a sideboard arrangement opposite, an open hanging locker (thoughtfully drained in case it needs to take dripping oilies) and a decent-sized drop-leaf table. The latter can be stowed out of the way when not in use, although its inset bottle stowage remains clear for immediate access. The sideboard is fiddled, like every surface throughout the boat, and all cupboard doors are fastened by substantial push-button handles.

The helm lies to port, and has two individual bucket seats. Neither were adjustable on the test



boat, and knees and wheel are too close for the long-limbed skipper, but the layout of the driving position is comfortable, with everything to hand and excellent visibility all round.

The main instrument console dominates. With the adjacent area given over to a reasonable chart table, in front of the navigator, there is only limited room for further instrumentation; the overhead panel is suitable for smaller electronic units, while a radar would probably have to be deckhead-mounted. An Autohelm Tridata log/depth package is included in the standard inventory, as is an Icom M56 VHF.

The fore part of the saloon windows conveniently slide open, and we were pleased to see that every unit was finished with a channel, draining outboard, to catch condensation or spray. This pilothouse area is thoughtfully equipped with a red nightlight, and further practical details include the overhead handrail along the deckhead and a grabhandle over the companionway leading below.

Down a set of three steps, which hinge to reveal the calorifier, accumulator and water pump, you find the galley immediately to starboard. If not too commodious, this area has shipshape storage for crockery and victuals, a two-burner hob/oven, plus a fridge. Ventilation is provided by the largest of the opening ports, and will be augmented by one of the six mushroom-type vents which are to be fitted.

Immediately ahead of the galley is an adequate-sized part-moulded toilet/shower compartment. This is equipped with an electric toilet, and finished with teak gratings to the shower tray. There is plenty of storage both outboard and under the sink unit.

Up at the sharp end, the master cabin is extra spacious and can be employed as a day cabin; the offset 6ft x 3ft 9in (1.85m x 1.15m) double berth has a foldaway flap to its base, allowing the attractive curved settee next to it to be more readily used. Plentiful storage is provided by drawers beneath the bunk, a three-quarter-height hanging locker, fiddled shelves and a hinge-down mini dressing table.

A midships twin-berth guest cabin completes the accommodation. This comes with a reasonable amount of clothes storage, plus an area for any bulkier items, such as kit bags, in a cave-style locker beneath the inboard bunk.

The whole of the interior is finished in mahogany, well executed and solid in construction, with upholstery-lined deckheads.

Engines

Twin four-cylinder Mermaid Turbo Four 200hp units are listed as the standard installation, with the alternative of 225hp six-cylinder Sabres costing an extra £2565 ex VAT.

Access is via a number of easily-handled hatches which make up the carpeted saloon sole. Each of these, we were pleased to see, was properly bound at the edges and finished off with insulation to its underside.

For the daily once-over, only the middle hatches need lifting, the engines being handed, and the fuel/water separators, raw-water filters and shaft logs can also be inspected in this way. Should fuller access be required, the settee and sideboard can be unclamped and wheeled clear, allowing further hatches to be pulled up.

The outboard side of the engines is totally devoid of obstructions, the main fuel tank being sited low and between the engines. As with the reserve tank in the lazaret, this is fabricated with an inspection hatch. Changeover valves to the top allow the engines to draw and return from either tank, and when the boat is fully completed we would hope to see these labelled to allow for a quick switch to the secondary reservoir.

The installation appeared to be textbook-engineered and tidy, with all cables and wiring ducted. Backing up the manual bilge pump in the cockpit is an auto-electric unit, although this looked tricky to service and needs relocating.

Performance and handling

Unfortunately, we missed the boat's delivery from Newhaven to Southampton. According to the skipper, this took just under five hours with a SW Force 6 dead on the nose, including delays caused by trials in the Solent.

Instead, we booked ourselves on the return trip after the Show, which promised to be a lively affair given the steady blow kept up throughout the week. As it turned out, the wind dropped completely during the evening before departure, and the 65-mile passage was completed in mirror-calm conditions. We averaged 16½ knots with the tide under us.

Although we did not have time to apply our own fuel meter, a reasonable extrapolation from the manufacturers' propeller law data indicates 1.42mpg at 2400rpm to give 16.8 knots and a dry tank range of close on 250 miles.

A close inspection of our test figures shows that the Mermaids were running 200rpm over their rated maximum. Crown Fletcher envisage increasing propeller pitch by an inch to possibly gain an extra knot, but still leaving something in hand to allow for cruising gear and hull fouling.

Noise figures were for the most part unobtrusive. We measured a wholly adequate 80dB(A) in the pilothouse at a cruising 2400rpm, and only the full-throttle level in the cockpit started to bark, registering 87dB(A).

With this trip rather less taxing than we could have envisaged, our seakeeping appraisal has to be based on our test runs in a busy and blustery Southampton Water. Here we cut and pushed through convoluted washes without any discomfort or concern, the hull's very full beam quickly picking herself up after passing awkward beam seas.

Handling, both at speed and in displacement mode, proved responsive. The 32 readily accomplished the tightest of turns, no doubt due to the designer's penchant for good-sized rudders. A further very real plus was its comparatively low running angle, which gave good visibility over the bow.

Conclusions

We liked the new Crown Fletcher immensely and, judging from many positive comments at the Show, we are not the only ones.

The reasons are not hard to fathom: an obvious sea-kindly countenance, on the back of a tried and respected working hull, combined with a solid, well-executed fit-out and sound practical touches to a most adequate layout. And, of course, all this within 32ft. □