

Power & Sail February 1974

Mike Pynn puts the Moonraker 36 fast power cruiser through her paces and finds her to represent good value for money with no short cuts taken in her construction.



A country retreat is all very well, but when you tire of the same surroundings, or just want a change, then it does have its limitations. So, it probably helps if you also have a villa in the South of France to push off to for the odd weekend or week.

Alternatively you can combine both in a much more exciting way and spend any leisure moments at a great variety of places in England and abroad, without the need to plan too far ahead, and with the facility to change your mind at the last minute if need be without incurring extra cost. The way to do this: buy what is virtually a high-speed floating cottage; the Moonraker 36 power cruiser.

If you feel like entertaining friends aboard, there are plenty of room for them to pour their cocktails. A small dinner party on a hot evening up some secluded creek or anchored in a quiet moonlit bay could make a pleasant way of passing the time. Then at midnight a short trip at 20 knots and your friends could be back at the marina and off home or to a hotel if they don't want to sleep aboard.

When the drinks locker starts to get low, it's just a matter of popping over to Cherbourg, Ostende or another handy harbour across the Channel and loading up with incredibly low-priced booze.

And for your summer holiday, why not arrange for professional skipper to take the boat down to the Mediterranean for you, then fly out with the wife and kids.

The possibilities are endless, and you need never be bored. Unable to eat at a restaurant ashore? Then you should be able to find something appetising in the fridge which can soon be turned into a delicious meal especially if you take the au pair with you to take care of such chores.

Arriving at Lymington Marina, there was no mistaking the location of the Moonraker 36, her distinctive fine stood out from among the many other exclusive crafts around.

A paid hand cast off our warps as we slid away from the pontoon and motored at five knots along the narrow boat-packed Lymington River. And even at such low speed, the boat's looks attracted quite a few envious glances from people on other craft.

It was difficult not to be impatient and open the throttles, but I had to wait until we were in the comparatively clear waters of the Solent before 'giving her the gun' so there was time to enjoy two glasses of Scotch with American dry ginger and plenty of ice from the fridge below.

Just like being on the top of an open topped double-decker bus travelling along Brighton seafront. That was the only way to describe the visibility from the flying bridge of this high-speed luxury power yacht.

But there the similarity with lumbering public transport ended, as her manoeuvrability was akin to that of a London taxi with its reputation for turning in a small space, and her speed and comfort were analogous to a powerful Alfa Romeo.



And it's not surprising the Moonraker possesses some of the better features to be found on certain road vehicles, for she owes much of her fine styling to Colin Chapman, the Lotus

car chief. Chapman became boss of JCL Marine Ltd of Brundall, Norfolk, three years ago, and turned the Moonraker 36 as designed by Robert Tucker -and already a popular boat- into an even faster more comfortable and more manoeuvrable power yacht.

The Moonraker which I tested was the latest development, the series D, and featured a flying bridge, enclosed wheelhouse and after cabin. Other variations available include without flying bridge, minus after cabin, or with open-ended wheelhouse.

Introduced at the Southampton Boat Show in September last year, the series D has extended forward cabin windows, giving greater standing headroom than on previous models. The chine has now been altered to deflect water thrown up with great force by the deep vee hull, and the Moonraker is now a much dryer boat than its predecessors. Even at speed you could sit in a deckchair on the quarterdeck and remain perfectly dry, whereas previously the old Moonraker had a tendency to slam into waves, making her fairly wet.

Colin Chapman began changing the boat in June 1971, and the slightly altered hull went into production in January 1972 following a number of tank tests. Fuel and water tanks were repositioned and a larger skeg fitted resulting in a much changed ride.

## **Handling**

I was impressed by the way the boat handled at reasonably low speed, considering the comparatively large amount of boat out of the water and little below, and found her surprisingly like a conventional displacement motor yacht. At speed, she responded immediately to the wheel, turning full circle within about 50 feet after entering a turn at around 21 knots, and coming out at around 15 knots.

With the port engine ahead and the starboard one in reverse, I was able to spin the Moonraker in her own length. Getting out of her berth at the Berthon Marina at Lymington. Hants, was a doodle, and the flying bridge offered excellent all round visibility. This would make handling in the most crowded of harbours as easy as possible with this size of craft.

An hour after leaving the marina and speeding up and down the Solent for the benefit of the camera boat, the wind rose to a Force 3-4 and a fair chop had built up near the Needles. But there was little tendency for the boat to slam, proving just how much the new Moonraker had been changed.

Throttling down to four knots, I had to constantly correct the wheel to keep on course, but in a slightly confused sea with a beam wind this was hardly surprising for a boat of this kind.

## **Getting carried away**

Our antics obviously had the skipper of a cross-Channel ferry worried as he steamed along the deepwater channel towards us, for an anxious officer called us up on the radiotelephone to ask just what we were up to. It is so easy to get carried away on a ritzy craft like the Moonraker, and as most people have something of the showman in them, commanding such a splendid vessel is likely to make the quietest person feel a bit cocky.



