

NEW BOAT TEST

THE DRAGON BOAT

With its fiery artwork, unconventional lines and semi-trad-styling, this 62ft narrowboat is certainly striking. But what is it like for long-term cruising? **Mark Langley** finds out...



Superb, smooth joinery on the dinette and throughout the boat. The dinette converts to a double berth for guest accommodation.



Length.....**62ft**
 Engine.....**Barrus 45hp**
 Berths.....**2+2**
 Price.....**POA**

ANDREW HOOKE HAS BEEN QUIETLY FITTING OUT BOATS SINCE 1997, and has built up a reputation for high quality craft, particularly with the joinery aspects that give rise to the company name: Woodworks Boat Fitting. We took the opportunity to view Mata Kuching a recently completed 62ft semi-trad-style narrowboat, based on an XR&D all-steel shell.

Shell and exterior

Externally, the shell has smooth lines, with a longer than usual bow cockpit rising up to the finely finished stem, complete with false rivets. The bow is quite high and gives the impression of an unladen motor, which is very pleasing. The cabin sides have large brass portholes, with a side door aft on the port side. At the stern, a pair of seats have been fitted either side of the tiller, though, as it is a semi-trad stern, steering will normally be from within the cockpit. The fuel filler cap is kept secure by a lockable flap – something of an XR&D specialism, but it helps combat fuel theft. Sensibly, the stern navigation light is mounted behind the tiller, so that view of it is unobstructed, unlike those mounted on aft bulkheads.

The roof has a brass mushroom roof vent and pole/plank holder, with matching



The boat pulled very little wash on the Trent, with the bow cleaving the water well.



tunnel lamp and trumpet horn. Otherwise, it is left fairly clear, though there is a mounting point for the 4G antennae, plus the cabling and deck socket for a future satellite installation, though the owners are avoiding using the TV at the moment.

The brush-applied paintwork is crisp and well detailed, with a diamond-pattern slip-resistant finish on the cabin roof, and treated gunwales. The main roof finish is matt, rather than gloss. As it is cream, strong sunlight reflection is avoided. The paint is Epifanes and the colour scheme represents a nice choice of cream, maroon and blue.

Cockpits

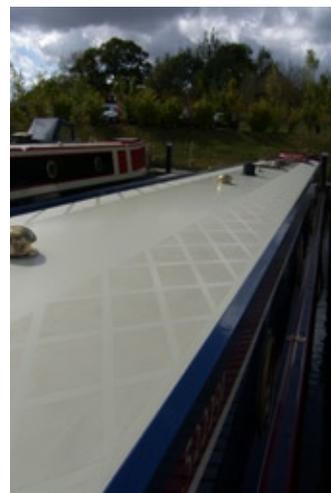
Up in the bow, the extended



forward cockpit has two large secure steel lockers either side, while the bowthruster and battery bank are in the forepeak, along with storage for the good-sized anchor and rode, plus other equipment. The forepeak has a full watertight bulkhead so, in case of failure of any seals, the boat cannot sink. There is also ventilation in the bulkhead to the cockpit, which is often overlooked, as bowthruster and associated charging systems require effective airflow for cooling, and gases need to be removed from the batteries.

Twin glazed hardwood doors lead down from the cockpit to the cabin, with the low-level ventilation properly ducted from a grill set in

ABOVE LEFT - Crisp paintwork and unusual, highly-finished decoration. **ABOVE** - The bow has more sheer than many craft. **BELOW** - The diamond-pattern finish on the non-slip cabin roof.





Useful open space under double berth, with holding tank against the hull side.



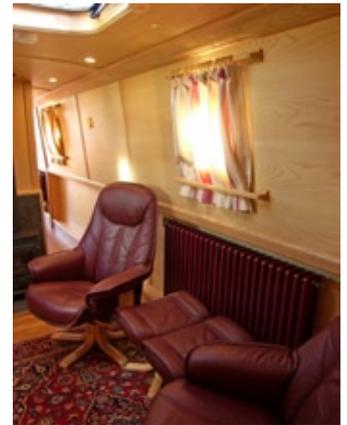
Battery system and tank monitors are positioned on the galley bulkhead.



