

Twin test

Custom-built craft

Braidbar Boats is known for producing high-quality bespoke boats, which, while meeting their owners' exact requirements, also retain a strong company identity. **Mark Langley** reviews two examples...



Santiago has gleaming paintwork and signwriting, while Tim Tyler hull handles well and stops quickly.

Length.....**58ft 6in**
 Engine.....**Beta 43**
 Berths.....**2+2**
 Price (from).....**£105,000**

FROM ITS BASE ON THE MACCLESFIELD CANAL at Higher Poynton, Braidbar Boats has been building narrowboats for over 30 years. The company produces around seven bespoke craft a year, as well as undertaking general maintenance and engineering services on site. On a recent visit, we took the opportunity to review their latest boat, No. 146 *Santiago*, as well as having a briefer look aboard No. 142 *Inception*.

Shell and exterior

Santiago is a 58ft 6in traditional stern narrowboat built on a 10/6/5/4mm Tim Tyler shell; Tim is Braidbar’s default shell provider, though they will fit to any shell the customer wants. The hull has a simulated planked bow, which is very smooth, while aft, the hull and cabin both taper in and rise together, giving a good traditional-style shape without resorting to false rivets on every seam. Underwater, decent length swims have a fine exit point at the stern, with a bow that cleaves the water cleanly, which should provide good handling. On the aft deck, a single steel deck plate gives access to the chute-like weedhatch – a Tyler speciality, which prevents any weedhatch malfunction from sinking the boat.

The dark blue cabin-side paintwork contrasts well with the cream roof and coachlines, while the red of the handrails and detailing gives a bright splash of colour. Brass vents and the pole/plank holder set off the colour scheme well, while the signwriting and decoration, provided by Andy Russell, are superb. Brass portholes aft and larger drop-back vent windows forward are a pragmatic mix. The roof space remains

“The dark blue cabin-side paintwork contrasts well with the cream roof and coachlines”



Santiago has a good traditional shape and styling, with superb decoration provided by Andy Russell.



Well laid-out electrical control panels.

uncluttered, though Braidbar has fitted the wiring and deck gland to allow the owner to add solar panels in the future, if so desired.

The forward cockpit is unencumbered by a cratch and cover, which does make line handling and moving around a lot easier. A single seat across the cockpit opens to a spacious locker, while under the deck is the stainless steel water tank. A brass tunnel lamp is mounted on a removable pole just aft of the gas locker, while vents on



The Portway stove has an inbuilt hearth, side convection fins and a double insulated flue.

the forward bulkhead feed low-level ventilation into the cabin. Substantial buffered hooks keep the doors in an open position, without the annoying rattling that often affects simple cabin hooks.

Saloon

From the bow cockpit, two storage steps head down into the saloon. To port is a BFM Portway multi-fuel stove. This is particularly interesting, as it has its own inbuilt hearth and aluminium convection fins on the back and side, which help put heat into the air, rather than it radiating to the sides of the boat. Along with the double insulated flue (and external chimneys), it makes the tiling surrounding the stove almost

redundant – it won’t become hot, unlike conventional stoves.

Opposite is a corner TV unit with cupboards above and below. This merges seamlessly into the deep bookshelf that runs along the starboard side below the gunwale, ending in a neat storage area for a coffee table, and a further bookshelf at the end of the galley.

There is plenty of space in the saloon for a couple of easy chairs, with the deep windows and glazed forward doors giving a good view out. The horizontal tongue and groove-jointed solid wood panels on the cabin sides are nicely balanced by the veneered ply panelling on the ceiling and under the



Compact washing machine and large 12V fridge.



Granite worktops with a deep sink and drainer set in, and a wider than normal cooker.



Linear galley gives plenty of space and divides dinette from saloon, while Welsh dresser provides added interest.



C-shaped bulkhead is a signature feature of Braidbar boats.



Superb internal decoration by Andy Russell.



Lots of good bookcase space, plus a sensible sized double panel radiator.



