

A STROKE OF GENIUS

This boat test is a little unusual in that we have two experts running their eyes over the Pilot 4. Russ Symons talks to designer Charles Houghton, who builds the boat in his Westport Marine yard in Plymouth, and our resident boat tester, Dave Lewis, who takes the boat for a spin off Poole courtesy of dealer, Poole Marine Services



FIRST CLAPPED EYES on the Pilot 4 moored alongside the pontoons at Queen Anne's Battery Marina in Plymouth, says Russ Symons. Wow, I thought, this boat has got a wide beam for such a short length. You don't see many craft with 13ft x 6ft dimensions.

Then there was a 50hp four-stroke Honda hanging off the back. I don't know what I felt, was it scepticism combined with a little disbelief? This was going to be an interesting day out. Charles Houghton, Charlie to his

friends, is a Naval architect who happens to like building boats, especially if he can go fishing in them. The Pilot 4 is his first venture under his own steam. He designed it from scratch; he made the plug to make the moulds, hand-built the first few boats himself, with just a little help from his friends.

“SHE TRACKED AROUND CORNERS AS IF SHE WAS ON RAILS... I'D TAKE THIS BOAT TO THE EDDYSTONE ON A GOOD DAY”

After spending two years at Falmouth College doing a practical boat building course, he spent the next three years at Southampton University getting the paperwork and design skills. He then worked for a while in a drawing office, which convinced him that he wanted to work for himself.

The concept in his mind was that he wanted a small rugged, seaworthy boat, which could be slipped on and off a trailer single-handed, and it also had to benefit from modern design and boat building practice.

First impressions are that the Pilot 4 is nicely built and finished, but quite plain, seemingly nothing to excite the imagination. With three of us on board while the bits and bobs were explained, she didn't flop about, in fact she was quite stable. It was then that the errant thought occurred to

me as I looked at the powerful 50hp Honda outboard: Have we got a wolf in sheep's clothing here?

Motoring out through the Cattewater, the wash from the dockyard and warship steamers hardly troubled her, past the end of Mountbatten Breakwater, out of the slow speed zone.

Charlie fed the horses to the engine; she jumped over the hump and sat up on the plane like a little beauty. What a little cracker this boat is, a 13ft boat with a Category C plate, unbelievable!

She tracked around corners as

if she was on rails, and I thought to myself that I would take this boat to the Eddystone on a good day, and I really would.

I have owned bigger boats than this that didn't feel as stable. When I asked Charlie about why this should be, he unpacked his laptop and showed me how the lines, the chines and the angles all worked together to give the exceptional performance. Just goes to show what can be done when practical skills combine with a bit of nounce.

At the same time I had a glance at

the concept drawings for a 17ft boat, for which the plug is being made on a CNC mill, with its programming coming straight off the laptop. Now that is a proper use for an NC machine!

RUSS TAKES THE TOUR

IN the little dodger there is a steering console with enough room to take a small navigator and sounder, but this is one of those instances where I would buy a slightly larger combo chart plotter and sounder and hang that off the back of the console and put the

compass up under the cabin roof well away from electrics and other lumps of metal.

When you are perched on the helm seat the steering wheel and throttle controls come easily to hand, it all worked like a charm just as you would expect with Honda units.

Forward, inside the dodger there is a seat locker, on which you can stand to get through the overhead hatch to access the forward cleat when anchoring. Aft there is another locker, which will swallow quite a lot of gear, and also



The Pilot 4 is rated for outboard engines up to 50hp



The forward hatch (top) and a rod holder (above)



The helm position

providing a useful seat when fishing.

The non-slip flush deck is self-draining when underway or when left on a mooring without a cover. There are optional extras, such as the stainless flush-mounted rod holders, seat upgrades and navigation lights. But the basic boat comes in at under £5,000 without an outboard engine and trailer and that is good comparable value for a boat that will take you fishing as well as this one will.

