

AQUA-STAR

OCEAN STAR 118

Fresh from a makeover after many years in production, this 38-footer has an inviting ambience, and performance beyond the semi-displacement norm. We tested the aft-cabin version in rough waters off Guernsey.



Guernsey-based builders Aqua-Star have had a 38-footer in their range for near enough 15 years, with aft-cockpit and aft-cabin models, both available with or without a flybridge, based on the same semi-displacement hull.

The latest version has undergone a number of major modifications, and has more powerful engine options available, so we nipped over to the Channel Islands to see what it has to offer in its aft-cabin format, as the Ocean Star 118.

Design & layout

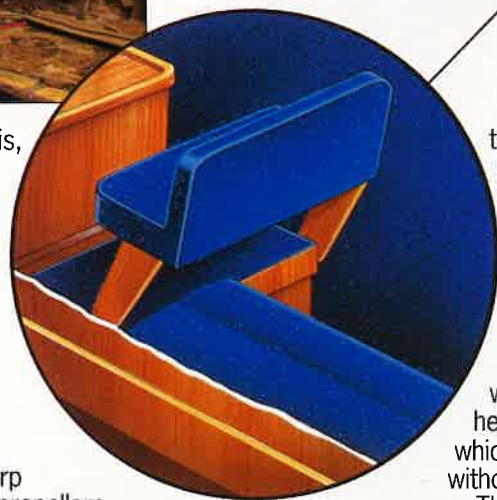
The main exterior modification has been to the transom, where an integral bathing platform bumps the overall length of the hull up a little, to nearer 39ft. For watersports and for ease of boarding from astern, it is a big improvement over the previous ladder arrangement.

The underwater sections are of round-bilge form, with a full keel, but incorporate a chine.



When up and running the hull lifts onto this, making speeds of up to 29 knots possible depending upon the engine installation. A new development is that the forward run of chine, past the break of the bow, has been modified to incorporate a set of sprayrails. This adds some downturn, which goes some way towards combating the spray which is so readily flicked up by a semi-displacement hull form.

The keel is quite deep, but also quite narrow, flowing easily from the hull's sharp entry and dropping below the line of the propellers and sterngear. This allows the hull to take the ground when fitted with beaching legs, and to this end Aqua-Star thoughtfully finish it with a nylon keel plate,

