

PREVIEWS
INSIDE:

WINDY 37
SHAMAL

INVICTUS
GT320

DUTCHCRAFT
25

POWERBOAT & RIB

BRITAIN'S BEST POWERBOATING MAGAZINE
NO. 160 MAR/APR 2020

BOOT DUSSELDORF
THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH?



TWIN TEST

2xXO DFNDR & 270

Which one would you buy?

SECRETS OF THE
INNER HEBRIDES
RIB Cruising Special

NORTH WEST PASSAGE

The grandeur, the
wildlife, the people

TESTED INSIDE ▼

WWW.POWERBOATANDRIB.COM YouTube Instagram Facebook

Botnia Targa 25GT • Finnmaster 16 Cuddy • Fjordstar 4.5m • Ring Ranger 25
Beneteau Flyer 10 • Extreme 885 Game King + loads of gear reviewed + all the latest news...

ISSUE 160 - MARCH/APRIL 2020 £4.99



9 772050 067012

XO DFNDR

Dave Marsh TAKES A CLOSE LOOK AT TWO XO CRAFT, THE DFNDR AND THE 270, IN THIS DUAL TEST REPORT ...

Please don't make the same mistake I did before I finally got to grips with the DFNDR on a perishing day in December, i.e. to dismiss it as no more than a cunning marketing exercise. What, with a name that is a barely disguised variant of Land Rover's most overtly hardy vehicle? Plus a black snorkel that rises imperiously above the cabin top

in a way that suggests some indefinably rugged purpose, rather as it does on, well, dare I suggest, an old Land Rover Defender? What other conclusion was a freezing journalist to come to except to see the boat as the child of a wily marketing department?

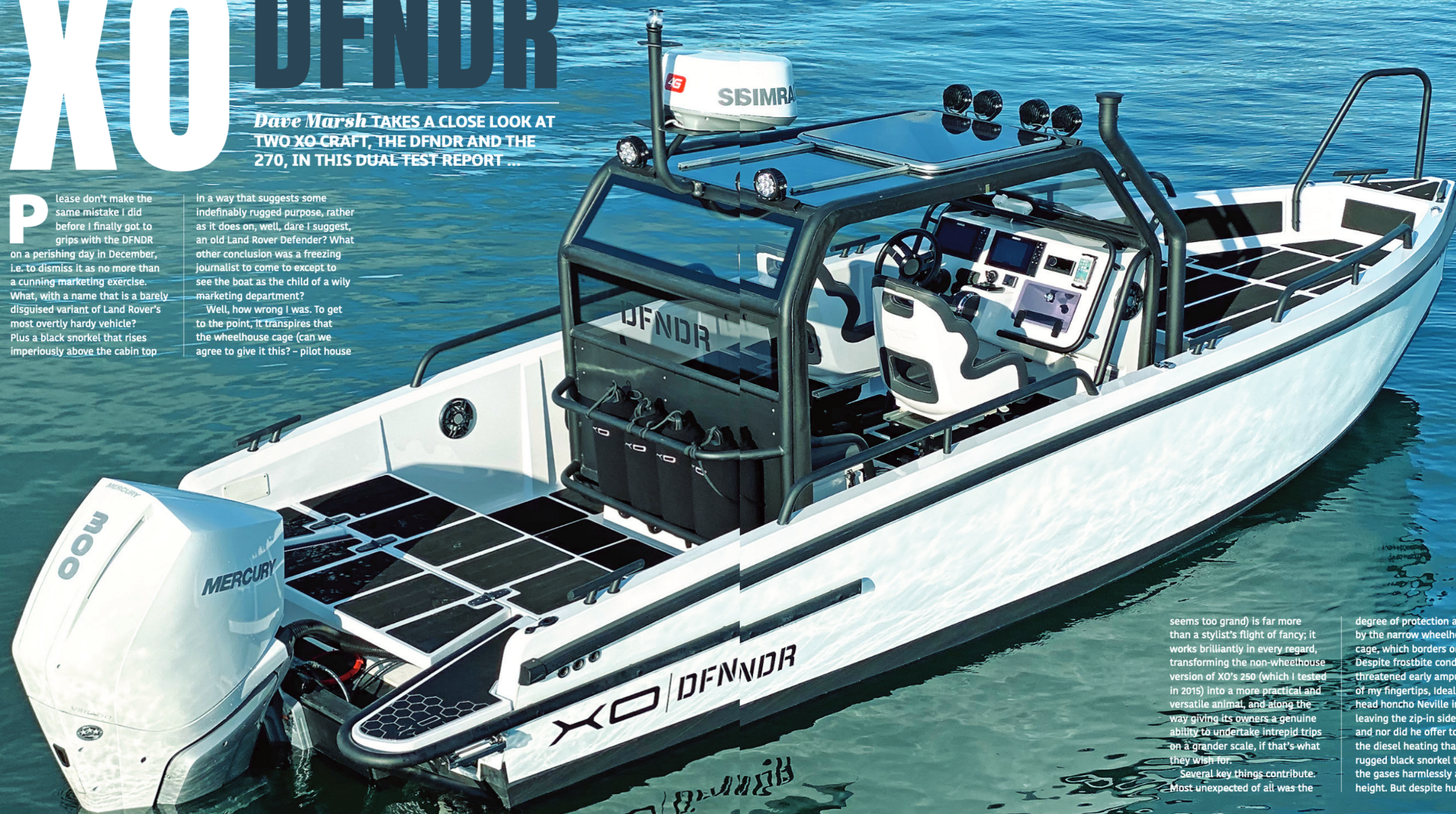
Well, how wrong I was. To get to the point, it transpires that the wheelhouse cage (can we agree to give it this? - pilot house

