

# The **boat-builder's** boat

Stokeboats latest narrowboat has been built for company owner Mike Adkins. **Mark Langley** looks at how he harnessed years of experience in the quest for a perfect cruising craft

**S**tokeboats (or Stoke-on-Trent Boatbuilding) is a long-established company that has built a wide variety of bespoke boats since 1980.

Recently, company owner Mike Adkins decided to take advantage of a slot in production to design a boat for himself, which incorporates his ideas of what makes an ideal cruising craft. The result is a boat that, although fitting the current favoured style of a reverse layout, 57ft semi-trad, is quite different to a lot of comparative boats.

## Shell and exterior

Stokeboats builds its own craft from the baseplate up at its yard at Longport Wharf on the Trent & Mersey Canal. While Mike chose 57ft as the popular go-anywhere length, and opted for a semi-trad

stern, he decided to give the boat several tug-style features, including a nod towards a covered hold.

The hull has a double curvature bow and long swims at both ends. Stokeboats is renowned for building craft that handle and swim well, though this is the first time in many years it has produced a boat with this bow style. While it is a bit more time consuming to produce, it does give the bow a very purposeful look. It is also different to the Jasher-inspired bows that are common among some boat-builders, and possibly cuts the water better.

The forward cockpit and forepeak take up 10ft of boat length, giving the right look for a tug-style craft without giving over too much space to the bow. The deck is 10in below the gunwale to give a more useable space than a flush deck, as loose seating can be more comfortably used. The

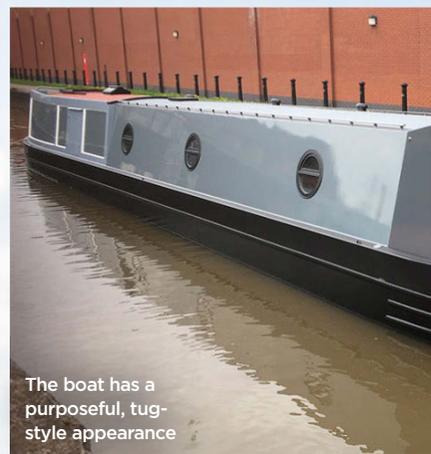
forepeak is purely a storage locker, though it is big enough to take a bow-thruster in the future (should an owner want one) and the entire compartment is separate and watertight to the rest of the boat.

The stern is elliptical, with a long taper that also helps with smooth water flow. It also gently rises, matching the cabin above. The cabin is split in two parts. The aft 18ft 6in section is laid out as a traditional boat, with recessed panels – a large one plus two smaller panels either side of the side hatches. The remainder of the cabin has been slightly tapered, reducing the width by about 3in at the top, so there is more tumblehome, which creates the appearance of a covered hold. This gives the boat a very attractive look, without the loss of internal space that a full steel replica of a hold would entail.

The aft section has solid



The large cockpit is set 9in lower than the gunwales, so allowing for the safe use of free-standing chairs.



The boat has a purposeful, tug-style appearance

Great lines, but could matt black paint work well on the forward hold section?



## FACT FILE

**Length** 57ft  
**Berths** 2+2  
**Engine** Beta 43  
**Price** £132,000 inc VAT  
01782 813831,  
[stokeboats.co.uk](http://stokeboats.co.uk)



The recessed cabin panels awaiting signwriting.



The change in the cabin tumblehome is subtle but works well.



handrails, often described as traditional handrails, while the forward section has shallow D-section raised handrails, of the type many later working boats used. As well as looking good, they provide a very secure grip.

The paint scheme is an attractive mix of light and dark greys, with a non-slip red oxide finish on the aft cabin roof and a grey version on the forward part. Mike had considered painting the 'hold' part of the cabin in matt black, but to our eye, the grey works well without turning the boat into an oven! The hull paint is brought up to the gunwales, which is sensible and suits the tug styling. Black-framed portholes are in the forward part of the cabin, with black mushroom vents on

the roof. There is a neat chrome tunnel lamp on a short mast just behind the forepeak, while the horn resides under the port gunwale. A six porthole pigeon box aft adds to the traditional look.

