



Larson

CABRIO 290

Radical interior layout and sportsboat performance make this four-berth American cruiser seem good value for money. We took a closer look.



Boat Report

Here's a sportscruiser for the indecisive. While some builders hold back on specification to pitch their prices as low as possible, American company Larson save you the bother of consulting an options list by throwing almost everything in.

Thus the Cabrio 290 comes 'fully loaded', as they say in the car trade. The only options you

get are a choice between three engine installations plus air-conditioning, a 4.0kW generator and an anchor winch. But the price remains competitive and the layout distinctive, especially down below.

Design & styling

The 290's hull has a deadrise of 18° and a stepped design which aids acceleration from low speeds.

With designers looking to optimise cabin and cockpit space on sportscruisers of this size, they can easily end up with bulky, slab-sided styling. But the 290 manages to avoid this.

The bow pulpit, the rubbing strake that drops to the bathing platform and the simple striping all elongate its appearance. The screen fits neatly into the profile, and the raked radar arch also enhances the boat's sporting appeal.

The weakest aspect of the



Main cabin

With the toilet compartment and galley both to port, there is room for a generous settee to arc around to starboard.

Whilst this contributes to what is a very open interior layout, it does mean you get a rather odd-shaped table to dine at, and we suspect that the steps down from the cockpit will be used as an extra seat. Spotlights provide night illumination in this area, but when in place the table restricts access to the midships berth.

The forward berth is angled across the bow, narrowing at its foot and best described as cosy. There are cushions around the head and the side, and a step up to port, and the mattress area can be curtained off for privacy. A porthole gives daylight here, while two spotlights add both illumination and atmosphere after dark.

Cabin stowage is generous.



There is a locker under each of the settee's three cushions, plus two lockers at eye level above, and a fair-sized hanging locker at the foot of the forward berth.

A gas strut conveniently lifts the whole mattress, revealing a large under-berth locker which is ideal for storing the bedding. There is another smaller locker just to starboard of this, and a drawer and locker to port, alongside the galley.



Midships cabin

The midships berth is more generous than the forward one, being a good-sized double, albeit with restricted headroom. Owners face an interesting choice as to which they prefer.

The area is fairly light during the day, thanks to the open treadwell of the steps down into the cabin and the porthole into the cockpit, but you have to make do with a single spotlight at night. A curtain can be drawn across for privacy.

There is a hanging locker to starboard, and two drawers aft of this which can be accessed only from the berth.



Toilet compartment

Aft of the galley, the WC offers standing headroom within what is a complete GRP moulding.

The small stainless steel sink has mixer taps, with the head on a wander-lead to double as the shower. There is stowage in mirrored cupboards and under the sink, and a toilet-roll holder and towel rail are standard features.

The porcelain loo has an electric flush to a holding tank.

Cockpit

Stepping through the transom door to starboard, you are presented with a spacious and tidy cockpit. Although the aft part is separated by a small step down from the forward section, and by the double forward passenger seat, it is still a sociable layout.

The wet-bar does restrict legroom at this forward seat,

making it a single in practice, but there is plenty of space on the U-shaped seating round the standard table. And the table can be dropped, and a cushion placed on top, to create a good-sized sunbathing area.

The wet-bar has a sink, a single tap, built-in drinks-holders and a grabhandle that is handy when stepping down below.

With the standard Sunbrallor canvas canopy erected, you get a

very usable night time entertaining area, helped by the lighting set in the radar arch. Clip-in carpets complete the specification.

Formal locker space is limited, but the void under the aft seating will keep fenders and warps out of harm's way, with easy access if they are needed in a hurry.

Strategically placed inspection hatches allow you to get at nearly all the services.

design is the stern, which is best described as functional. Larson would do well to look at the aft treatment on craft such as the Doral 300 for some hints on how to improve this area.

It is refreshing to see a boatbuilder take a fresh approach to the interior layout of a sports cruiser, and that is what Larson have done. Instead of putting the toilet compartment opposite the galley, they have set both on the same side, which frees up the whole of the starboard side for sitting and sleeping. The result feels far more open.

The cockpit has a practical and functional layout, even if it offers nothing radical in design terms.

Performance & handling

Our test boat was fitted with twin 170hp Volvo Penta KAD32P turbo-diesel engines on DuoProp legs. This is the most potent of the three engine options available, the others being 131hp diesels or 220hp petrols from the same manufacturers.

The KAD32s give excellent pick-up off the mark, helped by the stepped hull. Our radar gun showed 0-15 knots in 3.5sec, and 0-25 knots in 4.5sec, which is up to



Decks & bathing platform

The bathing platform is well above the waterline, but is fitted with a pull-down boarding ladder and grabhandles to help swimmers get safely back on board. There is also a shower.

Extending the full width of the boat, the platform is easy to board although narrow. If you are boarding from a higher structure, the side decks are also narrow but have plenty of handholds, and moulded steps leading down into the cockpit to starboard.

Larson must consider the side decks to be wide enough for access to the foredeck, as there is no opening centre section to the windscreen as an alternative route.

