

Nelson 40/42

The Nelson 40/42 is the marquet
sailors fed up with waiting for
favourable wind turn to for its loo
and seakindly character.
We take a look
one of its ma
incarnations,
Humber



I

n a rare streak of brilliance, a former editor of *MBY* gave an article about a pilot boat the headline 'The launch that faced a thousand ships'. The Nelson 40 does that to people. An inspired design in the first place, 30 years later it continues to inspire marine photographers, artists and sometimes even writers, all trying hard to capture on film, canvas or paper just what it is about the boat that makes it so exceptional.

The boat was designed by the late Commander Peter Thornycroft in the mid-1960s. His skill was in creating efficient semi-displacement hulls, and the 40 was a masterpiece. Narrow-gutted, with a beam of just 12ft (3.6m), it was fast, economical and extremely seaworthy: exactly the specification required by commercial users, such as pilots. It was an instant hit.

Most of the 40s were built at Keith, Nelson & Co on the Isle of Wight. Hulls – later hulls, decks and superstructures – were moulded by Halmatic in Portsmouth and sent across the water for fitting out in Bembridge.

It wasn't long before the motorboating public started to take an interest. A number of yards began fit the mouldings out, notably James & Gaddy of Weymouth. They called their Nelson motor cruiser a Weymouth 42, in keeping with its 41ft 6in (12.65m) length overall.

In the early days, when only the hulls were moulded and the deck and superstructure were built on, some yards went their own way and produced very different-looking versions. However, as the upper-works mouldings came in, the Nelson 40/42 standardised around two basic forms – the commercial and the recreational. The main difference is that the commercial buyers favoured a short midships wheelhouse, leaving the fore and aft decks relatively clear for working space. The motor cruiser had a much longer wheelhouse/saloon, a coachroof over the forward accommodation, and in many cases a raised full-width aft deck over an aft cabin.

Mike Phillips turned convention on its head when he bought a Nelson 40/42 motor yacht for use as a workboat. *Echopilot* is one of only two Humber 42s, a version built by Fred

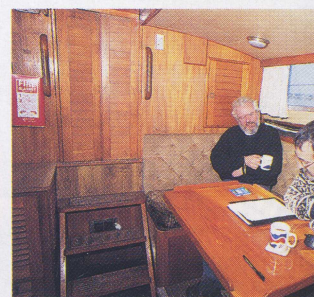
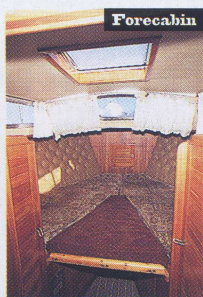
Booker Marine of Yorkshire at the end of the 1970s. She was Booker's show boat at Southampton in 1978, built on spec, but Mike had already decided to buy a Nelson when the show opened and by the end of the week had agreed a deal with Fred Booker.

Mike makes echo-sounders, and he ne a test bench. "I suppose I really needed a commercial Nelson," he explains, "but it's cheaper to buy the off-the-peg motor yacht at £77,500 than have a workboat built."

The Humber 42 had been moulded by Halmatic, who had also installed the twin Sabre 212s. This was something of a bon "Fred Booker's joinery was better than engineering," says Mike diplomatically.

If the original hull was robust, Booker's out made it virtually invincible. *Echopilot* features a double bottom up forward, a bulkhead, and fore and aft watertight bulkheads in the engine space. The timberwork is equally solid: for example the cabin bulkhead that doubles as the casing for the upper steering position consists of three sheets of half-inch marine ply back to back.

Text: Tom Willis. Photographs: Lester McCarthy





Wheelhouse/saloon

Nelson 42 Data

LOA	41ft 0in (12.50m)
Beam	12ft 0in (3.66m)
Draught	3ft 3in (1.00m)
Displacement	around 12 tonnes
Accommodation	Sleeps up to eight: typically, forecabin with vee-berths; toilet/shower; saloon with bench seats/berths; galley; wheelhouse/saloon; aft stateroom
Engines	Typically twin Perkins Sabre 225hp diesels
Built	From 1965 – mouldings still available
Designer	Peter Thornycroft
Builder	Keith, Nelson & Co and others



Cockpit locker



Heads



We said before in this series that the Nelson's almost universal appeal means that it is often bought by sailors who would like to switch to power but are worried about what their sailing friends would say. As the owner of a 34 said (Buying Second-hand, November 1998): "You don't have to be ashamed of parking a Nelson in a line of yachts." Well, Mike Phillips is a sailor too. His 1894 Itchen Ferry *Tom Tit* doesn't even have an engine.