### Saloon

A central doorway with a large hatch lets you into the saloon, down some wide steps. Often, reverse-layout narrowboats have the galley right aft, but Mike wanted more of a feeling of space when you enter the cabin. (There are some disadvantages to having the galley right aft, notably the proximity of the cooker to people walking past.) The saloon is fairly compact but fits in a free-standing sofa bed for lounging and guests. There

is also a large hanging locker to starboard, with a useful cupboard opening into the saloon at the base – this could be used to house a compact studio washing machine.

There are no windows in the saloon but there are side doors either side, which can have clear acrylic infills placed in them to let in a lot of light. The side doors are exceptionally well secured as well, with an internal bar locking mechanism, rather than just relying on a couple of bolts that can easily be prised open. There is more light and ventilation from the pigeon box as well.

The cabin woodwork feels very warm, with cream-painted cabin sides and white T&G panelling on the roof and hull sides. This is offset by a mix of



The saloon is compact but it makes a refreshing change to enter a reverse-layout boat and not be plunged into the galley.



The integrated rubbish bin in the galley is simple but brilliant.



The neat Thetford gas hob ensures pans are spaced out well.



A standard sofa bed works well in the saloon, with space for a couple of side tables and possibly another chair if required.



Lots of pull-out basket units in the galley cupboards.



Large wardrobe and dressing table in the forward cabin.

port, with a small, two-person breakfast bar at the aft end. The galley is compact but fits in a lot, with a mixture of cupboards and drawers. At the forward end is a full-height unit containing the Belling oven and grill, with an integrated Shoreline 12V fridge underneath. It would be possible to replace two of the drawers in the galley with a slide-out freezer, if required – another example of the future-proofing Mike has considered when designing this boat. The three-burner gas hob is under a glass lid, which acts as a splashback when open.

There is a stainless steel underslung sink, and the worktop continues into the corner behind the oven unit, which is a good space to store equipment away from the rest of the worktop. The cupboard tucked into the corner is accessed via a set of swing-out shelves, while further forward is an integrated waste

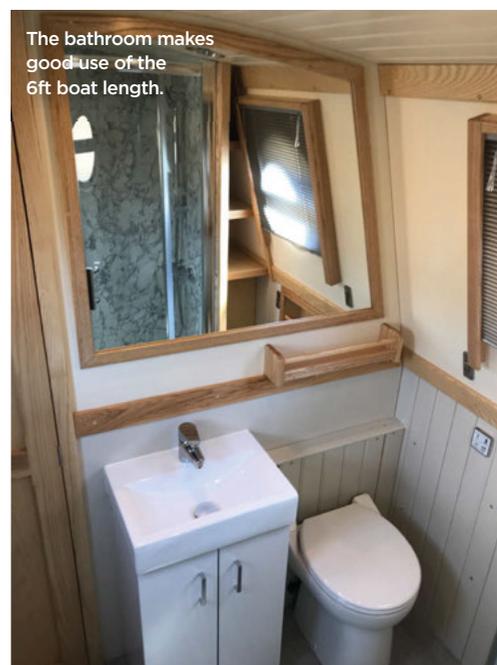
darker and lighter wood trims, which work well, giving the interior a contemporary take on more traditional finishes. The carpet in the saloon creates a homely feel while the LED lighting is well distributed. There is a TV mounted under the gunwale to port, as well as one of the anthracite tiered column radiators running from the 5kW Webasto diesel-fired central heating. Unusually for a traditional-style boat, there is no solid-fuel stove – the saloon would lose space if one was fitted and the boat works very well without one anyway.

**Galley**

As you walk from the saloon, you only just notice the change in tumblehome. The headroom and shoulder width are virtually unaffected. The galley is offset to



Large quadrant shower lined in a marble-effect finish.



The bathroom makes good use of the 6ft boat length.



### THREE-BURNER HOB

Pans are out of the way of passing traffic.

### WASHING STATION

Stainless steel underslung sink set into the worktop.

### HEAD HEIGHT OVEN

Full-height unit containing the Belling oven and grill.

### LIGHT & BRIGHT

A flat skylight above keeps the galley bright

bin. There is also a flap held with a magnetic catch, which swings back to allow a large bin to be easily removed for emptying – bins are so often an afterthought on boats. A flat skylight above keeps the galley bright even on a dull day.