seems too grand) is far more than a stylist's flight of fancy; it works brilliantly in every regard, transforming the non-wheelhouse version of XO's 250 (which I tested in 2015) into a more practical and versatile animal, and along the way giving its owners a genuine ability to undertake intrepid trips on a grander scale, if that's what they wish for.

Several key things contribute. Most unexpected of all was the

degree of protection afforded by the narrow wheelhouse cage, which borders on freaky. Despite frostbite conditions that threatened early amputation of my fingertips, Ideal Boat's head honcho Neville insisted on leaving the zip-in side covers off, and nor did he offer to turn on the diesel heating that uses that rugged black snorkel to exhaust the gases harmlessly above head height. But despite hurtling along

The wheelhouse cage can be equipped with racks for wakeboards and the like.



Flat out, the single 300hp Mercury gives around 43 knots (50mph).



at close to 43 knots (50mph), the biting wind did not swing around the front pillars and onto the driver and passenger as expected. Instead it magically flowed past, leaving the air inside the cage

SPECIFICATIONS

XO 250 DFNDR

Length: 7.76m (25ft 6in)

Beam: 2.28m (7ft 6in)

Fuel capacity: 355L (78 imp gal)

Water capacity: 0

Draught: 0.90m (3ft 0in) leg down

Air draught: 1.98m (6ft 6in) + mast

RCD category: C (for 5 people)

Displacement: 1478kg (excl. engine)

Transom deadrise: 24 degrees

PRICES (inc. 20% UK VAT)

Starting price: £72,995 single 225hp

As tested: Circa £87,995 single 300hp

ENGINES

Smallest: Single 225hp outboard

Biggest: Single 300hp outboard

Test engine: Single 300hp Mercury

3.4L V6 outboard

Top speed: Circa 43 knots (50mph)

largely undisturbed. Doubtless XO did not test the DFNDR inside a wind tunnel, so the fairy-tale aerodynamics must simply be a lucky happenstance.

Even in its open-sided form, the wheelhouse cage also provides an indefinable but very tangible sense of security that outstrips the archetypal open sports boat. With the two big clear side covers zipped into place, that gets better still, and protection from the elements is complete. It's this sense of safety and security and shelter that makes the DFNDR such a good vehicle for intrepid passage making, even if the deep-vee alloy hull underneath is no different from the original open boat (note: the open XO 250 is no longer listed on XO's website).

