



Westport Marine Pilot 4

The Westport Marine Pilot 4 was first introduced to the public at the 2006 Southampton Boat Show and it is now the trendsetter in modern, small-boat angling/family cruising design.

Charles Broughton, head of the Plymouth-based company, served as a naval architect mainly in the field of design, and is one of the most experienced design engineers of amphibious craft in Europe; it is easy to see that the Pilot 4 is built on the best of foundations.

DESIGN AND BUILD FEATURES

Westport Marine uses advanced Computer Numerical Control machining in developing its moulding tools. This features a robotic router machine, programmed direct from the computer model to cut full-sized patterns to produce far-greater mould quality and cut development time in half. This contributes to each and every boat being built to the same exacting standards.

The Pilot 4, manufactured from Lloyd's approved GRP materials, features a medium V-type hull with a deep forefoot to create a sharp water-cutting edge for easy cutting of oncoming waves.

The hull is based on a reinforced girder system, linking the hull and deck mouldings, to create an exceptionally strong and rigid structure. The keel is double laid, and the transom reinforced with marine plywood and supported by the girder system to take the engine loadings. The hull has a deadrise of 15 degrees, with a wide beam designed to support heavier four-stroke outboard engines.

Standing on the pontoon and looking at the Pilot 4 you have to double check that she is actually a 13ft boat, because she is very beamy and looks longer. Stepping aboard the same

applies, with a huge deck space for a 13ft boat and a completely open working deck area – no clutter!

Starting at the bow, there is a stainless-steel bow roller, with a double cleat for tying off behind it, and a fairlead at each side. Access to the foredeck is via a Houdini hatch through the cabin roof. This sees you haul anchor from an upright position with full stability.

The cuddy is detachable via four stainless-steel snap clips, giving you the protective cover if required, so fly fisherman and lure anglers can open up the full length of the boat for easy casting and separation of those on board. The cuddy screen is full fronted, with side screens on each side. The screen is tinted green and secured with stainless-steel bolts for increased strength should a wave ever whack the screen full on. The cuddy top also has the space for an upright stainless-steel gantry should you choose to fit one to get your VHF aerial higher for improved performance.

Inside the cuddy, moulded in to the bow, is a large seat locker with hinged lid access on which you can stand when using the Houdini hatch. This locker is also fitted with a forward pipe so that it can take the remote fuel tank. Access into the cuddy is wide and virtually fully

open with a good height to minimise bending.

The helm position is an open-console type on the starboard side. There is room across the console top for Fishfinder/GPS and VHF, plus instrumentation. You could also bolt the VHF out of harm's way on the inside of the cuddy roof, in front of the helm seat. The wheel is a car type, but comfortable with good grip.

The helm seat is a formed bench in a comfortable position for steering and manoeuvring, with the throttle on the right-hand side directly below where the hand naturally falls. On the test boat there was no comparable port-side passenger bench seat, but Charles tells me that in future this will be part of the standard boat.

The gunnels are just over mid-thigh height, as well as wide and flat with plywood underneath so that you can screw rod holders on. At the stern there is a large storage and battery locker, with a stainless-steel duo cleat on each stern corner for tying off – plus a stainless-steel dive ladder on the starboard stern. The splash well is a slightly unconventional shallow, round-basin style. This is to minimise the chances of someone falling into it, making it safer when small children are on board.



INFORMATION Specification

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

Price

The Pilot 4, as tested with the Honda 40hp four-stroke outboard, retails for £9,550 including VAT. A Brenderup 8115 trailer, plus jockey keel roller adds another £910 including VAT.

Information

For more information, and to arrange a Pilot 4 boat test, contact Charles Broughton, Westport Marine, Gunshed 9, Crownhill Fort, Plymouth, Devon PL4B 5BX. Tel: 01752 772224. E-mail: sales@westportmarine.co.uk. Also, visit the website: www.westportmarine.co.uk



The boat is impeccably finished in every way, and the deck is deeply stippled, allowing for excellent grip. Lockers are easily accessible and there is no clutter on deck, making it ideal for fishing. All the fittings are made from stainless steel too, so there will be no corrosion problems.

PERFORMANCE

For the test, the Pilot 4 was fitted with a 40hp Honda four-stroke and we eased her out towards the west side of Plymouth Sound, where calmer water would initially allow us to assess her top-speed performance.

Ease the throttle forward and power is instant. The boat leaps forward, the bow drops and she settles on the plane in minimum time. Once on plane she keeps a dead straight course with minimal wheel correction. She's also ultra stable when the boat is at speed and someone wanders about on deck.

I quickly got used to this boat and started to push her through tight turning circles at speed. I was looking for stern slide in the apex of the turn, but the hull grips like glue and she proved highly manoeuvrable. You can literally 'point and squirt' this boat using the throttle, and she's totally predictable at all times.

Let her drift and she seems to prefer to settle bow just off the wind direction, plus she proves to be totally stable

when two of you walk to one side. For a 13ft craft this is very impressive.

Coming around to face the chop and powering forward, water cut by the bow pushes out wide. Very little spray gets onto the screen, meaning you have good visibility at all times – plus the helm is ideally placed for good all-round visibility when seated.

The boat cruises at around 18 to 20 knots in the upper 4,000rpm rev range, but increase the revs to 5,900rpm and you'll be flying along at well over 25 knots! If you went for the 50hp engine option, cruising speed would increase to 26 knots, and flat out you'll be at 32 knots. Charles, though, feels that the 50hp is just a touch too heavy for her and recommends the 40hp, and I'd agree with that after the test day.



Things I'd Change

I'd certainly add 4in to 6in stainless-steel safety rails to the gunnel tops, but these are available as extras.

The forward edge of the cuddy roof facing towards deck is quite sharp if you bang your head on it. Maybe a strip of soft piping over this would avert cuts and sore heads in the heat of fishing.

I'd also look to add a lightweight stainless-steel gantry to the top of the cuddy, to raise my VHF aerial height and get the steaming light as high as sensibly possible. This applies to those who would look to take the Pilot 4 offshore a couple of miles, which she is more than capable of doing.

Once the passenger seat is added, then maybe a grab rail on the port-side rear edge of the cuddy would give some additional support when pounding back home into a sea.

Conclusion

In my opinion the Pilot 4 is a market leader. She's massive on deck for a 13ft boat with a fully open working deck. Access into the cuddy is unencumbered, and will remain so when the new passenger seat is added.

There's masses of locker space, the helm position gives incredible all-round vision, plus the craft is superbly stable for fishing from and you could fish four comfortably when estuary fishing without problems.

She's highly manoeuvrable, very fast and economical, plus you have the advantage that the cuddy simply clips off to increase the working space if required. The Pilot 4 is perfect for two anglers, especially fly and lure anglers with the cuddy removed, and so easy to transport and launch just for a couple of hours' fishing in the evening after work. She's spot on for all day inshore work and sensible offshore angling when after tope, bass, rays and the like.

This boat feels much more like a 16 footer when you're on deck, and has the versatility and nimbleness of its 13ft length – but with extreme sea-keeping qualities. That's why she's such a good package!

If you're in the market for a smaller craft for ease of towing with a family car, but want space for fishing you should watertest a Pilot 4 before making your final choice.