Access to the dry storage space next to the engine-hatch in the bulkhead above leads to the stern tube greaser and fuel tank valves.

gunwales. The oiled and burnt oak flooring is very hard-wearing and looks suitably aged. Lighting throughout is from LEDs, both downlights and wall-mounted reading lights, of which there are a lot. The warm colour of the LEDs matches the woodwork and is very controllable, as well as massively reducing the current required compared to conventional halogen lamps.

Galley

The linear galley neatly divides the saloon from the dining area, which does make the boat feel a lot bigger than it is. To port is a long run of solid granite worktop, with a very deep sink and drainer set into it. The

owner is an enthusiastic bread and pastry maker, so the granite top is perfect for this. To help with the baking, a larger than normal 600mm-wide Belling cooker is fitted to the aft end of the galley. Its 230V igniter and fan are powered through a separate small inverter, so do not rely on the main inverter being switched on, thus saving power.

As well as a large cupboard, a 12V Shoreline fridge and compact Zanussi washing machine sit behind matching doors. A water filter feeds to a separate tap in the galley, while the aluminium venetian blind behind the sink avoids any fire risk issues with curtains or wooden blinds.

Opposite the sink is a full-height Welsh dresser with a solid oak worktop. Deep cupboards and drawers below are matched by shelving and smaller high-level cupboards above, giving lots of storage. Well positioned lighting also means you are not working in your shadow. As the corridor moves over to starboard, there is a shallow cupboard under the gunwale, with a bottle rack next to it.

Dinette

A C-shaped bulkhead, which has become almost a signature feature of Braidbar boats, gives a sense of separation between the galley and dinette, without compartmentalising the interior.



The saloon has ample room for two people to relax and is a light, bright space.



Lots of storage under the raised dinette.



Bathroom has off-corridor layout but in a walk-through format.

The raised dinette easily seats four people and provides a good view outside; it can also be simply converted to a double berth for guests. On the aft bulkhead is a plate cupboard, which is of a useful enough size without being a head-bumping hazard. There are huge lockers under the berth, easily capable of swallowing bedding and guests' luggage.

Ventilation is something Braidbar is conscious of, with all lockers and cupboards having peephole vents, usually in a simple cross pattern. However, as the owner has named his boat after a pilgrimage walk from Burgos to Santiago (Camino de Santiago de Compostelo),

the vents have morphed into St James crosses. The side door above the tin cupboard also boasts some very fine artwork by Andy Russell, which continues this pilgrimage theme.

Bathroom

The corridor continues straight through the bathroom on the starboard side, though the room is laid out in the style of an off-corridor facility, which makes the space feel bigger than it is. A large 800mm quadrant shower is on the centreline, with the calorifier tucked away under the gunwale next to it and an airing cupboard above. The Sanimarine macerator toilet pumps to a holding tank

under the bed and there is a useful level gauge on the side of the vanity unit. The porcelain sink is fitted on top of a granite surface to match the galley, with a cupboard below housing toiletries. An extractor fan keeps condensation down, while the very attractive and slightly sparkly Mermaid wall boarding in the shower looks easy to clean.

A single towel radiator in the bathroom is supplemented by a low double-convactor radiator, making this a warm space in winter. The Webasto Thermotop C 5.2kW diesel heater provides heating and hot water. The four radiators (all topped with shelves) and

IN DETAIL EQUIPMENT

► SHELL

- 10/6/5/4mm steel
- Traditional stern
- Wesley Marine windows
- Large forward deck locker
- Stainless steel water tank
- Brass fittings
- Digital water tank gauge

► ENGINE

- Beta 43 engine
- PRM150 gearbox
- Single lever control
- Deluxe instrument panel
- 175A domestic alternator
- 45A starter alternator

► LINING

- Solid timber (ash/oak)
- Full spray foam insulation
- Burnt and oiled solid oak floor

► SALOON

- BFM Portway solid fuel stove
- Twin easy chairs
- Deep bookshelves
- Shelving and TV cupboard