### Bathroom

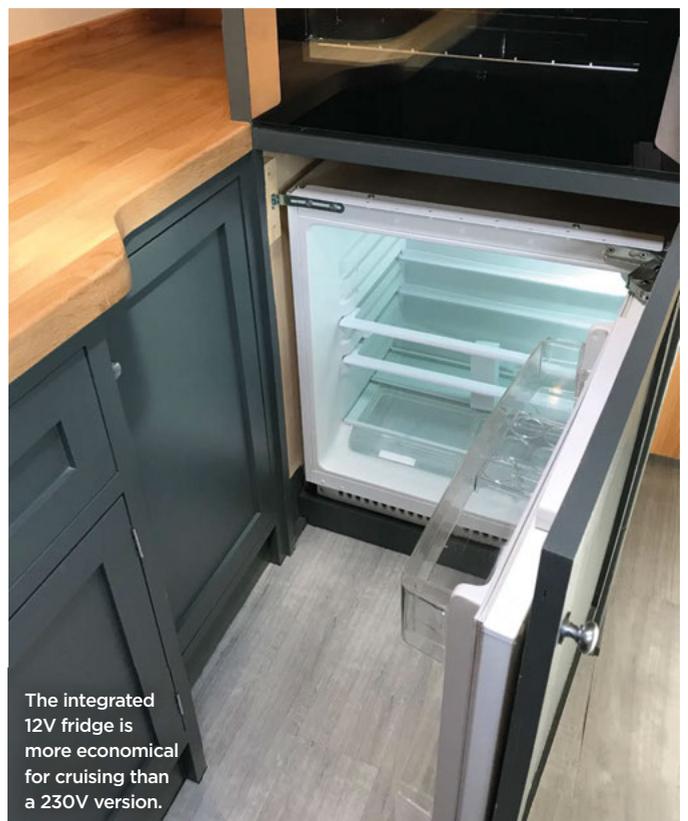
A walk-through bathroom has both doors on the starboard side of the boat. On the centreline is a washbasin set into a cupboard unit, with the Vetus macerator loo next to it. Opposite is a big quadrant shower with marble-effect lining. Two portholes in the bathroom, like all the others, have neat aluminium slat blinds contained in frames so they don't flap in the breeze.

To the side of the shower cubicle are useful shelves for towels and toiletries. Mike has added a lot of storage throughout the boat but not so much that the spaces feel cluttered. There is the option to add more in the future, but for now there is enough for a cruising couple.

### Bedroom

The front bedroom bucks the trend for a raised, fixed double-berth, instead having a pair of low-level, large singles – with the one to port being slightly wider. Many boaters like a berth that both people can easily get in and out of, and they can be bridged to make a huge double if required. The berths go right up to the bulkhead and have reading lights under the shelves – the forward end of the berths is usually higher than the aft end, so it makes sense to have the head uphill towards the bow. The berth cushions are very firm and supportive, and are finished in a robust blue fabric.

Against the bathroom bulkhead is a 4ft-wide, twin-door wardrobe with shelving in the upper part and hanging space below, while a chest of drawers makes for a good vanity unit. There is also a lot of very accessible storage under the berths – this could easily fit in large crates to make organisation easier. Despite the compact nature of the cabin, it



The integrated 12V fridge is more economical for cruising than a 230V version.



Useful storage against the shower and a dedicated place for loo rolls.

fits in far more useable storage than many other boats. There is a radiator in here as well.

Right at the front of the berths is the pump-out tank, which runs across the boat so that the lateral trim is not affected as it fills. Under the forward cockpit is a large stainless steel water tank. Both tanks are accessible should they need any maintenance in the future.

### Engine and services

The aft cockpit contains two large seat lockers, with the port one dedicated to gas bottles. There are two 13kg propane cylinders in here, properly restrained, while there is substantial protection for the wall-mounted regulator – often these are positioned so that they're vulnerable to being hit when exchanging gas bottles. There is also an Alde bubble tester to regularly check the soundness of the gas system.

On the port side is a shaped engine control column, with a deck light and switches for the headlight and horn. Two phenolic ply deck boards give access to the engine bay, which have been lined with quality



#### ELLIPTICAL STERN

Encourages good flow of water around the stern.

barrier sound insulation. A single steel hatch in the counter lets you get to the weedhatch easily, without having to clamber around the engine.

