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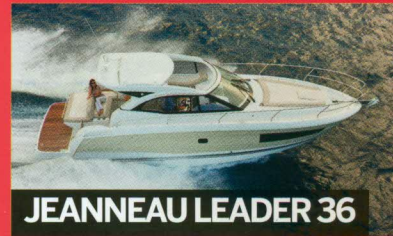
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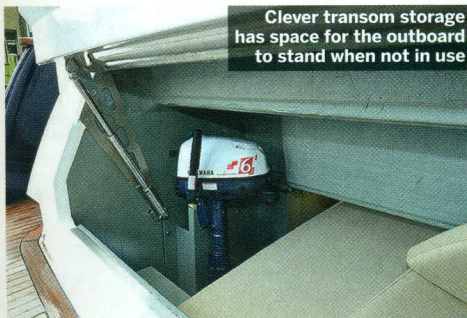
CONTEST 52 MC FLYBRIDGE

Adding a flybridge to the already competent 52 MC is a no-brainer, while the unflappable hull makes short work of choppy seas and benign inland waterways alike

Text: **Jack Haines** Photos: **Lester McCarthy & Contest Yachts**







Clever transom storage has space for the outboard to stand when not in use



Pop-out anchor keeps the boat's lines nice and clean but is a bit of a hassle in a hurry



The flybridge is spacious enough but the layout and finish needs some work



You may not have heard of Medemblik but it is one of many achingly quaint towns that fringe the vast IJsselmeer inland sea in the Netherlands. Sitting on the western side of this huge body of water, its chocolate box buildings burst with charm, as do the pristine, cobbled streets and the traditional low draft sailing barges that line the waterway at the heart of the town. The reason we are here is because Medemblik is also home to Contest Yachts, who just so happen to have added a flybridge and some new engines to its rather wonderful 52 MC. With the promise of good lager and fresh herring – not to mention wonderful scenery – we took Contest up on the offer of a trip that would show us the two distinct styles of boating in this area. One being blasting around the notoriously ratty IJsselmeer, and the other navigating the vast network of inland waterways, canals and locks, where you don't get

much above 5 knots. Is the 52 MC Flybridge suited to both these scenarios, especially the slow stuff, where its punchy 6.7-litre, 550hp diesels will be shackled to dead slow ahead most of the time? We'll see.

The first part of the journey is a cobweb-banishing blast across the lake IJsselmeer to Stavoren for a quick lunch stop, before taking to the waterways and heading inland to Teherne. While it remained to be seen how the torque-packed diesels would handle trickling along a canal, romping across the 'lake', as they call it locally, the 52 was absolutely fantastic. Two years ago we tested the boat that this one is based on, the regular 52 MC, and the lasting impression was one of refinement and laid-back mile munching. If anything, the Fly feels even better because on the flybridge you are even further away from the commotion of the engines. And the engines have shrunk, down from 8.2 litres in the original boat to 6.7s; losing 300kg in weight per side but only 50hp. This flybridge version also goes without the heavy Seakeeper gyro that the original 52 had so that and the lighter

The saloon, galley and helm are simple yet stylish and functional





The well-protected cockpit is very safe and has plenty of space to eat and relax

engines pretty much wipe out the extra weight of the flybridge, although that additional heft is quite high up.

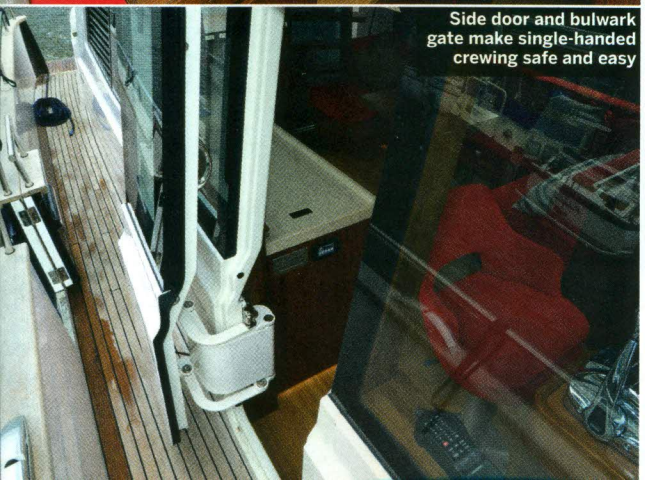
Either way, performance is mightily impressive and the fabulous hull that worked so well on the first MC is just as smooth, quiet and confident on the flybridge version. It strikes a unique balance between the alertness and responsive nature of a planing hull whilst feeling as planted in the water as a semi-displacement shape.

