

Westport Marine Pilot 4

LONG-TERM TEST

Mike Thrussell goes down memory lane to see if previously reviewed vessels have stood the test of time...

The Pilot 4 has become a top seller in the 4m angling-boat class since it was revealed at the 2006 Southampton Boat Show. Charles Broughton designed the boat and used advanced computer numerical controlled (CNC) machining to develop the mould tools. This technique uses a robotic router machine, programmed directly from the computer model, to cut full-sized patterns. CNC machining also improves mould quality over standard techniques, reduces development time by 50 per cent and ensures that each boat is built to the same high standards.

DESIGN FEATURES

The medium V-type hull has a deep forefoot to give a sharp cutting edge that slices through oncoming waves smoothly and offers a more stable, predictable ride. It was designed to be extra robust and features reinforced mouldings for strength and to support the engine easily.

Being fitted with a detachable cuddy secured by four stainless-steel clips means that she's popular with anglers because they can shelter and fish at the same time. Previous buyers

have praised the stainless-steel bolts that secure the screen, offering maximum protection against breaking waves.

Buyers also commended, given the size of the Pilot 4, the fully open access to the cuddy as it is at a height where minimal bending is required. Inside the cuddy there's a large seat locker, with a hinged lid, fitted with a forward pipe that can take a remote fuel tank.

The helm console is on the starboard side with room on the top of the console for your fishfinder/GPS unit, the VHF radio and all of your instrumentations. Buyers have often chosen to mount their VHF radios on a bracket inside the cuddy to better protect it. The helmsman is seated on a formed bench that gives a comfy steering position and good all-round vision.

Owners of this boat also favour the gunnels, which come to mid-thigh height and increase safety. They like the tops of the gunnels, too, that have plywood underneath, making it easy for you to fit additional screws/bolts on chandlery and rod holders.

The stern section houses a large battery and storage locker, and the splash well is a neat, shallow, round

basin designed to limit the chances of someone falling into it, which is important if you often take the kids out fishing.

The deck is deeply stippled, giving excellent grip when fishing and working in wet weather. For a relatively short craft she also offers a surprising amount of deck space that's totally uncluttered – so she's very easy to fish from. It also has good storage space to minimise equipment and gear on deck.

PERFORMANCE

The original test boat was fitted with a 40hp Honda four-stroke outboard with two people aboard. Though other owners have their own preference, the consensus is that she responds instantly to increasing power, shooting out of the hole and up on the plane. Once this happens, and slightly throttling back, the bow settles instantly and the boat rides straight with minimal wheel correction needed to maintain course at speed. She also remains

stable when crew members are moving about on deck with the boat powering forward.

Owners have said how highly manoeuvrable she is; that they quickly gain confidence when throwing her through tight turning circles at high speed. She is very forgiving and good to buy if you're new to boating. It was also noted that pushing into a head sea the boat remains dry from spray, with little getting back onto the screen.

Other key points are that she drifts with her bow angled just off the wind, so it's easy to set up on the drift for fishing – two anglers can fish off one side without the boat keeling over. As the boat is only four metres long, this is a major advantage.

Fitted with the 40hp engine and at 4,000rpm she'll cruise at about 22mph, and at 5,900rpm she'll hit close to 30mph. This package is also very economical regarding fuel (depending on speed and working conditions). **O**



FACT FILE STATISTICS

Length: 4 metres
Beam: 1.82 metres
Weight: 290kg
CE category: C – 5 persons
Engine size: Up to 50hp

PRICE

The Pilot 4 fitted with the Honda 40hp four-stroke outboard retails for £12,250 including VAT, and with a Honda 50hp it costs £13,500.

CONTACT

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On The Inside



↑ There's adequate seating and plenty of space for anglers.



↑ The wheel is set at a comfortable height.



↑ These T-cleats make for secure mooring.



↑ A 40hp engine is the ideal size for this vessel.

ADDITIONS

I mentioned in my original review in May 2008 that if I bought the boat I'd add 4in to 6in safety rails to the tops of the gunnels, and I've found out that some buyers have chosen to do this to further improve the on-deck safety should anyone slip. According to Westport Marine, however, Pilot 4s will come with forward gunnel safety rails and aft handrails as standard for 2010.

Some owners have also agreed with me that the top of the gunnels is ideal to take a stainless-steel gantry

on which to mount the navigation lights and VHF aerial as high as possible. Some added a rod-pod rocket launcher to the gantry as well, which means that the rods aren't taking up valuable deck space.

To new models Westport Marine has now added a portside passenger seat as standard and a downturn on the rear edge of the cuddy top, to increase strength and reduce the chance of hurting your head when accessing the cabin. These were points that, again, we commented on in the original review.

CONCLUSION

I said that this craft could be a market leader and she has, by being a proven performer. She's sold well to anglers wanting a boat that's easy to launch, retrieve and tow on their own, and has been used for inshore fishing for everything from estuary flounders to reef bass and inshore tope and rays. At a pinch she could hold four for short trips close inshore.

With the removable cuddy she's popular with lure and fly bass anglers looking for room with no high structure, allowing for casting ease. **UN**

BUYER'S QUOTE

"A deceptively small boat, she looks like four metres on the water but feels much bigger when you're on it. Suited for two people fishing, the seats are spot on for fishing either side of the boat.

"An early addition to mine was a pair of auto trim-tabs. These have completely transformed the way this 4m boat transitions onto the plane; it's flat up to about 12 knots then it's planing – easy! Charlie (Westport Marine) fitted side and rear quarter rails from new and, with a 10-year-old aboard, it all feels very secure with the high internal freeboard as well.

"She has stability and performance that's way above her length. Fishing mostly out of Plymouth, she feels completely safe – even when the horizon is disappearing in the troughs – yet with enough speed to have fun when it's flat (reaching 27 knots on the GPS with two onboard). The Honda 40 is very quiet for river trips too.

"Launch and recovery is an absolute doddle – you don't even have to get the rear wheels wet! She's effortless to tow and easily stored and manoeuvred too!

"After two seasons she's looking as good as when I collected her from Westport Marine, and getting to know the designer was part of the fun in owning a superbly designed boat.

"Apart from yearning for a bigger boat (don't we all?) and planning to fit a larger fixed fuel tank, I can think of no downsides to owning a Pilot 4 – it's that good!"

J Narramore, Devon.



↑ The boat rides well in the water.