

FREE DIGITAL MAGAZINE

Motorboat Owner

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Affordable practical boating

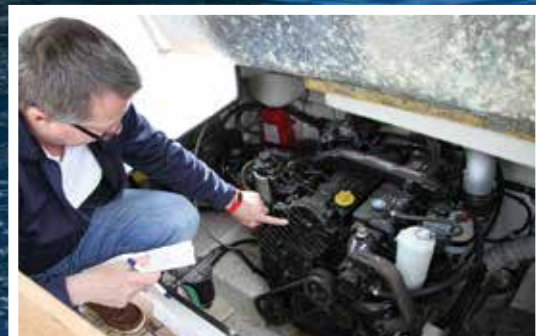


Corvette 32/320



BOAT TEST

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Corvette 32/320

Are you looking for a cruising motorboat that offers voluminous accommodation, comfort and oodles of deck space? This month we have been looking at a very clever, British-built trawler-style boat that has been with us for over 40 years, the Corvette 32, a model that combines the handsome looks and characteristics of a traditional-style trawler yacht, but yet has the ability to offer speeds up to 28 knots.

The Corvette had a rather turbulent history, with its design being sold on and resurrected four times over a period of 36

years. It was originally designed in 1972 by British naval architect Terry Compton, of the company Compton-McGill, and was first built in 1974 by Hampshire-based, Corvette Marine.

We suspect some inspiration may have come from the American trawler market, and the likes of Grand Banks, but the Corvette 32 is a very British design, and great things had been achieved aboard this chunky boat measuring exactly 32ft. It offered six berths in two separate cabins, a flybridge, a raised aft deck, fully walkaround decks and an aft master cabin,

not forgetting an abundance of teak decking and interior/exterior joinery. British-built aft cabins of the 70's included the Solar 32, Freeman 32 and Ranger 36, but there was simply nothing quite like the Corvette in the UK.

The boat was originally powered by twin diesel Volvo Penta or Mercedes-Benz engines, which, believe it or not, were mated to sterndrives or V-drives. This engine configuration encroached on the aft cabin significantly, but the builder still managed to squeeze in a double berth. Fitted with a pair of 106hp Volvo Penta



Built 1974-2010

Prices then £27,540 (1974)

Prices now £40,000-£180,000

Length 32ft / 9.95m

Beam 13ft / 3.96m

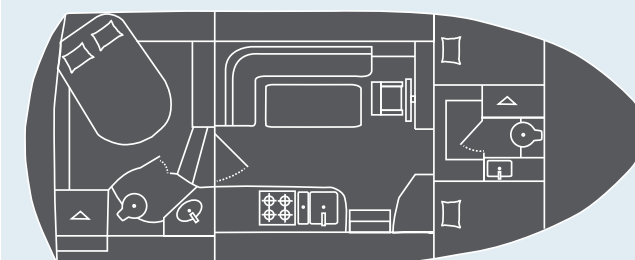
Draught 4ft / 1.22m

Air Draught 10ft / 3.5m

Fuel 180 gallons / 818 litres

Water 80 gallons / 363 litres

Displacement 6500kg approx



MD32A engines, the Corvette 32 made its debut at the 1974 Southampton Boat Show, priced at £27,540.

We understand that the Lymington-based company built approximately 10 32's before going into liquidation in 1977. But all was not lost. In 1984 the 32's moulds were bought by newly formed Nottingham-based company, Corvette Cruisers Ltd. After producing a few more V-drive boats, the builder switched to a conventional shaftdrive configuration, which was not only of great benefit to the aft cabin, with the engines now under



Two variations of the 32 were built, the Europa left and the Mediterranean right, but these are rare

the saloon floor, it also provided better handling. The boat was reborn. MDL Boat Sales, based at Penton Hook Marina at Chertsey, was the main Corvette dealer during the 1980's and exhibited the all-new 32 at the 1986 Southampton Boat Show for £58,995.

