

By Evan Says

Sea Trial: Power



Monaro 298

Boating on the West Coast is often dependent so much on the weather. Here at Monaro Marine, Dan Parker has for years been designing hardtop boats that can cope with all types of conditions. Running open sunbridge-type boats is normally restricted to the peak summer months, unless you are particularly hardy.

One of the latest models from this Richmond-based factory is the 298. The hardtop performs two duties: first as a steering station, and secondly as a dining and seating area, with a view. The "Arctic bulkhead" turns this into a very comfortable area in all conditions and is considerably larger than the 27 model from which the 298 is derived.

CONSTRUCTION

I have to say that this vessel is well built, being a fiberglass deep V hull handlaid with a vinyl ester resin skin coat and an epoxy seal coating to guard against osmosis. All framing is totally encapsulated in mat and roving, so there is not much chance of any rot getting in there. Monaro has a

very loyal following of people who appreciate tough, rugged boats; and as they have been in business for some 31 years, they must be doing something right. Monaros have a justifiable reputation for being very seakindly and a joy to drive in virtually any weather.

You'll find stout handrails in all the right places and they are particularly welcome up on the bow platform for anchoring, as well as aft for boarding. The hardtop accommodates the radar and rod holders and will take all the arrays you can find, such as GPS, VHF antennas, and so on.

INTERIOR

The main difference between this boat and the popular 27-foot version is in the area under the hardtop. It is much more spacious, with room for a larger table and additional seating. The headroom under the hardtop is maintained at 6'4" in the Monaro 27-foot and 298 models. The hull has been extended in the stem, so there is a larger berth under the steering sta-

tion as well. The V berth converts from a dinette, and the galley is to port, with the toilet to starboard. Just forward of the toilet is more galley workspace and a microwave. The arrangements are simple, easily cleaned, and unpretentious: just the ticket for the family that enjoys using their boat all year-round for both fishing and cruising in safety.

The test boat was kitted out with almost every conceivable gizmo, which gives an idea as to what can be done on this boat. The heating system is great, with two bus heaters below in the main cabin, and a separately controlled hot-water diesel heating and ventilation unit in the 'loo. There are vents for the windshield to keep windows clear on those winter fishing trips, and another bus heater up there to keep the helmsman and passengers nice and toasty.

There is a large freezer under one of the seats up top, and a fridge below in the galley. Storage is more than ample and the whole interior is designed for easy cleaning and low



Monaro 298. (Photo courtesy of Monaro)





Clockwise from top left:
Convertible V berth with lots of stowage.
Simple, uncluttered dashboard.
Storage for electric downriggers inside.
Galley with handy garbage bin, twin-burner alcohol stove with chopping board and stainless sink to port, and microwave and more work surface to starboard.
Stand-up head with shower, hot and cold water, and sink.

maintenance. A large Bowmar hatch lights up the V berth area and gives another access to the foredeck (where there is a good-sized anchor locker and an electric windlass). It includes a bug screen, as do the portholes on either side of the space. These are under the gunwale and can even be left open when it's raining.

COCKPIT

Again, the additional length has allowed for larger windows and another dinette area up top in the sunshine, and both the helmsman and passenger's seats swivel around to make a cozy seating and entertaining area that is under-cover and can be used in any weather.

The window frames are of tough, welded and powder-coated aluminum and the windows are on sliders for lots of ventilation if needed. As I mentioned above, the heater vents keep the strong windshield clear on the inside and there are two wipers on the outside. The comprehensive dash is accessed from behind via the toilet and a hatch, making service and maintenance easy here as well. In the test boat, a new generation Furuno NavNet vx2 all-in-one display was used that combined a GPS/WAAS chart plotter, radar, fish finder/depth sounder, and a networked weather fax. This made for a clean and uncluttered dash area. The tacks showed not only engine revolutions but also fuel

consumption, which is a very handy thing. Unfortunately, our boat had not been synchronized so we were unable to check fuel consumption. But a good guess would be around 20 litres per hour per engine at about 26 knots cruising. Top speed is in the 38-knot range.

DOWN BELOW

The curtained-off V berth forward is a good size (6'4") and aft is a full queen-sized bed under the cockpit sole. The toilet and shower room (6'3" headroom) is light, airy, and easily cleaned.