Without the old boat to hand, it was difficult to tell whether the seating height was higher on the DFNDR, but it certainly felt like that, and the view forward is very clear and commanding. XO fit shock mitigation seats as standard - a generous touch on a small aluminium boat that can be had for as little as £72,995 - and they seemed to work well. Consequently,

there's very little reason to stand. However, XO's designers have made that possible by incorporating a well forward of the seats that can be exploited by lifting a folding floor hatch, allowing the crew to drop their feet into the well and stand. Unfortunately, even with the seats pushed right forward, in the seated position the geometry of the hatch and the standing space leaves the angled footrest plate too far away to offer support. If this



Even with side screens removed, the wheelhouse cage provides good protection.

were my boat, I'd add a transverse spacer to solve that issue, and accept that the two-part hatch cannot be folded fully forward.

The big flat dash helpfully points the screens directly at the crew's eyes, and handrails abound. There's a perspex lidded locker for odds and ends, but it would be great to add a fiddle around the horizontal shelf at the top of the dash - that would then provide a secure place for the small invaluable oddments, such

IT'S THIS SENSE OF SAFETY AND SECURITY AND SHELTER THAT MAKES THE DFNDR SUCH A GOOD VEHICLE FOR INTREPID PASSAGE MAKING ...

as handheld VHF, sunglasses and mobile phones, that follow the crew around. The wheelhouse cage also provides a framework for mounting all manner of things: spotlights, VHF aerials, navigation lights, radar and GPS - equipment that invariably benefits from elevated positioning. XO have also integrated a handy fender rack into the rear of the cage. My only grumble is that the nuts securing the overhead hatch, and maybe the top rails of the cage itself, could do with some



Fender stowage is an extremely practical feature on a small boat.

protective padding to stop the tall and the unwary from unwittingly denting their craniums - this sturdy little boat is not one that bends easily!

With its transom boarding, secure walk-around decks and near 50mph top speed, the DFNDR will make a good water sports platform. You could dispense with the spotlights and use the optional roof rack to store waterskis and surfboards or even small windsurfers. However, XO have devised a canny arrangement for the roomy, full-width forward deck locker that largely eliminates that need. The back face of the locker comprises a detachable slot-in panel; remove that and anything longer than the locker can poke out and sit along the side decks. It's a tiny masterstroke of design, and a cornerstone of the DFNDR's very versatile deck arrangement.

50mph - almost!

Although our test day was relatively calm - no more than F3 - relentless 60mph winds the day before had left us with an uncomfortably steep and closely spaced swell to contend with as soon as we stuck our nose out



Shock mitigation suspension seats are standard issue - a generous touch.



The bow locker's removable back panel allows longer items to be stowed.



XO owners can customise their boats with innumerable vinyl wrap options.

BOAT TEST **XO DFNDR**

The wheelhouse cage can be completely enclosed with clear zip-in side panels.



of the protected harbour at Ideal Boat HQ in Pwllheli in North Wales. Undertaking trustworthy speed and fuel consumption trials was out of the question, but we did attempt top-speed runs. This involved waiting for the biggest swells to pass through, then blasting flat out in the lee of the short breakwater towards the pebble shore, a run of no more than 200 metres. Despite repeated attempts, it's still unclear whether the DFNDR is a true 50mph boat with its single 300hp Mercury or whether my wimpy reluctance to risk running aground and being catapulted through the windscreen at 49mph was an impediment to achieving that last 1mph. For the record, I clocked 50.9mph (44.2

THE BIG FLAT DASH HELPFULLY POINTS THE SCREENS DIRECTLY AT THE CREW'S EYES, AND HANDRAILS AROUND.

knots) on the 300hp Mercury-propelled XO 250 in 2015. Either way, this is a nippy boat, and even the modest 225hp option should be good for around 42/43mph (37 knots).

Just like its discontinued 250 sibling, the DFNDR sports impressive handling, performance and agility. Even when I did get things wrong and unwittingly thumped into the back of a big swell or an unexpectedly steep

head sea, the DFNDR always felt very solid and reassuring. It boasts an impressive 24-degree deadrise at the stern, which doubtless enhances the rough-weather ride. However, it is important to remember that this is ultimately a small boat capable of 50mph, with a waterline length of under 7m. So if you intend to drive at high speed in challenging conditions, you will need to pay attention to optimising the DFNDR's trim. With this in mind, I'd implore you to specify the excellent Zipwake interceptor trim system fitted to our boat. This highly versatile system can be fine-tuned to suit the conditions, the DFNDR's payload and even the skipper's individual driving technique, for

example leaning away from the waves in a beam sea. The Zipwake system is also extremely fast-acting, certainly far faster than even the most gifted throttleman could ever manually trim the outboard or conventional trim tabs.

