

## BOAT REPORT

**T**he Dutch yard of Volharding Staveren has been in the business of building fine steel displacement boats for the leisure market since 1965, even if they have been represented on this side of the North Sea only for the past couple of years.

We have already had the pleasure of giving their Sturier Trawler 480 aft-cabin model a spume-flying test (see MBM Jan 00 p112), with commendable results, and were therefore intrigued when the even more traditionally styled Kotter 400 OC made its UK debut at this year's Southampton Boat Show.

### Design & layout

The 400's design harks back a generation or two in the builders' history. A kotter is a style of craft often used as a fishing boat, and this is just what they were building before they moved predominantly into the leisure market.

Until relatively recently, the hulls were fabricated in steel and the superstructures in wood. Now the whole lot is steel, and the Volharding yard does a superb job of it — not least because they are prepared to roll and work it so that there is hardly a flat panel or angled corner in sight, from the attractive

curved stern to the radiused edges of the wheelhouse and coachroof.

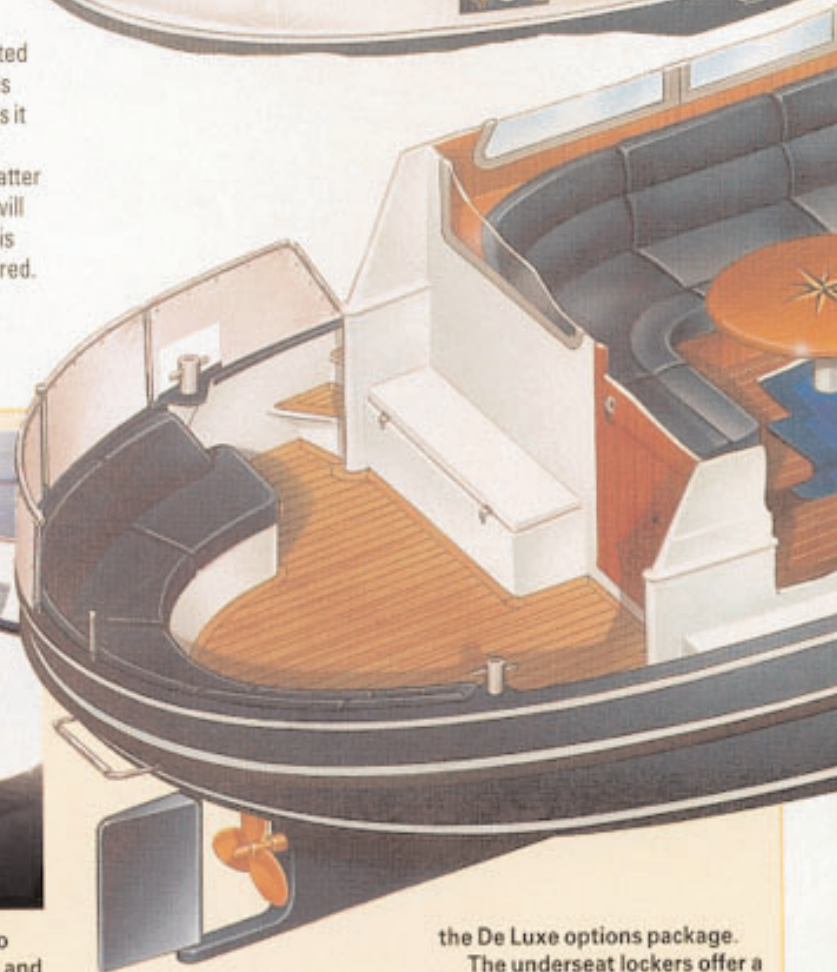
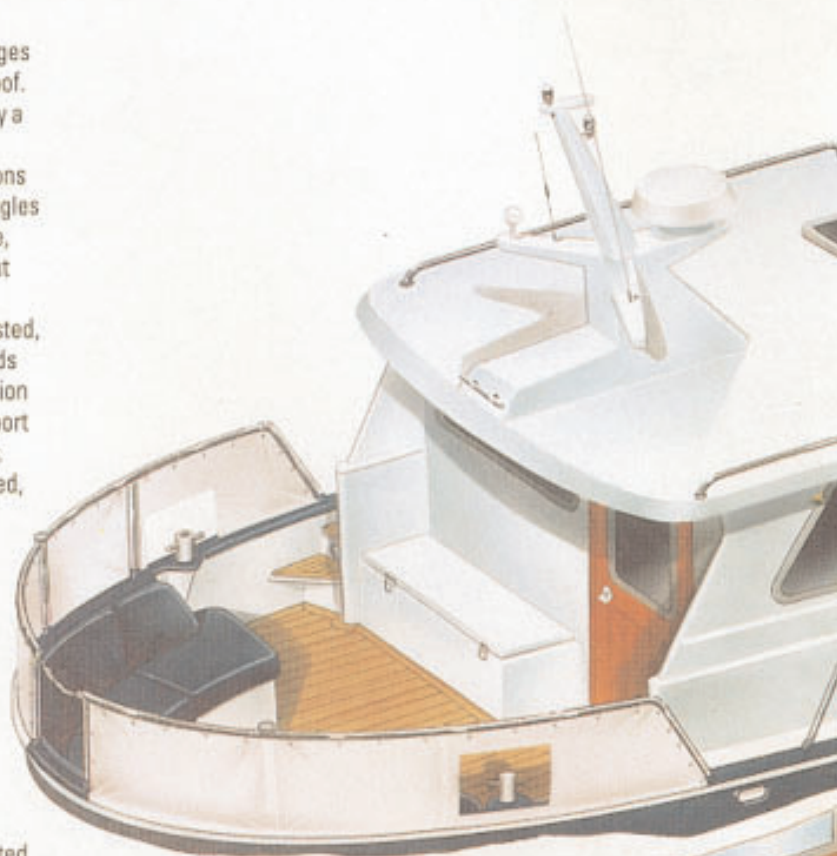
Neither is the hull itself merely a single-chined fabrication. The topsides and underwater sections are notched through several angles for an almost round-bilge shape, giving not only pleasing lines but also a sea-kindly form.

