

NEW BOAT
TEST

A residential area

Designing a boat for use as a permanent home requires close attention to detail, as demonstrated by Brayzel Narrowboat's 58ft cruiser stern *Ickle Brayzel*. Could **Mark Langley** find any room for improvement though?



Pleasing hull shape and excellent paintwork.

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE RESIDENTIAL BOAT can be challenging enough for a boatbuilder, but when the customer happens to be your sister, it can be even more demanding. Andrew Crook of Brayzel Narrowboats has been working on and fitting out narrowboats since he left school, gaining a depth of experience with other boatbuilders before setting up himself in 1999. The company name is a combination of his parents' forenames – Brian and Hayzel – and the family connection doesn't end there, with his brother also working in the business. His sister's boat is *Ickle Brayzel*, a 58ft cruiser stern narrowboat designed especially for residential use.

OUTSIDE SHELL

The 10/6/5/4mm steel shell is built by Piper Boats in Stoke-on-Trent to Brayzel's detailed specification. The boat is readily identifiable as a Piper shell (including the logo at the engine vents) and is very smoothly finished, with attention given to clean welds and distortion-free cabin sides. The shell is blasted and primed steel, with mill scale removed,

giving a very sound base for a long-lasting paint finish.

Externally, the finish is a very well applied blue and cream, with red handrails. Thankfully, the black hull paint is taken up to the gunwales, rather than gloss being applied to the top bend. As well as looking better, it is far more practical, as the hull paint can be easily touched up with the inevitable scrapes in locks and when mooring.

Chrome vents and other roof furniture are matched by the clamp-in Wesley Marine windows. These can be easily removed if they ever need resealing, and they also do not require drilling into the shell, which can reduce corrosion issues when dissimilar metals come into contact.

BOW

Right in the forepeak, where you might expect to find the gas locker, is a water tank integral to the shell. Underneath the deck hatch is another sealed plate (to prevent water ingress) that can be opened to check the condition of the tank. However, the two-part epoxy water tank paint should last many years without needing attention, though it is reassuring



Large glazed cratch and water tank in forepeak.

that you can easily clean the tank, should you want to.

A glazed forward wood cratch has twin panels which swing inwards to give easy access for handling lines, while a good canopy, with two opening flaps each side, provides variable degrees of cover. Under the wooden top plank there is a large LED light, which can be controlled via a remote key fob – ideal for when coming home in the dark. The flooring is neatly planked solid teak which is easy to clean (as it has been treated), and the cockpit has its own sump and automatic bilge pump.



Generous galley with lots of sensible storage.



Shelves and shallow cupboard make full use of space in galley.

Boatbuilder Brayzel Narrowboats
(01995 601 515, www.brayzel-narrowboats.co.uk)



Price
£107,500



Berths
2+2



Length
58ft



Engine
Beta 38



Canvas dodger surrounds aft deck.

The cockpit well is at cabin floor level, so neat steps have been built into the side lockers, as well as low-level lighting for safety. These lockers give useful storage for solid fuel and have vinyl upholstery to make them comfortable seats, with the forward transverse locker containing the Vetus 75kgf bowthruster. This is a particularly excellent example of a knowledgeable builder fitting the tube within a watertight bulkhead, and providing a weedhatch that is large enough to allow the thruster prop to be changed if ever required.

INTERIOR SALOON

Going against the trend for a 'reverse layout', the saloon is forward – a feature that is possibly better suited to a residential boat. It also allows the cockpit, which is the same level as the saloon, to act as a conservatory extension, making the saloon a very spacious place.

To starboard of the front glazed doors, a Morsø Squirrel multi-fuel stove sits in a good sized tiled hearth and is fitted with an insulated flue. To port is a full height shelving unit, with a door at the base which has drawers and a cupboard at the bottom. Opening the cupboard leads to a cat flap for the owner's furry friends, with the door closing it off easily should it be required. Ventilation is routed through here (and behind the stove) from corner vents under the gunwale in the cockpit, giving

proper low-level ventilation as opposed to louvres in doors which are not at floor height, giving draughts. In the base of the cupboard are the water pumps; two are fitted to provide an alternative should one fail.

The saloon has lots of cupboards and drawers, plus two sensibly sized radiators. Smooth lines to the ash woodwork are complemented by the hard-wearing light brown carpet and excellent choice of neutral soft furnishings. Two easy chairs sit comfortably in the saloon without being cramped. A raised L-shaped dinette is fitted aft with the space underneath the elevated floor section having a couple of shallow drawers for more storage. As well as space for guest bedding under the seating, a slide-out chest freezer fits in at the galley end of the dinette.

Lighting is by halogen downlighters, controlled in small groups for the most flexibility. In a continuous pelmet along the edge of the roof on both sides are LED strip lights, which give useful indirect lighting – I suspect that this will be the principal lighting used at night. As well as being low consumption, it gives a very even illumination without the glare that halogen lights can produce. Opposite the dinette is a single side door for fresh air.

GALLEY

The galley is effectively linear, providing particularly useable space through its 8ft 6in length. To port is the gas



Separate drainer more sensible than a grooved worktop.



