

WHEELHOUSE WONDER

While no 27-footer can be all things to all owners, the sheer flexibility of Marino's All Purpose Boat (APB) breaks new ground for sub-30ft motorboats **TONY JONES REPORTS**

It is no coincidence that the APB 27 from Marino hails from northern Europe, where the climate is notoriously variable.

As motorboat performance levels increased throughout the 1990s, Scandinavians responded by inventing the fast wheelhouse sports cruiser. North of Marbella, this type of boat is now arguably more popular than the pure open sports cruiser.

The big challenge facing boatbuilders has always been how to provide a snug and dry wheelhouse for cruising in inclement weather that can also be thrown open as much as possible when the sun is shining. The traditional method is to use large windows, fit an expansive sunroof and make the opening doors to the cockpit as wide as possible. But the structural

requirements of a rigid wheelhouse have always placed a limit on the size of the apertures. Until now, that is.

SHARP STYLING

The term 'All Purpose Boat' (APB) might lead one to expect a rather utilitarian vessel in which appearance has been ruthlessly sacrificed on the altar of function. So it is a delight to find that the APB's styling is sharp, clean and bang up to date. A boxier and more upright wheelhouse might provide a little more interior space, but the APB's chosen teardrop shape looks great and doesn't compromise on functionality at all.

At first glance, the wheelhouse of the APB seems to be constructed entirely of glass apart from the C pillars at the aft end. This impression is reinforced

by the glass wheelhouse roof, which retracts in two sections, and the single pane windscreen. The dark finish on the outer faces of the mullions also helps.

Only when you step aboard does it become apparent that the wheelhouse is actually quite a substantial structure, made possible by the semi-walkaround design that sets the main and side decks low in the boat, providing deep, safe bulwarks.

The term 'semi-walkaround' is appropriate because one cannot walk right round the wheelhouse as the C pillar extends out to the gunwale just aft of the side doors. So communication between cockpit and main deck is through the saloon. This

BELOW At the touch of a button, the patio door assembly slides down into a recess below the cockpit sole



RIGHT All external woodwork (including the traditional striped soles) is birch, not teak



ABOVE The styling of Marino's APB 27 is sharp, clean and bang up to date

design feature ties the wheelhouse to the deck moulding in such a way as to significantly increase the rigidity of the former.

RETRACTING BULKHEAD

Were it not for this structural element, the boat's *pièce de résistance* — the disappearing wheelhouse rear bulkhead — wouldn't be possible. In effect, at the touch of a button, the entire patio door assembly, including its upper frame, slides down into a recess below the cockpit sole. Not only does this open up the interior to the cockpit in a way that would be otherwise impossible, it removes any headroom limitation from the cockpit through the middle of the saloon right up to the driver's seat.

Taking a big lump out of what is effectively a ring frame would normally be a disaster, but Marino has cleverly



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maintained structural integrity in three different ways. Firstly, the half-height C pillar is clearly exceptionally rigid. Secondly, where it rolls over to become part of the roof it is braced to the cockpit sole by two stainless tubes, and finally, the upper aperture is bridged by a substantial twin-tube 'roll bar' well

above head height. The wheelhouse roof is constructed in three sections — only the centre one is fixed and non-transparent. Fore and aft of this are two glass sliding sections that stack on top of the fixed panel at the push of a button. Just one or both sections can be retracted at the same time. ➔

Construction

Marino has worked closely with infusion consultants DIAB for the layup specifications, so it comes as no surprise to find extensive use of lightweight sandwich construction and a partly cored hull. Of particular note is the unique silver grey metal flake gelcoat (for both hull and upper wheelhouse) which will be a signature feature of all APBs. The finish is protected by clear lacquer applied to the mould before the gelcoat itself is sprayed on.

Finally, it's interesting to note that Marino considers it worth emphasising in its brochure that the entire production and supply chain is focused on finding environmental friendly alternatives to conventional materials and processes.

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Accommodation

The APB is clearly a dayboat first and foremost, but Marino has managed to squeeze in basic overnight sleeping arrangements for four people. The fore 'cabin' is essentially a large triangular double berth with a small standing area cut into its base. The toilet is revealed by removing a small section of berth. A small holding tank with overboard or deck discharge is standard.