Conclusions

Who would have thought that a simple aluminium cage could so transform the workings of a small sports boat? Of course, the original 250 was a far more sociable affair, with its central four-seat cockpit plus a foredeck seating area suitable for entertaining duties too. But if that is the sort of boat you are looking for, then XO can oblige with their new XO 260 T-top. As it stands, the DFNDR is an obvious rival for the more accomplished fast RIBs, often chosen as hard-core A-to-B sprinters and cruisers, capable of exploring in challenging conditions. And as a platform for water sports, the XO DFNDR gets top marks. Proof that a spot of original thinking goes a very long way indeed.

+ HIGHS

- + Wheelhouse cage works incredibly well
- + Impressive handling and agility
- + Very versatile deck arrangement
- + Hard-as-nails aluminium alloy hull
- + Standard-issue suspension seats
- + Deck layout and sturdy hardware

- LOWS

- Angled footrest too much of a stretch
- Wheelhouse overhead needs cushioning

XO 270

Choice is a wonderful luxury to have on a small boat. I'm not talking about the usual optional extras, I'm referring to significant alternatives such as a whole extra twin-berth cabin, a choice you might expect to find on a voluminous 60ft flybridge cruiser but not on a sports boat like the 8.60m (28ft 3in)-long XO 270. Yet that very thing is available on XO's 50mph pilot house speedster. The 270 is also available with a wide range of engines, comprising a multitude of petrol outboard models (single 250hp to 300hp, and twin 150hp to 250hp) plus three diesel sterndrive versions (300hp or 370hp Volvo, plus 370 V8 Mercury). And because the alloy XO hulls

are vinyl wrapped, not painted, there is an almost limitless opportunity to customise the look of your XO. So with all that choice, where to start?

Decisions decisions

I've been fortunate enough to test this boat in most of its incarnations: with single and twin outboards, with mighty 370hp Volvo and 370hp Yanmar diesel sterndrives, and in forward cabin and conventional layout forms. Converting the dinette in the pilot house is all very well (and at 2.06m [6ft 9in]-long it's generous too) but it cannot match the convenience of the permanent V-berth in the Front Cabin version (as XO

label it), especially with the unusually fiddly conversion that involves six separate cushions. However, that front cabin option gobbles up the lovely foredeck seating area that our test boat had, a space that sports three handy deck lockers, plus a useful working area that makes it easier to moor and anchor, and to disembark.

If you feel that sacrifice is worthwhile for the pleasure of a more comfortable permanent bed, don't forget to ponder the inextricably linked question of the engines. Hinging seats in the cockpit may well give you all the outside socialising space that you need (enough for six adults to cosy up around the removable



In praise of aluminium

Superyacht owners will happily spend millions building gigantic boats constructed entirely of aluminium, and yet it's not always easy to convince buyers of small production boats that aluminium is a viable alternative to the usual glass fibre - which is ironic, because the smaller the boat, the more pronounced the myriad advantages of owning a boat built of aluminium.

Most obviously, glass fibre has three potential foibles that aluminium simply cannot suffer from: gelcoat crazing, osmosis and orange peel effect - the surface rippling caused by long-term shrinkage of the gelcoat down onto the top layer of fibreglass, an effect that is more evident and commonplace on dark hulls living in hot and sunny climates. Another benefit is that aluminium can be recycled in perpetuity, whereas GRP is extremely difficult and expensive to salvage, so eco bonus points to the alloy brigade. One enduring myth is that metal boats are noisy underway. Well, that has emphatically not been my experience to date. They

do sound different, but solid muffled thuds from wave impacts, on a par with the quieter foam or balsa-cored glass fibre boats I've tested, are all I've had to endure.

Marine-grade aluminium is also incredibly tough and strong - like Jason Statham tough. We could examine any number of scientific properties, but perhaps it's enough to know that aluminium's physical properties are so impressive that they usually allow stiff alloy boats to be constructed without the bonded bulkheads that would be essential in their floppier glass fibre counterparts. Like steel, alloy is quite stretchy, and marine-

grade alloy can typically elongate by 10% before it will tear or puncture. Along with its strength, this means that in practice it's surprisingly difficult to hole an aluminium boat. Instead, when steel or alloy boats hit something, they tend to stretch a lot first. And metal boats are very easy to repair, either by welding in new plates or by knocking out smaller dents. Neither process requires the repairer to bother much about temperature and humidity, as GRP repairs do.