► GALLEY

- Belling 600mm full gas cooker
- Under hung s/s sink
- Granite and oak worktops
- Seagull IV water filter
- Zanussi studio washer
- Shoreline 5ft 3in 12V fridge

► BATHROOM

- Saniflo SN35 macerator toilet
- Stainless steel water tank
- Ceramic washbasin
- Vanity unit with storage
- Airing cupboard
- Towel rail and radiator
- 800mm quadrant shower

► BEDROOM

- 4ft wide double berth extending 12in
- Large wardrobe
- Radiator
- Overhead cabinet and lighting
- Houdini hatch

► ELECTRICAL SYSTEM

- Four 110Ah domestic batteries
- One 110Ah starter battery
- Mastervolt 12/2500/120 inverter/charger
- LED lighting throughout
- 230V ring main

► HEATING & HOT WATER

- Webasto Thermotop C 5.2kW diesel heating
- Four radiators
- Heated towel rail
- 55-litre twin coil calorifier
- 1kW 230V immersion heater

the towel radiator should easily distribute enough heat to stop short-cycling – the bane of diesel heating systems.

Bedroom

The aft bedroom has a 4ft wide double berth which extends 12in into the corridor to give more elbow room for the hull-side occupant. Cupboards above the bed include a shelf to store the porthole stoppers, and one for the large glazed Houdini hatch which gives extra light and summer ventilation. Although some of the space under the bed is for the toilet tank, there is still generous, easily-accessed storage underneath. Against the aft bulkhead is a good-sized wardrobe, which leaves enough room for the owner to stand in front of it, unlike on many boats. There is certainly plenty of space here for a couple on a long-term cruise.



The aft bedroom has plenty of storage and is roomy enough for a couple on a long-term cruise.

Engine room

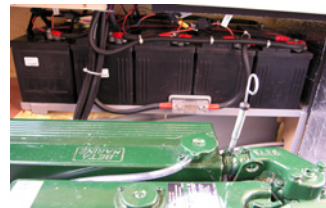
A door leads into the engine room. The phenolic ply flooring to starboard has a hatch to access dry storage next to the engine, while the raised engine box itself has good levels of sound insulation. Under the boards, the Beta 43 engine has been well fitted, with a conventional stern tube and flexible coupling. The four leisure and one starter battery to port are easy to get at and have large surge fuses to protect the electrical system. Mounted right aft is the Webasto heater, which has been placed against the weedhatch to allow it to breathe cool air from the

air intake vents. The fuel feed is taken through vibration-resistant coiled copper lines from the engine primary fuel filter.

The large electrical cupboard above has a Mastervolt combi 2.5kW pure sine wave inverter and 100A charger, as well as the 12V and 230V switch panels on the forward part of the cupboard. The engine control panel is unique to Braidbar and also includes the ready-use switches for lights and the horn. Control is by means of a single lever while the standard PRM150 hydraulic gearbox gives smooth shifting.

Underway

The engine noise does not intrude – the sound insulation works well on an already quiet engine and could hardly be heard or felt in the saloon. Steering astern out of the Braidbar basin was very simple; there is no need for a bowthruster on this boat. Underway, the boat remained quiet, both aboard and from the towpath, and pulled remarkably little wash at cruising speed. It stopped well without slewing and has a sensibly weighted tiller that is not tiring to handle for a long time.



Accessible battery bank and fuses.



Webasto heater carefully installed in the coolest part of the engine room.



There's plenty of space to stand in front of the wardrobe.

Verdict

Braidbar consistently produces high-quality bespoke boats, which, while incorporating the owner's specifications, also retain a distinctive 'Braidbar' character. *Santiago* is no exception. It is very hard to pick fault with this boat: the joinery is superb, the level of engineering outstanding and the design has clearly been very well thought out. No wonder that at the Crick Boat Show (at which *Santiago* may be on display this year) previous Braidbar boat owners will be manning the company's stand. The fact that customers often return to Braidbar for a second boat when upgrading is a testament to their satisfaction.

