

Popular Cruisers

OCEAN 30 & MOONRAKER 30

Similar but different fit-outs of the same 30ft Aquafibre shell still command respect today, even though the design is now more than three decades old.

Alex McMullen reports, and confers with owners.

For an indicator of the way motorboating has developed over the past three decades, look no further than the history of the Ocean and Moonraker 30s.

In the late 1960s these near-identical cruisers were seen, if not quite as superyachts, then at least as very substantial vessels. At the 1967 London Boat Show, where the Ocean was first exhibited to the public, it was, in terms of length, in the top 20% of craft on display.

Today, the two models are perceived as modest, affordable craft, excellent for river boating ó quite capable of going to sea, but rather too slowly for serious coastal cruising. If one had been shown at Earls Court in 1999, it would have been well down in the bottom half of any list of exhibits in size order. R M 'Rip' Martins designed the Ocean 30 for GRPmoulders Aquafibre, who in turn produced the hull and superstructure for completion by other builders, most of them based nearby in Norfolk.

Principal among these yards were Herbert Woods and R A Nunn, who sold the boat under its original name, and Buxton Marine Services, who as part of their ambitious marketing and advertising campaign called their version the Moonraker 30; the James Bond film business was then in its prime, though the boat predated the film of the same name by more than 10 years.

The heavily-built, round-bilge displacement hull is the same as that of the Broom 30 (see MBM Jun 98 p66), but the superstructure and accommodation layout differ radically. While the Broom is totally enclosed inboard of its wide side decks, the Ocean, in its MkI guise at least, and most Moonrakers, which were based on MkI mouldings, are much more open boats. Rather than the Broom's aft cabin, they have a large aft cockpit, usually with a hardtop over the forward end, although they still have plenty of accommodation.

Later variants of the Ocean 30 did blur the distinction; the MkII has the unusual arrangement of a single aft cabin, offset to starboard, whilst the MkIII has a full double-berth aft cabin and a minute centre cockpit. But both of these were fitted out largely for river hirefleets, without hardtops. It was the MkI, built through to the end of the production run in 1980, that

proved by far the most popular version for private use.

The combination of an attractive sheerline and a low, well-proportioned superstructure, not as angular as on some of their contemporaries, has served the Ocean and Moonraker 30s well. They do not look as dated as they otherwise might.

In the Woods and Nunn Oceans and Buxton's Moonraker, layout was broadly similar. All three offered the option of a totally open cockpit or one with a sizable hardtop which, especially with its side canopies rolled down, provided a good wheelshelter. Most buyers opted for the hardtop.

R A Nunn managed to reduce the air draught of their boats by lowering the cockpit sole (except for the area under the helm and pilot seats), which enabled them to fit a lower hardtop, projecting back from a slightly smaller windscreen. The idea was to guarantee passage under the 8ft clearance of Oftord Bridge on the River Great Ouse, where Nunn had an active dealer.

A main feature of the cockpit are the raised sides, running all the way back to the aft seat. This is a good safety facet, enhanced by the all-round guardrail with a gate at each quarter that was usually fitted; it also gives some shelter from cross-winds.

Down below, there are four or five berths, depending on which of several minor variations in the layout you come across. All versions have a toilet/shower compartment to port, just inside the companionway, and a galley opposite. The latter is commonly fitted with a full cooker, a fridge and a large sink/drain, still with plenty of worktop and adequate storage. Further forward, to port, most boats have a conventional four-seater dinette which converts into a double berth. This area is raised so you can sit with a good view out of the large side windows, and it has a neat arrangement whereby you can have the table taking up the full width of the space between the seats or just half of it; the latter set-up is handy when you are not actually sitting down to dinner for four.

Forward again there is a half-height wardrobe and shelf, while to starboard is a settee-cum-single berth, with a capacious drinks locker concealed behind the backrest.

Some Oceans have a larger, U-shaped dinette, with the wardrobe relocated on the other side. In this layout the toilet compartment is slightly smaller, and the single settee is too short for an adult to sleep on. On some of their boats, however, Nunn managed to build-in what they called a wrap-round dinette, without having to move the wardrobe across.

The standard arrangement in the forward cabin is two single vee-berths, although some owners have arranged things so they can be converted into a double.

For their day, the Woods and Nunn Oceans and the Moonraker were well fitted-out, with plenty of solid and veneer woodwork, commonly in sapele (a mahogany-like hardwood), and with high-quality fittings.

Buxton Marine Services included several 'luxury' trappings in the standard price of the Moonraker, including built-in television, stereo radio/cassette and, more seriously, hot-air central heating. Some boats were fitted with extra-large water tanks, up to 110gal, or increased fuel tankage, up to an impressive 200gal.

There were also some odd design decisions on the Moonraker, including having a calorifier located under one side of the dinette, which could be very hot to sit or lie on, and an exhaust

outlet for the Webasto heating in the aft deck, so that the fumes would often blow into the cockpit and wheelshelter. Furthermore the breather for the forward fuel tanks fitted in some boats allowed water to get into them in bad conditions. Many have been suitably modified over the years.

Most of the Mkl Ocean 30s which were fitted-out for private use are powered by a pair of 42hp Mercedes OM636 diesel shaft-drive inboards; an alternative were 50hp Perkins 4.108 diesels. Moonrakers were sold with the same options, but in this case most have the Perkins.

Some private boats and, as far as we know, all hireboats were fitted with single installations of the same choice of units, providing quite adequate power for river cruising.