The threat of corrosion still looms in some minds - not helped by the fact that some specialist anodes are made from aluminium alloys. However,

aluminium anodes typically contain 5% zinc plus a little iron. The tough alloy that XO use (along with most other builders of aluminium boats) is 5083 marine-grade alloy. This has a vastly different composition containing around 5% magnesium, plus a smidgen of manganese and silicon and chromium, hence its excellent resistance to corrosion.

Aluminium alloy also has an invaluable self-healing property. Unlike steel, it doesn't really matter if an accident chips away the paint and exposes the raw metal. Strictly speaking, in these circumstances both metals technically do the same

thing: they rust. However, whereas steel produces unsightly red stains, oxygen in the atmosphere or the water rapidly combines with the exposed aluminium to form a protective film of aluminium oxide, and this appears to be relatively innocuous. So although aluminium can be affected by galvanic corrosion, this self-healing property is its saving grace. So effective is this restorative oxidised skin that some owners choose to leave their alloy boats completely unpainted except for the antifouling. Of course, that's not the XO way - the vogueish lure of a fashionable vinyl wrap is too good an opportunity to miss.

BOAT TEST XO 270



Few boats this small have sociable seating areas at both ends of the boat.



Well-disguised head compartment to port has sitting room only.

DESPITE ITS WEIGHT, THE 760KG D6 370HP VOLVO STERDRIVE 270 I TESTED PERFORMED JUST AS WELL AS THE LIGHTER OUTBOARD BOATS ...

table), but that arrangement is only possible if you have the outboard version. The engine room hatch/cockpit floor is necessarily much higher on the inboard sterndrive version, so even with Volvo's smallest D4 300hp diesel in place, the seating is supplanted by a wide flat deck space, suitable for storing and launching wakeboards and waterskis.

Inside the pilot house, the combination of convertible dinette, helm station and optional pantry (galley) module on the starboard side, plus the optional toilet module just in front of the crew seating on the port side, inevitably gobbles up most of the floor space – you will need to squeeze past your other crew if they're not sitting down. But it doesn't feel unnaturally squashed for a 28-footer, and the headroom along the walkway is 1.91m (6ft 3in). If

you opt for the standard version and eschew the front cabin, there is a long pilot berth running forward from the helm station, which doubles as an exceptionally large inside locker.

If your choice between diesel sterndrive and petrol outboard is based on costs, then although

SPECIFICATIONS

XO 270 Cabin

Length: 8.60m (28ft 3in)
Beam: 2.59m (8ft 6in)
Fuel capacity: 450L (99 imp gal)
Water capacity: 100L (22 imp gal)
Draught: 0.95m (3ft 1in) leg down
Air draught: 2.50m (8ft 2in) + mast
RCD category: C (for 10 people)
Displacement: 2250kg (excl. engine)
Transom deadrise: 24 degrees
Design: XO

PRICES (inc. 20% UK VAT)

Starting price: £157,470 single 250hp
As tested: Circa £178,236 twin 200hp

ENGINES

Outboard engines: 250hp to 500hp
Inboard diesels: 300hp to 370hp
Test engines: Twin 200hp Yamaha
Top speed: Circa 43 knts (twin 200hp)

the maths is straightforward, the decision is not so simple. Very approximately, based on all the data I've accumulated over five 270 tests, if you cruise for around 50 hours (according to Volvo, the UK owner's average annual run-time) at around 30 knots, diesel will cost you about £2,000 a year, whereas petrol will set you back around £5,000. However, the cost of the annual servicing on an inboard diesel and its sterndrive leg (the frequently forgotten cost) can be eye-watering. And if a major problem did arise in later years, the potential payback provided by the typically longer warranties offered on the outboard engines could easily trump the diesel fuel saving. You'll also need to factor in the higher initial cost of the diesel boat.

