

MOTOR BOAT

& YACHTING

FIRST TEST MAREX 440

THE BEST
FAMILY
BOAT
EVER?



AS TESTED IN THE JANUARY 2024 ISSUE OF

MOTOR BOAT

& YACHTING

BOAT TEST

MAREX 440

GOURMET CRUISER

Behind the wheel of one of 2023's most hotly anticipated cruisers

WORDS: Alex Smith



The buoyant foredeck lounge can be chucked overboard and used as a lilo



LEFT: Marex's guiding principle is to build the world's best family cruisers from 30 to 50ft



BOAT TEST

LEFT: The galley and cockpit can be split by doors or linked as one

BELOW: With its big water tanks and high-spec appliances, the 440 is perfectly set up for extended cruises



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When Espen Aalrud took the reins from his dad in 1999, Marex was a small family firm, employing just 14 people at its Norway HQ. Today, it employs 400 people at its own 22,000m² factory in Lithuania and there are plans in place to expand that by an extra 10,000m².

That will apparently enable it to forge ahead with the construction of a new fleet-topping 50-footer, while also providing some much needed breathing space for its bulging trophy cabinet. But while the fleet has historically contained all manner of weird and wonderful creations from aft cabin platforms to cabriolet cruisers and swell-cleaving GTs, Espen is keen to clarify what Marex is all about. The mission, he says with trademark candour, is "to build the world's best family cruisers from 30 to 50ft" – and the new Marex 440 is designed to play a very important part in that.

EXTERNAL PARTY TRICKS

Even by Marex standards, the good things come thick and fast. The swim platform, for instance, has integrated teak steps that fold out as it lowers, so it can be used as a watersports platform and a tender lift. On either side of this are low-profile extensions running fore-and-aft on the outside of the bulwarks. Described as "cigars" by the team at Marex, these enable you to plant your foot and grab a cleat or a line, without having to over-reach or go to the trouble of accessing the internal deck. The hatches along

the leading edge of the swim platform also provide plenty of volume for fenders and lines and in addition to separate transom and deck showers, it's pleasing to see that the shore power cable is housed on a retractable coil, tucked neatly out of sight with a simple push-button switch to return it to its housing.

Move forward along the symmetrical side decks toward the bow and although it might look pretty simple, there are plenty of vivid little sparks of design intelligence up here too. The central sunbed, for instance, is built from closed-cell foam, which means you can disconnect it from the deck, lob it overboard and use it as a lilo with sufficient buoyancy for an adult and a couple of kids. Up at the step-through forepeak, the anchor locker hides a fold-out bowsprit with integrated ladder so you can achieve 2ft of forward extension without the extra marina and storage costs that a permanent fitting would incur. To keep everything neat and tidy, the anchor itself is thrust out through an automated hatch on the stem, and the fact that it's monitored by an overhead camera means you can chart the progress on your MFD when deploying or retrieving your anchor, without having to leave the comfort of the helm.

THE FOUR-SEASON CYLINDER

Ever since the emergence of the first aft-cabin cruiser, we've grown to love Marex's ability to create a long unbroken cylinder of four-season living space on a relatively compact platform, and the 440 repeats the trick. The big aft cockpit is securely hemmed in by elevated mouldings and lined on all sides by seating. That

enables the central table to open right out, creating an alfresco lounge big enough for ten (or even 12) people. It's sheltered too, thanks to a manually operated fabric sunroof overhead and curtain-style side canopies that pull out from concealed lockers in the roof supports. These slide around the aft end, before being tensioned over a neat little fibreglass lip by means of quick-fix retainers, so you can take advantage of the heating and AC to turn this external day space into a proper year-round party zone.

It's enjoyable for other reasons too. For instance, Marex is keenly aware that people like to sit in corners, so they've used extra cushions on adjoining bulkheads and the aft gate to create no fewer than five proper corner seats in this space alone. And ▶

BELOW LEFT: The cockpit can be enclosed with canopies for winter use or sleeping duties

BELOW: The timeless aesthetic should help keep residual values strong





INSET RIGHT: The bathrooms are really bright, thanks to unobstructed foredeck skylights

storage is excellent, too, thanks to undercut backrests and clever L-shaped lid mouldings that enable all the hatches to be lifted one-handed without any need for cushion removal.