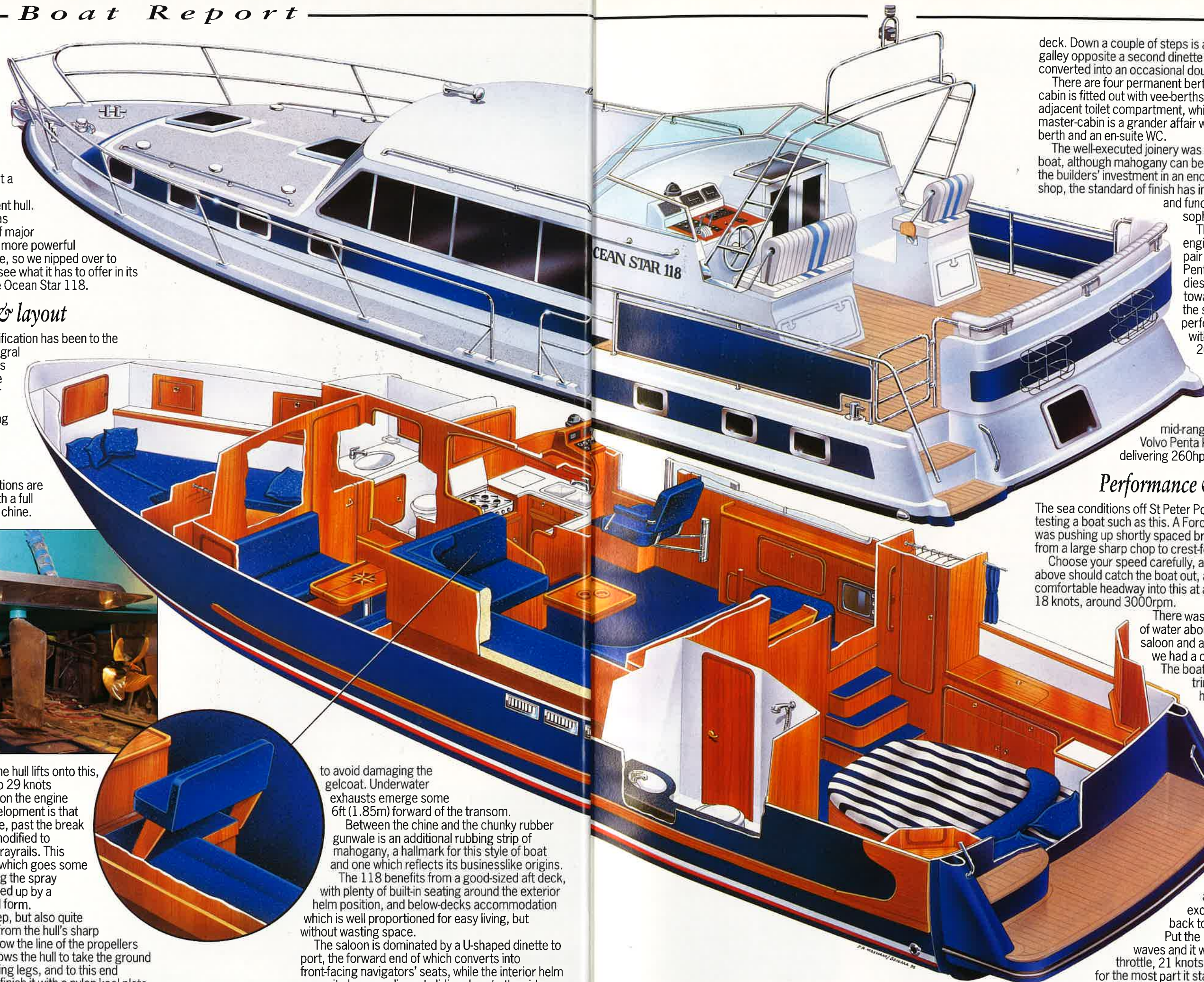


to avoid damaging the gelcoat. Underwater exhausts emerge some 6ft (1.85m) forward of the transom.

Between the chine and the chunky rubber gunwale is an additional rubbing strip of mahogany, a hallmark for this style of boat and one which reflects its businesslike origins.

The 118 benefits from a good-sized aft deck, with plenty of built-in seating around the exterior helm position, and below-decks accommodation which is well proportioned for easy living, but without wasting space.

The saloon is dominated by a U-shaped dinette to port, the forward end of which converts into front-facing navigators' seats, while the interior helm opposite has an adjacent sliding door to the side



deck. Down a couple of steps is a neat but roomy galley opposite a second dinette, which can be converted into an occasional double berth.

There are four permanent berths. The forward cabin is fitted out with vee-berths, and has an adjacent toilet compartment, while the aft master-cabin is a grander affair with central double berth and an en-suite WC.

The well-executed joinery was of teak on our test boat, although mahogany can be specified. Following the builders' investment in an enclosed spray-varnish shop, the standard of finish has improved from solid and functional to sophisticated.

The 118's base engine installation is a pair of 200hp Volvo Penta TAMD 41B diesels, which position it towards the top end of the semi-displacement performance bracket with a flat-out speed of 20-22 knots, but

buyers can choose anything up to twin 350hp Caterpillars. Our test boat had a mid-range option, a pair of Volvo Penta KAD 44P EDC units delivering 260hp apiece.

Performance & handling

The sea conditions off St Peter Port were ideal for testing a boat such as this. A Force 5, bordering on 6, was pushing up shortly spaced breakers, ranging from a large sharp chop to crest-forming rollers.

Choose your speed carefully, and none of the above should catch the boat out, and we made comfortable headway into this at a steady 18 knots, around 3000rpm.

There was bound to be plenty of water about, but snug in the saloon and at the interior helm we had a comfortable ride.