The ingenious aft berths are perhaps best described as 'sleeping trunks' with their forward halves under the saloon side seats and their aft ends extending under the cockpit seats. Access is by hinging the saloon seats upward and clipping them back. This leaves the top half of each berth open to the saloon and prevents any feeling of claustrophobia.

The optional sink and cooker are located under one cockpit bench and beneath the helm seat respectively.



ABOVE Communication between cockpit and main deck is through the saloon



ABOVE The APB 27 boasts a flat 'roll-on, roll-off' loading facility

Even a casual look at the APB 27 indicates that this design presented Marino with a number of structural challenges and tricky moulding problems. The integration of the lower half of the windscreen frame with the wheelhouse sides and roof is the most obvious example.

excellent access to the side decks both from the helm position itself and the saloon area behind. Its backrest flips over to provide extra saloon seating when stationary.

The boat's other major innovation is the fold-down aft cockpit coaming that gives a totally flat 'roll-on, roll-

deep rubbing strake, made of six laminations of memory foam. In many mooring situations fenders would be unnecessary. The strake is constructed in sections, allowing easy repair should one become torn.

CONCLUSION

The combined effect of all this ingenuity is to deliver a fast wheelhouse cruiser that is as weatherproof as any competitor, but can also open up like no other when the sun is shining.

The drop-down transom is a stroke of genius that makes loading of large items such as dive compressors or surfboards virtually effortless and expands the available cockpit space by nearly a third.

The APB 27 casts an entirely new light on what can be done with a boat of this size and type. In short, it is an inspiration. 🗨️

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A good deal of thought has also gone into the helm seat. Fore and aft adjustment ensures a comfortable seated driving position and sliding it right back gives an unrestricted standing position when the forward roof is open. Its relationship to the twin sliding side doors is ideal and gives

off' loading facility. The key here is the forming of the coaming and the wide seat or step above the bathing platform as a single component hinged at the aft edge.

The wood-faced GRP cockpit 'guardrails' are visually distinctive and thoroughly practical, as is the

Marino company profile

Founded in 1958 by Tor-Bjorn Fagerstrom and his wife Kitty, Marino is now the oldest Scandinavian boat business still in its original hands. The company began by building sailing dinghies and rowing boats before graduating to larger sailing cruisers.

These days it is run by sons Ben (managing director), Jan (production manager) and Christer (sales manager), from a complex close to Helsinki that combines showroom and boat storage and maintenance, while the typical Scandinavian 'customer club' facility is at Sipoo.

The majority of its construction takes place in a factory further north at Pietarsaari. Hitherto, Marino has focused largely on its home market, where the brand is much respected, but it has also actively exported into other Scandinavian markets including Greenland.

Until this year, most of the range was based on comfortable deck saloon designs, concentrating on functionality over good looks. It would be fair to describe the styling as traditional, if not actually staid.

CONSTRUCTION SOLUTIONS

But the APB 27 has changed all that. Stunning practicality has been combined with the very latest modern styling to produce a boat that fully justifies that over-used word 'innovative' and comes close to revolutionary. Making the combination work has demanded some really clever mould and construction solutions coupled with mechanical engineering ingenuity. Clever design ideas and great attention to detail can be found throughout the boat.

Marino understandably remains cagey about the catalyst that has moved this family concern from the 'safe

and familiar' into 'ground-breaking' territory, but it is encouraging that such a thing is still possible in this age of corporate conservatism.

The plan is for APB to become a 'brand segment' separate from the current range, and smaller and larger versions are on the drawing board.

If the boatbuilding industry is to attract new customers as it emerges from recession, the sort of progressive thinking evident in the design of the APB 27 will be of the essence.

BASIC SPECIFICATIONS

- **LOA:** 8.2m
- **Beam:** 2.9m
- **Weight:** 3,000kg
- **Carrying capacity:** 8 people/920kg
- **Fuel capacity:** 290lt
- **Power:** Single sterndrive. 190–300hp
- **Maximum speed:** 25–40kt depending on engine