

DALE CLASSIC 35

The culmination of months of hard work and craftsmanship, this 35-footer is a dream come true

Text: Jack Haines Photos: Lester McCarthy



Take yourself back to the May and June issues of *MBY* and you may remember that editor Hugo penned two separate features on the conception and build of the Dale Classic 35. He went to Arthur Mursell's design studio on the Isle of Wight with owner Bill Slee to see how the pair conjured up this unique concept and then took a trip to Neyland to see the boat in build in Dale Sailing's sheds.

Then, for the final part of the trilogy, he handed me *MBY*'s big red pen and asked me to go and put the 35 through its paces. We know the back story and the love that has gone into building Bill's dream boat but is it any good?

OOZING WITH QUALITY

The initial signs certainly are. It looks every inch the high-quality motor launch; the elegant swoop in the decks, the teak transom and highlights in the superstructure, and the mirror-smooth finish thanks to six layers of top coat. There are no guardrails, or portholes for that matter, so the overall effect is very clean yet the grey paint adds a modern edge.

The hull is based on that of the Dale 23, a pint-sized tender launched at the 2012 Southampton Boat Show. The hull shape was very similar to the traditional Nelson design that Arthur made his name with – but it had one crucial extra ingredient, power. It turns out that if you provide it with enough horses Arthur's hull will generate serious amounts of lift and get a real lick on. This surprising turn of speed and sterndrive agility made the 23 a thrilling driver's boat.

The 35 treads this same path, but in place of the 23's 240hp VW powerplant there is a single Volvo Penta D6 400hp. Dale's technical manager Matthew "Moss" Barker tells me they could fit twin engines to the boat, "But the balance feels so much better with one lump. And you wouldn't get the same amount of heel," he says, with a glint in his eye.

Fire up the D6 and you know it's there, growling away underneath the engine box at the aft end. We glide away from Bill's swing mooring in the middle of the Beaulieu River and you can instantly feel the unmistakable

connection that a sterndrive boat has with the water. Every tiny nudge of the steering wheel adjusts the boat's course – we're only doing 6 knots and it already feels alert and quick-witted.

The helm station is clear and simple with one Garmin screen used for the chartplotter, radar and engine information, plus separate analogue dials for quick checks. A couple of rows of rocker switches control the major functions, my personal favourite being the one labelled 'siren'. Push this to activate the restored siren from a US fire truck that sits in pride of the place on the bow and my word is it loud. "That thing uses more power than the windlass," Moss points out.

The design is simple but the execution is mouthwatering. The helm is made from luxuriantly varnished teak with carbon fibre inserts for mounting the instruments. Moss has designed an exquisite split companionway hatch hewn from the same teak and the pair of chairs from Release Marine in Savannah look a million dollars, and probably didn't cost much less. "I saw them and just had to have them," says Bill.

Bill's sense of fun is dotted all over *Dashing*. The siren is one example, as is the steering wheel, which is taken from a Nicholson 38 motor sailor and has been installed on his last three boats. Then there is the Latin phrase '*suave mare magno*' picked out in gold lettering above the chart table on the starboard side. It means "how sweet it is to be on the mighty sea". It's these personal touches that make building a boat in this way so very special.

But enough of these distractions, we have reached the Solent and the D6 is warm and ready for action. I take it easy at first, this, after all, is Bill's pride and joy and she is only a week old when we get behind the wheel. But it's not long before I am being coaxed into opening the throttles and giving that lovely steering wheel a good workout. The boat is just such a joy to pilot – the balance, the ride, the view and the split-second reactions to the helm. The little 23 shines through in the way this boat handles, I can feel that grip on the water, it's like the keel is slotted into a specially made track in the Solent. Even with the throttle wide open, full-lock turns are dispatched without a hint of slide and barely any loss of speed – she is a sensational steer.

She is a fuel efficient beast, returning over 2mpg at every increment in the rev range

As much as Bill seems to be enjoying witnessing his boat's freakish handling characteristics, it's unlikely that he will spend much time doing this. "My wife Heidi and I will mainly use the boat for exploring the Solent, with the odd longer trip down to the West Country. She will spend most of her life at 20 knots and, to be honest, the most valuable dial on that helm station is going to be the fuel flow meter!"

PLENTY FAST ENOUGH

It's easy to see why 20 knots is the chosen cruising speed with the D6 spinning at a steady 2,600rpm and fuel being sipped at a relatively modest 35lph. She is a fuel efficient beast, returning over 2mpg at every increment in the rev range apart from flat out.

I can't help thinking that the noise from the engine is marring the experience, though. It never quite fades away to the background thrum it should be and means that you have to raise your voice higher than is comfortable to talk.

Dale hasn't scrimped on insulation, that's for sure, so it may just be an unfortunate side effect of using an engine box and the noise being thrown forward and bounced around inside the wheelhouse. Our sound figures support this theory, showing a higher level of noise in the wheelhouse than when we were taking readings close to the engine box.

