



BOAT REPORT

VIKING 26

Room for six within 26ft on Viking's latest wide-beam river cruiser, based on the hull of that 1970s favourite, the Seamaster 813.



VIKING are building up an excellent reputation for their narrow-beam river and canal cruisers. Well built, well thought-out and offering good value for money, they appeal both to the first-time boating family and to experienced owners alike.

Much of the popularity of the range is due to the efforts of Walton Marine, who are Viking's agents on the Thames and the Severn. Feedback from their customers has gone into improving new and existing models, with consequent benefits all round.

One point that emerged was that many owners were buying narrow-beam boats with the idea of using them both on the Thames and on the Oxford Canal, but in reality were ending up using them only on the river. This gave added impetus for Viking to develop wide-beam models, over 6ft 10in (2.08m), for river or broad canal use only.

The first of these, the 22 (see MBM Oct 91), was launched a year ago, and has now been followed by the 26.

The hull of the new model first saw life as the Seamaster 813; when Seamaster ceased production, Viking bought the moulds. They have now added a completely new deck and cabin, together with a redesigned interior layout.

As a result of the generous 9ft (2.75m) beam, this layout allows a possible six berths, with a double cabin forward, a convertible dinette in the saloon, and an under-cockpit cabin that can be used as a double or two singles. Add to this a separate shower/toilet compartment, and a spacious cockpit, and you have the ideal boat for comfortable day-boating or longer cruising. Power comes from an outboard, and Walton fit four-stroke Hondas for quiet, economical performance.

The first boat had gone to Walton Marine's River Severn base at Upton Marina, so we travelled here for our test on a bright but chilly February day.

The new deck and cabin blend in well with the



The hull looks familiar, but Viking's latest wide-beam cruiser has forsaken the Seamaster 813's superstructure for new lines above the gunwale. Accommodation is conventional for a river cruiser, except for the under-cockpit berth which features a cushioned divider.

old hull, giving the 26 a sturdy but not unattractive shape. Stepping aboard the boat at its after end is helped by well-placed grabrails on the cabin side. However, it is then a long way down from the side-decks into the cockpit; unless you are to tread on the aft seat cushion, a step or ladder should be provided here.

The side-decks themselves are a reasonable width, varying between 6in and 9in (150mm-225mm) as you move forward, but they have a slight downward slope outwards. This, coupled with rounded corners on the gunwale lip, can give you an uneasy feeling underfoot. Solid grabrails inboard and a pulpit around the foredeck help to make moving about safe.

Cleats are fitted port and starboard, midships and aft, and there are two fender eyes on each side. The foredeck has one central cleat, plus two fairleads which are too small to be of any use. A shallow locker in the foredeck to starboard would just take a Danforth-style anchor, plus its attendant line.

Back in the cockpit, you have a bench seat across the rear, with room for four or five people, with ahead of it a double helm seat to port. The rear seat has three useful-sized lockers

underneath. The starboard one takes a pair of gas bottles, plus plenty of space for other items of gear. The port locker is similarly roomy, and includes the battery in a box. The centre locker takes the 5gal portable petrol tank, and would also have room for a spare can of fuel.

Removing the centre section of the cushioned seat-back reveals a hinged hatch which opens to give access to the engine. The hatch is wide enough for you to stretch through and reach the engine, should you need to remove its cowling for maintenance or repair.

It would be less easy to tilt the motor through here, and impossible to reach the prop should it be fouled. We have commented on this problem before, and suggested the possible solution of fitting small bathing platforms port and starboard, which would at least allow you to climb down to water level in an emergency.

The helm seat to port is mounted on a box which stands on a moulded GRP plinth. The plinth gives the headroom in the aft cabin below, and has a sliding window in its aft face to give light and ventilation. The box provides further useful storage space, accessed by hinging the seat forward. The sides of the cockpit go right out to the shell of the boat, and it would be possible



to make use of this space to provide further lockers, or the step we suggested earlier.

The driver faces a simple console, with the single-lever engine control sited conveniently to the left of the wheel and a panel of fused switches to the right. The 35hp Honda engine fitted to our test boat uses Honda's own control head, with key-operated start and choke, plus oil and temperature warning lights in its rear face. It is possible to drive standing up or sitting down, giving you complete visibility and control in all situations.

The 26 comes with a two-piece cockpit canopy, which makes a snug area should the weather turn inclement. The forward section can be used alone, or both can be used together, zipped in the middle. The aft section is carried on a single hoop, and folds back neatly out of the way on the narrow aft deck behind the cockpit. The forward section is carried on two hoops, which fold down forwards. On the first boat the hoops do not lay flat, but on future craft they will be cranked to rectify this.

The windscreen is in four sections, which can be folded down to reduce the air draught. With them up, the clearance is 7ft 8in (2.32m) above the waterline; with them down, it is 6ft 2in (1.90m).