The boat's natural angle of trim is quite flat, helped by the slight downward slope to the aft underwater sections, so visibility

forward through the three-part screen is fine, and the long run of side windows also give an

excellent view right back to the quarters.

Put the 118 across the waves and it will take a little more throttle, 21 knots at 3200rpm, and for the most part it stays appreciably drier, not least because the extra deep

sprayrails running along the forward chine push the water out and down to good effect. The long keel keeps the hull tracking easily, and there is little to do with the wheel except hang on to it.

Once round the corner past St Martin's Point we gained a little shelter, and easing open the throttles we clocked a top speed of 24.5 knots at 3700rpm. Aqua-Star's managing director Geoff Wilson told us the yard were going to tweak the props slightly on our test boat to bring the revs up, to take account of the greater payload envisaged once the owner had all his cruising gear aboard.

With the seas behind him, the skipper need have few qualms, as the large rudders maintain a good bite and the bow has plenty of buoyancy. The additional bulk of the new transom design has not introduced any bad manners.

From our performance figures, cruising at around 21 knots appears to give the best fuel economy. With its generous tankage, this is a well balanced boat in terms of the speed available and range.

Nudging back into the marina, which was crowded

Interior helm



The interior helm is listed as an extra, to supplement the exterior one which comes as standard.

It benefits from a side pilot door, and the seat is easily swivelled clear if you want to get to this, or if you want room to stand at the wheel. The way it turns inboard to face into the rest of the saloon is also sociable.

The wooden ship's wheel fits in well with the overall feel of the boat, and the area is businesslike in its approach.

There is a single instrument and switch panel straight ahead, and an additional breaker panel next to it, ensuring that everything is an easy glance away or ready to hand. A second, more angled fascia takes smaller navigation instruments, and is topped off with a wet-card compass.

An overhead panel could be draughted in to accommodate other instrument heads, but larger electronics would be best bracket-mounted.

Bathing platform

The new bathing platform extension is well sculpted onto the original flat transom, with indented steps leading up to the aft deck. The platform itself and the treads are laid to teak, and a hefty handrail makes for easy boarding as well as extra security when using the stairwell.

A bathing ladder is tucked within the platform as standard, although the shower unit is an extra.



Forward toilet

Largely a moulded affair, the forward WC is enlivened by its Corian worksurface and teak trim.

It has no separate shower, just a built-in tray, but there is plenty of elbowroom. Lockers outboard and under the sink provide the right

amount of storage space, although it would have been nice to find these lined rather than simply painted-out.

The compartment is fitted with an extractor, and privacy is provided by the port's opaque glass, which is a solution more builders should consider. A holding tank comes as standard.



Aft deck & helm

Half a dozen people can be entertained with ease on the raised aft deck. Modifications to the transom area have provided a better, more substantial run of seating across it, and both the helm and co-driver's seat backs can be hinged over so they face aft. A handy swivelling, folding table is fine for snacks, without getting too much in the way.

With fender baskets ranged across the transom and lockers located in the seat-bases, there is a satisfactory amount of deck storage for an aft cabin boat.

The helm seat is a bit of a squeeze for two incumbents, not least because the stainless steel vertical wheel is set centrally, but then this is not the style of boat that requires constant hands-on steering and throttlework. Engine instrumentation is set within the flat area of console ahead of the wheel, while a more vertical fascia will accommodate navigation

equipment. Just a log and depth-sounder are supplied as standard, together with a wet-card compass.

The deck is laid to teak as standard, and the stainless steel radar hoop can readily be lowered to bring the air draught down to 10ft 6in (3.2m).



Lower dinette

The lower dinette area is a four-seater, with its table dropping to form a double berth if required.

The table has hinged flaps, which makes it easier for occupants to sidle in. Usefully, as with most other flat surfaces, it comes with a deep fiddle to help keep things in situ.

Outboard is a handy cave locker, allowing loose items to be readily stowed when making ready for sea, as well as a number of cupboard-type lockers. Bulk items such as the bedding for this occasional berth, can be stowed beneath the forward portion of seating; the rear portion houses the calorifier.