Large wardrobe and dressing table, plus single step up to the bow cockpit.



Forward bedroom is functional without cramming in too many cupboards.



Red leather chairs match the radiator, which in turn reflects external colours.



Logical electric panel with circuit breakers.



Multiple cabin bilge access hatches in the tiled galley floor, plus access to bilge pump for cabin.

the bulkhead to port. There is also one of two shoreline inlets – the other is aft.

At the stern, two lockers sit either side and make good seats. The starboard one houses three 6kg gas cylinders. One of these bottles is for the Honda EU20i generator. The genny lives in the port locker, which not only has an opening top lid but a side that drops down, making removal of the generator very easy. The engine starter battery, plus the isolation switches, also live in here, making for easy access. The generator can be lifted out and set to run on the bank, along with the spare gas bottle. Thoughtfully, the generator

has been wired up with a decent length of earthing cable; something that can be missed.

Bedroom

From the front deck, a wide single step leads you into the forward cabin. The use of a single step, with neat non-slip strips, is easier than two steps and helps you avoid banging your head on the way in. A small dressing table is to starboard, with a large wardrobe and cupboard below. The double berth is lengthways, with the toilet holding tank – this could potentially induce a list as it fills. However, it does leave an easy accessed

space along the other side of the bed. Unusually, this is left free from cupboards and drawers, so boxes can be slid in and out. This is a cruising boat, rather than a residential one, so being able to move things has more priority, plus it gives very good ventilation to anything stored here.

There is a large radiator on the hull side, in a very attractive deep maroon colour, which matches the paint scheme outside. It looks far more impressive than a bland white convector and offsets the light ash panelling very well. The flooring is solid oak tongue and groove boarding, which is well finished and durable.



The saloon manages to be comfortable without being crowded.



Large shower and tiled floor in the off-corridor bathroom.



Surface top basin and macerator toilet.

Bathroom

The owners have decided that an off-corridor enclosed bathroom is the most sensible option, given that this is a cruising boat and guests will be aboard as well. It gives freedom of movement through the boat, at the expense of slightly less space. However, the interior is well fitted, with a large quadrant shower, which has a small cupboard (and pump access) to port, while the large towel radiator is fitted to the side bulkhead, rather than the hull side. A black and white tiled floor is a nice touch and makes it distinct from the rest of the boat.

There is a vanity unit with more storage below and a very neat, illuminated mirror with

a high-level cupboard above. The Jabsco macerator loo is on the centreline and has ample legroom. Cunningly, a small computer cooling fan has been fitted in the mushroom vent to give quiet, effective extraction, rather than some of the very noisy units fitted to boats.

Saloon

Against the toilet bulkhead on the centreline is the Morso solid fuel stove – this is the 1435 model which is identical to the better known Squirrel, but it lacks the picture of the furry rodent on the side, replacing it with ribbing! This is an excellent example of a properly fitted stove to match the Code

of Practice for installation, with good spacing around the unit, a fully double-insulated flue, large hearth with tiling on a thick heat-resistant board, plus air gaps behind. The hearth leaves plenty of room to port for a log/coal basket without it getting too hot.

A pair of large maroon leather swivel chairs, plus matching footstool, faces a low-level cupboard with a TV on the cabin side. Above, a Houdini hatch gives more light and ventilation, while a roof-mounted CO detector is fitted as standard. Lighting throughout the boat is mainly halogen; electric consumption is less of an issue with a cruising

IN DETAIL

EQUIPMENT

SHELL

- ▶ 10/6/5/4mm shell
- ▶ Semi-trad stern
- ▶ Brass portholes and fittings
- ▶ Stainless steel water tank
- ▶ 95kgf Vetus bowthruster