Perhaps it is the expertise developed from running a canalside engineering service, or maybe its owners Peter and Susan Mason's insistence on perfection, but whatever it is, Braidbar continues to produce great boats.

Braidbar Boats (01625 873471, www.braidbarboats.co.uk)

Length..... **60ft**
 Engine..... **Beta 43**
 Berths..... **2+3**
 Price (from)..... **£130,000**

WHILE VISITING BRAIDBAR we also took a look at the company's 60ft narrowboat, *Inception*. Although it has some similarities to *Santiago*, it also has a number of interesting unique features.

Designed as a cruising boat for two families, it has been specially adapted for the owner, who suffers with a bad back. Two features are the extra-large hatch leading down from the aft deck, and the cupboards in the galley, which are raised far higher than normal to give a more comfortable working height, as well as additional storage.

The 'reverse' layout is slightly different to the norm, as the saloon, rather than the galley, is furthest aft. This gives more separation between the two sleeping areas (saloon and bedroom); plus, having a galley aft can disturb the cook when underway. The saloon aft provides an extension to the semi-trad cockpit, so giving a much more family-friendly entertaining space. Having glazed aft doors, as well as those leading to the forward cockpit, enables the cockpit and saloon to flow together. These doors, coupled with the two glazed roof hatches and four glazed side doors, make this all-porthole boat very light inside.

Either side of the extended steps down into the saloon are sets of wardrobes at both high and low levels, to give plenty of storage for occupants of the saloon. *Inception* has the same model of solid fuel stove as *Santiago*, fitted sensibly to port to avoid low-hanging branches catching the chimney when meeting other boats. A low level cupboard runs along the port side, while a largish chair (which converts to a single bed) occupies the open saloon. An L-shaped dinette has sloping cushions for comfort and converts in a few seconds to a double bed, with easy access underneath for the bedding.

Under one of the side doors is stored a custom-made folding gate leg table, where the two leaves are asymmetric, so serving as a dining



Inception

Large semi-trad cockpit leads down into the saloon via glazed doors and a large hatch side.

table for two or for the whole crew. Also, the diagonal ash T&G boarding here does enhance the height of the interior; the joinery is as superb as any Braidbar boat.

In the galley, the underhung sink is a one-and-a-half unit, without a drainer – instead the owner has opted for a removable polymer unit. The galley tap combines the filtered water feed, but through a separate pipe inside the mixer all the way to the nozzle, unlike some cheaper models that allow filtered and general water to mix. Under the dinette on the galley side there is a hatch which leads to the baseplate – as well as being ideal for chilling beer, it also gives further ventilation to the cabin bilge.

Moving forward into the walk-through bathroom, the

toilet to starboard is neatly obscured by the door when it is open and a pigeon box above gives useful ventilation. An extra-large 1000mm by 800mm quadrant shower enclosure has been fitted here. There is plenty of space too, with two towel radiators running off the (expensive but very reliable) Hurricane diesel heating system.

Forward, a raised extending double bed has lots of storage underneath, while the wardrobes against the bulkhead have doors that open to clear the steps up to the cockpit, making all the space easy to access. Up in the bow, under the cratch and canopy, is a large forward locker above the bowthruster, with a false floor to enable a Honda petrol generator to be stored.

However, this generator, the EU20i inverter model, has been adapted to run off LPG rather than more hazardous petrol. A fixed bayonet point and isolation valve is fitted in the cockpit, so the generator can be run ashore (or possibly on the foredeck) while still complying with the Boat Safety Scheme. Shoreline points, both in the bow and stern, make hooking up easy, while the two solar panels fitted should keep the batteries in a good condition without having to rely on the generator too often.

Inception is a very different boat to *Santiago* while still having many Braidbar characteristics. Again, it is a bespoke boat, built to meet the requirements of its owners, and has proved very successful in the period they have owned it.



Galley has higher than normal work surfaces.



Aft saloon is bright and spacious.