A CLASSIC REBORN

THE Moonraker 36 Softrider was designed as a serious high-speed cruiser that could handle the vagaries of British weather and coastal sea conditions. Harry Stanley of Chertsey, owner of this month's Second Look boat, *Proph-a-Sea.* happily endorses this. "I have been offshore in her in a blow, alongside bigger, more modern, and powerful boats, but coming through the experience more comfortably than many of them".

The Moonraker 36 first appeared in 1970 and was originally built by Bell Buxton. In 1972 the company was taken over by Colin Chapman of Lotus fame, and the name changed to JCL Ltd. A total of over 300 Moonraker 36s were built before production ceased in 1980, whereupon the manufacturing tools were locked-up in the hangers at Lotus. Fortunately, the former managing directorof JCL, Robin Poulton, was eventually able to purchase the moulds in 1986, and the Moonraker 36 is now once more in production with Monitor Marine (see our Boat Buyers Guide).

The Moonraker 36 Softrider hull, designed by Bob Tucker, is just over 36ft long, with a beam of lift 6in and a draft of 3ft. It's smooth ride is attributed to a fine bow entry, with deep-vee forward sections which reduce to 15∞after sections. A soft chine rises to form the main spray rail forward, and a very steeply raked bow also ensures that owners enjoy a dry ride in all but the worst conditions. In addition, a small keel reaches its maximum depth about amidships, providing added directional stability and a measure of protection for the propellers. The hull is double-bottomed,

which not only makes for extra safety and rigidity, but provides space for fuel and water storage. In some of the earlier, pre-1972 models, the fuel was contained directly within this space and although it was specially treated. there were some reports of osmosis occurring with in the tanks. This problem was solved in later boats by the construction of separate tanks - some in fibreglass and some in steel - that were fitted within the same area. This type of design also ensures that the weight of both fuel and water is kept low, where it is most beneficial to stability. The quality of construction was evidenced by the granting of a Lloyds Certificate for each boat.

A number of model variants were produced based on this hull: Sportsman models had no aft cabin, but could be provided with or without a flying bridge and open or fully enclosed wheelhouses. The GT or GTS models could be supplied with the same wheelhouse and flying bridge options, but with the addition of a largeaft cabin.

Proph-a-Sea is a 1974 model with fully enclosed wheelhouse and a flying bridge. Power is supplied by the standard installation of twin turbocharged Perkins 6.354,175hp, six-cylinder diesels. These will push her along at a maximum speed of about 20 knots, but Harry finds she cruises most comfortably and economically at 14-15 knots, using around four and a half gallons of fuel per engine per hour.

Looking at the boat on the Thames, at her mooring alongside Harry's garden, it was difficult to accept that *Proph-a-Sea* is nearly fifteen years old. Apart from being very well looked after, her lines are as modem, and individual as many coming off today's drawing boards. The rake of the bow is echoed in reverse by the forward windows of the main cabin and then again by the triple windscreen of the wheelhouse. Steps up to the aft deck are concealed from the side by a matching coaming; the angles of the aft cabin windows and the after end of the wheelhouse are also symmetrical.

Stepping aboard at the break in the rail, one gets the impression of boarding a much larger boat. Grabrails and cleats are big, and the boat feels steady in the water. There is just one entry to the boat, apart from escape hatches,

and that is through a smallish door from the aft deck, behind and below the flying bridge on the starboard side. This leads directly into the big, light wheelhouse with a helm position to port, and navigator's seat to starboard. The helm position is well sited as are the engine controls, instruments, Cetrek autopilot and the electrical switches which all fall easily to hand.

A big Sailor radio is set on the after bulkhead alongside an RDF set and other navigational gear; a seat is provided for the navigator directly behind the skipper's. Head linings and seats here are in a rich green leatherette, complemented by green carpets and curtains. But, with all of its comforts, the immediate impression is of an operational area for a boat that gets used. Almanacs and hand bearing compasses, charts and tide tables, dividers, pencilsand parallel rulers are all ready for use.