It culminates in a large, ballasted, box-section keel. A shoe extends from this to offer partial protection to the single propeller and support the sizeable foil-shaped rudder. Bilge keels are also incorporated, allowing the boat to take the ground if necessary.

An extremely pleasant, well-sheltered aft cockpit of surprisingly good size leads through to a wheelhouse that is light and roomy, with an L-shaped settee offering good views and a very businesslike helm station.

Down a couple of steps are the inviting and smartly appointed galley and dinette. The former is close to the steps, which makes it easy to pass sustenance up to those in the wheelhouse. The latter has two facing settees which will seat four, or six at a pinch, and is convertible into a berth if required.

There are two permanent double cabins: one forward, either with a central double



Cockpit



A bathing ladder is affixed to the Kotter's curved counter, and there is a break in the sturdy 1½-in-diameter guardrails at this point, enabling anyone emerging from a bracing North Sea dip to step across the bulwark and onto the arc of seating aft.

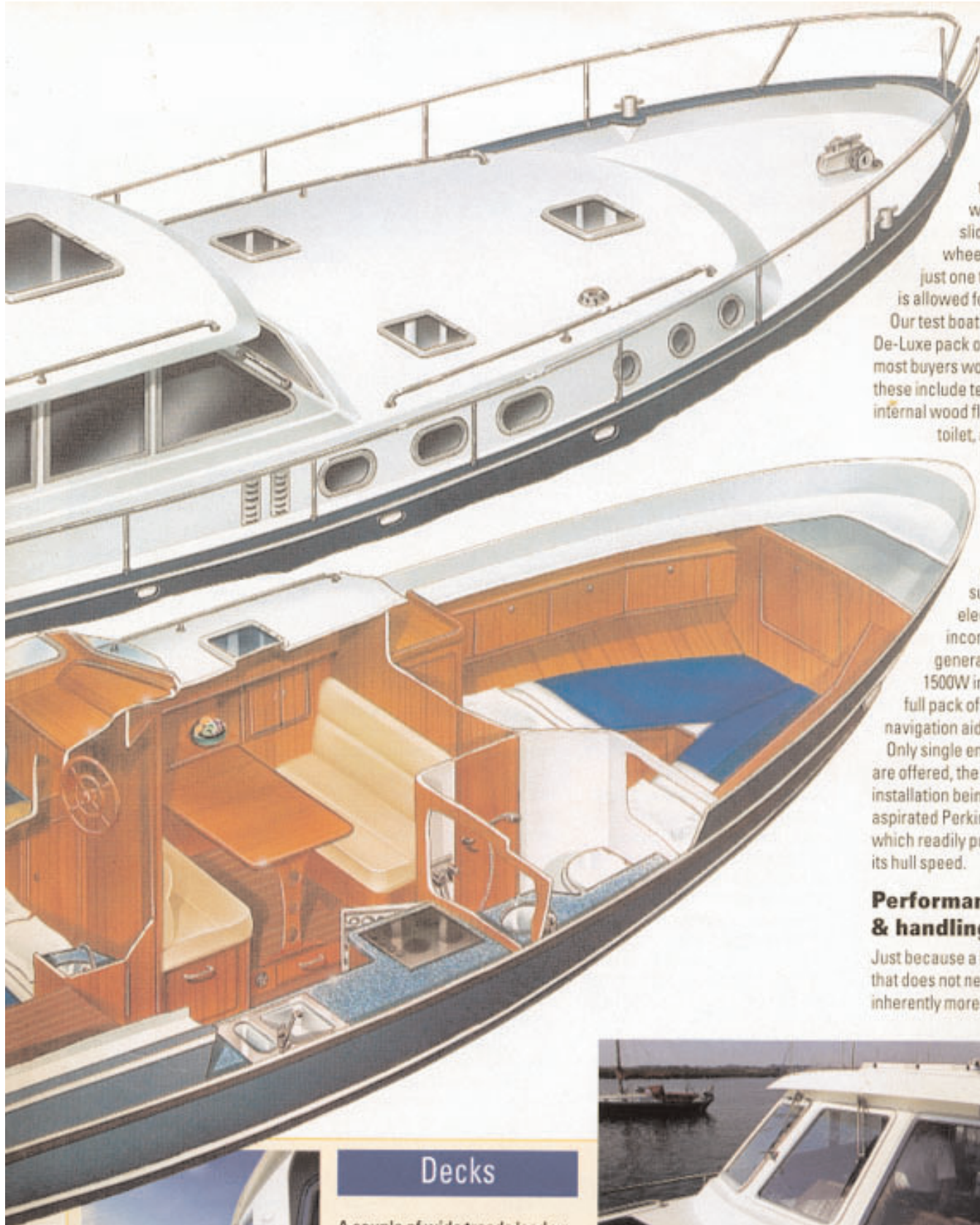
A further bench seat across

the way, which doubles as the access to the engine compartment, completes a generous, sheltered socialising area, with room for a table if desired. Teak decking is part of

the De Luxe options package.

The underseat lockers offer a useful amount of storage, even though the central ones are taken up by the steering gear. On future boats, fenders will find a home in baskets mounted on the guardrails by the break of the bow, although these had yet to be fitted on our test boat.





berth or a vee arrangement, and the other amidships, with its double berth slid partially under the wheelhouse seating. But just one toilet compartment is allowed for in the layout.

Our test boat featured the De-Luxe pack of extras, which most buyers would probably want; these include teak cockpit decking, internal wood flooring, an electric toilet, a bow-thruster, beefier windscreen wipers and double-glazing. This particular craft also had the superior Mastervolt electrical installation, incorporating a 6kW generator as well as a 1500W inverter, and a full pack of electronic navigation aids.

Only single engine installations are offered, the standard installation being a 135hp naturally aspirated Perkins-Sabre 135L, which readily pushes the boat up to its hull speed.

## Performance & handling

Just because a boat is built in steel, that does not necessarily make it inherently more seaworthy. Steel is