The cabin is reached via a single-hinged wooden door to starboard, with a double-folding hatch above. Two wide steps down make entering easy. The saloon has full standing headroom of 6ft 1in (1.85m) over most of its area, reducing to 5ft 11in (1.90m) in the forward cabin.

The galley is to starboard, along the length of the saloon. A Flavel cooker is fitted, with two burners, oven and grill. Ahead of this is a stainless steel sink and drainer, with ahead again a Paloma gas water heater. The plumbing and pipes for this are neatly boxed in underneath. Worktop space comprises just a small area at the aft end, plus a hinged lid over the cooker, with a shallow lip all round to keep things in place should the boat rock.

Two reasonable-sized lockers under the worktop provide stowage, with a shelf in each of these but no bottom except that of the hull itself. Further storage space is found under the dinette opposite, with doors set into the ends of the seat-bases. Some of this space could be used for galley items, but the rest would be needed for bedding and clothes, and it is a pity that again there is no lining to the locker.

A narrow shelf runs behind the galley under the window, and the pipes and shut-off valves for the cooker and heater are mounted rather obtrusively here.

The 26 does not have a fridge as standard, though one can be supplied as an option. At present, its final location has not been decided, this depending on the model chosen. Possibilities include using one of the galley lockers or the dinette base.

The dinette itself is a good size, with room for four or five people to sit at the large table. This drops down to make the infill for a double berth. Sliding windows port and starboard provide light and ventilation in the saloon.

A full-height hanging locker is located forward to starboard, its door doubling as the door to the forward cabin. When it is in use as the latter, a neat zipped canvas front closes off the locker.

The forward cabin itself has an angled berth to port. This is 3ft 3in (1.0m) wide to start with, but an

infill section covers the area of the cabin where you would normally stand, extending the berth to make a spacious double. A deep locker under the aft end of the berth takes bedding, with three drawers for clothes, and the flexible water tank is under the forward end. A small dressing table is sited in the corner of the cabin.

Aft of the saloon, under the cockpit, you find the third sleeping space. The 3ft (0.9m) square entrance to this is curtained-off for privacy. The whole area is cushioned, allowing the options of having two fore-and-aft single berths (with a neat divider) for children, or an athwartships double. Headroom is crouching only.

The toilet compartment is located at the aft end of the saloon, to port. Headroom here is 6ft (1.82m), and you have a small sink plus a Porta Potti toilet. There is just room to shower with the toilet in place, but it can be moved out for increased space. The only storage space for toilet gear is a narrow shelf outboard.

Throughout the 26, finish is practical and satisfactory. Teak woodwork is to a generally adequate standard, though the softwood stiffeners backing the doors do not look pretty. The overheads are vinyl-lined panels. Pink upholstery was not to our liking, but more conventional blue is available. Much of the interior is a one-piece GRP moulding which was patchy in parts, but this and some of the other nicks and knocks could be put down to this being the first boat off the line, produced in a rush for the Boat Show.

Underway, the Viking proved the perfect river boat, and the four-cylinder 35hp Honda was a dream. It started first time, and purred away unobtrusively at tickover.

Manoeuvring around the marina was simple, with the engine slipping quietly in and out of gear, and the power was smoothly controllable, with no suggestion of stalling, making it ideal for working through locks. Out on the river, there was more than enough power for any normal use. You would never need to use full throttle, but we tried it in a quick burst, and recorded 8.0 knots. A far more sensible maximum would be 6 knots for broad rivers such as the Severn, or 5 knots for the Thames.

We measured noise levels at the latter speed, and recorded an almost imperceptible 66dB(A) on the aft seat and 58dB(A) at the helm. At 6 knots these figures increased slightly to 70dB(A) and 65dB(A) respectively, still quiet by any standards.

The basic 26 is supplied with the 15hp Honda, which would be adequate for the job, but would be working much harder all the time. If you can afford it, we would recommend you pay the extra £1000 for the larger engine, just for the smoothness and silence.

To complete the test, we hooked our fuel meter to the engine, and measured a miserly 0.4gph (1.8lph) at 5 knots, 0.75gph (3.4lph) at 6 knots, which confirms the basic economy of the four-stroke and gives a range of around 60 miles on a 5gal tank.

All the qualities of its narrow brothers, but with extra room for comfortable cruising, make the wide-beam Viking an ideal river boat. Bear in mind, too, that the prices shown include Walton Marine's Ready-to-Cruise package, which includes fenders, warps, anchor, extinguishers, gas bottle, boat hook and bilge pump. □

Viking 26

Loa 26ft 0in (7.92m).

Beam 9ft 0in (2.74m).

Draught 1ft 6in (0.45m).

Weight 2100kg.

Price £21,660 ex VAT with a 15hp Honda engine, £22,510 with a 35hp.

Builders Viking Mouldings, Unit 11, Ongar Road Trading Estate, Dunmow, Essex CM6 1EU. Tel: 0371 875214.

Suppliers Walton Marine, Upton Marina, Upton-upon-Severn, Worcestershire WR8 0PB. Tel: 0684 593111.