Some original advertisements for the boats claimed that they could do 14 knots with twin engines, but that was pretty optimistic, and certain more than the hull was designed to do. Maybe, when they were brand new, clean-hulled and light-loaded, they could achieve 10 knots with the Mercedes or 11 knots with the Perkins, but today you would be lucky to push them up to more than 9 and 10 knots respectively, or to cruise comfortably above 7 or 8 knots.

At such speeds, like any round-bilge displacement boat, they roll quite considerably, especially in a beam sea (some were fitted with shallow bilge keels to lessen this effect), but they are good, sturdy sea boats.

Early Oceans and the Moonraker were advertised as having a self-draining cockpit, but it was not so in the modern sense of the phrase. True, the sole is flush with the aft end of the side decks, so some water would drain away over the side if a large dollop found its way in; but, equally, some would find its way down into the engineroom or the cabin.

On the river, their centreline keel and low windage makes the boats easy to control even at the lowest of speeds, and their relatively low freeboard makes them manageable when mooring and working through locks. The great majority of Ocean and Moonraker 30s still have their original engines, and possibly the age of these units is something to do with the fact that current owners tend to do most or all of their boating inland.

Altogether, a total of 268 boats were fitted out from Aquafibre's Ocean 30 hulls and superstructures. The Mkl accounted for 93 of these, the MkII for 161 (by virtue of being a favourite of the hirefleets) and the MkIII just 14.

Of these, Herbert Woods, who offered the boats from 1966 to 1975, completed a total of 86, though they were mostly MkIIs and included several for their own and other hirefleets.

Buxton Marine Services built 38 Moonraker 30s in only three years, from 1968 to 1970, at which point they introduced the rather better known Moonraker 36 (see MBM Jun 96 p58).

R A Nunn fitted out Ocean 30s from 1974 to the very end of production in 1980, building 32 in all, nearly all of them MkIIs for private sale.

Prices then & now

In early 1967, the Ocean 30's first full year of production. you could buy a single-engined version for £4400. For a twin-screw boat you had to face the fact that it would cost you over £5000.

The first Moonraker 30s, two years later, cost from £5750 to £6450, depending on engine

installation

By 1979, the first full year in which RA Nunn were fitting out the Ocean, the basic price had risen to £24,300 ex. VAT.

The brokerage department at Newark Marina on the River Trent sell a fair number of these boats, and tell us that early single-engined, ex-hire Ocean 30s can be bought for between £15,000 and £18,000.

At the opposite end of the scale, they say you should expect to pay up to £30,000 for a privately-owned, well-maintained twin-engined boat from the late 1970s. On the Great Ouse, where Ocean 30s are particularly popular, we have heard of boats being sold for up to £35,000.

Moonraker 30s, which date from no later than 1970, will fetch up to about £24,000, in good condition.

Newark Manna are at 26 Farndon Road. Newark, Nottinghamshire NG24 4SD Te/ 01636 704022

Subject to survey

Norfolk-based marine surveyor Syd Harris has inspected many Ocean 30s and several Moonraker 30s for prospective purchasers, and reports that their condition varies considerably

"Some of the single-screw versions are the worse for wear, having served in hirefleets, with signs of heavy use and abuse. Hull impact and deck edge damage can be expected on these,"he points out "By comparison, there are some fine examples of the twin-screw versions that have been in private hands and are maturing well"

Overall, Syd finds the hull and superstructure to be well stiffened and in sound condition But he says prospective purchasers should watch out for damage to the timber bilge keels fitted to some twin-screw models, and also examine the external hull in way of the shafts.

"A common problem is wet and dirty bilges The cause of the water ingress can be a puzzle, and is often not from a single source. A weathered or damaged cockpit hood. perished window seals or slack deck fittings, in particular the guardrail stanchions, are the usual suspects. Wet and warped linings, both in the cockpit and the accommodation, are the clues to watch out for. The tops of support timbers under the engine hatches and aft locker lids can be soft from lying rainwater or spray."

In general, safety features on former hirecraft will be satisfactory, but private craft, as originally constructed, may need additional ventilation for the gas appliances and some improvements to the electrical and diesel installations.

Given the age of the these boats, it is always worth looking for signs of osmosis.

As usual we would urge anyone considering buying a secondhand boat to do so subject to a professional survey.

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and certified for safety

The owners we spoke to who keep their boats on Environment Agency and British Waterways rivers said they had no great problems in obtaining their Boat Safety Certificates.

Some minor modifications were usually required, including rerouting of the fuel tank breathers and in some cases changes to the gas piping and connections, including the fitting of a test point.

We understand that the fuel systems on Mercedes OM 636s, as fitted in most Mkl Ocean 30s, need modifying if the fuel pumps, piping and injectors fitted are made by TDZ rather than being the standard Bosch units TDZ's rubberised fuel return pipes do not satisfy the requirements of the Boat Safety Scheme (see 'Mercedes spares' panel, above).

Dimensions

Loa	29ft 9in (9.07m).
Beam	10ft2in (3.10m).
Draught	2ft 6in (0.76m) with two engines; 2ft9in (0.84m) with one engine.
Air draught	about 8ft 0 in (2.44m) to top of hardtop on Woods Ocean and Moonraker about 7ft 6in (2.28m) to top of hardtop on Nunn Ocean; about 6ft 6in (1.98m) with windscreen folded on soft-top boat.
Displacement	4-4.5tonnes.
Fuel capacity	70gal (320Lt) on Ocean with twin engines; 70-200gal (320-910Lt) on Moonraker with twin engines.
Water capacity	55gal (250Lt) on Ocean; 55-110gal (250-500Lt) on Moonraker.