The galley area is split between the port and starboard side and has lots of drawers and cupboards to stow things, and there is even a small hanging closet.

The cabin sole was teak and holly in this case and there were wood trim touches, but not enough to make maintenance a chore.

Fuel, water, and holding tanks are all situated under the sole and through-hulls are easily accessible.

MECHANICALS

This vessel was equipped with twin 190-hp Volvo D3 190/DPS 2.4-litre five-cylinder turbo-charged units coupled with dual-prop inboard/outboard drives. To me this is the very best for the boat. The standard power plant would be a single big block V8 Volvo gas engine, giving lots of speed, but a lot less thrifty on fuel. These are a revolution in lightweight diesel engineering and I was pleasantly surprised to find how quiet they are. They sit at the stern of the boat in a cavernous engine room that has a removable partition built in front to enable storage of deck chairs, kicker motors, tarps, etc. In my mind, there is nothing like dual-prop drives to get a larger powerboat up on the plane with the least drama. The contra-rotating props enable the boat to track beautifully, and the EVC (Electronic Vessel Control) signals that this is pretty much a "fly by wire" control system too. Throttle settings are entirely electronic, but a cable is still needed for the gears. It is however, very user-friendly, smooth, and precise to use.

I also noted the NorthStar NSB.M12 batteries are slim line and can be mounted in any position, except upside down.

SEA TRIAL

Dan Parker had brought his son Brad along for the test and we set about extricating ourselves from the boat shed in Vancouver Marina on the Fraser River. For once it was a lovely day. No rain, no hurricanes — just a great cruising day. Dan took us under the bridges towards the North Arm so that we could open her up and get a feel for the ride. The river was a dark muddy brown, in stark contrast to the blue sky as we headed out towards the Strait of Georgia. A tug-boat was headed toward us, so we played with the wake for a while, and I started to understand why the new owner of



From top:

Note the stern opening with door and handy railings.

Large removable rails make the huge stern platform a safe place to be for docking or catching the sun.

Engine lid is lifted on a hydraulic jack and gives easy access. Note the engine control boxes just ahead of the engines.

this vessel had decided to buy the boat. He had apparently rented one in Campbell River on a fishing trip recently, and had been able to really try out the marque. The ride through all kinds of conditions was what had solidified his decision to buy this hardy vessel. Coming on the plane is easy and happens with little bow rise, and I found that the visibility was superb from our captain's chairs. I sat in the comfortable yet simple covered cockpit with the "Alaska door" shut and could just see how nice it would be to take a run up the coast to a favourite fishing hole — and not have to worry about freezing my little buns in winter.

The boat heeled into the turns as she should and took the wakes we found easily. I went aft to see how she felt underway and found it a stable platform. Looking farther aft, I noted the recently redesigned swim platform, which is big enough to be able to set up a couple of deck chairs on, or

put the tender on and still have room to walk around it. Large hooped rails kept me from falling in and are really handy when docking, as I found out later when we were back at the boat shed.

CONCLUSION

Once again Monaro has looked to their loyal customers and their suggestions on how to improve the vessels, and the 298 is a triumph for Dan Parker. I love the new aft platform, the large cockpit area, and the accommodations below: simple but functional. No fancy stuff to break and fall off; everything works and works well, is easily maintained, and looks great.

Sleeping four people plus a child or two is possible given the huge queen-sized bed under the cockpit sole, the V berth forward, and the possibility of converting the dinette up top into a bed if required.

Monaro is a company that will take your old Monaro and alter it or refurbish it to suit your needs. They will talk with you about special features not normally found in other boats, and endeavour to satisfy their customers' needs. They think of the customer first and will build to suit. The vessel I tested today starts at an incredible \$160,000 in base form, which could leave you quite a few dollars to play with before you arrived at comparably priced boats on the market today. Think of the goodies you could bolt on!

Call Dan or Brad Parker at Monaro Marine (located at 12711 #5 Road in Richmond) at 604-277-7433, and be sure to check out the website at monaromarine.com. This family company will be happy to help set you up with a boat to suit your needs. I do not think you will be disappointed.

Evan Seys is a dedicated sailor, but he always appreciates a good powerboat. After 45 trips across the Atlantic and one to Hawaii in a 40-footer, he knows the seas and the vessels that sail on them. ■

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