



CURVES IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES

Bluewater's widebeam narrowboat aims to give the space for which these boats are renowned - but without the boxy edges. Does it succeed?

BLUEWATER BOATS are a young company with a steadily growing reputation for building barges at sensible prices. They aim to construct boats entirely in-house, from the base-plate up - so that the new owners can have control over all aspects of the design and construction. As well as widebeam narrowboats, they also produce Dutch barges based on Branson and Wolstenholme designs.

Happy Daze is a 57ft by 12ft wide-beam boat with a narrowboat-style hull. Although many widebeam river cruisers are 60ft long, the owners wanted to keep this boat on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, so chose the slightly shorter length to ensure ease of passage through locks on neighbouring canals.

Exterior

The all-steel shell is well constructed with carefully ground-out welds, and curves in places you might expect hard edges. Shallow stainless roof vents give the same level of air throughput as conventional mushroom vents, but are much lower profile and discrete.

The shell is not completely flat-bottomed, but has raised chine edges, which allows the boat to be less brick-like in its handling. In

particular, it eases approaches to shallow banks, where a craft deeper at the edge may suffer. It also means the draught for the main baseplate can be a little deeper, giving valuable extra headroom inside.

The forward cockpit appears quite short because there is no fore-peak locker: the usable space is the same as a longer conventional cockpit. Instead, the gas bottles are stored in an aft locker, against the rear cabin bulkhead, which then keeps the gas piping to a minimum. Back in the forward cockpit, a steel seat runs around the well, which is open underneath, to give storage space for coal and such like. There is easy access to the weedhatch for the bow-thruster, and its associated battery and switches.

The aft deck is noticeable for two things: the lack of a tiller, and a large dodger surrounding the cockpit. This boat is wheel steered, which can certainly have advantages on a wide-beam craft. Some tillers can be difficult to handle, while wheel steering can be easier on the arms. The hydraulically-powered wheel is quite small, and set to the left of the boat, along with the engine panel, rocker switches for headlight and horn, single lever control and bow thruster joystick.

FACT FILE

BOAT *Happy Daze*

BUILDER
Bluewater Boats

ENGINE Vetus 65

DIMENSIONS
57ft X 12ft

PRICE

PRICE TESTED
£135,000 + VAT

CONTACT

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The solid steel dodger encases the whole of the stern, curving round slightly inboard. This gives a full-width bench seat protected from the wind, with storage lockers under. This is, of course, very useful for seating the crew, but doesn't get in the way of getting on and off the boat - as might be the case with extending the dodgers to meet the cabin side.

Engine

Under the deck lives the Vetus 65hp engine, which pushes the boat easily at canal speed at around 1400rpm. This also gives enough reserve power for tidal rivers. The engine is keel cooled, with a dry exhaust. This should be an appropriate decision for a boat that will spend most of its time on a fairly shallow canal, so avoiding blocked mudboxes and strainers that can affect a raw water-cooled exhaust.

The cockpit surround does not get in the way of the weedhatch, and the exhaust is safely routed out of the way - so the owners are unlikely to get burned when trying to remove debris from down the hatch. The large battery bank, with the owners' choice of 6V traction batteries, should easily be kept charged by the engine: however, an optional Vetus 6.5KVA diesel generator has been specified. This sits in its own sound-insulated cocoon and is operated by a simple switch near the galley.

Master cabin

Stepping down from the bow cockpit through the wide (and quite tall) forward doors, the master cabin is very light and spacious. The king-size bed juts out from the starboard cabin side, and has lots of space underneath, along with the waste tank. The forward door and bulkhead is glazed, and usefully, the top half of the bulkhead windows open for fresh air.



Happydaze - a wide-beam boat with a narrowboat-style hull.



Words & photos | Mark Langley

Galley has an enlarged breakfast bar.



Gas hob with eye level gas and oven.



Large three-seater sofa in the saloon.



‘A full-sized quadrant shower sits on the centreline, benefiting from the 6ft 8in headroom.’

The cabin sides are lined in solid oak tongue and groove planks set diagonally – a nice change from horizontal or vertical boarding. The cabin roof is painted white, with the stainless LED lights inset into this. As these LEDs use far less electricity than halogen bulbs, the whole boat can be lit with very little power. Ten halogen bulbs would eat away the stored power at around 16 amps an hour: compare that to about 3 amps for the same brightness with LEDs.

Cupboards sit either side of the front doors, and a large bank of wardrobes and a chest of drawers are against the toilet bulkhead, all in solid oak. A large radiator is opposite the bed. Throughout the boat, all services are easy to get to, just in case something does go wrong. A useful shelf above the bed head gives a place for the morning cuppa, with the portholes above having neat stoppers instead of curtains – much better when the window is directly above a bed.

