



Lissome Is As Lissome Does

What's the difference between a Gentleman's Launch and a Gentleman's Motor Yacht? We sent two gentlemen, Peters Goad and Chesworth, to see the Bristol 27.

Back in 1764, from the slipways of the Fishburn yard in Whitby, the collier bark *Earl of Pembroke* dipped her bluff bows into the water for the first time. She was soon to be commissioned into the Royal Navy, her hold converted to accommodation and her name changed to *HMS Endeavour*, under the command of Captain James Cook.

Nearly 250 years later, Dudley Fishburn, journalist, politician and direct descendant of that same shipbuilding family, commissioned another yard to build an elegant and beautifully proportioned development of the Bristol 22 – see W92 – a 22' (6.7m) stepped sheer launch built by Win Cnoops of Star Yachts in his yard on the waterfront at Bristol docks.

Ches and I were fortunate to get the chance to try her the day after her proud owner had taken her out for her first trials. We – or rather Ches – drove from Cornwall up to Bristol through some atrocious autumn weather, aquaplaning occasionally in Mrs Chesworth's Audi which seemed altogether

too vertically challenged after my battered old Land Rover. We left the weather front behind as we approached Bristol and found Win's Overfall Yard just as a weak October sun tried to brighten the grey surroundings – and failed.

There, magnificent against the drab surroundings, lay the new Bristol 27, all teak laid decks and sparkling mahogany brightwork setting off her dark blue hull and clean lines. I've always admired Andrew Wolstenholme's ability to design boats whose simple, uncontrived lines are so easy on the eye. This is especially difficult to achieve

when trying to accommodate the preferences of an owner who is paying for the privilege of owning a boat built to order to such a high specification.

The 27' (8.2m) hull is strip planked in yellow cedar and sheathed with 300 gsm mat inside and both 500 gsm and 300 gsm layers on the outside. After fairing, she was painted with the Awlgrip paint system to a perfect high gloss finish.

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Coppercoat has been applied below the waterline, which should give many years' protection against fouling.

On first impressions, it's difficult to imagine she is the development of any other craft, especially one that, although she has the same classic good looks, is distinctly different in concept. She looks created from scratch to complement her smaller sister; a Sense and Sensibility relationship.

The stepped sheer, long foredeck, large cockpit and clean lines are instantly appealing and deceptively simple - from her almost vertical stem which blends into her cutwater to the beautifully carved *Eskdale* on her curved mahogany transom - *Eskdale* in the Lake District has been the location of the Fishburn family's country retreat for many generations.

The differences between the Bristol 22, a gentleman's launch and the 27, very much a gentleman's motor yacht are not just cosmetic. The smaller boat was designed for river use with a fine entry and easy run aft to accommodate electric/diesel hybrid power; the 27 is designed for more exposed waters. Although *Eskdale* is destined to spend much of her time on the Thames, she is also expected to enjoy the odd sojourn to the choppy waters of the Solent. The development of the hull to fulfil the new role is not as great as her appearance would suggest but results in a semi displacement hull form, capable of 12 knots with a comparatively modest power-plant. This has been achieved by retaining the fine entry but giving her fuller, flatter aft sections with an immersed transom to stop her stern digging in as she exceeds her maximum displacement hull speed.

The short, deep bilge keels which gave the 22 the ability to take the ground have transmuted into longer, lower profile runners which give some protection to the hull but primarily

dampen any tendency to roll in more exposed waters.

Andrew has added a touch more flare to the topsides forward and only marginally increased the freeboard - by about 2" (50mm). Similarly the beam is only 4" (100mm) wider than that of her little sister. With an overall increase in length of 5' (1.6m) it isn't surprising that the result is that long, lean look epitomised by the motor yachts of the 1920s.

Since *Eskdale* is to be berthed alongside a pontoon, anchoring and mooring have been given less priority than might normally be the case. Access to the foredeck is via the hatch which is situated far enough forward to make anchoring practical without necessarily going out on deck. Future versions, which are more likely to be berthed using fore and aft moorings or a pick-up buoy when short-handed, may need side decks and handrails introduced, wide enough to give easy topsides access to the foredeck.

The garage for the companionway extends forward, beneath the mahogany framed windscreen forming a Dorade box for the two chromed ventilator cowls. The screens themselves characterise this type of vessel and with their large toughened glass windows give a great deal of shelter to the comfortable steering position whilst affording maximum visibility. They also provide the frame for the landau style hood which adds to her impeccable looks.