Full size washer dryer and large larder fridge.

Spacious saloon with raised dinette and open plan seating. INSET: LED strips behind pelmet for subtle diffuse lighting.



False drawer gives access to toilet cassette.



Chest freezer slides out from dinette.



There are even drawers built into raised dinette base.

“Andrew understands the large storage space requirements of a residential boat; there are 42 cupboard doors and 16 drawers throughout”



The heated floor continues into the bathroom which has a Whirlpool bath with screen to provide more showering space plus curvy sink.



Thetford ceramic bowl cassette toilet.



Catflap, with twin water pumps in cupboard below.



The 12ft-long bedroom has a king size double bed opens across cabin.

hob, with separate oven and grill underneath. The circular inset stainless steel sink has a matching separate drainer, which is attractive and more pragmatic than a grooved worktop. Usefully, the edges of the worktop have a small fiddle rail to prevent spillages onto the floor – unlike many boatbuilders who seem to think that when underway nothing will slide off a work surface!

Against the dinette is a small angled cupboard, which prevents a 'lost corner' in the galley and the use of mechanical cantilevered shelving. A wine rack sits at the end of the starboard galley run and, as well as a cupboard, there is a full-size Indesit washer-dryer and large matching 230V fridge. The flooring is tiled in the galley and felt unusually warm during our visit. While we initially thought it might

be the underfloor Kingspan insulation fitted throughout the boat, it is actually heated from the central heating boiler!

The end of the galley has a set of drawers; however, the bottom pair is a false set, which open sideways to give access to the toilet cassette tank and a spare tank, plus toilet fluids, which reside here. Above the galley is a small cupboard to starboard, with a pair of cupboards to port joined by a shelf over the deep windows.

BATHROOM

The heated floor continues into the bathroom – which actually has a bath. And not an ordinary bath, but one that has both a bulbous section with screen to provide more showering space and a whirlpool feature. Just forward of the bath is an airing cupboard, fitted with a small radiator to give a proper drying space, while another

small radiator is fitted to the opposite hull side under a shelf. It certainly means a warm bathroom and no shivering when stepping out of the shower.

The cassette loo is one of the Thetford ceramic bowl units, which look almost identical to a domestic unit. Next to this, a smoothly curved sink is on top of a vanity unit. As you move through the walk-through bathroom, the corridor moves to starboard, and the central heating boiler is fitted on the centreline into the bulkhead. A tall, thin, Alde Comfort boiler has been fitted. The design is quite old, but very reliable and uses little electricity (around 0.2A current draw), though it is less efficient on LPG than newer designs. It happily powers six sizeable radiators, plus the narrow bore underfloor heating (which the 5.2kW gas boiler is also designed to do) on gas, but it is fitted with a 2kW electric heating cartridge. Once the boat is heated up on gas, the boiler can be switched to electric, which should then maintain the very well insulated boat at a comfortable temperature when hooked up to a shoreline supply.

BEDROOM

The 12ft-long bedroom is dominated by a king-size double berth, which pulls out across the boat. Against the forward bulkhead is a large wardrobe, with hanging and shelf space, which is gently warmed by the central heating plumbing to avoid dampness in the depths of winter.

High level cupboards flank the porthole above the bed, with small bedside cupboards fitted either side. Against the aft bulkhead is a curved shelf to act as a dressing table with cupboards above and below it. The electrics cupboard is opposite, with an exceptionally neat and tidy installation. Low-level ventilation is taken from louvres high up on the external bulkhead and routed down through both sets of cupboards. Two radiators warm the bedroom, with one situated underneath the steps up to the back deck, which provide a convected blanket of warm air to reduce any draughts from the rear doors.

Under the flooring there is easy access to the cabin bilge. A pair of bilge pumps has been fitted here; although the risk of the underfloor heating leaking is remote, having the pumps there 'just in case' is a sensible idea. Many boats suffer water leakages, such as a split calorifier, and a pump for this area makes perfect sense.

ENGINE & SERVICES

The Beta 38 engine is a sensibly sized choice for the 58ft boat, as the 35hp engine will be relaxed on canals without running too slowly and still have enough power for tidal rivers. A Volvo-Penta cutlass stern tube seal is fitted, which does not require a water feed or greasing. The engine is flexibly mounted with good sized coupling and the diesel feed has a water-fuel separator fitted before the



Large forward cockpit is at cabin floor level; seats contain lockers and bowthrustrer.

engine mounted final filter. Under the deck board is thick sound insulation which should substantially reduce the noise from an already quiet engine. The keel tank is properly sized for the unit and is fitted with a baffle to ensure good cooling when working harder on rivers.

The engine is fitted with twin alternators; the 100-amp unit charges two 250Ah Elecsol AGM batteries, with the smaller 40-amp alternator charging the engine starter battery. A Victron 3000W combi inverter-charger supplies pure sine wave AC electric when away from a shoreline, and also charges the batteries when hooked up. To connect to the shoreline, there is an inlet socket mounted both on the stern and at the bow.