The flying bridge was unusually dry, and safe enough for use in winds of up to around Force 5 when waterproof clothing is still unnecessary, except if it rains. After this, I would opt for the security of the wheelhouse, which offers comfortable helmsman's seat to port and co-driver's seat to starboard. It is possible to wedge oneself fairly securely in either these positions, and even on a fairly long passage one should remain comfortable.

A full range of instruments is fitted to both the flying bridge and the wheelhouse, and the electro-hydraulic trim tabs fitted as standard and operated by a tiny joystick allow the boat to sit at the correct angle for the variety of weather conditions the boat is likely to encounter. They also come in handy for trimming the boat when there is an uneven weight distribution.

Costing £18,650 plus VAT, the Moonraker which I tested was fitted with twin 175 hp Perkins diesels. but twin 180 hp Ford Tempest marine engines are optional.

I felt that Europe could be my oyster with this minicruise ship and probably the only real fault with the vessel is that once aboard it is very difficult to pluck up enthusiasm for going back to work.

## **Construction**

The hull is manufactured to a Lloyds approved design in Lloyds approved conditions, and all craft are built under the Lloyds series production scheme, the appropriate certificate being available for a further £65.

Basic lay-up of glassfibre is 25 oz on the bottom and 11 oz from the chine upwards, and a spray technique is used to deposit accurate quantities of resin and glass. As soon as they are completed the hulls are weighed to see that they are within strict limits, for with planning hulls such as this, the final displacement of the craft is critical.

## **Accommodation**

The Moonraker can sleep 6-7 people, her main saloon including a dinette with four-place table. During the day this offers a large U-shaped settee, but at night turns into a double berth. Opposite is another settee doubling as a cocktail cabinet and bar top, and the forward cabin has a double berth-or twin berths-plus wardrobe and cupboards.



The galley, which has a stainless steel sink, cooker and refrigerator, can be virtually hidden after use.

Aft, there are two choices: aft stateroom with double berth, shower and toilet suite, or aft cabin with two wardrobes and hide-away hot and cold wash units. The wheelhouse provides easy access to engine compartments, which offer plenty of working room either side of the power units. In the main cabin, to port, is the toilet compartment, which also contains a shower, wash basin, and airing cupboard, and is Melamine lined throughout.



## **Other interesting points**

A battery charger is built in so that when the boat is plugged in to shore electricity supply the batteries are automatically charged. Fire extinguisher controls are fitted in the wheelhouse and these set off fire fighting equipment in the engine room and galley.

A manual bilge pump is fitted in case the electric pump fails to operate, and the gas bottle is stowed on the flying bridge to reduce the risk of explosions.

Fenders can be stowed in a special holder built into the aft rail, and reinforced blocks to take davits are fitted on the transom as standard.

JCL makes much of the equipment on the Moonraker, including settees, stainless steel work, spray dodgers, headlinings and woodwork.

To make the fitting of electrical extras as simple-and safe-as possible, an auxiliary services loom is fitted together with ready built-in attachment points. This enables the owner to fit an entire range of extras inexpensively and means you can pick up power at virtually any point in the boat, with little extra wiring.

Any electrician could fit a radar unit or electric winch with the minimum of fuss.

Visibility from the wheelhouse is improved now that pantograph screen wipers are fitted as standard, and the galley has been redesigned to include a larger refrigerator and purpose-built moulded crockery containers. A self-lighting automatic water heater has been fitted in the WC compartment where there is also an improved ventilation system.

Altogether, around 300 Moonrakers have been built and production is up to about 120 boats a year, selling mainly to people who have never before done any boating. Twenty-five per cent are exported directly and another 60 per cent are exported by English buyers, mainly to the Mediterranean.

The boat is aimed, according to the manufacturers, at people who want to do more boating than fiddling.

## **Conclusion**

The price seems very reasonable for a craft of this standard, particularly considering the comprehensive inventory. which includes stereo tape player, television, crockery, cutlery, echo sounder and just about all you need to go to sea. Extras on the boat I tested were: electric winch, radar, auto pilot and radiotelephone. Fuel consumption is 12 gallons per hour flat out.

## **DATA**

Hull length overall: 36 ft 1 in (10,91 metres).

Length overall from pulpit to davits when fitted: 40 ft 6 in (12.03 m).

Waterline to cockpit roof: 8 ft 3 in (2.51 m).

Displacement: 6.5 / 7.5 tons (6604/7620.3 Kg).

Beam: 11 ft 6 in (3.50 m).

Draft: 3ft (0.91 m).

Thames tonnage: 16,43tons

Fresh water: 90 Imp gallons (409.1 litres).

Fuel capacity: 200 Imp. Gallons approx. (908,8 litres).

Price: £18,650 plus VAT.