

Angliã Afloat

March/April 2012

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BOAT TESTS
Merry Fisher 645 & 725
Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 379



£3.95



Plenty of glass on the Merry Fisher 745 lets in lots of light.



A side view shows the boat's attractive, sweeping deckline.



A practical bench seat and gated access to the bathing ladder.



The 745 with a powerful and economical 30hp Honda outboard.

Duncan Abel was spoilt for choice when trying out two boats in Jeanneau's Merry Fisher range, the 645 and the 725. Although they are designed for use by sea anglers, he found them well suited for our region's inland waters

Offshore by design...

BOATS IN THE MERRY FISHER RANGE FROM JEANNEAU were primarily designed as offshore sports fishing boats, powered by outboards of up to 150hp, but they are also at home on more tranquil inland waters and rivers.

When asked if Anglia Afloat would be interested in testing not one but two from the range, the 645 and the 725, I jumped at the chance. I do not have many opportunities to get on the water nowadays and even less to get behind a wheel or my hands on a tiller.

The offer came from Ben Jones, of Jones Boatyard in St Ives, Cambridgeshire, which has recently taken up a sub-dealership from main Jeanneau motorboat

dealers Morgan Marine based in Brightlingsea.

"We had been looking for a while at a number of manufacturers, their boats and what packages they would enable us to offer our clients," said Ben, when I asked why they chose Jeanneau.

"Once we started talking to Jeanneau and Morgan Marine it was clear that not only the type of boats available but also the after-market client service was exactly what we wanted to provide."

Arriving early one morning in St Ives, I was welcomed by bright sunshine and still air, a perfect day for messing about on the river.

I was greeted by Ben who said I would

have the pleasure of his father's company, Mike Jones, for the day.

It was Mike's father, Laurie, who first started the boatyard in 1946 and the business is now in its third generation, with Mike's sons, Ben and Sam, handling the day-to-day running.

Over the years the family has changed and developed the business, and last year had planning permission granted for a new 104-berth marina extension.

I was very happy to see how well the boats looked tied up in what is a picturesque marina.

Their lines draw the eye very easily, with the sheer amount of glass an unmissable feature of both the 645 and 725. →



...river use by choice



The helm position and ample glazing gives the skipper good, all-round vision.

→ My heart immediately jumped to the lines and size of the 725 while my head kept being turned by the 645; this was going to be repeated throughout the day!

Outside, the 725 gives plenty of aft cockpit space, a bench seat, a miniature access gate to the bathing ladder and large under sole storage locker, which comes well lined and finished.

Jeanneau have carried this detail on in the under sole storage lockers throughout the rest of the boat. Other practicalities like cleats, fairleads and rod holders are all placed in ideal positions.

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There are steps up to both side decks and the access forward to the bow is made very safe by means of the tall siderails.

Hand-holds can be found in all the places that you might need them. My experience has always been that these have tended to be an afterthought, and require to be fitted post-commissioning, so Jeanneau are definitely on the ball with their practical safety considerations.

Entering the interior of the 725 through the sliding door from the cockpit, I found the benefit of the large amount of glass – light – and an



An adaptable, practical boat for river or sea.



A front view of the 645 moored up.

enormous amount of it too. Not only is there a practical-sized skylight, the aft quarter windows are even curved.

The helm position gives simply wonderful all-round vision even if the crew is at the table. The table lowers to become a generous single berth or, if you have small kids, there's potentially room for two. The helm seat tilts forward to reveal a galley area comprising a sink and drainer plus a portable stove, neatly hidden away when not required.

Stepping down into the bow, there is a heads compartment to starboard, then good-sized double berth, which feels nice and private, and a small but useful clothes stowage locker.

Both boats have bow lockers for an



Mike Jones in the roomy interior of the 645. A hinged bench seat can be altered to face forwards or to the stern. Pictures by Duncan Abel



The dinette area in the Merry Fisher 725.

anchor/kedge with fairleads and strong points for a capstan winch.

