



Boat Test Report

Pilothouse 27 MKI

Motor Boats Monthly

Orkney Pilot House 27

Challenging weather conditions make for a thorough test. By Nick Burnham

THE LOWDOWN



Weather bad enough to abort a delivery trip gives me ample opportunity to uncover the sea-keeping qualities of Orkney's largest boat to date.

SO GOOD

- All weather capabilities
- Practical
- Solid
- Customisation possible

NO GOOD

- Engine room a little tight with twin installation

DEALER

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Don't get salt water all over it!" A simple instruction, borne of a boat carefully valeted in Lymington prior to a sea delivery to Poole for the Sandbanks Boat Show. And we do indeed keep the boat completely dry – for at least 30 seconds after leaving Lymington. A Force 5-7, bang on the nose as we swing to starboard and head up the Solent towards the Needles, is augmented by a spring tide surging in the same direction.

Result – a nasty short high swell coming right at us. We lift over the first before dropping straight into the teeth of the second, the resultant cloud of spray engulfing us. Rinse and repeat ad nauseam (almost literally)!

The Pilot House 27 has a full planing hull and with the revs set to about 2500rpm and taking tidal flow into account we're probably at about 13 knots

through the water, just on the plane. Doggedly, we push west, the peaks increasing and the troughs deepening. It's not what you'd call a pleasant experience but the boat copes admirably, bobbing and bashing its way stolidly forward.

Flexible seating

Chris Powell, one of the original founders of Orkney Boats 40 years ago, is at the helm, leaving me an interesting quandary. With the only other seating in the wheelhouse being the two bench seats of the dinette opposite, I have a choice of sitting up by the

“The helm is light yet positive and the boat skips through the swell”

helm but facing aft, or sitting on the rearward seat where I can face forward but can't talk to Chris or, given the angle of the boat, see what's coming. Neither are comfortable options given the conditions, and I elect to stand next to the helm where I can see the ominous green swell and, most importantly, the horizon.

In fact, Orkney has got this issue well in hand and as standard on all new models offer a hinged seat for the co-pilot at the dinette that can face forward or aft.

Beyond my lurching stomach, all is good. There are a couple of bits of trim detaching, but the 27 is hanging together well in the conditions. The view out of the large deep windows is excellent and twin top-hinged wipers are doing a sterling job of shifting copious amounts of water.

However, as we reach the Needles a sea of churning green and white



right across Poole Bay convinces us that things aren't about to improve and with discretion being the better part of valour, we turn tail and head back to Lymington.

With the sea behind us it's like a different day, and we surf east at an easy 20 knots, the tide helping rather than hindering. With outdrives and electric power steering, the helm is light yet positive and the boat skips through the rolling breaking swell with confidence, precision and a real sense of buoyancy as the planing hull keeps the nose up rather than burying itself into the back of the next steep wave. One touch 'flick wipe' on the twin wiper switches is a useful feature, a quick half prod giving a single sweep and self park. Orkney will

provide windscreen wash if you'd like it and given the conditions, I wish we had it today. Without it, even though a heavy dousing of sea water is easily cleared, a light dusting of spray can leave a smeary screen if you're too slow with the buttons.

It's great to see massive opening side windows to augment roof hatches, meaning that in more clement weather there are plenty of ventilation options. We've got the door open instead, but closing it makes a massive difference to the otherwise intrusive engine noise, making the wheelhouse a far more convivial environment. In the slightly calmer waters off Lymington I clock a two way average of 27 knots flat out (briefly!) at 3800rpm. I suspect >>>>



PHOTOS: NICK DORNHART



Open plan layout maximises interior space



Forward dinette converts to double berth



Compact galley and helm occupies port side of wheelhouse

IT'S IN THE DETAIL



Chunky anchor winch, solid D-section fendering and double guard wires add to the workmanlike appeal of the Orkney.



in calmer conditions there's another knot or two to be eked out, but in fact a plaque on the dashboard states that 27 knots is the designated maximum design speed and warns against exceeding it. 3000rpm gives an economical 20 knot cruise, while 3500rpm offers a fast cruise speed of 25 knots.

Back at base it's time to take in the rest of the boat. The Pilot House 27 is typical Orkney – smart, practical and user-friendly with long cabin top rails and decent side decks aiding progress forward. Stanchions and guardwires rather than an extended pulpit is something I haven't seen for a

while, but actually, with their shackles and bottle screws, they're entirely in keeping with a boat that will undoubtedly appeal to the ex-yachtsman. There's a

“A typical Orkney – smart, practical and user-friendly”

sturdy looking electric anchor winch on our test boat, and a large chain locker. A chunky black D section fender encircles the gunwale, while back aft the deep cockpit is kept completely uncluttered for fishing, although Orkney does offer foldaway cockpit seating as an option. A


large hatch gains access to the engine compartment, well stocked with a pair of Yanmar 150hp diesel engines. A single engine installation is the



alternative. There's also a separate deep cockpit locker.

The trailing edge of the hardtop roof overhangs the aft bulkhead slightly, giving a little protection should the door be open. Step into the light and airy wheelhouse and you'll find a small galley directly behind the port mounted helm, the dinette opposite converting to a berth. Further forward, Orkney has resisted the

temptation to create a separate sleeping cabin, instead opting for an open plan layout with a vee-shaped dinette. The table stows vertically in the heads, or drops to create a double berth.

It's a layout that matches both the concept and the fitout – simple, solid and practical. In fact they're three adjectives that describe the whole boat. Well, those and 'salty'. Very, very salty. 



The deep aft cockpit shown uncluttered in fishing guise, but it can be fitted with removable leisure seating

SPECS

Build	GRP
RCD	B
LOA	26ft 8in (7.93m)
Beam	9ft 2in (2.80m)
Fuel	96gal (435lt)
Engine	Twin Yanmar 4BY3 150hp diesel sterndrive
Price	£133,782 inc VAT. With twin Yanmar 4BY3: £157,946 inc VAT

VERDICT

The largest boat in Orkney's range continues its tradition of solid no-nonsense craft.

8/10 



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SINCE 1973*

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