Ahead of this, the internal saloon on this "Gourmet Cruiser" variant is swallowed up in its entirety by a massive aft galley that faces out into the cockpit. There's a little fold-out bar here to make the integration feel that bit more convincing but such is the scale of the aperture that, with the drop-down panel and the starboard door open, they really do feel like a single living space.

You can of course spec this boat with the more conventional internal saloon of the "Scandinavia" variant, where the big port galley is replaced by a huge U-shaped seating area. But that would be a shame because, even on this model, seating is plentiful and you also get the cruising benefits that a huge sociable cooking space brings. For instance, four big fridges in and around the galley provide a combined total of more than 500 litres of volume, enabling a family of four to go long spells without having to head ashore for supplies. Three of those four can be used as freezers, simply by adjusting the settings and that cruising practicality is also backed up by a large washer-dryer in the port guest cabin, as well as a 780-litre water tank and a 335-litre holding tank – both of which are far more generous than you would tend to expect in this class.

Ease of movement and ventilation are also very strong in the saloon, thanks to a wide companionway and a pair of forward side doors, which open out onto lateral boarding points. And if you're concerned about the power demands of that high-spec galley, it's good to see that, in spite of a pair of large sunroofs, there are eight solar panels mounted on the hardtop, as well as space for an additional four. That's enough to take care of your key domestic systems but if you prefer to run your generator at anchor instead, you'll be pleased to know that the insulation is so effective that you'd struggle to tell whether it's actually running.

BELOW: Gourmet Cruiser variant swaps conventional saloon seating for a vast full-beam galley

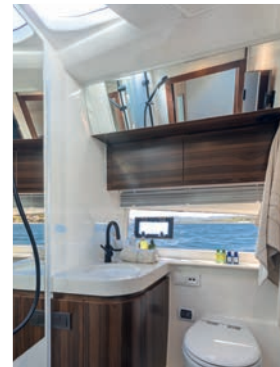


SLEEPING FOR EIGHT

The lower deck is split into a pair of mid cabins, a forward owner's cabin and two bathrooms – one to port and one to starboard. Natural light is good thanks to unobstructed foredeck skylights and deep hull windows and that is supplemented with a combination of spotlights and recessed LEDs. Pale carpeted bulkheads make the lower deck feel restful as well as bright, and storage is again a strength, thanks to a range of hardworking spaces inside cupboards, beneath steps and on shelves.

Although modest in scale, the two bathrooms work well too. While the port compartment serves as the ensuite for the owner's cabin, the starboard compartment is accessible from the central companionway for easy use as the day heads. And in another clever touch from Marex, they each make use of a folding two-part screen that cordons off the heads and sink from the shower section so you can use it as a wetroom without getting your towel or your clothes damp.

The test boat's three-cabin layout is very effective for a family of four but if you cruise as a couple (or as a couple of couples), the two-cabin option is by far the better solution. It uses the space beneath the helm to create a massive starboard ensuite for the owner's forward cabin. It then combines the two guest cabins into one vast full-beam space with access to its own ensuite facilities on the port side. The enlarged mid cabin is so big in fact that there's plenty of room for a starboard settee to accommodate a third guest, so cruising with five



The three-cabin layout is very effective for a family of four

The owner's cabin is forward in the three cabin version. Curved edges, ambient lighting and soft linings feel very premium

people remains very feasible – and of course you still have a huge convertible double in that self-contained aft cockpit.

With its secure wraparound design, quick-rig canvases, black-out blinds and natural separation, it's a brilliantly private space and it's made all the more so because of the pilothouse's twin side doors and midships boarding points. It means you can get up in the morning, make breakfast, watch TV, lounge at the helm, head to the bow or step ashore without disturbing the cockpit guests in the slightest. In the three-cabin layout, that makes this a genuine eight-person cruiser. But even in the more decadent two-cabin configuration, sleeping for seven is by no means an issue.

FAMILY COMES FIRST...

The test boat uses D6-480s hooked up to IPS drives but you can also have D6-440s operating through stern drives. Either way, this

is not about high performance because Marex has no desire to go beyond 35 knots when its boats are likely to be stocked with crockery, glasses and loved ones. Instead it's all about refined, safe and efficient family-friendly cruising. ▶



LEFT: Clever hinged screens cordon off the sink and loo from the shower



ABOVE: The guest double shown here and the twin (below) are replaced by a single bigger full beam master cabin in the two-cabin version



ABOVE: The long hull window and extra headroom over the bed ensures the twin cabin still feels bright and comfortable enough for guests or children



There's a heavyweight feel to it all that feels pleasantly reassuring

Pick up is very sound for a 13-tonne boat, visibility is good, and efficiency looks reasonably sustainable too. At everything between 22 and 32 knots, we're seeing a fuel flow of between 4.3 and 4.7 litres per mile for a range in the region of 200 miles, which is plenty for most family applications.

