

Rhein 42

This aft-cabin boat may have 'Made in China' stamped on it, but it's clearly aimed at the European market

REPORT BY MARK TURLEY



PHOTOS: GRAHAM SNOOK

The brief...



When I first heard of this Chinese-built pseudo-steel, aft cabin cruiser, I thought someone was playing a game of the proverbial whispers. Having

checked it out though, I can vouch it's very real and very solid. **Mark**

LOA: 41ft 10in (12.75m)

PRICE: from £249,750

TOP SPEED: 12 knots

BUILDERS: Fuzhou Blue Bay Yachts

ENQUIRIES: Motor Cruiser Sales Ltd

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Motor Cruiser Sales in Ireland found it could not offer the type of boat that many of its customers wanted – a practical aft cabin layout along Dutch steel boat lines, offering single engine economy but with some extra pace – so they decided to commission this 42-footer and have it built. Where? In China, at the Fuzhou Blue Bay yard that has been furnishing the North American market with heavyweight cruisers for a good few years. The boat came in for much acclaim when it was exhibited at the Düsseldorf Boat Show, and with several boats built or on order, we nipped across to Holland to find out more before this one was delivered to its German owner.

Design & build

The designers responsible for this chunky, semi-displacement boat are from Taiwan and it's

pretty clear that it's a mix of the trawler yacht-style designs, he and the yard are used to, and the aft cabin layout favoured by liveaboard aficionados. The result is a pretty serious-looking craft it has to be said. It is well put together too, by way of a solid teak fitout, when it comes to the structure and behind-the-scenes engineering. Additionally, most of the equipment is sourced from Europe.

There is a choice of three layouts but the yard is happy to give them a tweak here and there so owners get exactly what they want, helped by the fact that aside from the toilet compartments, the build process is not reliant on mouldings as everything is hand-built. All the variants feature a huge, full beam aft cabin with a nicely appointed en suite that incorporates a separate shower stall. Then it is a matter of deciding whether to sacrifice some of the otherwise very spacious, wood-clad forecabin, as well as the interior helm and have an additional dinette opposite the galley. Or

perhaps you could make do with the saloon's dinette and keep the larger fore cabin. The boat featured has the latter arrangement, but the owner has had the yard dispense with the usual interior helm that accompanies it, although he's kept the sliding door out to starboard-hand sidedeck. The third option squeezes in an extra cabin, which takes off a corner of the main suite back aft.

Layout nuances aside, the fitout won't be short of teak joinery, it covers just about every square inch from stem to stern and bilge to deckhead. And as for cupboards and drawers (which all have dovetail joints), they even feature where there is actually no space behind them, yet still, they look great. Check inside the cupboards and they are all lined, yes, in teak, and every shelf or worktop is finished with a fiddle. In the few places that teak – and it is invariably of the solid variety – is not used, such as under the mattresses, the woodwork is sanded smooth

and finished in a lacquer-like paint job.

If you find this wholesale use of teak a bit ecologically dubious, we would have to agree it is verging on the gluttonous. But you still have to applaud the actual workmanship involved, which is to a very high standard.

As to the actual hull design, this is as no-nonsense as the fitout, with a deep cleaving forefoot at the bow that eases into a serious, full-length keel which supports the stern gear. The underwater sections are designed to give a degree of lift so the hull won't plough when pushed above displacement speeds and eases into the topsides via a soft chine.

Up at deck level the sidedecks are wide and easy to move around, and protected by chunky guardrails. These also incorporate fender baskets (always useful on an aft cabin boat that has to forego the bulk storage afforded by a lazarette), along with drop-down gates which double as short ladders.

If preferred, a separate, detachable set of steps can be supplied. The other boarding point is via the tidily inset bathing platform and the accompanying, gently inclined stairwell up to the aft deck.

The guardrails here have solid dodgers and the whole area can be enclosed by a framed canopy that carries to the vessel's considerable beam. The radar hoop and windscreen can be hinged down, reducing the air draught to that required by European waterways.

The usual aft deck seating arrangement of a double helm module with flip-over backrest, which enables it to face the transom settee, has been done away with in this instance as the owner prefers free-standing seats that can be moved about. The downside of this is that he will miss out on the useful amount of plinth stowage, including a pair of teak drawers, although there is still a useful amount beneath the triple seat ranged across the transom.

"The hull rests on the water rather than endeavouring to tunnel through it"



Exterior

Getting about outside couldn't be easier

Clamber aboard the Rhein and you immediately feel belt-and-braces secure with its 1.5in solid railings, clear 16in wide side decks and a side door that gets you straight inside the saloon without always having to go up to the aft deck. We also found that the hatch access down to the saloon

from the aft deck, and the accompanying steps are a good size, both of which make it easy to nip to and fro.