During the late 80's, the builder introduced a Mediterranean version of the Corvette 32. This was essentially a 4-berth aft cockpit trawler boat, with a large flybridge and a full beam covered aft cockpit. We came across one such example for sale in the UK a few years ago, but we have been unable to find out how many of these were actually built.

In the wake of some quality control issues, the struggling builder sought to revitalise the 32 in the early 90's by introducing a refined Classique version. Sadly this move was shortlived as the company fell into liquidation in 1991/2. Between 60-70 Corvette 32's were built at

the Nottingham factory before it closed.

The boat builder, Seacoral Motor Yachts based at Reedham in Norfolk, bought the company in 1992 and a dealership was established with the Shepperton-based broker, Boat Showrooms of London. Seacoral sought to revitalise the model in every way possible, and rebranded it the '320'. Larger engines were on the long list of refinements, and the revised model was exhibited at the 1992 Southampton Boat Show priced at £110,802.

By 1997 a non-flybridge, Europa version was being offered. Designed to appeal to those looking to explore UK or European waterways, the Europa has a helm position on the aft deck and a lower air draft of 2.6m. However, the design did not prove popular, and we understand that only one of these was built.

Seacoral's build quality was highly regarded, and consequently the 320 grew in popularity. The company also raised

its profile by helping owners of older 32's with refits and renovation work. Operating under a revised company name, Corvette Marine, from 1994/5, the 320 was built at the Reedham factory until 2008 when, unfortunately, the recession forced the factory to close its doors. Approximately 12 320's were built under the Seacoral name, and 46 under the Corvette Marine name. This equates to roughly four boats a year produced over a period of 14 years.

But again, all was not lost and the Corvette was to rise again from the ashes for a fourth time, thanks to US boat builder, Fleming Yachts. The builder reignited the Corvette Marine name and set up production at its Tung Hwa factory in Taiwan. The two previous owners and managers of the Reedham factory, Steve Robson and Rod Nixon relocated to Taiwan to oversee construction and conception of a new model. In 2010, Fleming launched the new 340 model, which was based on the same 32ft hull. The 340 is a heavier boat, at 7500kg, and crucially, the aft walkaround decks have vanished to provide a full beam master cabin with an island double berth, and a one-level raised aft deck above. It also has a larger integral bathing platform, which brought the overall length up to 34ft 10in. Five 340's have been built to date.

On the used market today the Corvette spans a massive price range of £40-£180k. The 00's models with larger engines will, of course, be among the most desirable and hold their value of £100k upwards on the used market. 90's boats fitted with engines of 200hp upwards are an appealing compromise to a savvy buyer, offering speed, value for money and build quality. Finally 1980's 32's are usually the



Side by side, a 320 deck part in used during the 340's conception, top. Bottom, the new 340 was built by US builder, Fleming Yachts from 2010

most affordable on the market, and you are likely to find that dotting owners have ironed out many of the quality control problems suffered during this era. While these might be a little underpowered, they could prove superb cruising liveaboards for inland and coastal forays.

Despite its troublesome past, British boaters have really taken to the Corvette and, it seems, once you have owned one you will be loathed to part with it, nor find anything to match it for space, size, ability and comfort. As one owner said, "You really don't feel like you're on board a 32 foot boat. It feels like a little ship." Consequently these boats tend to stay in an owners possession for a long time. So what are these boats like to live with today? We stepped aboard a 1995 Reedham-built example to find out more.

Interior
Step through the side door of the Corvette



Original brochures, from 2009 left, 1997 middle and 1986, right



It has a very practical Scandinavian feel. The wheelhouse is light and versatile as a main living area

and you will immediately feel the comfort and security of the wheelhouse. This spacious main living area combines entertaining, helming and cooking facilities, which all sounds quite utilitarian but is actually extremely practical and a very comfortable space. A large windscreen and side windows provide partial-panoramic views, with two smaller opening ports looking out across the aft deck. Some mid 80's 32's can be identified by a smaller, sliding wheelhouse window above the galley on the starboard side, allowing space for an extractor vent above.