Market Report

A production history of more than 30 years makes Nelson 40/42s difficult to price, but it's compounded further by the fact that many motor yacht examples are converted pilot vessels or other commercial craft. Ian Driver, a broker (and former owner) who has a number on his books, says condition is far more significant than age: he reckons that a 1972 model built as a motor yacht, re-engined in 1993 with twin 225s, is probably only a little overpriced at just under £100,000, while one of a similar age converted from a former fishery protection vessel is realistically tagged at £39,500. £80,000-90,000 is likely to be a reasonable base price, which you could halve or add 50% to depending on the condition of the boat and the age of the engines.

Nelson Owners' Club

The Nelson Boat Owners' Club is run by Simon Mayes of Nelson Engineering of Bembridge. Not entirely coincidentally, Nelson Engineering is on the site of Keith, Nelson & Co, and Simon's own office is the one used by Peter

Thornycroft. The club has about 90 members, almost all of them with their own boats, and puts on a well attended rally in the Solent every summer. For further details contact the Nelson Boat Owners' Club, Nelson Yard, The Embankment, Isle of Wight PO35 5NR. Tel: 01983 872306. Fax: 01932 875100. **MBY**

• our test of the new Dale Nelson 38 is on p60.

Mike has had the Sabres derated, or more accurately retarded the pumps, so that they deliver nearer 200hp than their factory-spec 212hp. *Echopilot* still pulls a respectable 21 knots plus, but the small reduction in load means that she has not yet worn out her original turbochargers.

Unusually, *Echopilot* has Whitlock mechanical steering. Originally, it was set up to give six turns of the wheel hard over to hard over, but Mike has adjusted the gearing to two turns only. Despite the lower ratio she is still relatively easy to steer because of the well-mannered Nelson hull.

Another unusual feature is that *Echopilot's* wheelhouse has both a side door and a door on to the aft deck. Although considerably more convenient for moving round the boat, this does reduce seating space in the deck saloon area, so most other Nelson 42 builders tended to fit just one of the two.

For the past four years, Mike has kept the boat on a swinging mooring at Keyhaven, which only became available after he had spent 16 years on the waiting list. Compared with the £4,100-plus he was paying for a Wymington marina berth, the £300 annual mooring charge is peanuts. "It does have its down side, though," he says apologetically. The mooring is almost a mile downriver, which can be pretty unpleasant when you have to break the ice off the tender before going out to the boat. And though protected from the sea, it's frequently very windy: the dodger cords can rattle right through in the course of a winter. Given this, it's probably just as well that

Echopilot has a belt-and-braces electrical system. There are three 24V batteries: a heavy-duty battery dedicated to the port engine starter and two deep-cycles, one for starting the starboard engine and powering the 24V domestic system, and the other kept as a spare starboard starter. As a final failsafe, the port engine battery can be switched over to start the starboard.

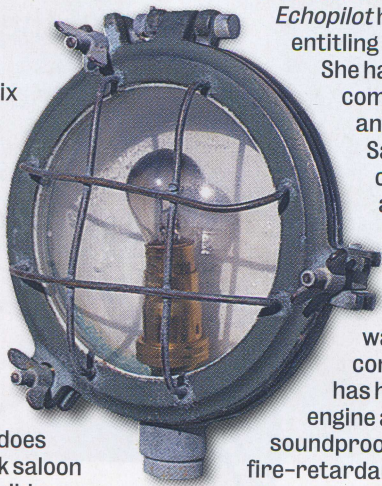
Echopilot has a Class A certificate entitling her to carry 12 passengers.

She has to comply with a commercial Code of Practice, and as with the dreaded Boat Safety Scheme, this doesn't come without a certain amount of effort and

expense. The stability test was no problem, but the original Booker specification fell a long

way short of modern commercial standards. Mike has had to fit shut-offs to the engine air intakes, replace the soundproofing and upholstery with fire-retardant material, raise the height of the guardrails, fit an emergency tiller, bilge level alarms and firefighting equipment, buy numerous lifejackets, and so on, and so on...

What with weekly echo-sounder and sonar tests and other work, *Echopilot* doesn't get much use as a motor cruiser. In fact, Mike reckons he can count the number of nights he has spent aboard on the fingers of one hand. But she's always available for days out, and the advantage of the downriver mooring at Keyhaven is that she is only hampered by the tide at springs.



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