

Boat test courtesy of Motor Boats Monthly, June 2006

Orkney Vanguard 190 + 170

Few-frills manufacturer dishes up duo of dapper dayboats

Developing new models is a costly business, and one that often seems the exclusive preserve of the major players that turn over 30 and 40ft models as a minimum. Orkney Boats notably bucks this trend, and the firm is always found developing new ideas and models right down the scale. This admirable policy has created a range that offers few-frills fishers at one end and neat pocket cruisers at the other.

The latest thinking – again in conjunction with Arthur Mursell of TT Boat Designs, the firm that developed the Nelson marque – is to take the always-practical elements of the Orkneys and sharpen up their performance and looks. This has resulted in a couple of new models, the 17ft 170 (discussed in brief in the panel, far right) and the 19ft 190, which we'll concentrate on here. Both are altogether more launch-type day boats than the rugged, basic fishers hitherto available at this size. The hulls have Orkney's tell-tale clinker look, but under the water you will find more of a full-planing hull. There is through, the concession of a small ridge keel to help these models take the ground if required and maintain straight-line stability. Both are smart, open day boats, but protection from the elements is a must these days, and as a result, wheel shelters are being developed for both models, if you prefer the open look and clean sheer, then a drop-down bow dodger arrangement can be fitted.

Around the 190

This is a good beamy boat for its length, and this is noticeable as you clamber aboard. It barely heels; always a reassuring sign. The layout runs to a split-helm seat arrangement, which allows people to move about easily. Coupled with the standard forward vee-seating, there is the option of a further run across the transom. There is loads of stowage for what is still a pretty small boat, not just under the seats but within the forepeak, too. The anchor and its rode can languish in the large, self-draining well located forward of the forepeak, which makes it much easier to grapple with the ground tackle. You certainly won't have to squirrel it away awkwardly in a tight lipped closed locker. This abundance of stowage means there is plenty of clear deck space, and it was also nice to find the fuel tanks have been tucked out of view – a gas-strut supported hatch in the cockpit sole makes room for a couple of 25lt jobs or, if preferred, a built-in one can be specified.

The helm seats have lift-up backs so they can be made to face aft, and the console is moulded with an angled fascia so a few pieces of electronics can be retrofitted. Seated here, you feel very much 'in' rather than 'on' the boat, not least because the coaming gunwales are a good width. This ensures the occupants maintain a respectful distance from the oggin. Deck fittings are a good size, and clearly plenty of quality material has gone in to the boat's construction. It doesn't just look smart, it feels smart too, and nothing flexes or complains.

This solid feel was replicated in the boat's treatment of the messy, short seas we found outside Chichester harbour. This is a hull that would much rather push along on the plane than be nursed along to timidly. Yep, this little tiger can leave the spray behind and find a good pace without the hull or its occupants feeling that they are being flung about.

And we didn't treat it gingerly. We kept up a steady 21 or 22 knots at around 4500rpm in these sharp conditions. In calmer water, we clocked 27 knots flat out, courtesy of that muscle-bound 70hp Suzuki four-stroke.

190 CONCLUSION

FOR Smart, yet still practical and plenty of performance

AGAINST Difficult to find fault with this neat 19-footer

VERDICT Our preferred catch of the two. Just two feet longer than the 170, it weighs half as much again and choppy seas proved a doddle to deal with. Hats off to Orkney for upping the ante in the UK small boat market

Vanguard 170

This little brother to the 190 is clearly that bit smaller all round, but has essentially the same shaped hull and layout with the split helm console configuration and, like the 190, plenty of stowage in the seat lockers forward. Our test boat was fitted with a 50hp outboard, the boat's maximum rated horsepower, and the hull did not find this at all awkward to handle, delivering a lively 24 knots flat out.

170 CONCLUSION

FOR Well built, nice handling, and great stowage for a little'un.

AGAINST ...less boat than the 190, so a little more lively when out on the water.

VERDICT Again, it's great to see smart, solid design in this size and price bracket.