Top end speed is around 32 knots, which feels more than enough when you consider the boat's optimum cruising speed is early to mid 20s. Yet even at 22 knots you can have more than enough fun simply throwing the 35 through a few tight turns. Who needs top end speed?

Although Dale will continue to build and sell the 35 to customers, hull number one is so specific to Bill's tastes that it's hard to judge it as anything else than his ideal creation. There are some parts of the layout that work well universally but there are other bits that Bill has specified that won't make much to sense to you as a punter at a boat show.

The yard openly admits this and, of course, with Dale being the sort of company it is, if you want to change something you can. Bill was keen to have as little clutter in the cockpit as possible so, minus the engine box, there are

very few intrusions. There is the bench on the engine box, two opposing seats on the threshold of the wheelhouse and the aforementioned helm chairs.

This rather sparse layout will not suit all tastes but it's just what Bill wanted. This, and storage space. "I hate having things strewn all over the place," he tells me. So there are cubbies for shoes and lifejackets dotted either side of the wheelhouse, a section of the engine box lifts to reveal a deep storage bin for cleaning equipment and the beautifully made canopies and there's a large storage space beneath the cockpit sole.

One of the most contentious decisions from a design perspective is the omission of guardrails at the bow. In Bill's mind they would have totally ruined the look of the boat, and you can see his point, but there's no escaping how precarious it feels on that tall, flat foredeck when it's lumpy. The fact that there aren't even toe rails around the edge of the foredeck mean this particular 35 is a Cat C boat as opposed to Cat B.

A HEAD FOR HEIGHTS

The tall, flat foredeck makes perfect sense when you stroll below, though. Bill and his sons are well over 6ft tall so headroom below decks was paramount from the moment Arthur's pencil touched paper.

The interior is fit for purpose, without being overly luxurious, and filled with a surprising amount of light considering there are no portholes and just a set of deck hatches.

Dale's cabinetry is some of the finest in the business and the American cherry interior here is expertly finished. The galley, though compact, uses the available space intelligently with fiddles for every conceivable shape of glass, mug or plate you could wish for.

Opposite is a spacious heads unit finished in cherry and Corian. There is no door, just a custom-made Oceanair screen that pulls down from the ceiling. It isn't particularly fitting of such a high-quality interior but there is a far greater feeling of space without a door blocking the light and getting in your way when you're by the galley.

The forward section of the cabin is given over to a permanent sleeping area. There's



The opposing chairs took hours of tweaks to meet Bill's perfecting design. The open-plan layout and huge headroom below decks make the most of the space.



Owner Bill Slee enjoying the ride on his custom-made dream machine.



Everything in its place inside the compact galley.



No door on the heads adds to the feeling of space.



A CLOSER LOOK WITH JACK HAINES

HELM SEATS

Made by Release Marine in the US, the helm seats are not only somewhere to park your bum but also one of the *Dashing's* many talking points. Bill saw them and said to himself that he must have them on his new boat. You can see why, they're utterly splendid.



FLIP-DOWN STEPS

There is one of these beautiful flip-down steps on either side of the cockpit to aid descent down into the boat. The teak has been varnished within an inch of its life, meaning they look almost too good to be trampled on by shoes. The star detail is dotted all over the boat.



STORAGE

Bill's aim was to leave the decks as clutter-free as possible, so the top of the engine box lifts up to reveal a deep storage void, ideal for the boat's canopies, fenders and lines.

However, the height and width of the box does make it difficult to get over the transom to the bathing platform.



ENGINE ROOM

Stern-drive power is usually more fuel efficient than shafts and its position near the transom often makes it easier for the designers to create good service access. The 35 is no different, with a large portion of deck lifting on a powered ram to reveal very good all round engine access. And the white liner makes it easy to spot leakage at a glance.



The quality of the construction and the attention to detail are sky high



The lack of toerails downgrades this 35 from a Cat B to a Cat C boat

Elk skin on the grab-handles not only looks classy but is wonderfully grippy, even when wet

The table in the cockpit pops up on a gas strut but is a little too low for comfort



The fine entry and high bow plus a prominent spray rail make for a very dry ride

A first for an MBY boat test, a US fire truck siren. One of the best extras ever?



The split bathing platform makes access to the sterndrive leg very easy

no table – but Dale could supply one – just a split vee-berth for sleeping in and sitting on if the weather turns.

VERDICT

It's hard to come to a meaningful conclusion about this Dale Classic 35 as it is so unique. It is one man's dream boat and it works perfectly for what he wants to use it for. And as a boat that Dale can build and sell to other customers the basics are outstanding. The quality of the construction, the attention to detail and the general finesse are all sky high – the boat feels like a top quality piece of design and

boatbuilding skill. It is phenomenal from behind the wheel, too – heaps of fun if it wants to be but also capable in poor conditions. Thanks to the wheelhouse design it is also a boat that you could happily use all year round.

