

Viki 26

It's got character, it's got a sturdy hull, it's got practical facilities and it's got an affordable price tag. Is this dinky Turkish-built river cruiser the new Seamaster? **REPORT BY CARL RICHARDSON**

Genuinely new river boats of any type are rare enough, but ones that look as good as this and only just miss sneaking under the £50,000 barrier are particularly thin on the ground.

That's why dealers Boat Showrooms of London have had to spread their net as far as Turkey to find this handsome new craft.

With its solid displacement hull, spacious cockpit and timber-heavy fit-out, it could be just the ticket for messing about on the river or comfortable two-up cruising in sheltered tidal waters.

Have inland and estuary boaters finally got the boat they deserve? We were able to get aboard the very first Viki 26 to reach the UK, and take it for a spin on the River Thames.

DESIGN & BUILD

The exterior design might be more dinky than debonair, but it suits the placid environs of the river rather well. If it seems vaguely familiar, that's probably because it's a little reminiscent of cruisers past.

A displacement hull shape, combined with a good slice of keel, keep the boat planted and stable in the water. The mock-clinker topsides are low in freeboard, making boarding very easy, while the turned-up nose of the bow completes interesting and protective lines.

Once you step on board, first impressions are altogether more impressive. Following our test of the Viki 32 (see MBM Dec 03 p70), we should have been mentally prepared for the hit of teak and mahogany that greeted us, but we were still suprised by the extent and quality of the woodwork on such a relatively inexpensive boat.

The cockpit is the centrepiece of the show both in size and splendour. It's something quite special, in a 1950s launch kind of way,

and its unfussy open-plan style is perfect for the toing and froing of life aboard a riverboat. Indeed, there is easy access around the whole boat, from bow to stern.

An optional hardtop can be fitted for around £1,000, but we think the extra shelter it offers comes at the expense of some of the cockpit's bounteous personality.

The single cabin revels in solid cabinetry, and even boasts a continuation of the teak sole from the cockpit, although the importers intend to offer carpeting as an alternative if required.

To be fair the Viki's fit and finish does not quite match the finesse and quality of the more expensive Sea Saga 26, but with so much solid wood around it nonetheless retains a very sturdy feel.

Dig deeper, and the solidity of its construction is confirmed, although the detail does waver slightly, with some unfinished wood and rough edges tucked away where most people won't see it.

ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation comprises only a single cabin, with a single sleeping area, which will not suit every buyer of this type of boat. But it's a good compartment that manages to feel spacious and fairly bright, even in the face of so much sumptuous dark mahogany.

In part, this is due to the 2ft wide entranceway which lets the light pour in. With this closed off in the evening, the ambience switches to something far more cosy.

The forward area is taken up by a wide vee-dinette, which converts into a huge double berth, some 7ft across. As seats,

though, the bases are almost too wide, and the uncushioned backrest are in dire need of a few scatter cushions to improve comfort.

Storage is plentiful, and well able to look after the clothing and stores required for a week away. Large cubbyholes are set around the dinette, and proper drawers in the seat bases.

A decent galley area is located beside the entrance where ventilation is at its best. The single gas burner comes with a protective guard. Siting the fridge out in the cockpit has also left space for plenty of storage cupboards down below.

Opposite is a proper toilet and shower compartment which features yet more mahogany trim.

Boasting the same 5ft 9in headroom as the main cabin, it feels pleasantly spacious.

EXTERIOR

If the teak-sole cockpit is the focal point of this boat, then the tall mahogany-framed screen is its outstanding feature.

Its flanks sweep down around the cockpit before wrapping around the stern in the form of a solid rail. Standing at the column helm, or sitting on the slightly incongruous plastic seat, you feel cosseted by its reddish glow, and protected by its sheer size.

The U-shaped aft seating is neatly finished, with teak bases doubling as locker lids, and will take five people. For alfresco dining, the cabin table can be moved out here.

A good deal of open space separates the helm area from the U-shaped seating aft, so it's worth noting that the cockpit is self-draining. A deep run-off encircles the sole, and leads aft to two gaping outlets that should not fall foul of leaves and other such clutter.

Steps lead up to the teak side decks, or off the boat via a break in the all-round guardrails. For safety's sake, these breaks can be chained off when underway.

The guardrails, fixed outward of the deck edge to provide extra width, grow taller nearer the bow, and there are plenty of inboard grabrails too. Only the deckware lets the side down, looking a bit too dainty and making rope handling fiddly.

✓✓✓✓✓
There's only one cabin, but it's practical and neatly finished.

✓✓✓✓✓
Plenty of teak and mahogany in a charming package.

✓✓✓✓✓
Roomy cockpit and safe decks are just what you want for river cruising.

Below The cabin feels spacious despite the mahogany. The WC is neatly trimmed and the galley well ventilated. Even the helm is resplendent in wood.



ENGINE OPTIONS & ACCESS

Power comes from a choice of Yanmar's excellent 4cyl diesels. The 40hp option will be fine for less strenuous work on non-tidal rivers, but we think the 75hp unit we tested will be the right option for most buyers, allowing forays downstream into estuarial waters.

To help you get at the engine, there are three hatches cut into the cockpit sole on the centreline. The main one opens up the entire block, and all of the service points, although with twin fuel tanks straddling the engine any work has to be carried out from cockpit level.

