

No ugly DUCKLING

Standard Narrowboats' new Cygnet comes in at just £55,500 for a 50-footer. Mark Langley tries it out...

The first thing you notice about the Cygnet 50 is the lack of forward cockpit. This means that it has more than a passing resemblance to CanalTime boats. However, the exterior is more shapely, and a large opening forward window gives light and access to the forward cabin.

By not having a forward cockpit, you save around 4ft of boat length. With some clever planning, the Cygnet 50 manages to carry as much accommodation as a fairly run-of-the-mill 57ft boat. An aft saloon and galley lead forward to a bathroom, then to a bedroom in the bow, making best use of the cabin design.

OUTSIDE

The steel shell is built by Stourport Canal Craft on sensible 10/6/5/4mm plate. Although this is a budget boat, the hull is well finished with a good eye to detail. The thicker cabin side plating means that there is very little distortion in the shell, which has been brush painted in-house rather

than the cheaper, thinner spray painting used by some budget builders. The bow shape is unremarkable but pleasant, while the gunwales are quite wide and flat – and thankfully treated in non-slip paint, as is the roof. Lipped traditional handrails make moving round easy, while the very forward cabin edge has two vertical decorative handholds, so boarding at the bow is simple.

The cabin roof has four chrome mushroom vents, along with a matching pole and plank holder. The centre handling line even has (chrome) fairleads to prevent the rope from catching the stove chimney. Windows are also in matching chrome finish: large 36in drop-back rectangular ones for the aft part of the cabin, with 15in opening portholes forward plus a pair of side hatches in the saloon. Navigation lights are fitted as standard on the forward cabin edge, with a tunnel light and horn above the front opening window.

ENGINE

The large cruiser-style aft deck is

surrounded by a wide steel taff rail, with Hexagrip deckboards across the entire engine bay. Even the steel supports underneath can be removed, making working on the engine easy. The engine on this, the first Cygnet, is a 45hp Barrus Shanks engine, but future models will have the 35hp 1.8-litre engine. A hydraulically operated gearbox drives through a water-lubricated stern gland, reducing daily maintenance. The large quick-release weedhatch is easy to get to, while the properly lagged exhaust passes through the starboard hull side.

A large battery box contains three 110Ah domestic batteries (with room for a fourth) plus the engine starter battery, all strongly secured. These are charged by twin alternators, with a 110- and 40-amp unit on the 35hp engine. This should give more than ample power for both cruising and basic residential use. The engine control panel is mounted on a pedestal to port, which also had the single-lever control and the 230V shore power inlet.



No forward cockpit gives more cabin space, plus commendably little wash underway.

FAST FACTS

Boat: Cygnet 50, 50ft x 6ft 10in

Builder: Standard Narrowboats

Price: £55,500

WE LIKE

- The price!
- Good quality painting, woodwork and equipment
- Leak detector in the gas locker
- 'Added value' extras such as a year's insurance and diesel in the tank

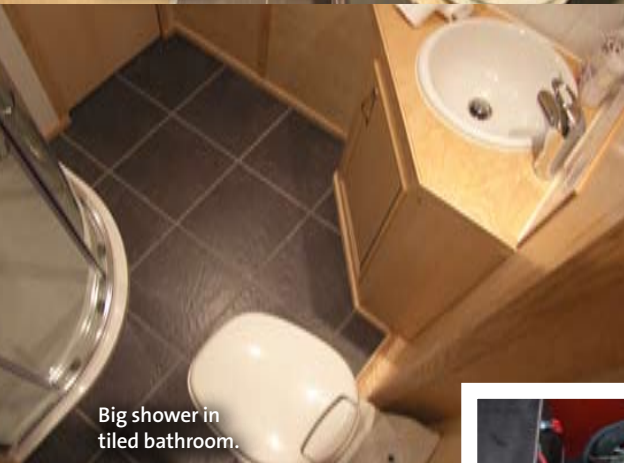
Excellent non-slip on roof and standard chrome fittings.