An L-shaped seating area on the port side offers seating for four people, storage, and a table that drops down to create an occasional double berth. Interestingly, U-shaped saloon seating was offered as a £2.5k extra on a 90's Reedham pricelist.

The galley unit is immediately opposite the dinette and is edged with a very

sturdy grabrail. Here, lift-out panels in the worktop conceal a sink/drain and a four-burner hob. Below the worktop is a generous-size fridge, a large shelved cupboard for storage and a gas oven and grill with pan storage underneath. A lack of galley storage was addressed by later builders who fitted eye-level cupboards above the galley windows for crockery storage. The galley usually has a moulded GRP worktop, which can stain easily. Consequently, we are aware of one owner replacing this with a Corian-effect top.

The helm lies slightly off-centre to port, and offers good visibility out of the boats huge three-pane windscreen. An adjustable single helm seat on a loose pedestal is seen on early boats and this can be moved over to the table. Later models may have a seat on a fixed pedestal, which is better for sea going boats. You will note there is no navigator's seat but



This '95 320 has the darker, mahogany joinery

this matter was addressed in much later models by shortening the dinette seating and slotting the nav seat into the small gap on the port side. Dashes and dials are arranged on panels ahead of the helmsman. This invariably leaves bracket mounting the only option for larger pieces of equipment, such as a radar screen or chartplotter.

Whilst in the wheelhouse we would recommend inspecting the wood surfaces and cabin linings for stains that could indicate leaks, in particular below the windscreen, windows and next to the side door. The end of the galley unit is one area that might well be suffering from exposure to the elements. It is possible to get under the decks on the starboard side, if you move the side steps away. This reveals a hole just



Re-organisation may be needed to fit new nav equipment



1995 320 £68,950
Twin Yamaha ME 420Dti diesels
TBS Boats Bray
01628 773177
www.tbsboats.com



1986 32 £39,950
Twin Volvo MD31A 65hp diesels
Boat Showrooms Shepperton
01932 260261
www.boatshowrooms.com



Choice of three 320's
£109,000 - £139,000
Karl Farrant Marine Sales
01932 853925
karlfarrantmarinesales.com



2004 £130,000
Twin Yanmar 6LP-DTP 260hp
Ancasta Dartmouth
01803 752498
www.ancasta.com



Making use of the bow shape, the forward cabin offers two berths and a central toilet compartment

large enough to crawl into.

The Corvette boasts an average headroom of 6ft throughout and, as you move through the boat, the feeling of space and practicality continues. Moving forward, a companionway door and top hatch opens up to reveal the boat's rather unconventional forward cabin. After you have descended steeply into the space, you will find that the cabin is divided into two by a central bow toilet compartment and wardrobe. The cabin offers two generously wide single bunks each side and plentiful storage, with every cavity utilised for drawers, cupboards and open-fronted lockers. We would recommend inspecting the bunk upholstery for stains, as leaks from the deck air vents are a common problem. The toilet compartment is a good size and is fitted with an escape hatch, a sea toilet and a sink unit with a shower mixer tap and storage. Overall this cabin is ideal for children or two adults sharing.

A door and a set of steps aft of the galley lead down into the spacious aft cabin master suite. Despite the encroachment of

the early engine configurations, and the changes of ownership, the layout in this cabin remained fairly similar throughout its build. Inside is a double berth to port, with a hanging locker, and generous toilet and shower compartment to starboard. One thing that may be different from boat-to-boat is the exact placement of the double berth. On the very first boats, this berth was flush against the port side. However, by the mid 80's, an angled berth was introduced allowing access to both sides of the bed. A choice of these two layouts was offered with the 90's 32 Classique, and Seacoral/Corvette Marine continued with this. 00's boats will usually have an angled berth.