ENGINE

- ▶ Barrus Shire 45hp
- ▶ PRM 150
- ▶ Conventional stern gear

LINING

- ▶ Ash faced ply
- ▶ Matt finish varnish
- ▶ Solid ash furniture
- ▶ Spray foam insulation
- ▶ Solid oak T&G flooring

SALOON

- ▶ Pullman dinette
- ▶ Low-level shelves
- ▶ Morso stove in tiled hearth
- ▶ Side door
- ▶ Freestanding swivel chairs

GALLEY

- ▶ Argent hob with glass lid
- ▶ Belling full-size oven/grill
- ▶ 12V fridge
- ▶ Zanussi compact washer
- ▶ Belfast sink with pump drain
- ▶ Drinking water filter

BATHROOM

- ▶ Jabsco macerator toilet
- ▶ Quadrant shower
- ▶ Towel rail
- ▶ Extractor fan
- ▶ Vanity sink

BEDROOM

- ▶ Fixed double berth
- ▶ Large wardrobe
- ▶ Dressing table

ELECTRICAL SYSTEM

- ▶ Six 180Ah domestic batteries
- ▶ One starter battery
- ▶ Two 660CCA bowthruster batteries
- ▶ Victron 3kW combi
- ▶ Honda LPG EU20i generator
- ▶ 230V ring main
- ▶ Twin shoreline inlets

HEATING AND HOT WATER

- ▶ Kabola HR300 diesel heater
- ▶ 75-litre twin-coil calorifier
- ▶ 1kW 230V immersion heater
- ▶ Designer column radiators



Wine drawer makes good use of void under raised dinette – note the blue column radiator to match external paint finishes.

boat and the owners prefer the light given by them.

Aft of the lounging area is a raised Pullman dinette, with lots of storage below the two benches. The table fits well, overhanging the seat edges for proper dining, while under the plinth a slide-out wine rack utilises this space exceptionally well. Easily seating four people, it converts to a guest double berth. Opposite, the radiator here is blue rather than red – and it took the owners to point out that the upholstery here matches, as do the curtains. Although the same pattern, the colours are different, depending on the area of the boat (either red or blue) and this gives more character without being over the top.

Along both sides of the roof are panels which can be removed to access the 12V wiring easily. Under the gunwale, similar panels are found for the 230V wiring, while kick-plates at the base of the hull sides do the same for the plumbing. Andrew is adamant that all services should be accessible for repairs and upgrades.

Galley

Andrew's obsession with good practice extends to the bilge. Large hatches are set into the cabin throughout, notably in the lounge (currently sitting under the rug) and in the galley, where latterly they have been made into a feature of the tiled floor. The hatches give superb access to the



Corian work surfaces have a solid stone look without the maintenance.

bilge, both for inspection and for trimming ballast. Andrew has also installed an automatic bilge pump into the cabin bilge, which is highly unusual among boatbuilders. Should water make its way into the cabin bilge on most boats, it sits there, going stagnant or rotting away wood for a long time before many owners notice it. A bilge pump can cope with disasters such as a calorifier splitting or the main pipe from the water tank coming loose. Although it is unlikely to be needed in a new boat, it is very useful to have and much easier to fit when building the boat than retrospectively.

The galley itself is linear, with an L-shape to starboard. The worktops have a light grey Corian finish, which looks like marble but is much easier to care for. A suspended cupboard over the L part is glazed both sides and, in the top, hides the 4G Wi-Fi router, which is also patched to Ethernet points under the dinette and by the TV.

A deep Belfast sink is to port, which drains via an electric pump, rather than having the sink outlet near the waterline. A compact Zanussi washer is also fitted, with plenty of cupboard space below. Opposite, an inset four-burner gas hob has a glass lid to extend the worktop



230V Kabola diesel heater gives efficient, controllable heating.



Bright clean engine bay with Barrus Shire 45hp engine.



Suspended galley cabinet hides the Wi-Fi router.



Proper fire port into the engine space from the cabin.