We slipped our lines and motored gently out of the marina on to the River Great Ouse, heading up towards St Ives town. I put the 725 through its paces first of all, finding the boat responsive, very easy to handle both in a straight line and when wheeling hard over; and in fact the 645 handled equally as well once I had swapped over. My only small criticism is that the throttles were rather sticky; this didn't actually create a problem with over-powering the engines and is a small issue easily remedied by simple adjustment.

Mike explained to me that due to the difference in weight of the outboards the Merry Fisher range normally sports, they

Specifications

■ 725 Premier River Package

Length overall: 7.15m/23ft

Hull length: 6.97m/23ft

Hull beam: 2.75m/9ft

Light displacement: 1,850 kg/
4,070 lbs

Standard keel draught: 0.6m/2ft

Fuel capacity: 200 L

Water capacity: 100 L

Engine: Honda 30 HP 4 Stroke.

Marine toilet and holding tank

Price: £34,500, including VAT

■ 645 Premier River Package

Length overall: 6.61m/22ft

Hull length: 6.43m/21ft

Hull beam: 2.54m/8ft

Weight without engine: 1,345 kg/
2,959 lbs

Standard keel draught: 0.53m/2ft

Fuel capacity: 136 L

Water capacity: 20 L

Engine: Honda 20 HP 4 Stroke

Sliding sunroof and inside cover

Table dinette to port

Price: £28,500, including VAT

■ Agents: Jones Boatyard, Low Road, St Ives, Cambridgeshire, PE27 5ET. Tel – 01480 494040. Website – www.jonesboatyard.co.uk



Sliding doors provide a wide entrance.

had added some ballast and given each outboard a hydrofoil to assist with the handling. Had Mike not told me this information, I would have been none the wiser.

With both boats powered by Honda four-strokes, the 725 by a 30hp and the 645 by a 20hp, I found both to be perfect for their intended use, and in fact found the turning circles on each to be only enhanced by the hydrofoil's addition.

The 645 may be the smaller of the two boats but don't underestimate its ability. The aft cockpit is only slightly smaller but sports a larger bench seat which spans the stern and benefits from a hinged back making a lovely sundeck area. A removable table makes this space special indeed. →



Above – The 645 with its extended roofline, left, and the 725 about to pass under the landmark bridge at St Ives.

Left – The double-berth cabin in the 725.

Below – the interior of the 725.

Right – The 645 under way and heading upstream from St Ives.



→ The aft roof overhangs further back on the 645 but is furnished with one of the two skylights onboard. With double sliding doors leading into the interior, the feeling of space is accentuated.

With the galley situated again on the starboard side aft of the helm position, on the 645 you don't require to tilt the helm seat forward to access the sink, so the skipper can remain in situ while the crew get the wets on. Again, the table drops to become a generous berth, with the table's supporting pole dropping into grooves underneath and across the table.

The forward double bench seat back not only folds back flat to become the berth but also hinges to allow crew to face forward when under way.

Unlike the 725, the double berth in the bow is not sectioned off with a bulkhead but is fully open; for privacy a curtain is fitted which is of obvious benefit if you choose to have the chemical head fitted. The amount of internal storage will be welcomed by all. There are lockers under the bench seats, under the galley, and lined bilge stowage under the companionway.

Again the 645 feels wonderfully light and airy due to the vast amount of glass. The extra opening provided by the double sliding doors along with the internal skylight actually gave me the feeling of there being more space than on the 725.

I was very glad Mike chose to go through the bridge at St Ives first. I simply followed his line under the only navigable arch and

continued upstream. The boats were ideal for a day out on the river and would work well for a weekend break. With the spacious but safe aft cockpit areas on both boats, the 645 and 725 would make ideal starter boats for families trying boating for the first time.

As we tied up, I was in a quandary over which boat I preferred. My heart kept telling me that the 725 was the one with its sweeping lines, but my head was telling me that the 645 was the boat to pick with its practical layout and space. I couldn't decide in the end – so take a trip down to Jones Boatyard in St Ives and let us know which one you prefer.

■ Send your email to editor@angliaafloat.co.uk. 