Saloon

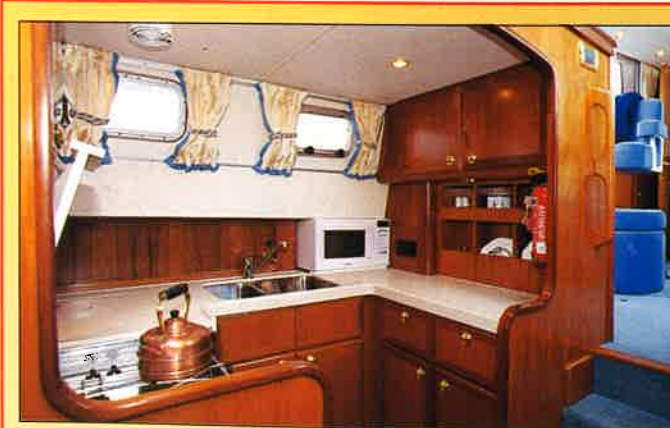
A pair of doors and a hinged hatch give easy access from the aft deck to the saloon, although it is somewhat annoying that the latter is supported only by rather basic struts which have to be tightened manually; either a sliding hatch or at least gas struts would simplify the procedure.

Both comfortable and businesslike in its fit-out, the saloon is dominated by a U-shaped dinette to port, which can seat six and comes with a large hinged table complete with inset mug-holders. It can be specified so that it is convertible into a double berth, but in this case you lose some of the underseat storage capacity.

The forward section can be tipped over to turn it into a pair of forward-facing seats, just ahead of which is a chart table complete with inbuilt storage.

Aft of the helm position and side door to starboard is a run of sideboard which houses not only a wet-bar and space for a television but also a neat locker for a dehumidifier, as well as storage space. A further locker is built into the aft bulkhead, and a drop-down panel in the deckhead allows good access to the innards of the exterior helm.

The saloon has headroom of 6ft 4in (1.93m), and we were pleased to find a central length of overhead handrail.



Galley

U-shaped, with Corian worksurfaces, the galley is tucked behind a 'keyhole' bulkhead which disguises it without shutting it off. It has quite a yachty feel to it, with plenty of cubbyholes for securing loose items away, as well as an array of

lockers and pull-out shelves.

Fitments include a sizable four-burner hob and oven, and a one-and-a-half bowl sink. A dedicated rubbish-bin locker is also provided, as is an overhead extractor.

A fridge is located just a step and an arm-stretch away opposite, in the recess under the chart table.

Forecabin

In the forward cabin, the vee-berths are a good width right down to their feet, which makes them comfortable singles without the need for an awkward in-fill.

Indeed, there is plenty of room all round, with ample standing headroom and a useful amount of stowage thanks to lined cave lockers both outboard and within the bunk bases, plus a hanging



wardrobe. A fiddled shelf is a nice finishing touch.

The forward part of the coachroof has a couple of small fixed ports let into it, providing additional

light over and above what comes in through the side windows and deckhead hatch.



Aft master suite

The aft cabin has plenty of natural light coming in through its myriad ports, while the pale-coloured linings help to emphasise the warmth of the joinery.

The 6ft 2in (1.89m) by 4ft 6in (1.37m) berth is biased to starboard, but is accessible from either side. Beneath the fully sprung mattress are access panels to the steering gear, the

manual back-up bilge pump and provision for bulk storage.

Running round the cabin are an elegant array of drawers and cupboards, topped off with

attractive rounded fiddles. There is also a hanging locker near the companionway, and a dressing table arrangement.

The en-suite toilet compartment is a good size, largely moulded but lifted by the use of a contrasting Corian worksurface, and offering adequate stowage. Although it does not have a separate shower cubicle, a proper screened-off area means you can avoid soaking the whole compartment.



Engineroom

There is a door to the engineroom in the forward bulkhead of the master cabin, and if you have not opted for the generator (which nestles between the engines) it is possible to make a quick inspection from here.