Driving from the lower helm position it's abundantly clear that Contest's efforts with huge amounts of engineroom soundproofing have done the trick. This boat has a regular shaftdrive setup, meaning the engines are directly beneath the saloon floor, not tucked aft outside the cockpit doors as with pod drives – so the low sound levels are even more impressive.

In terms of layout and interior design, there's not too much to report over the non-flybridge boat. The décor is clean and simple and the build quality is reassuringly tactile, but the cabins feel sparse



Navigator's chart area lifts up to reveal plentiful storage for navigation equipment



Side door and bulwark gate make single-handed crewing safe and easy

and bare. Contest's yacht-building roots shine through though, in the chunky fiddles, dedicated handholds and smooth, curved edges on most of the joinery.

The owner of this particular boat had plenty of influence in the build – as is the way with Contest – but one such input is the undersized and uncomfortable stool at the helm station. This replaces what is, in my eyes, the far more useful double bench, which, teamed with the double navigator seat to port, gives you four forward-facing seats. Anyway, the owner wanted a stool, so they got a stool – like it or not, the customer is always right.

We go through our first lock and into Stavoren, which has a large marina and a quiet promenade overlooking the IJsselmeer. We tie up to a wooden pier and stroll into town for piping hot fish and chips on the blustery front.

LIFE ON THE FLYBRIDGE

From here we are on the inland trail to Teherne and the Contest will have to get used to life at a slightly slower pace. Contest's sales manager Marcel Offereins points out that this is when the flybridge really comes in handy – the extra elevation meaning you have great views over the banks either side.

The 52 looks as if it was designed from day one to have a flybridge and it suits the boat well. Yet there are some simple changes that Contest can make to improve the workings of this area, though, mainly at the helm. It doesn't really match the high quality of the rest of the boat with a plain fascia and exposed screw heads, nowhere to stow your phone or other bits, a very upright, fixed (and cheap looking) steering wheel and silly things like the start/stop buttons being closer to the skipper than the trim tabs, which you need to interact with more regularly. This is all stuff that Contest can and will change, and it needs to. Aft there is opposed seating, which is crying out for a table that the owner didn't specify, and two blocks of sunpad right at the aft end of the flybridge.

All that being said, as Marcel suggested, being on the top deck does improve life on the waterways, delivering sweeping views of the lush farmland. The engines are inaudible up here, purring along at tickover, the only sound being that of the water peeling off the hull and the bubbling water beneath the transom. It's relaxed, easy boating where you stick to the middle of a perfectly marked channel making small adjustments to the wheel now and then and moving to one side when something passes you the other way – always with a smile and wave. There's no sail versus power here, we're all enjoying the water together.

We wind onwards through the countryside taking in the boundless vista, peppered with handsome waterside farmhouses complete with private moorings, traditional windmills and the more modern counterparts greedily swiping up the wind's energy. It's eerily peaceful and gentle and very easy to chat and walk around the boat, to sit on the coachroof and watch the water slip by beneath the hull. Even if we weren't in the swimming pool-calm of the waterway network the Contest is one of the safest boats to move around on I've ever tested.

And the boat is relishing the slow stuff. That planted feeling that was so evident on the IJsselmeer is now keeping her tracked perfectly straight doing single figure speeds on the long stretches, meaning minimal steering input.

Using Marcel's intimate knowledge of the waterways he grew up exploring, we take narrow, watery alleyways off the main drag and arrive in the beautiful town of Teherne with the evening sun blazing, shouldering away the menacing rain clouds that had hung over our voyage.