## Decks

A couple of wide treads lead up and over the washplate to side decks which measure a full 16in (40cm) wide, and to the break in the guardrail where you can board the boat from alongside.

Lending further security are an excellent 8in-high mini-bulwark, handrails running the full length of the superstructure, and an extremely effective non-slip coating on the metal decks.

The foredeck is little-ship size, and equipped with a horizontal windlass to handle



the anchor hanging off the starboard bow. Access to the chain locker itself is through the forecabin bulkhead. Mooring lines are handled by two sets of good-sized T-bollards, fore and aft, and a 12in bar cleat welded to each bulwark for springs.

The nicely sculpted

navigation light and antenna mast is fabricated in aluminium, to make it easy to hinge it back, although as an option this can be hydraulically actuated. With the mast lowered, air-draught is reduced to just over 9ft (2.8m), which is low indeed for a craft of this length.



often preferred to GRP by Dutch boatbuilders and owners because, if the hull design is simple, it is a relatively cheap method of construction, and of course less vulnerable to abuse in locks.

However, you need have no concern about the integrity of anything from the Volharding yard. Even though the Kotter is in no way a world-girdling yacht, due to its need for fuel, it is built to design category A ('Ocean') under the Recreational Craft Directive.

On our test boat's cross-Channel delivery trip to the Southampton Boat Show, the crew got caught out in a full gale and tell us that the rounded stern and large rudder allowed following and quartering seas to roll through without fuss.

Our own experience was much more genteel, on an almost eerily quiet Autumn day on the South Coast.

The hull's preferred speed is obtained at around 1900-2000rpm, which equates to a speed through the water of 7.7 knots, with a range approaching 400 miles. If you feel you need to tank on, to



## Wheelhouse/saloon

A hefty half-glazed teak door leads through from the cockpit to the light and spacious wheelhouse, which is dominated by an L-shaped dinette offset to port. Running along the starboard side is a range of wood-lined cupboards.

The settee is raised slightly to allow a perfect view right round, and there is no shortage of ways to open the area more fully to the elements, including a large skylight, an opening portion of windscreen and a hinged rear window.

Headroom is extremely generous, at 6ft 6in (1.98m), and the headlining has an

attractive tongue-and-groove finish.