Bow and deck rails offer a ready handhold when moving forward, and there is a clip-in sunpad. At the bow, working gear includes a roller, three cleats and a hawser. A spotlight here, controlled remotely from the helm, has proved fairly vulnerable to damage so the UK importers are considering doing away with it altogether. There are further cleats amidships and at the quarters.



Galley

The galley to port is a good size and easy to work at.

It offers a good length of GRP moulded worktop for food preparation, and this incorporates the centrally located sink with its tidy mixer tap. Just aft is a twin-burner alcohol/electric stove.

At the back of the worktop is a recess with six drinks-holders,

and to the right of this is an open locker for easy access. Two good-sized cupboards are set at eye level, with the standard microwave between them; the right-hand cupboard can be used to house a television if required.

In the base of the unit are the fridge, a large cupboard with no shelving under the sink, and four drawers, the top one being fitted out as a cutlery drawer.

A porthole illuminates the whole area.



genuine sportsboat standards.

The only thing that tells you there are diesels down below is the very brief hesitation to get them spinning over. The engines keep pulling strongly right through the mid range, until 30 knots, whereupon the curve flattens out and the last two knots up to the 32-knot maximum are eked out.

Flat-out, the Volvos are pulling 3800rpm, and at 25 knots 3000rpm. A comfortable fast cruising speed is around 27.5 knots at 3400rpm. Unfortunately our sound meter was in for repairs so we were unable to take any readings on

Helm

Whether you are standing or seated, the helm station is a comfortable workplace. The steering wheel can be tilted to suit, and the swivelling single helm seat adjusts fore and aft so there is plenty of legroom. To stand for close-quarters manoeuvring, the chair can be slid back far enough that it does not dig into the back of your legs.

Whilst the array of instrumentation at the helm looks impressive, the fascia it is mounted on spoils the effect by looking cheap. Gauges for the twin engine installation are presented logically, and include one for synchronising revs. A flat section of moulding below the top pod could have been fitted with a chart flap but has been left free, presumably for retrofitting electronics.

The same tacky backing is used



for the lit rocker switches to the left of the wheel, and to the right you find engine trim gauges and a remote control for the stereo. Trim tab controls are set forward of

the twin throttle controls.

Though it looks low, the wraparound windscreen gives full protection when you are seated, while still offering good visibility.

engine noise, but it was not intrusive in the cockpit.

The Cabrio 290's handling is as sure as anything. There is no ventilation or hull skip-out, and the only limitation on our test boat was that the steering stuck on full lock, and you needed two hands to come out of a turn. Air in the power steering was the probable cause.

In other respects tight turns are no problem, as the combination of the engine's torque and the DuoProp legs just push the hull round with no hint of falling off the plane. There is some loss of feel at the wheel because of the power steering, but straight-line tracking and

S-turns are no problem at all. Although the 290 has a big-boat feel when you step aboard, it handles and performs like a smaller one.

Fairly calm conditions meant we were unable to test the boat's ride as fully as we would like, but the wash thrown up by other craft in Southampton Water posed no real problems.

The throttle controls were a big disappointment, lacking feel and having fiddly trim controls under the hand grip that are impossible to work together, even though that is what they are designed for. Also the gauge for synchronising engine revs only seemed to work properly at low speeds.

Conclusions

The Larson Cabrio 290 rates highly on the key criteria of styling, specification and performance, and the currently quoted price (admittedly a boat show special offer) is very competitive.

You are not buying a craftsman-fitted interior, and some more attention to detail would improve the tacky helm console and fiddly trim buttons, but overall build quality suffices and the craft has a solid feel.

If cockpit stowage is limited, cabin stowage is almost excessive, and it is nice to see a radical interior layout. □



BUILD

glass-reinforced plastic

DIMENSIONS

LOA

28ft 11in (8.81m)

BEAM

10ft 0in (3.05m)

DRAUGHT

2ft 10in (0.86m)

AIR DRAUGHT

9ft 4in (2.85m)

DISPLACEMENT

7500lb (3402kg)

FUEL CAPACITY

104gal (473lt)

WATER CAPACITY

27gal (125lt)

ENGINES

twin Volvo Penta KAD32Ps

4cyl 2.4lt diesels

170hp at 3800rpm

PRICE

£64,680 ex VAT as tested

Engineerom

The aft section of the cockpit flooring lifts on an electric strut to reveal the twin engine installation, with insulation on the underside of the hatch.

There is plenty of space at the front of the enginebay, but access between the engines is limited. The filters are well placed for attention, as are other day-to-day check points, although some of the wiring runs could be a bit better.

Access to the fuel tank is through a further hatch, and there are cocks on the connectors. All the skin-fittings below the waterline are in bronze, and the hosing is double-clipped on the connections. Electrical connections are gel-filled.

The batteries are to starboard, with the master switch in a small

locker at the transom door. The manual bilge pump is located just above this, and it is supplemented by electric pumps in the bilge.

An audible carbon monoxide detector is standard, and there are resettable breaker switches for the electrical functions at the helm.



SUPPLIERS

Thames Boat Centre,
Racecourse Yacht Basin,
Maidenhead Road, Windsor,
Berkshire SL4 5HT.
Tel: 01753 865611.

BUILDERS

Larson Boats,
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56345, USA.