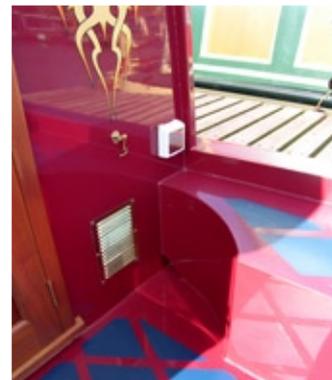
Massive domestic battery bank securely restrained and covered.



Recessed aft panels are very attractive.



The gas locker on the aft deck includes space for a generator.



Ducted low-level ventilation to cabin, plus shore inlet socket.

space, while a full-size oven and grill are below. A large fridge with freezer compartment sits further aft, while the L-shape of the galley opens up fully to make it convenient to get to everything inside.

There is a full-height locker to starboard, currently used as a wet locker for coats, and it is heated by both the central heating header tank and a dedicated length of finrad. The cupboard doors have a neat pattern to provide ample ventilation. Throughout the boat, curves have been fitted to the edges of the joinery where possible, giving a very smooth finish to the superb woodwork.

The cabin steps can be easily removed and above the top step is access to a proper fire port. Behind a sliding wooden shutter is a tube which enables a fire extinguisher to be discharged into the engine space, without having to open the hatches. This arrangement should be standard on new boats, and is a condition of both the Recreational Craft Directive and the Boat Safety Scheme; it is, however, ignored by a large number of boatbuilders. It is not difficult or costly to achieve and can enable a fire to be contained easily.

Engine and services

With both bow and stern inlets available, a manual switch has been fitted in the electrics cupboard so that only one can be live at a time. The wiring from the sockets is for 32A, rather than the usual 16A, which means less resistance when running a full shoreline load. There is a Victron Quattro 3kW inverter/charger fitted with remote control, plus monitoring systems for the starter and bowthruster batteries on the bulkhead. A BEP tank gauge gives the levels of the fuel, water and sewage tanks. Underneath, the 75-litre twin-coil calorifier is fitted, with a 1kW immersion heater for shoreline use.

The electrical system runs from a massive battery bank consisting of six 180Ah batteries, charged by the 240A domestic alternator on the 45hp Barrus Shire engine. The engine battery has its own 50A alternator, which looks tiny in comparison to the huge casing of the domestic unit – yet 20 years ago, a 50A alternator was usually the only one fitted on a boat...

The engine has a PRM 150 gearbox driving through a conventional stern gland. The large cooling tank should cope well on fast rivers

– indeed, much early cruising was on the Trent where the boat ran well with no signs of overheating. The engine has the deluxe instrument panel, with rev counter, oil pressure, temperature and voltmeter, with attractive chrome bezels. It can easily be seen from the helm position.

Starboard of the engine bay is mainly occupied by the Kabola HR300 diesel boiler, running with 230V pumps and systems. This highly efficient heater is also easy to live with, as it can be used as a conventional domestic boiler, able to heat the hot water and/or the central heating without issue. The

water system also includes an expansion vessel on the hot water side, as well as the cold water, so reducing strain on the calorifier and pipework.

Underway

The engine is very quiet, despite a standard exhaust and no sound insulation, and is pleasantly rattle free. The unit started with no fuss and ran smoothly, while the bowthruster, being mounted slightly further forward than most boats, performed well. The rudder is a good shape, with the usual XR&D top plate, which helps direct thrust, while the tiller is a nice length to avoid cruising fatigue.

Verdict

The lines of the craft, which are slightly different to the norm, are very attractive, with superb decoration by Chris Hodgson reflecting the boat's name, as the dragons and other symbols match the tattoos of the culture of the Mata Kuching tribe. The interior is exceptionally fitted out, with a degree of thought that is missing from many builds. Good practice abounds in the boat, such as the installation of the electrics and solid fuel stove, and superb access to the cabin bilge.

Mata Kuching is an excellent long-term cruising boat that is easy for a couple to handle, while comfortably accommodating guests for long periods of time. The boat strikes a good balance with adequate space given to each area, and has already proved itself an excellent craft, of which the owners are rightly proud.

Woodworks Boat Fitting

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