Less commodious is the under-seat storage void, which has been limited to allow the midships cabin's double berth sufficient legroom. But the cupboards opposite are pretty generous, and it was good to find nearly all flat surfaces finished with fiddles.

## Toilet

Although quite large, the Kotter's single toilet compartment does not have the benefit of a separate shower cubicle, which is a little disappointing. On the plus side, in no way does it feel cramped, and it is fitted out in laminate which is less bland than mouldings.

There is plenty of storage, and the De Luxe options pack brings with it a Jabsco vacuum-flush electric loo.



## Galley

The short companionway between the saloon and the forward accommodation is a decent width to allow easy movement to and fro, with a couple of handrails worked

onto the well-crafted teak joinery. This being the case, the galley is conveniently placed to serve either the wheelhouse and cockpit or the dinette.

Rather than simply being a straight run, the Avonite work surface is made more attractive by incorporating a

return housing the hob and fridge. Disappointingly, bearing in mind the fastidiousness of the builders elsewhere on the boat, this has no fiddles, a point which could easily be remedied.

As standard, the hob and oven are gas. With the optional 230V electrical package, the cooking facilities are all-electric, including a smart Bosch combined oven/microwave.

Stowage is excellent, with a good combination of cupboards and drawers under the counter, and chest-high lockers. Flooring panels lift to allow you to get at the bilge and the holding tank.

Apart from a run of opening ports at head height, an overhead hatch adds more natural lighting and the countertop has a series of vents rigged to an extractor, keeping cooking smells to a minimum. The grilles set in the joinery outboard are not, however, part of an extraction system.





## Helm

A fixed seat is usually fitted at the helm, but our test boat had a giraffe-legged director's chair so that it can be moved when necessary to give more room. It looks a little prone to toppling over, but any such concerns have proved unfounded, even when the weather piped up on the vessel's North Sea crossing.

The wheel is set at a good height, whether you are seated or standing. Your view through the screen is excellent, with each of its three parts serviced by a sturdy-looking wiper.

On the teak console there is plenty of space for all manner of electronics (our test boat was fitted with a collection of Raymarine products and a Skanti DSC VHF set), as well as for a folded chart. A section to port opens to reveal a modicum of storage for additional charts



and pilot books, while the built-in trough in front of the main fascia will save glasses, pencils and other odds and ends from taking a dive.

Just the main ready-use switches are brought to the

helm; the rest of the electrics are accessed from the midships cabin. A second lifting section of console, just ahead of the wheel, gives access to the main battery switches and the fuel shut-off solenoid.

overcome some tide, then yes, you can gain a knot or so if you add an extra 500rpm, but this really starts to cane the fuel consumption — and the stern begins to squat, indicating that the vessel's hull speed has been well and truly reached.

Slower speeds are clearly not a problem, and the Perkins-Sabre 135L will happily trundle on forever and a day without upset. It is non-turbocharged, so there is nothing to fur up or worry about, except for providing clean oil and clean diesel.

Most buyers are going to specify a bow-thruster to help with close-quarters manoeuvring in a single-engined boat such as this, and it does make life just that bit less stressful given that you've got some 16 tons of steel to control. However, there is loads of boat in the water so the Kotter is not one to be blown around. It will turn in its own length on the engine and



## Dinette

In earlier examples of the Kotter, the dinette was a U-shape. But apparently our test boat's configuration of facing seats gives slightly more room — and it will seat six if you are feeling friendly.

If there are six sleeping on board, the seating can be converted into an occasional berth of a little over 6ft 0in (1.83m).

Built-into the seat-bases are two large, full depth drawers, one of which could be made into a pull-out fridge if you needed extra cooling capacity. Outboard are a couple of cupboards with a shelf area between; a deep fiddle here would be good, so it could act as a bookcase.

## Midships cabin

The midships cabin has a most convivial feel, and it is no inconvenience that at least half of the 6ft 6in (1.98m) by 4ft 2in (1.28m) double berth is cubbyholed under the saloon. There is still ample room to ease under the duvet,

or to sit up and read.

Clothes storage is down to a good-sized hanging locker outboard plus a double cupboard under the head of the berth. As part of the De Luxe options pack, a small vanity basin was incorporated on our test boat, adjacent to the cupboard door that hides the breaker panels.



## Forecabin

Our test boat's forward cabin had a vee-berth layout, with mattresses a full 7ft 0in (2.13m) long by 2ft 6in (0.79m) wide. A central double is offered as an alternative. Both versions offer lots of space, and full standing headroom throughout.

There is a good array of stowage, mainly thanks to a number of deep lockers outboard and a reasonable sized wardrobe. Set in the sides of the berths are what look like drawers, but are in fact lift-out panels, giving onto fairly shallow lockers.

The opening ports above the outboard lockers are circular. Along with the warm teak joinery, these serve to enhance the snug, traditional feel of the boat.