Again every cavity and crevice of this cabin has been utilised for lockers or shelving. On the Seacoral example viewed, we particularly liked the way the dead space under the port side decks had been utilised as an open-fronted chart locker, and the additional lockers and drawers inside the massive wardrobe are surely a godsend. More storage, and the boats two

40-gallon water tanks, can be found under the aft berth. A panel in the base of the transom dresser unit can be removed to inspect the boats steering gear.

While customisation during build was fairly common, significant changes to the layout were rare. However, we have seen one very unusual 2+2 berth variation. This particular boat had the galley in the forward cabin with a bench settee and corner fridge unit on the starboard side of the wheelhouse.

Several different wood finishes may be seen aboard Corvettes, the most common, and most popular, being teak. The 1995 Seacoral example we viewed had been fitted out with mahogany joinery, which had been stained darker at the request of the owner in build. The dark wood may not be to everyone's taste and could limit the market for resale. However, we are told that a few days work by a wood joiner could reveal a lighter shade. With a two-tone wood effect proving popular on modern boats, highlighting and

varnishing only certain wear areas, such as trim and edging could be an option. Traditional teak and holly flooring was a popular option in the wheelhouse. A generator and diesel heating are two useful extras to look for. During the 00's, a 6kva generator priced at £7k, and a 5kw Eberspacher heating system with four outlets was available for £3k.

On Deck

The Corvette's side decks are absolutely incredible, so much so that in normal conditions there is usually no need to use the superbly sturdy metal guardrails when moving about on deck. The side decks are over 2ft wide in places, and are enclosed by a deep bulwark that is topped by a chunky teak toerail. The one-level decks extend all the way around the boat, narrowing at the stern between the transom and aft cabin moulding. The boat also sports very impressive trawler-like deck hardware, with metal-lined scuppers, rubbing strips, fairleads and chunky

In the palatial aft cabin, the double berth was fitted in two ways, providing a choice of either space or access





The Corvette has incredibly wide decks, which make this boat a joy to crew or singlehand. You will note that late 320's have stainless flybridge trim detailing, as opposed to teak, seen on early boats

stainless steel cleats.

Most Corvettes were fitted with teak decks as standard. These not only look fantastic, they are usually very practical and hardwearing. However, teak decks need to be maintained and as there is a lot of it on these boats, it is crucial to make sure that these are in good condition. Also be aware, teak-faced ply was used aboard many 80's boats, which can be prone to rot. If the decks are in poor condition, and replacement is the only option, this could set you back many thousands of pounds. Removal of the old deck is a mammoth job, and to be done properly the aft deck

seat mouldings and stanchions will need to be unbolted, which can only be achieved from the inside by taking down the headlining in the aft cabin. Be aware that some may choose to cut corners by cutting around the stanchions, and only replacing the exposed teak.

A vast anchor locker set into the sunken foredeck easily swallows up large fenders and, although it is self draining, this locker seems to stay quite wet, so we would recommend checking the anchor chain for corrosion. A large hatch in the starboard side deck reveals the boat's gas locker, and its two 4.5kg cylinders.



Corvette's have a spacious, raised aft deck. Right, a four-person seating area on a late 320 model



Moulded, narrow-tread steps lead up to the flybridge. Seating configurations vary, 90's boat pictured

A protruding side step on each side of the aft cabin moulding leads up to the large aft deck area. This spacious, flat deck is enclosed around the stern by sturdy metal guardrails and vinyl dodgers. Again there is likely to be differences between early and later boats here. We know that GRP L-shaped seating deck boxes were available in sets of two as a £1292 extra during the 00's. These are extremely useful for storage, and are placed in the corners of both the flybridge and raised aft deck levels. Be aware, these may not be bolted down to the decks. The aft deck might also be enclosed by characteristic 'Corvette' vinyl dodgers, which were a £470 extra in the 00's. Finally, on much later boats the aft deck may well have been transformed into a four-person alfresco eating and entertaining area, with two inward-facing bench seats and a table inbetween.