The cockpit is large enough to host a fair number of guests, with the top of the stylish engine box incorporating a hinged table to double its area and make it even more hospitable. A typical example of the practical detail displayed throughout the boat are the fittings located on the sides of the engine box which have flexible grommets designed to be pierced with an extinguisher in the unlikely event of a fire in the

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engine space. Two upholstered swivelling seats give a good all-round views with no obstructions – not always the case from sheltered steering positions. The single lever engine control falls easily to hand when seated at the wheel and a full set of engine instruments include oil pressure and temperature gauges and tachometer. Fuel and water tank levels and speed through the water are included on the Garmin chart plotter as well as the normal navigational screens. The hydraulic steering system including the inboard rudder is supplied by Vetus as is most of the other equipment on board, all of which seems to be high quality and has the advantage of compatibility. In fact with a Dutch builder – Win is from Holland – and the brightwork finished in Epifanes varnish, the boat is a very good exhibit for the Netherlands.

The impression is of simple functionality finished to the highest standards.

The power is supplied by a 52hp 4-cylinder turbocharged diesel – Vetus, of course – which is compact and runs quietly and smoothly. Access is excellent with the engine box tilted back and it is then that shallow bilges are evident, as the engine is mounted almost level with the cockpit sole with just enough room beneath for the sump and the exhaust muffler. The cockpit drains into a well at the forward end which is automatically pumped overboard. A cockpit cover keeps the rain out when the boat is unattended, neatly fitting between the sprayhood frame and the coamings. Two 16 gallon (60 litre) tanks for fuel and water straddle the steering gear under the aft deck.

Down below the interior is fitted out in light oak with white painted bulkheads which together with the large





There's something very stylish about that round forehatch.

forehatch and three side ports gives a light, airy feel to the accommodation. The comfortable settee berths with deep cushions are upholstered in dark red which contrasts nicely with the oak. Everywhere the impression is of simple functionality finished to the highest standards.

You enter the saloon through the double companionway doors to find a compact galley to starboard, complete with a combined single burner gas hob and sink unit covered by a smoked acrylic lid. Shelves above and a large locker below are more than adequate for the intended use. A hanging locker to port is big enough to take the whole crew's wet weather gear without getting the accommodation wet.

The heads is located in the foc'sle with a stainless steel basin and faucet to starboard, lockers to port and the WC centrally mounted with plenty of space to use them. Steps are incorporated into the furniture on both sides to give easy access to the deck through the circular hatch, which opens forward so the mooring manoeuvres can be carried out from the security of the forward cabin. Anchor and cable are easily accessible in a locker further forward, in the eyes of the boat.

By the time I had emerged from below, the tide had risen enough for us to lock out of the basin so we started up, cast off and Win reversed out of the rather tight pontoon berth. Once he'd done the tricky bit, I tried a few manoeuvres while we waited for the camera boat in the guise of *Eskdale's* little sister to arrive.

As you would expect in a boat of this type, steering astern in a stiff breeze was restricted by the small rudder but she was very precise in her handling forward, making tight turns in both directions, slightly favouring starboard due to her right handed prop, especially nudging her in and out of gear. Her wake was minimal up to near displacement speed and even in semi-displacement mode her wash was reasonable, her after

sections keeping her from burying her stern and dragging a hole behind her.

Once out of the basin we made the most of a rather narrow, muddy River Avon at a quarter tide with a 2-3 knot flood. Although the engine was still running-in, she managed 9 knots through the water comfortably at just over 2000 rpm. And continuing to perform for Ches's cameras, *Eskdale* showed her pedigree, leaning positively into figure-of-eight turns with very little side slip. By this time I was getting quite addicted and was reluctant to head back under the Clifton Suspension Bridge for the return appointment with the lock-master. She had an easy, reassuring motion when crossing her own wake, keeping her decks dry so that we had no need for the wiper on the helmsman's windscreen.

Before we left Win to start what was to be an equally wet return trip to the depths of Cornwall, he added another enlightening twist to the Fishburn story. He showed me a photograph of a pre-war 32' (9.8m) Gentleman's Launch. Although she had the typically flared bow and plumb stem of her day, she was eerily reminiscent of the Bristol 27 with her stepped sheer and long cockpit. She was the *Nigella*, owned by the Fishburn family and one of the privately owned vessels which went to Dunkirk, sadly never to return. She lives again in the elegant *Eskdale* which will hopefully bring many years of pleasure to future generations of the family.

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Bristol 27 Specification

LOA: 27'4" (8.34m)

LWL: 26'3" (8.11m)

Beam: 7'10" (2.39m)

Draft: 2'4" (0.72m)

Displacement: 5800 lbs (2630 kg)