The big Perkins diesels are fitted under the wheelhouse. A centre hatch gives first-class access to all main service points, water-intake filters. seacocks, and to the two banks of heavy-duty batteries in their box amidships. Other hatches under the seats give access to the engine sides. All hatches are heavily constructed and lined with sound proofing which is very effective. Safety features have not been forgotten either. Remote controls are fitted in the wheelhouse for fire extinguishers in the engine compartment and galley; the manual and electric bilge pumps are easily accessible through the midships hatch. It was also good to see a comprehensive first-aid box secured to the bulkhead.

From the wheelhouse, three steps lead down to the light and spacious main saloon, with 15in deep windows running down both sides and across the fore-end. The layout is fairly conventional; vee berths right forward have chest-high hanging lockers at their after ends. In the main saloon area, there is a single settee on the starboard side and a raised dinette to port. Aft of the dinette is a good sized toilet compartment which has a chemical loo for use on the river, together with handbasin and shower. Opposite this is the galley, which consists of a stainless steel sink and drainer, alongside a two-burner gas hob and grill. Outboard, there are a couple of stowage racks, but the galley area does suffer from a lack of working surfaces. Harry is in the process of correcting this omission - the chef has complained. The galley also has an oven, a fridge, a number of drawers, holds, and a big storage cupboard mounted on the bulkhead across the after end of the area. All of the seat cushions in the saloon are upholstered in a bronze coloured dralon, with buttoned backs to the settees, while side panels above the vee berths provide the finishing touch.

Going back through the wheelhouse to the aft cabin, you realise how much space there is on this boat. The aft cabin has a full-sized double-bed to starboard, a vast deep dressing table with a hanging cupboard to port. and a toilet / shower compartment forward of this; there is also plenty of room to move around. The toilet compartment is just as big as the forward example, and has the same facilities, but with a sea-toilet instead of the chemical type. A hatch in the toilet compartment gives access to the port shaft cutless bearing and stern gland. Access to the starboard shaft, which is underthe double berth, is equally easy. As in the main saloon, there are windows all around, two of which open for extra ventilation.

Leaving the main accommodation areas - four steps up from the after deck - is the flying bridge. A single, well-upholstered helmsman's seat is located in the middle, with bench seats down each side. Engine controls, a compass and basic engine instruments are set amidships. Harry has installed a second VHF up here, as well as a battery-powered intercom that enables him to speak to the occupants of the main saloon. A wind deflector runs around the lip of the coaming, and there is a small mast amidships which is fitted with steaming and anchor lights.

Proph-a-Sea real ly is a boat fit to go to sea. Both Harry and the boat's previous owner, Jim Willis of Thames Yacht Brokerage have covered many miles in her round the coast and across the Channel in all conditions. At the same time, they have used her for long passages up and down the Thames, finding the Moonraker to be totally tractable at slow speeds, threading through hire boats and into congested locks.

Harry tends to use one engine on the river, both for economy, and to cut down on wash. Many twin-screw boats handle badly on one engine, but not the Moonraker. Harry's previous boat was a particularly poor example, but he takes *Proph-a-Sea* into locks without ever considering starting the other engine.

After nearly fifteen years of use. *Proph-a-Sea* looks good, both in terms of her overall visible condition, and also in the way that her actual fittings and equipment have lasted. There are one or two areas where the teak-finish laminate is beginning to show signs of wear, such as around the galley and forward hanging cupboards. But the deck fittings, stanchions, locker doors, drawers and of course the hull all look as though it will be many long years before they really start to show their age. Above all, both the hull and the internal layout of the Moonraker 36 Softrider will continue to earn the praise of many who step aboard.

With prices starting at £85,217 (plus VAT), you can once again buy a brand new Moonraker 36 courtesy of Monitor Marine, which will have all the attributes of the original boat, but benefit from modernised production methods and of course, the availability of new materials. In 1974, a new boat like *Proph-a-Sea with* a very high level of specification, would have cost you just £13,000 - the same boat today on the secondhand market would fetch in the region of £35.000. Eitherway, you can be assured of owning a classic marque in the history of British boatbuilding.

LOA	40ft 6in
Hull length	36ft 1in
Beam	11ft 6in
Draft	3ft 0in
Fuel Capacity	200 Gals
Water Capacity	90 Gals

Powered by Twin turbocharged Perkins 6.354 Diesels