Inspect the side door frames, as on 00's boats these may be white painted aluminium, which can be prone to corrosion. Flaking or bubbling paintwork is often a sign of this. There are several DIY temporary options detailed on the

[Corvette Motorboat Association website](http://www.corvette-motorboat-association.com), but ultimately a powdercoat refurbishment as the best long-term answer.

Flybridge

A central set of wide moulded steps lead up to a spacious, trawler-like flybridge. The flybridge offers a very commanding central helm position and the forward part of this area is enclosed by an integral helm moulding, with sturdy metal guardrails (usually with vinyl dodgers) continuing aft. You will note that the helm position does not have a Perspex wind deflector that is commonplace on many flybridges. Instead, the stylish flybridge moulding scoops and deflects the wind away from the helmsman.

Through the years there were a few different flybridge layout configurations available. Some boats will have an L-shaped seat moulding, which extends out from the port side and offers seating for three. The interior of this seating module offers plentiful deck storage and, with two large access hatches facing aft, is capable of swallowing up the largest



An unusual hull shape offers speed and seakeeping

exterior seat cushions, brushes and other deck equipment. Other boats might just simply have three identical helm seats on individual pedestals. 00's 320's usually have a central three-person bench seat.

The integral helm and windscreen module is quite minimalistic, but is most practical for exposure to the elements. It incorporates a full width sloping dash, with switches and dials displayed on a central recessed panel (protected by a Perspex cover) in front of the helmsman. The throttles are usually mounted to the left. Navigation equipment, if fitted, is usually to the right of the helm. Raytheon/Raymarine equipment was fairly common on these boats, and later sea-going boats often have an 8-inch Raymarine E80 installed here. The helm module has a hatch to allow access to the steering and instrument wiring, and also provides access to storage within the console.

Hull and Handling

The Corvette, as a shaftdriven boat, has earned an excellent reputation for its stability and solid responsive handling at fast and slow speeds. Information on the seakeeping and handling of early boats fitted with V-drives and sterndrives is difficult to find, although the former should be almost as good, if not identical.

The 32/320 is a heavy boat, and bow trim may have been an issue in these versions, so trim tabs would be a useful feature to look out for. At the time of writing, we were unable to track down any V, or stern drive examples, and would love to hear from any owners of these aft-engined 32's.

Essentially a semi displacement cruiser, the Corvette does have quite an unusual hull shape. It has a very broad bow with a shallow vee entry, a round bilge centreline with flat underwater sections to generate lift, and a keel for slow speed stability. At sea, these boats have very broad shoulders, confidently pushing the water and waves aside for a dry ride, and a reassuring ability to carry on at a steady pace in choppy seas. Because of their unusual shape, beamy 13ft width and very bluff bow, we understand that these boats are a little tricky to lift out of the water, with not all boatyards having a suitable crane or hoist.

The 32 also has the remarkable ability to turn absolutely flat at speed, and comes with equally impressive slow speed manoeuvring, although a bowthruster may offer a little extra peace of mind in windy conditions. Please note longer rudders were one of the many refinements Seacoral made to the 320 during the 90's. We understand that an extra three inches

was added to the length for improved low-speed handling.

Most boats from the 1990's onwards will be fitted with a stainless steel radar arch. This was often adapted for inland use and, hinged down, gives an air draft of 3.2m, meaning it was possible for these boats to venture as far up as Oxford on the River Thames. For customers in the Channel Islands and similar areas, beaching legs, complete with a stainless steel keel band, were available at a cost of £1742.

Engines

This aft-cabin boat was originally powered by twin diesel 106hp Volvo Penta MD32A's, mated to sterndrives, and 105hp Mercedes-Benz OM352's engines on V-drives. Records indicate that these engines would have pushed the boat along at top speeds of around 16 knots.

The shaftdrive roll out of the early 80's brought a whole host of Volvo Penta engine options. In 1986 five Volvo Penta engine options were available, a base engine option being a pair of 65hp MD31A's giving a 10-knot top speed. While top of the range were twin 200hp TAMD41A's, giving 22 knots. Intermediary options were 100hp TMD31A's giving 14 knots,

130hp TAMD31A's 16 knots and 150hp TMD41A's 18 knots. However, years later, twin 210hp Cummins 6BT5.9M diesels were fitted to the early 90's Classics.