The same easy-to-traverse consideration is shown to the stairwell that leads down to the bathing platform, which in itself has just the right amount of uncluttered deck area outboard for stepping to and from the pontoon.

An electric windlass is fitted as standard, together with a generous amount of ground tackle. The chain locker is split in two allowing warps to be stowed here, too.

Performance & handling

To move a boat beyond displacement speed takes more than shovelling in extra horsepower. The hydrodynamics of the hull need to generate a modicum of lift, entailing a slight bow-up attitude, so that the hull rests on the

water rather than endeavouring to tunnel through it. The Rhein's hull checks out on the semi-displacement front, pushing above its displacement speed of around 7 knots into early teens territory; we clocked just over 11 knots during our trials, a knot or so down on

what is claimed. OK, we're not talking anything approaching the sound barrier here, but being able to push on beyond displacement speed and maintain 9 to 10 knots in open water is always going to be useful for Channel crossings or stemming a tide.

The semi-displacement hull also tends to be kinder on fuel efficiency as once you try to push a displacement hull hard, you gain very little in terms of speed compared to the considerable amount of extra fuel consumed. The Rhein's hull certainly delivers some leverage on speed for the investment in fuel. However, due to the considerable weight of timber it is lugging about (it's around 20% heavier than other GRP equivalents), neither outright speed nor efficiency are as useful as they might be.

In regards to handling, there's that full run of keel to keep things tidily on track, plus a decent-sized rudder, and although our sortie on the boat did not unfortunately mean catching much of a seaway, the hull clearly has all the right elements to ensure a certain stalwartness when it comes to passage making.

It also appears to be a relatively dry boat (not always the case where this sort of hull is involved), with the chine at the bow pushing water straight down so that there is little escape spray to get caught by the wind.

FORE DECK



TRANSOM STAIRWELL



AFT DECK



From the helm

Loftier seating may be required, but aiming high delivers results

Whether it's a good idea to dispense with the inside helm station depends upon the envisaged cruising ground and accompanying weather. The outer steering position has decent protection given its canopy. The yard also fits heating as standard, with an outlet up top, as well as screen demisters.

Shunning the exterior helm's double-seater arrangement is more questionable, not least because any seating

needs to be on the high side as the coachroof and console themselves are relatively deep. It is probably going to require something higher than a director's chair to maintain an unimpaired lookout.

The unfussy console has a good-sized angled fascia to take gauges and electronics, with a flat area for switches and controls. The vertical stainless 'destroyer-type' wheel is just what is required on this sort of single-engined craft, enabling plenty of helm to be spun on quickly when required. There's also a spacious covered box set to starboard, which is deep enough to hold a pilot book and the usual odds and ends that accumulate round the helm.





SIDE DOOR



DOORS EVERYWHERE

SALOON

Interior

Capacious areas mix with bold workmanship

Like it or not the boat's most stunning feature is its **cabinetry**, and not simply the sheer amount, or that it is so solid, but in the actual workmanship itself. And if louvered cupboard doors are not your thing, then they'll make them plain instead. Fitout aside, the **interior** is geared towards providing plenty of elbow room and the window line ensures a great view out when seated in the saloon. Today's must-haves include a pop-up TV incorporated in the sideboard, while back on the practical front, the deckhead is fitted with steadying handrails.

The well-appointed **galley**, including a domestic-sized

fridge/freezer and Corian work surfaces, is tucked well out of view of the saloon, yet still benefits from plenty of natural light from the overhead windscreen. If you lose something in the recesses of the umpteen cupboards, then flick a switch and they are lit from inside.

Both **cabins** have generous island doubles that are surrounded by monumental amounts of stowage, along with dressing tables and shelving. A picture window-sized hatch in the aft cabin's transom lends plenty of light, as well as providing a view. However, best check whether anyone is paddling past before opening the blind or they could be the one with the view.

The aft cabin's **en suite** has the benefit of a separate shower stall but not so in the forward toilet which, while roomy, has no method of enclosing the shower tray, and so would soak the rest of the compartment.