Starboard cabin side has lots of space for signwriting.





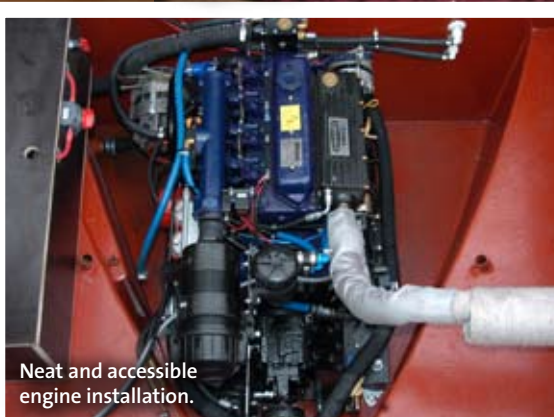
Galley makes good use of space.



Big shower in tiled bathroom.



Cosy bedroom with king size bed.



Neat and accessible engine installation.



Wardrobe with desk in bedroom.

The foredeck has a hatch, giving access to the gas locker, which takes several 13kg bottles. Impressively for any boat, never mind a budget one, there is a proper Alde bubble gas-leak detector next to the regulator. This means that you can regularly check on the soundness of the gas system yourself – and should make the Boat Safety Examination quicker!

SALOON

Access down into the cabin is by a pair of wood-lined steel doors, and large steel sliding hatch. Three steps down into the cabin provide storage space for mooring pins and other cruising gear that might otherwise be stored in a forward cockpit. To port is the electrics cupboard. This contains the 12V and 230V circuit breakers, as well as the standard combi inverter/charger, giving 1600W power from the batteries and 40A charging when on a landline. To starboard is a proper airing cupboard above the 55-litre calorifier, with the engine coolant header tank in here as well.

The cabin is sprayfoam insulated, and then fully lined in ash face ply (or oak, if the customer prefers), with 9mm on the cabin and hull sides, and 6mm on the roof. All the furniture and bulkheads are blockboard; no MDF is used aboard. The saloon is open

plan for customers own furniture, but could easily take a sofa-bed, coffee table and folding dining table. Electric sockets are sensibly placed throughout the boat, with a TV aerial point in the port aft corner. The carpeting and curtains are standard, and the light beige colour matches the very clean woodwork finishes. All screw holes are properly plugged and colour matched in, yet the services are easily accessible.

The compact solid fuel stove is the boat's main source of heat. Placed at the end of the galley, it should easily heat the boat with its rated 5kW output. It has been carefully installed to match the new code of practice. The large hearth should contain any embers, and the granite tiling sensibly extends to become the galley floor. The tiled back of the hearth is well separated from the stove itself, and the chimney is double insulated where it passes through the cabin roof.

Webasto central heating is a £1,800 option, though not one we would think is



230V fridge freezer.

“By not having a forward cockpit, you save around 4ft of boat length”

Solid fuel stove properly installed.



likely to be needed. Nevertheless, along the starboard hull side at floor level, a box has been included big enough to take pipes in the future without having to rip out cabin linings, should the owner wish to upgrade. The calorifier already has twin coils (plus a 1kW immersion heater) to facilitate fitting central heating in the future.

GALLEY

The galley is a reasonable size for the boat, and is L-shaped, taking the forward bulkhead and along the starboard side. The free-standing stainless steel four-burner, grill and oven cooker sits well within the granite-effect laminate work surface, with several cupboards and drawers under the stainless steel sink and drainer.

The sizeable fridge-freezer is a 230V unit, which is cheaper to buy than a 12V model, and does at least avoid issues with voltage drop which can cause problems in 12V fridges if insufficient wiring is used. It is nicely separated from the solid fuel stove by a built-in wine rack, though some clips might stop bottles flying if you bump the boat.