If you are serious about daily checks, however, at least some of the hatches in the saloon sole will need to come up. Fortunately, these are bite-size panels, although less helpfully a couple on the port side are partially under the settee base, which will have to be moved first.

There is good access right round each engine, and the water strainers, seacocks and fuel/water separators can be got at quite simply, as can the shaft logs.

The batteries are located towards the head of the compartment, while



further forward still are the athwartships fuel tanks, which have 150gal (682lt) capacity each as standard but can be specified as 200gal (900lt) apiece if required. Fuel shut-offs are on the tank tops.

Insulation is fitted to the patchwork of floor panels, as well as to the fore and aft bulkheads. Halyard exhaust alarms are included on the extras list, something which other builders might consider.

Decks



The side decks feel safe to walk around, not least because they are a minimum of 13in (33cm) wide and bordered with a decent 3in (7.5cm) toerail. And you never run out of inboard handrails, as these run the full length of the superstructure and coachroof.



Outboard guardrails are fabricated in 1.25in rather than 1in stainless steel, with a midships break allowing easy boarding from alongside.

Mooring hardware is equally substantial, with 9in T-bollards fitted fore and aft, and similarly sized cleats amidships to handle springs. A vertical electric windlass handles the ground tackle, but there is no access to the chain locker from on deck, only from the forecabin.

with weather-bound visiting boats, conditions were slightly more tricky than they had been out at sea. The route to our berth was something of a chicane, but with plenty of boat in the water we were able to ease through nimbly. The hull is responsive and can quickly be pulled around or nudged sideways, and with comparatively little windage the 118 is not one to be pushed around by the elements.

Conclusions

Aqua-Star's new 118 certainly benefits from some improvements on the earlier model, successful though this has been.

The modifications to the transom add to, rather than detract from, what has always been a pleasing-looking craft, the level of fit-out has been taken up a step, for a softer ambience, and underneath it all there is still plenty of solid engineering.

Available horsepower pushes the boat well past the normal criteria for semi-displacement performance, but the hull does not appear to mind this. And when you drop back to the more usual 18 knots, you have all the passagemaking benefits that this type of vessel affords. □

OCEAN STAR 118

PERFORMANCE & CONSUMPTION							SOUND LEVELS dB(A)		
rpm	knots#	gph†	lph†	mpg†	range*	trim	saloon	aftcab	aftdck
2000	9.9	8.1	37	1.22	293	3.0	76	83	74
2500	14.2	12.3	52	1.15	276	4.0	77	85	75
2800	16.5	14.0	64	1.18	283	5.5	78	86	76
3200	21.0	17.2	78	1.22	293	5.5	79	89	82
3500	23.3	20.8	95	1.12	269	5.0	80	89	81
3700	24.5	25.7	117	0.95	228	5.0	80	90	82

Measured by radar gun. † Calculated from engine manufacturers' figures. * Allows 20% margin.

CONDITIONS - wind southeasterly Force 5, sea moderate to rough

LOAD - fuel 25%, water 50%, crew 3

BUILD

glass-reinforced plastic

DIMENSIONS

LOA

38ft 9in (11.81m)

HULL LENGTH

36ft 3in (11.05m)

BEAM

12ft 9in (3.89m)

DRAUGHT

3ft 6in (1.07m)

AIR DRAUGHT

10ft 6in (3.20m)

with hoop lowered

DISPLACEMENT

9.5 tonnes

FUEL CAPACITY

300gal (1363lt) or

400gal (1818lt)

WATER CAPACITY

100gal (454lt)

ENGINES

twin Volvo Penta

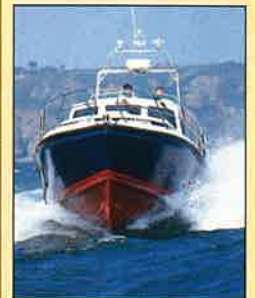
KAMD 44P EDCs

6cyl 3.6lt diesels

260hp at 3700rpm

PRICE

from £198,493 ex VAT;
£220,070 as tested,
including extras such as
interior helm and generator



BUILDERS

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