Teherne is built around the water, with houses dotted around a central basin, and we slip into a corner berth with ease, the water glassy and smooth, and head up to our accommodation, which looks down on the boat. We wander into



The 52 MC Flybridge's side decks are absolutely vast and very safe to navigate



The master is spacious and bright but feels a little cold and sparse



The double cabin is perfect for kids to snuggle up in and storage is good, too



Guests are treated to a bright and comfortable twin ensuite cabin



The master cabin gets its own bathroom while guests share the day heads

town and find a great pub with carpets on the table – as is traditional in Holland – a pool table front and centre, and ice cold Heineken on draught. It's a great venue in which to talk over a wonderful day on the water, the sort of day that reaffirms ones love of boating.

The warm morning sun breathes on my face as I sit on the balcony with a coffee, looking down on the Contest. It is an effortlessly handsome boat with traditional lines that also manage to look bang up to date. She looks seaworthy and purposeful but retains an unshakeable cool, even without the heavily tinted saloon windows of the original boat.

The journey to Lemmer passes in much the same manner as the one to Teherne the previous day – more slow-paced waterways with the odd scarily narrow lifting bridge to keep us on our toes.

We reach Lemmer and lock back out into the Ijsselmeer, which in stark comparison to the waterway we have just left, is frothing and boiling with anger. With 25 miles of this to contend with between us and Medemblik it was the perfect opportunity to test a hull that had, up until now, not put a foot wrong.

I gave it the full beans in this particularly rough section at the edge of the lake and the 52 surged into a rangy canter as if we were still on the canals. Hammering into the horrible short chop at 27 knots the boat was

totally unflustered, quiet, comfortable and assured. This hull really is a thing of wonder; considering we were heading into the chop and wind we weren't even getting much spray on board.

READY TO HANDLE ANYTHING

So comfortable was it that it didn't really seem like much of a test, so I throttled back to 22 knots where the engines are even quieter and progress a touch smoother. And this is how we stayed for the rest of the journey, slicing over the brown soup that is the Ijsselmeer, on this occasion dashed with the brilliant white spume of the fuming chop.

Contest must address the issues on the flybridge as there is far more to be made of this area and it feels a long way behind what many 50ft rivals offer. But the yard that used to only make yachts has got the hard bit right – the way the boat takes the water – so tweaking the flybridge is not an issue to keep its designers awake at night.

We edged back into Medemblik with the 52 MC Flybridge having taken everything we had thrown at it in its stride. Whether it was blasting across the calm lake, patiently traversing the waterways, waiting for bridges to open or peerlessly wafting over a fitful Ijsselmeer, the Contest was equal to all of it and shone as a most versatile cruising companion. **MBY**

Contact Contest Yachts. Tel: +44 (0)1590 647422
Web: www.contestyachts.com



The flybridge helm looks crude by comparison



The lower helm is clear, simple and classy, and the view out is excellent

THE DATA

SPECIFICATIONS

DRAUGHT 2.8ft (0.85m)

DISPLACEMENT 16.3 tonnes

FUEL CAPACITY 396 imp gal (1,800 litres)

WATER CAPACITY 89 imp gal (400 litres)

ENGINES Cummins QSB 6.7. Twin 550hp @ 3,320rpm. 6-cylinder 6.7 litre diesels

TOP SPEED ON TEST 27 knots

FUEL CONSUMPTION
Slow cruise 10.8 knots, 44lph, 9.7gph, 1.12mpg, 353nm range

Fast cruise 23.1 knots, 154lph, 33.9gph, 0.68mpg, 216nm range;

Flat out 27 knots, 212lph, 46.6gph, 0.58mpg, 183nm range.

PRICE FROM €1.025 ex VAT (Twin Cummins 305hp)

PRICE AS TESTED €1.25m ex VAT (Twin Cummins 550hp)



BEAM 15ft 1in (4.6m)

LENGTH OVERALL 52ft 3in (15.9m)