At the heart of this boat, though, is something that is so good about the marine industry. A man can spec his perfect boat with one of the world's top designers and 5,000 man hours later she is on his swing mooring, ready to become part of the family. And that is something very special indeed. **MBY**
Contact Dale Sailing. Tel: +44 (0)1646 603112
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THE HELM VIEW

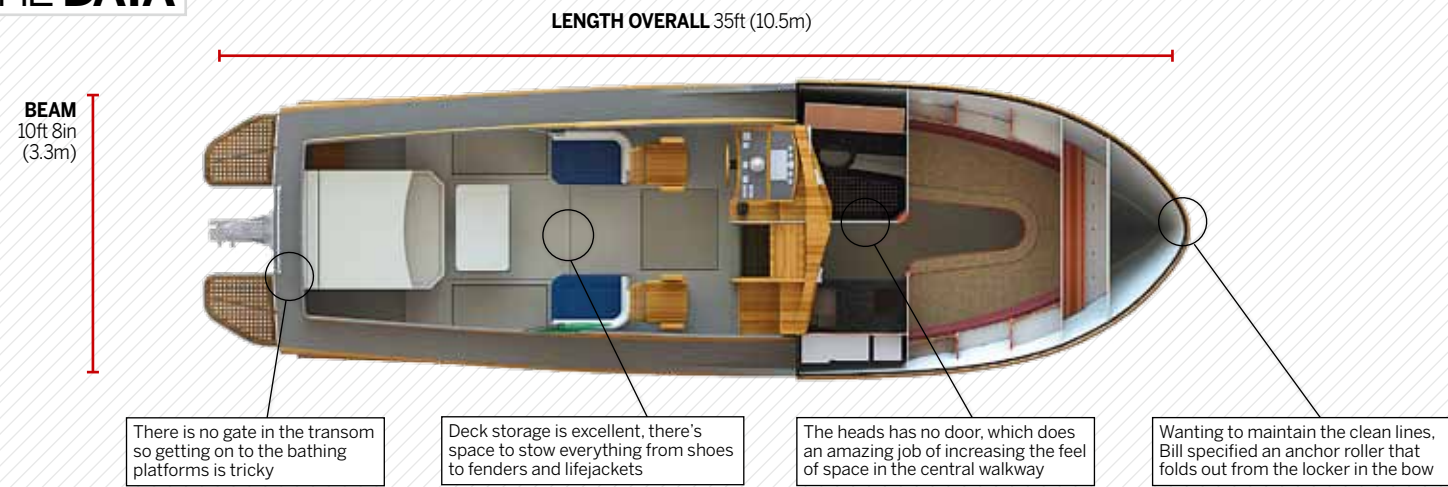


The narrow-rimmed wheel feels fantastic and the steering is spot on

Varnished teak around the helm is absolutely sublime, as is the companionway hatch mechanism

Folding step drops down to the deck to give shorter helmsmen a better view over the tall bow

THE DATA



PERFORMANCE

TEST ENGINES Single Volvo Penta D6-400. 400hp @ 3,600rpm. 6-cylinder, 5.5 litre diesel

MBY TEST FIGURES

	2,200	2,400	2,600	2,800	3,000	ECO	FAST	MAX
RPM	2,200	2,400	2,600	2,800	3,000	3,200	3,400	3,600
Speed	16.0	18.8	21.0	23.5	26.2	28.5	31.4	32.7
LPH	25	30	36	43	50	55	70	81
GPH	5.5	6.6	7.9	9.5	11.0	12.1	15.4	17.8
MPG	2.91	2.85	2.65	2.48	2.38	2.36	2.04	1.84
Range	298	292	272	254	244	241	209	188

SOUND LEVELS dB(A)

	80	80	80	80	85	ECO	FAST	MAX
Saloon	80	80	80	80	85	83	88	87
Cockpit	87	90	90	90	92	94	94	95
Helm	90	88	90	90	91	92	94	96

Speed in knots. GPH & MPG figures use imperial gallons. Range in nautical miles and allows for 20% reserve. Calculated figures taken from on board fuel readings, your figures may vary considerably. All prices include UK VAT. 90% fuel, 100% water, 5 crew and minimal stores/no tender, calm F2 for sea speed trials.

THE COSTS & SPEC

Price from £348,000 (single 260hp)

FUEL CAPACITY

128 imp gal (580 litres)

WATER CAPACITY

28 imp gal (125 litres)

DRAUGHT 4ft 9in (1.5m)

RCD CATEGORY C for 10 people

DESIGNERS TT Boat Designs

DISPLACEMENT

5.2 tonnes (light)

RIVALS

Cockwells 33

Price from £350,000

Another bespoke beauty, made by Cockwells of Falmouth.

BUY THE TEST mby.com/co33

Hinckley T34

Price from £426,942

A sumptuous slice of Americana with the added fun of jet-drives below the waterline.