The dealers have some good deals on boat, engine and trailer packages, so go and visit them and have a ride. I am sure it will be as interesting for you as it was for me. Now a 17ft version will be tasty, mmm!

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

AFTER SPENDING several hours kicking about in this little cracker, Dave Lewis says: This is a basic, smart, simple yet beautifully functional little angling boat; I absolutely loved it.

I was delighted to find I would be reviewing a standard fishing boat, precisely the sort of craft that would be absolutely perfect for the overwhelming majority of British sea anglers - if only they realised it.

Like Russ has said, the boat only stretches to a diminutive four metres, and the bare hull weighs just 290kg; a tad small for sea angling some would say. Again, like Russ, I think the Pilot 4 is an ideal inshore boat and when the weather is settled, could be used for 'near offshore' fishing.

The boat has a CE Category C rating that classes her for "voyages

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on coastal waters, large lakes, bays, estuaries or rivers where wind of up to Force 6 on the Beaufort Scale and significant wave heights of up to two metres may be experienced."

Rated for up to five persons as a maximum, this is clearly for solo angling or you plus a mate.

The gunnels fall vertically to the deck and I noted a decent amount of inboard freeboard, a major consideration on such a compact craft. Closer inspection revealed cavernous stowage hatch fore and aft, and I was especially impressed with the fact that the manufacturer offers the installation of a full size 25-litre fuel tank, complete with twin fuel lines, in each hatch, as an optional extra. This would create more space and a less cluttered deck.

You get a full set of quality deck hardware and a basic boarding ladder as standard. The one feature that is almost unique is the cuddy can easily be lifted off. Release four quality stainless clasps, disconnect the electrics and off it comes, creating an open boat for summer lure and fly-fishing. Excellent.

The boat's hull is reinforced by an internal girder system linking the hull and deck mouldings, producing a very strong and rigid structure, all GRP materials being Lloyds approved. The keel is double laid and the transom is reinforced with marine plywood and

supported by the girder system to take the weight of the engine.

The Pilot 4 is rated to take engines to 50hp, which will produce a top speed of around 30 knots. I'd suggest a 20-30hp outboard would provide more than enough power, while obviously reducing both initial purchase and day-to-day running costs.

WHAT A GREAT LITTLE SEA BOAT

BOATING conditions in and offshore were nigh on flat calm, yet with the speed restrictions in the harbour lifted during the winter, I was able to drive the Pilot 4 with enthusiasm.

I really enjoyed this boat, which had been supplied by Poole Marine Services, out of Salterns Marina. It is my sort of boat, easy to launch, easy to retrieve, easy and cost effective to maintain with enough performance to make me smile.

As I applied the throttle the medium vee-hull rose sweetly up onto the plane and even when I ploughed her at speed through the chunky wake created by our much larger camera boat, she maintained lateral stability, cut the wake cleanly and crisply, and threw minimal spray.

I have seen a few much larger boats that have not produced such a com-

fortable and secure ride as the Pilot 4. But at the end of the day you have to remember that this is just a 13ft boat that should be used within the context for which it has been designed and built.

Do that and you'll have yourself a superb little sea angling boat that will give many years of trouble free boat and angling pleasure. ●

INFORMATION

WHAT IT COSTS

The package as tested with a 50hp Honda outboard costs £10,495, including trailer, although you can reduce the cost by fitting a 15hp Johnson J15 EL4, which brings the price down to just £7,695.

WHO SHOULD YOU TALK TO?

To arrange a viewing, contact Peter Johnson at Poole Marine Services, Mariner Leisure Complex, West Quay Rd, Poole, Dorset, BH15 1HX, tel: 07980 759069, E-mail: sales@poolemarine.co.uk.

Web: www.poolemarine.co.uk.

For dealers in your area contact: Westport Marine, Gunshed 9, Crownhill Fort, Plymouth, Devon, PL6 5BX, tel: 01752 772224. Web: www.westportmarine.co.uk.