Bathroom

A door, with a frosted glass panel in the upper section, leads to the corridor outside the bathroom. Here a wide set of side hatches give more ventilation; however, with no steps provided, these would only be suitable for use as an exit in case of emergency.

The loo itself is fairly large, with a domestic-sized quadrant shower on the centreline, benefiting from the 6ft 8in headroom found in the boat. The macerator toilet and vanity unit are against the hull side, with a heated towel rail running from the diesel fired central heating. There is storage under the sink and on a shelf running behind the loo. Otherwise, the bathroom is pleasantly free from clutter.

Saloon

Against the forward bulkhead sits a solid fuel stove in a slate-covered hearth, on the centreline of the boat

Bathroom has a full-sized quadrant shower.

so the chimney is less likely to be hit by branches. It should also mean the stove can heat the boat better. To the left of the fire is an attractive lit glass display unit. There are no fiddles or doors, so anything put on them could be knocked off if an entry to a lock is misjudged! Further high and low level cupboards are against the starboard cabin side.

The owners have added a large three-seater sofa to one side of the saloon, with a low TV cupboard on the other – sufficiently modest additions that the space still feels open. The solid oak flooring throughout the boat should prove to be hard-wearing, and can be sanded and refinished should damage occur. A large dog-box roof light (which is shallow enough not to raise the air draught of the boat too much) is double-glazed, as are the rest of the boat’s windows. This, coupled with the good sprayfoam insulation, should keep the boat particularly



snug during winter, when the owners will be aboard full-time.

Galley

The granite work surface curves into an enlarged breakfast bar on the starboard side. Instead of a separate dinette, the worktop is extended to hang over both sides of the cupboard underneath. Four people can eat here, sitting on high chairs: a very effective use of space, especially as it doubles up as more galley preparation space. The owners have usefully fitted a two-drawer filing cabinet into the 'dead' space in the breakfast bar – a place to store all the important 'ship's paperwork'!

Against the aft bulkhead is the gas hob, with the oven and grill at eye level. The stainless units match neatly with the oak finish to the cupboard doors, with a full size washer/dryer, fridge and an optional slimline dishwasher nestling underneath the inbuilt sink on the



port side. Careful consideration has been given to having a wide variety of drawers, shelves and racks within the galley, to cope with the needs of residential boaters.

The electric panel, including controls for the generator and 3000W inverter/charger, are mounted where they can easily be seen. The battery monitoring functions of the DC control system should make it easy to keep on top of energy use – vital when the boat is moored with no 230V shore supply at all, as the boat is currently in use.

Underway

In our experience, Bluewater's craft show good handling, with a positive response from the steering. The chines on the hull help with the tracking of the boat, reducing the suction effects of the bank in shallow water.

The owners, who are fairly new to boating, have taken to handling

ABOVE: King-sized bed in the master cabin.

LEFT: Oak finish to the cupboard doors in the galley.

RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM: Washer/dryer and dishwasher in the galley. Useful side hatch. Vetus 65hp engine.



✓ WE LIKE...

- Extended breakfast bar acts as a dining table.
- Rear dodger creates a semi-enclosed aft cockpit.
- Good access to service items for ongoing maintenance.



the boat well. Due to its sheer size, speeds on shallow waters – such as the Leeds & Liverpool Canal – are invariably slower than narrowboats. The wheel steering can take some getting used to, especially when navigating a boat close to the maximum dimensions of a waterway. However, after the maiden voyage from Preston Docks down the Ribble Link, and local cruising for a few months, the boat shows virtually no battle scars.

The engine is quiet and rattle-free. The Vetus marinisation of the Hyundai 2.6 litre engine is well proven in larger boats, and the 110-amp alternator should keep the batteries well charged during cruising.



TOP: Spacious aft deck – note the lack of a tiller.
 ABOVE LEFT: Steering wheel...
 ABOVE: ... and control panels.
 RIGHT: Good seating on the aft deck.



VERDICT

For the price, there is a lot of equipment aboard this boat, and the level of fit-out is high. The interior is light and very welcoming, while the external steelwork is of the highest quality. By pricing a fairly 'off-the-shelf' design with room for further adaptation, Bluewater can keep up their standards while not pushing the price up. This is a suitable craft for cruising wide canals and rivers, and would also work very nicely as a floating apartment for a couple.

A boat similar to *Happy Daze* would be £135,000, plus VAT if applicable.