Ten years later, in 1997, Corvette Marine at Reedham were offering Volvo, Perkins Sabre and Yanmar engine options. The five Volvo Penta options ranged from 110hp TAMD31D's offering 12 knots and priced at £134,478, to 230hp KAMD42P's giving 24 knots for £158,625. Next were two Perkins Sabre options, namely M225's or M265's giving top speeds of 22-26 knots. Lastly were the Yanmar options, the largest being 230hp Yanmar 4LH/STE's giving 24 knots, priced at £158,272.

The 320 was awarded more power in the 00's, with options ranging from 200hp to 300hp, and top speeds of up to 26 knots. Base engine options again were Volvo's, namely 200hp TAMD41P's priced at £187,165 and the 230hp KAMD43P's £189,555. Perkins Sabre engines were M225Ti's priced at £188,897 and M265Sti's at £190,408. Top of the range were three Yanmar options, 190hp 4LHA/DTE's priced at £185,591, 250hp 6LP/DTE's at £190,896 and finally, 300hp 6LP/STE's at £192,758. Several years later 315hp 6LPA/STD's were being fitted priced at £197,576.



Left, Yamaha ME 420 DTi's fitted to a '95 boat. Right, 315hp Yanmar 6LPA/STD's fitted to an '04 320

These engines propelled the boat to a top speed of 28 knots, and proved popular in the last years of production.

Through our research we have uncovered a few 'engine anomalies' that were untraceable to any of our brochures and pricelists. While twin engines are common, we understand a few single-engined boats were built in the 1980's. Furthermore, the 1995 example we viewed was fitted with a pair of 230hp Yamaha ME 420Dti engines. While Yamaha engines were fitted regularly to many sterndrive-powered sportscruisers during the 90's, inboard versions were seen more in the commercial sector. The ME 420 is based on a 4.2 litre Toyota engine. Parts for some of the older engines, such as the MD32's, are becoming difficult to source, which is something to be aware of if buying an early model.

Engine access is via hatches in the wheelhouse floor. Earlier boats may simply have two hatches, which is quite limiting for access, while later boats, from the Seacoral era onwards, are usually fitted with a series of hatches, so the majority of the floor can be removed. One owner had numbered each hatch for easier reassembly, which is an excellent idea. Access to the starboard engine is generally better than the port, although the physical size of the engines fitted will dictate how much room you have to play with. Additional access to the back of the engines is provided by a removable panel in the aft cabin.

Be sure to inspect the boat's two 90-gallon fuel tanks for leaks. We understand that mild steel tanks were used in 1980's boats, which are known to suffer from corrosion due to salt spray being sucked into engine room vents. Consequently

some of these boats were fitted with new stainless steel tanks under warranty, or at great expense by their owners. All 320's built by Reedham and Corvette Marine should be fitted with stainless tanks.

Conclusion

The Corvette is a no-nonsense cruiser that can turn heads with its traditional good looks and, most importantly, can offer cruising comfort at any speed you wish to travel at, whether it be for inland or coastal use. Its interior is comparable to much larger boats, and its two-cabin, two-toilet layout is ideal for a couple with occasional overnighting guests, or a family with children. If you choose wisely, you'll have a boat that will look after you now, and for years to come.

Before buying any used boat, always employ the services of a IIMS or a YDSA accredited surveyor and, if you have any doubt about the engines, a separate engine survey by a suitably qualified person is recommended.

Corvette Family

340

2010-Present



Length 34ft 10in Beam 13ft

The evolution of the Corvette, the 340 is built by Fleming Yachts and offers the same 4-6 berths, with a full beam master cabin with island double and larger aft deck. Five built to date.

Buy one (pictured) 2014

£329,000

www.karlfarrantmarinesales.com