Inside, extra wiring has thoughtfully been included for possible future upgrades, such as a satellite TV unit, solar panels or a surround sound system, plus other unused cabling. Many boats suffer from later owner additions, so planning in advance can pay

dividends in the future. Poor quality 'upgrades' by an owner can seriously affect future resale values so pre-wiring in extra cabling is one way to avoid this.

On the aft deck, single seats are mounted either side of the rear doors. These contain a gas bottle each, properly restrained – after all, Andrew is also a Boat Safety examiner, so he knows how to make sure everything is correct. To this end, there is also an Alde bubble tester in the gas locker, so that a quick and easy gas soundness check can be made, rather than, as many boaters do, waiting for the four-yearly BSS inspection.

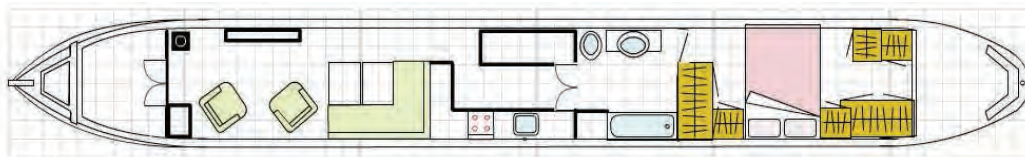
The cruiser stern aft deck has been fitted with a very neat blue canvas 'dodger' running around the taff rail, giving some shelter to the helm and making the enclosed aft deck a more cosy suntrap when moored up. Like the forward cockpit, low-level lighting is fitted to give safe access – and could also prove useful if you ever have to go down the weedhatch in a tunnel.



Low level vents ducted properly inside cabin, with catflap, steps and forward shoreline connection visible.

Vital stats

Price £107,500 **Length** 58ft **Engine** Beta 38 **Berths** 2+2
Builder Brayzel Narrowboats (01995 601 515, www.brayzel-narrowboats.co.uk)



Shell distinctive as a Piper but built to Brayzel's specification.

Verdict

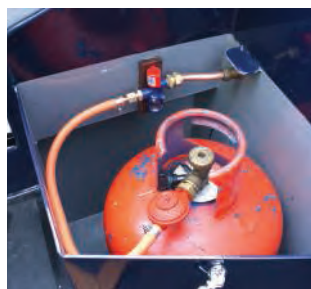
Although we did not have the opportunity to take the boat out on the water due to incredibly high winds, having handled Piper-built boats many times before, including those built to Andrew's specifications, we are confident that *Ickle Brayzel* will perform very well when underway.

Although many companies offer high quality builds, the experience and thoughtfulness of a builder is often demonstrated in the details you don't see. *Ickle Brayzel* is full of these nice touches, such as extra wiring, cabin bilge pumps and ample radiator space. Andrew also understands the large storage space requirements of a residential boat, as there are 42 cupboard doors and 16 drawers throughout. The fact that they are subtly fitted, without making the interior overbearing, is a testament to a high quality boat. In fact, it is hard to suggest any improvements or find fault with this boat, which is always slightly frustrating for a boat reviewer!

Andrew's sister is very happy with her boat and has managed to fit in all of her belongings from her apartment, with space still left over. Although *Ickle Brayzel* is currently priced at £107,500, at the Crick show and for a short while after, a similar build would be priced at £99,950 which is exceptionally good value for this level of bespoke build.



Beta engine well installed with decent sound insulation.



Gas locker with Alde bubble tester allows regular safety testing.



Control pedestal also has bowthruster switches and aft shoreline inlet.

"It is hard to suggest any improvements or find fault with this boat, which is always slightly frustrating for a boat reviewer!"

Standard Equipment

Shell

- 10/6/5/4mm steel
- Cruiser stern
- Chrome windows and fittings
- Integrated epoxy lined water tank
- 75kgf Vetus bowthruster

Engine

- Beta 38 (35hp) engine
- PRM120 mechanical gearbox
- Single lever control
- 100A domestic alternator
- 40A starter alternator

Lining

- Solid ash
- Full spray foam insulation
- Kingspan under floor insulation

Saloon

- Squirrel solid fuel stove
- Raised double dinette
- Easy chairs
- Shelving and cupboards

Galley

- Four-burner gas hob
- Separate sink and drainer
- Separate oven/grill
- Indesit larder fridge
- Indesit washer-dryer
- Shoreline chest freezer

Bathroom

- Thetford ceramic bowl cassette toilet
- Spare cassette storage
- Ceramic washbasin
- Vanity cupboard
- Radiator
- Whirlpool bath with shower over

Bedroom

- King-size athwartships bed
- Large wardrobes
- Two radiators
- Dressing table
- Eight cupboards

Electrical system

- Two 250Ah AGM domestic batteries
- One 110Ah starter battery
- Two 110Ah bowthrusters
- Victron 3000W combi inverter-charger
- Shoreline connections bow and stern
- Halogen and LED strip lighting
- 230V ring main

Heating & hot water

- Alde 5.2kW Comfort LPG gas boiler
- 2kW electric heating cartridge on boiler
- Six radiators
- Small bore under floor heating in galley/bathroom
- 55-litre twin coil calorifier
- 1kW 230V immersion heater