BATHROOM

The bathroom is a walk-through type. A common criticism of these layouts is that it can restrict access through the boat, but this is less of a bind on a craft with no forward cockpit. The door to port from the galley goes into a large tiled bathroom, with a big 800mm quadrant shower on the centreline of the boat, and a toilet directly opposite. The electric flush Thetford cassette loo has its back to the bulkhead. There is plenty of space, including under the large sink. The headroom, at over 6ft 5in, means that showering is very easy compared with a cubicle placed towards the cabin side.

FORWARD CABIN

The door into the forward cabin is set to starboard. A king-size permanent double bed is set up against the forward bulkhead, making full use of the cabin as it starts to taper in to the bow. Under here is the stainless steel water tank, water pump and valves, plus plenty of storage space. A small hatch below the opening window gives a little cupboard; a couple of shelves are due

Open saloon with two side hatches.





Cute lines!



Decent aft deck.



to be added either side above the bed, to hold a cuppa and glasses! The whole space is very cosy and an excellent retreat.

Against the aft bulkhead is a decent wardrobe, which extends under the gunnel, plus a desk-cum-dressing table, which also has a second TV aerial point fitted (and access to the loo cassette under!). Small LED spotlights above the desk and bedhead give good, focused light; the rest of the illumination is provided by halogen downlighters, set into chrome surrounds.

To supplement the solid fuel stove, a small 230V electric oil-filled towel-rail style heater is to be fitted into the bathroom and the forward bedroom, properly hardwired into the AC system. At around 500W each, this should be more than enough to warm these areas, and could even be run from the inverter whilst cruising if needed.

OUT ON THE WATER

We took the boat out cruising just as it had been completed. This meant that a few last minute items, such as the bow and stern fenders (and the bathroom/bedroom heaters), had not yet been added. We also had to contend with gale force winds, and a very difficult exit from the marina!

However, we were pleased to find that the boat handled well. The engine was eager – and possibly a bit too powerful for this boat on the canal; the standard 35hp motor will be more sensible. At 1300rpm the boat was making around 4mph up against the slight current on the Nottingham and Beeston Canal.

Considering the shortish swims, it didn't pull much of a wash, and the bow

wave was flatter than many similar boats. The Shanks engine started well and, considering it had only run a few hours so far, was commendably smoke-free and without rattles or vibration. With no sound insulation, the noise level was low enough to have a conversation without raising voices. An owner could specify a hospital generator type silencer if they wanted, and could fit their own proper sound insulation if they wanted to reduce it further.

Handling was fairly precise. The tiller arm was due to be trimmed down by a few inches, to give easier clearance. It was a comfortable height, with good balance and quite a light feel, which made manoeuvring in the strong winds much more pleasant! The throttle was well set up and progressive, and the boat stopped quickly with only a small amount of ventilation from the prop – exacerbated by having an almost empty fuel tank at the time.

WHAT'S INCLUDED?

At £55,000, the basic price is excellent value for the 'amount of boat' that you get and the standard of workmanship. Few narrowboats can match this on a bang-for-buck basis.

The only non-standard item in the boat we tested was the 45hp engine. However, the price also includes a year's full insurance, three decent polyester mooring lines, a bow V fender, extended stern button, six side fenders, a pole, plank, full bottle of gas, mooring pins, windlass, BW watermate key, piling chains... and even 100 litres of diesel in the tank! Add a licence, and a quick trip to Ikea down the road for pillows and duvet, and you could be off.



Centre engine controls at good height.

WW Verdict

As a starter boat, or for the more cost conscious buyer, the Cygnet 50 is worth a look. By keeping to a standard layout with very little in the way of options, the price can be kept low, yet there is enough space and flexibility in the boat for owners to personalise their craft in the future. Standard's confidence in the boat extends to a full, independently-issued Boat Safety Certificate.

The Cygnet 50 sets the bar high for boats under £70,000. It is a carefully thought-out boat that deserves to do well. And one final thought on the budget: by not having a forward cockpit, and thereby losing several feet of boat length, you could save around £500 a year on licences and mooring without compromising accommodation.

CONTACT

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