The use of microfibre linings on the bulkheads and ceilings also helps absorb any stray noise, keeping the sound readings down to the low 70s, even at a fast cruise. That said, the refinement is certainly more pronounced than the handling vigour. In fact, it requires a few more boat lengths than you might anticipate when attempting to execute a rapid 180° turn. But the heel is settled, the grip at the props is unfussy and there's a heavyweight feel to it all that feels pleasantly reassuring.

While we're at the helm, it's also worth noting that in the absence of conventional saloon seating on this Gourmet model, Marex has been careful to maximise the practicality of the helm seats. The fact that there are four of them means that the entire family can get involved in the drive but you can use them for your downtime too. The co-pilot bench gets a neat fold-out teak table large enough for food, drink, laptops and books, as well as a deep storage tray with a soft-touch lining. And even the skipper can join the party, thanks to wraparound cushions and elevated backrests that enable you to raise your legs and face inboard with a glass of wine when you come to anchor.

As a freshwater lake trial rather than a true sea trial, we can't yet vouch for the softness or the dryness of the 440's warped hull design but everything else feels as competent and dependable as a dedicated family boat ought to. The use of a shallow 13-degree deadrise for pace and stability, alongside finer forward angles for wave-cutting duties certainly makes good sense. Of course, work is still ongoing to reconfigure the back end of this boat so that Marex

can derive maximum efficiency and refinement from a shaft-drive installation – and that will be a critical option, particularly in Asia and Australasia, where buyers are keen to minimise servicing requirements. But as things stand, this 440 does exactly what you expect of it. No fireworks but no concerns either.

VERDICT

If the degree of thoughtfulness in the design of this boat is outstanding – and it really is – then its execution is very much on a par. That's partly because of the calibre of work that goes on at the factory and partly because of the care lavished on the refinement of the boat as it undergoes the long finessing process between initial concept and final product.

There is more to be done of course and we will see that in minor tweaks like the raising of the helm position, the creation of a quick-release mechanism for the aft gate and the upsizing of the external guardrails. But the Marex 440 already feels like a distinctly premium piece of work. Clever, flexible and painstakingly resolved, the fact that it's classically (rather than radically) beautiful also means that it ought to do justice to Marex's reputation for sky-high residual values. In short, as Espen continues his mission to streamline the fleet with the establishment of a common design philosophy, he would do very well to adopt the new Marex 440 as his blueprint.

CONTACT: www.marex.no

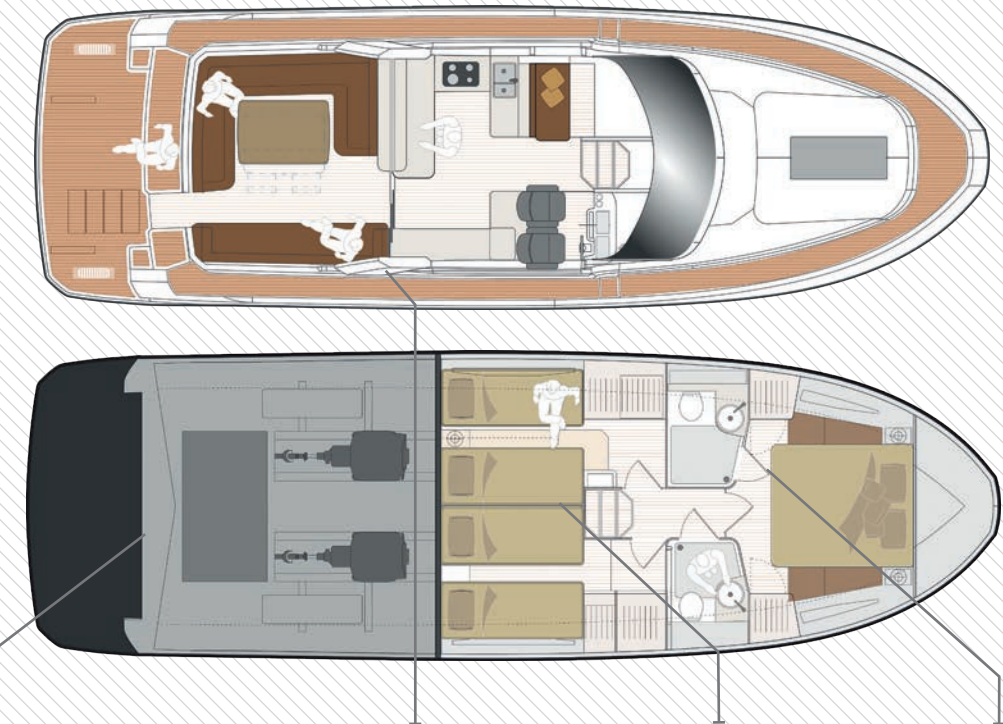
ABOVE: The 'hidden' anchor hatch frees up the space for a clever fold-out bowsprit