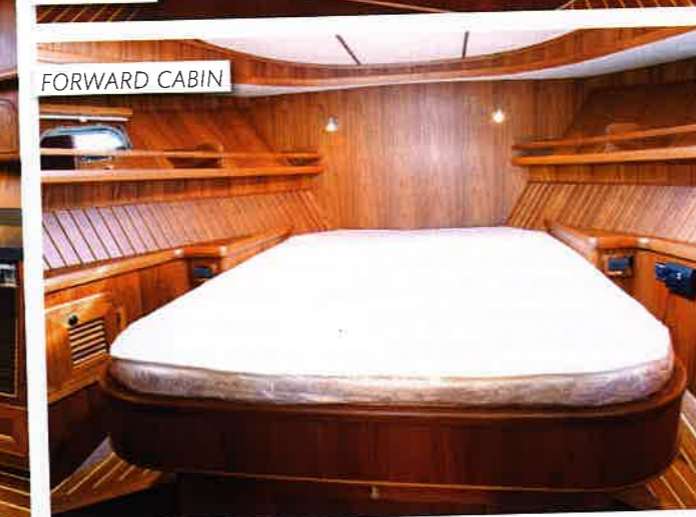
TRANSOM WINDOW



DOVETAIL JOINTS



AFT CABIN



FORWARD CABIN



TOILET COMPARTMENT



GALLEY

Specification & value

The Rhein comes as a well-specced package, which includes heating and a bow thruster, but then so do the likes of the Haines 400 and Westwood A390. Both of those are aft-cabin boats servicing the same sector of the market, meaning they're nicely suited to inland, but with full B-category credentials. However, the real surprise comes when you compare the cost of these three when given the single engine treatment. There's not a great deal between the Chinese-procured boat and the ones built in the two UK yards. OK, the Rhein is that bit larger and the wood fitout is something to behold, but somewhere along the line, the competitive edge that you feel must go with something built in China is not helped by sterling's poor showing against the euro and is undermined by hefty shipping costs.

Technical data

KEY DIMENSIONS	
BUILD	GRP
RCD	B
LENGTH OVERALL	41ft 10in (12.75m)
HULL LENGTH	40ft 2in (12.20m)
BEAM	13ft 8in (4.14m)
DRAUGHT	3ft 7in (1.12m)
AIR DRAUGHT	10ft (3.05m)
DISPLACEMENT	13.5 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	350gal (1591lt)
WATER CAPACITY	150gal (681lt)
WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	18in (41cm)
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 3in (1.92m)
FORECABIN BERTH	6ft 3in x 5ft (1.91 x 1.52m)
MID CABIN BERTH	6ft 4in x 5ft (1.95 x 1.52m)

PERFORMANCE	
Engines	Single Volvo D4-260 diesel
Configuration	4cyl, 3.7ft, 260hp@3500rpm
Conditions	Wind NE/LJ Force 3, see calm
Load	Fuel 30%, water 50%, crew 4

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	LPH	MPG	RANGE	NOISE
1800	6.5	2.2	10	2.95	825	72
2200	7.5	3.5	16	2.14	600	74
2500	8.4	4.8	21	1.83	512	76
3000	9.3	7.3	33	1.27	356	78
3600	11.2	11.6	53	0.97	270	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 in dB(A) were taken in the saloon.

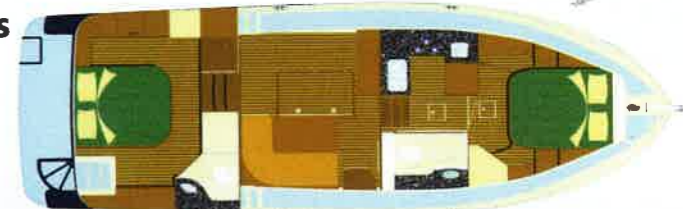
PRICES	
STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with single Volvo D4-260	£258,350
BOW THRUSTER	standard
HEATING	standard
ELECTRIC WINDLASS	standard
GENERATOR	£13,640
TEAK DECKING THROUGHOUT	£10,060
ANTIFOUL	standard

BOAT AS TESTED £303,940

Base price includes VAT and shipping to UK

Optional layouts

The Rhein offers a range of interior layouts, including a dinette opposite the galley and a third cabin aft of the saloon



Enginebay

The standard boat is priced with a single 135hp Perkins engine, a sound workhorse, but to get that semi-displacement hull working, you'll need something like the 260hp D4 Volvo fitted to the test boat.

Access to the engine compartment is via a

large, gas strut-assisted hatch in the saloon sole. For quick inspections, there's also a small inspection window behind the galley steps, which acts as the secondary access. The whole space is decked over in tread plate and well insulated. Typical trawler-type engineering details are in evidence, such as sight gauges incorporated on the fuel tanks and a steadying handrail round the engine.

THE VERDICT

There is probably more solid wood in one of the Rhein's cupboard doors than in some boats' whole interiors, and the rest of the fitout doesn't appear anything but shipshape. It also has the benefit over its steel rivals in that it has the edge in terms of a bit of extra speed. However, don't be under the illusion that a Chinese-sourced boat means it is a bargain.



The rivals



Westwood A390 from £257,300
Available with single or twin engines, the A390 has been designed with an eye on the Dutch steelboat market, having that no-nonsense edge but with the capacity to get going.



Haines 400 from £265,200
Two en-suite cabins and a super smart fitout. Available with either a semi-displacement or a full-planing hull, depending upon engine installation (single or twin).