Two more things, both surprising. Despite its weight, the 760kg D6 370hp Volvo sterndrive 270 I tested performed just as well as the lighter outboard boats, achieving 42.4 knots – pretty much

THE NOISE AND VIBRATION FROM THE BIG D6 370-POWERED BOAT WERE VERY ACCEPTABLE ...

the same top speed as our twin 200hp Yamaha outboard test boat. You would expect a single to be more efficient than a twin installation (due to reduced appendage drag), but that's still impressive when you consider the Volvo boat was around 300kg heavier. The noise and vibration from the big D6 370-powered boat were very acceptable, and Volvo recently completely re-engineered the D6 and D4 diesels and introduced a new sterndrive leg, so noise, vibration and performance will only improve further.

Nevertheless, it's remarkable just how smooth and quiet the modern generation of outboard motors has become. If it's finesse you're after, the outboard-powered XO 270 is every bit as refined.

ON TEST



Twin overhead hatches improve through-boat ventilation no end.



BOAT TEST **XO 270**

Deck lockers are secured with adjustable catches.

WHICHEVER VERSION APPEALS, THE RESULT IS A POTENTIALLY 50MPH POCKET ROCKET THAT IS CAPABLE OF HIGH-SPEED PASSAGE MAKING IN QUITE CHALLENGING CONDITIONS.

Blast off

Whichever version appeals, the result is a potentially 50mph pocket rocket that is capable of high-speed passage making in quite challenging conditions. Trimmed correctly, the boat runs level and the helmsman's view out is good. Personally, I'd ditch the comically weedy windscreen wipers completely and instead apply a

good water-shedding coating like Rainex. Our twin 300hp Yamaha-powered test boat sported the Mente Marine trim system, but the current XO extras list shows the Zipwake, which is an option on the DFNDR. Insist on the Zipwake, which feels far faster-acting and more effective, and is more versatile and programmable too. With the engine weight comprising

up to 25% of the total boat weight, and a wide range of such notably different engine configurations too, correct trimming is key to getting the best out of these boats.

For the same rough-weather reasons as with the DFNDR, we weren't able to conduct credible speed and fuel consumption trials. But like the DFNDR, we did see 49mph on the clock before the looming pebble beach halted our progress. Our twin 200hp Yamaha test boat proved remarkably agile, but not so lively that it felt flighty, and it steadfastly refused to lose grip in tight turns. That said, it does feel slightly different to the Volvo D6 370hp sterndrive boat, which seems even more firmly planted – hardly surprising given its extra weight and its more deeply immersed single drive, complete with its astonishingly grippy duoprop propellers.

Conclusions

You could use the 270 simply to hurtle from A to B as quickly as is possible, safely cocooned inside the warmth of the pilot house, and then employ your credit card in the nearest B&B or restaurant or bar. Or you could pack both ends of the 270 with water sports toys and

head off for the day. Alternatively, with the Front Cabin version, and especially in diesel sterndrive form (with its much greater range), the 270 has the makings of a serious long-distance passage maker for a cosy couple. What a marvellously multi-talented metal miracle! **P&R**

CONTACT**Ideal Boat Sales**

Tel.: +44 (0)1758 703 013

Email: sales@idealboat.com

www.idealboat.com

<https://vimeo.com/361150937>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2_Bx0pyNVY



XO 270 Front Cabin version

+ HIGHS

- + All-weather boating potential
- + Numerous mix 'n' match options
- + Big sociable foredeck area
- + Alternative Front Cabin version
- + Inboard sterndrive & outboard power
- + Optional head compartment
- + Ultra-tough construction

- LOWS

- Weedy windscreen wipers
- Electrical panel positioning



SeaDek
MARINE PRODUCTS

www.seadekpro.uk | info@seadekpro.uk

Certified Installers now in the following locations:

Plymouth – Technical Marine Supplies

Salcombe – South West Marine Store

Poole/Channel Islands – Below Decks

Hamble – Marina Marbella

Southampton – Marine-Dek

Portsmouth – Grapefruit Graphics

Bristol – Wet Marine/ProCast Marine

Scotland – CHRU Marine

Northern Ireland – Mastercraft Ireland

Republic of Ireland - Ropedock

Gibraltar – GibDeck

Marine non skid PE/EVA decking • Custom designs available

Covers spider cracks, repairs and other surface imperfections • DIY sheets for self cut and install

3M™ peel & stick application • Great wet/dry traction for the harshest marine conditions