ANCHOR WORK
You can keep an eye on progress with a bow-mounted anchor camera as standard

EASY ACCESS
The side doors provide access to handy midships boarding points

SMART DASH
The wheel, throttle and tabs sit on an independently adjustable dash unit



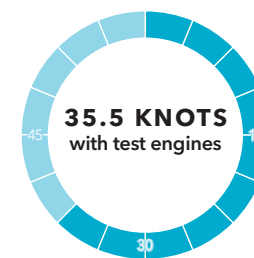
DRIVE OPTIONS
Sterndrive, IPS or shaft-drives? You can take your pick on the 440

COCKPIT COVERS
Curtain style canopies stow in these roof supports when opened

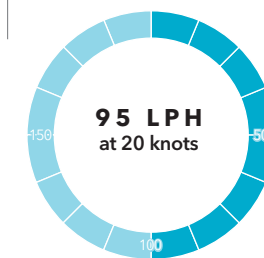
TWO OR THREE
If you opt for the 2-bed layout, the mid cabin spans the entire beam

DOOR JAM
The bathroom door won't open fully due to the foot of the bed

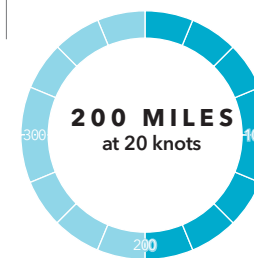
TOP SPEED



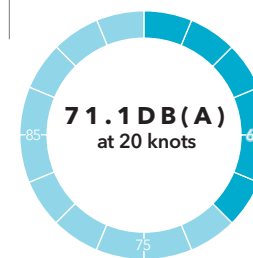
CONSUMPTION



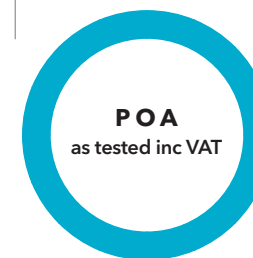
RANGE



NOISE



PRICE



SPECIFICATION

- LOA: 44ft 11in (13.70m)
- BEAM: 14ft 0in (4.27m)
- DRAFT: 3ft 3in (1.00m)
- DISPLACEMENT: 13 tonnes
- FUEL CAPACITY: 1,190 litres
- WATER CAPACITY: 780 litres

COSTS & OPTIONS

- PRICE FROM: POA
- Med-spec air conditioning
- Hydraulic aft platform
- Fold-out bowsprit
- WhisperPower 8kW generator

PERFORMANCE

TEST ENGINES: Twin 5.5L six-cylinder Volvo Penta D6 480hp diesels on IPS drives

	1,750	2,000	2,250	2,500	2,750	ECO	FAST	MAX
RPM	1,750	2,000	2,250	2,500	2,750	3,000	3,250	3,500
Knots	9.7	10.9	13.6	17.8	22.5	27.0	30.6	34.5
Litres per hour	44	66	84	97	105	125	144	170
Litres per mile	4.54	6.06	6.18	5.45	4.67	4.63	4.71	4.93
Range	210	157	154	175	204	206	202	193
Noise (dB(A))	65.3	69.5	70.0	72.0	70.4	71.2	73.0	76.5

CALCULATED figures based on real-time readings, yours may vary considerably. Figures allow for 20% reserve. All prices inc VAT. 90% fuel, 50% water, 3 crew + safety stores. 9 degrees air temperature, F2 and 0-1ft seas for sea trial.



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