The forwardmost hatch give access to the calorifier and plumbing, while the aft one reveals the gearbox and shaft; with a little bit of improvisation, it could also offer some useful storage.

The finish is fairly basic, even rough in places. However our test boat was number one off the production line, so perhaps this can be put down to the builders' enthusiasm to get it on the water.

The importers assure us that a certain amount of tweaking will take place.



The right engines and reasonable access, but a lack of finish.

PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

If you've ever spent your time slowly zigzagging along a river on a sterndrive sports cruiser, you will doubtless appreciate the merits of a displacement hull, complete with



above The main engine hatch allows for servicing, but you can't climb in. Seat bases double as lockers.

shaft and rudder. It is quite simply the best tool for the job.

On top of this, the Viki's keeled underwater design ensures the propeller is well protected, for peace of mind in shallow bankside moorings.

The hull's handling is textbook inland cruiser. The gradual feed of the steering and the restrained revs of the engine combine to ensure that nothing happens too quickly, and the boat can be inched lazily into spaces.

As with most displacement craft, the only drawback comes when reversing. In this case, the stern naturally kicks to port, and only steely determination and a fair wind will make it change its course.

These mannerisms are out of the same box as classic inland cruisers such as Freemans and Seamasters, and the similarity with boats of yesteryear doesn't end there, as the lack of

soundproofing allows the Yanmar to whirl away a little too intrusively. Once again, this is something which Boat Showrooms intend to address on customer boats.

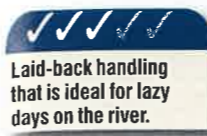
A throttle setting of 1000rpm delivers just over 3 knots, enough for decisive helming. For the fast walking pace recommended as a maximum on rivers, 1200rpm fits the bill very neatly, and by 1300rpm the boat becomes far more assertive, without adding too much wake.

Across all these revs the boat's economy hovers around a frugal 5mpg, giving you a 200-mile range and literally days of fun between fills.

You still have 2500rpm, and the lion's share of horsepower, in reserve, which will prove handy if you have to deal with a fast-flowing river or run against the tide. But there's little more outright speed to be gained (we recorded

a maximum of 10 knots at full throttle), and be warned: a sharp increase in rpm will have a similar effect on gph.

That said, the upper end of the rev range does see the bow begin to lift rather than furrow. This, and the boat's RCD category C rating and sturdy feel, suggest that a run towards the bumpy stuff is not out of the question.



Laid-back handling that is ideal for lazy days on the river.

SPECIFICATION & VALUE

The bottom line is that, for £53,297 inc VAT, you get a proper river and estuary cruiser with bags of character and superb joinery.

And that is an on-the-water price. The standard specification includes canopies, teak decking, a holding tank, a calorifier, ropes and fenders, a full handover and no nasty surprises.

Until now, if you wanted a boat that truly suited the river for this kind of money, you bought a golden oldie. People who insisted on the reassurance of buying a brand new boat often ended up opting for a far less suitable sportsboat simply through lack of choice.

Now there's a sensible alternative. Of course, £50,000 is not a small amount of money, but at least it is comparable with the cost of a mass-produced 24ft sports cruiser.



A more affordable price tag than most new riverboats.



Verdict

The Viki 26 fits in seamlessly with river life, and should prove an ideal vessel for anyone who wants to cruise the inland waterways, with the option of an occasional foray into tidal reaches.

The cockpit is a superb place for you and your guests to enjoy the day, and the cabin will look after two with enough comfort for a serious cruise.

River and estuary boaters with an eye for character are finally being offered a boat that will suit their tastes and, perhaps more importantly, their pockets.

MBM RATING



8/10

Viki 26 technical data

specifications

BUILD	glass-reinforced plastic
RCD	design category C
LENGTH OVERALL	27ft 2in (8.3m)
BEAM	8ft 5in (2.6m)
DRAUGHT	2ft 3in (0.7m)
AIR DRAUGHT	7ft 2in (2.2m)
DISPLACEMENT	3.3 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	40gal (180lt)
WATER CAPACITY	33gal (150lt)

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	0ft 6in
HEADROOM IN CABIN	5ft 9in
BERTH	6ft 5in x 6ft 10in

performance

engines single Yanmar 4JH3-TE diesel.
 configuration 4cyl, 1.9lt, 75hp at 3300rpm.
 conditions non-tidal river.
 load fuel 75%, water 50% crew 3.

rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	noise
1000	3.5	0.7	3.2	5.0	160	70
1200	4.2	0.9	4.1	4.6	147	72
2000	6.0	1.2	5.4	5.0	160	78
3000	8.5	2.1	9.5	4.0	128	84
3600	10.0	3.5	15.9	2.8	89	87

Range figures above are in miles, with 20% margin.
 Noise figures are in dB(A), recorded in the saloon.

prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with single 40hp Yanmar diesel	£53,297
with single 75hp Yanmar diesel	£56,430
LAUNCH & COMMISSIONING	standard
DELIVERY	standard
TEAK DECKING	standard
CANOPIES	standard
HARDTOP	£1256
BOAT AS TESTED	£56,430

ENQUIRIES Boat Showrooms of Harleyford, Harleyford Estate, Harleyford Road, Marlow, Buckinghamshire SL7 2DX. Tel: 01628 471361. www.boatshowrooms.com

the rivals



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