#### DECK HATCHES

Sound insulation with barrier core on all three rear hatches.

A Beta 43 Greenline engine is fitted in the quite deep engine room – the boat draws a little more than many modern craft. The installation

#### SEAT LOCKERS

Aft cockpit contains two large seat lockers.

is exceptionally neat and tidy, with all cabling labelled. The engine is skin tank-cooled, with a decent sized-tank, while a hospital generator-



The unusual twin forward cabin works well for a cruising couple. The separate berths can also be made into a huge double.



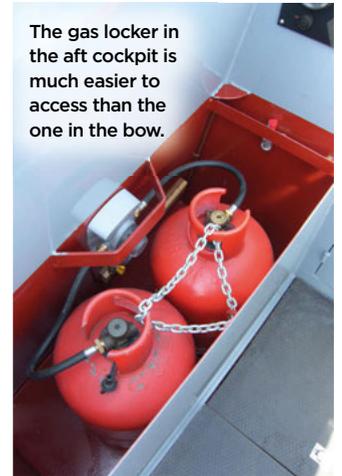
Simple but effective power controls and monitors.



A traditional pigeon box contrasts with the modern 4G aerial.



The calorifier is mounted in a fully accessible cupboard, with a 1kW immersion heater and a proper hot water expansion vessel.



The gas locker in the aft cockpit is much easier to access than the one in the bow.

type attenuation silencer is also fitted, with all pipework lagged. A fuel pre-filter is used and the tank drain valve is easy to access, to encourage maintenance of the diesel tank. A Centaflex coupling is on the shaft, with a conventional stern gland – the greaser is easy to reach and there is a small sump under the gland to prevent water sloshing around the entire engine bilge.

There are twin alternators on the Beta 43 – the 45-amp one charges the starter battery with the 175-amp alternator supplying the large domestic bank. Four 160Ah AGM batteries are fitted in the battery box, with master fuses easily identified on the bulkhead behind. The master switches are usefully set inside the cabin.

Under the aft steps is the 230V distribution panel, as well as the Victron MultiPlus 3000, giving 3kW pure sinewave power and 120-amp charging. There is also a galvanic isolator installed, with access to the master switches above. The engine compartment and bilge are both very well ventilated – something that is mirrored in the bow, where low-level vents are ducted into the cabin bilge. This should help keep the bilges dry and corrosion free.

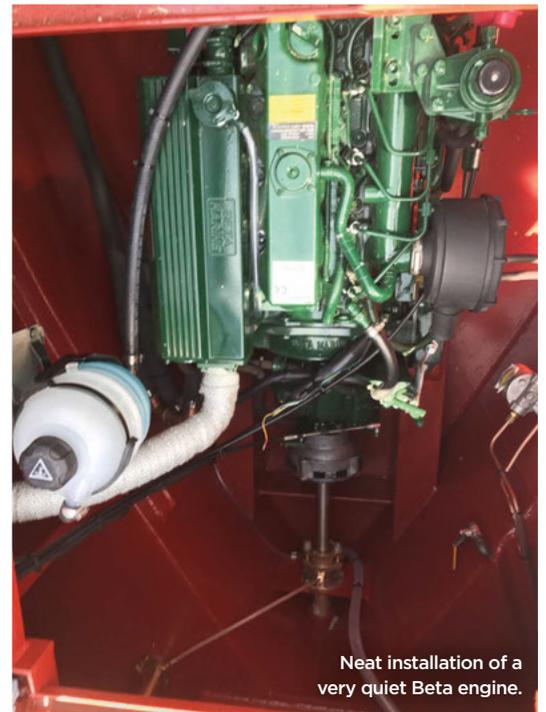
In the saloon is a half-height cupboard in the aft port corner that contains the calorifier and ancillary fittings. Water systems on boats are prone to needing attention over their life, so having very easy access is crucial. There is also an expansion vessel on the hot water side, as well as the accumulator on the cold feed, which should minimise stress damage to the calorifier – something often missed by boat-builders.



A steel hatch allows good access to the weedhatch, stern gland and greaser.



The combi-inverter charger and other 230V items fitted in the well-ventilated aft step, which is fully removeable.



Neat installation of a very quiet Beta engine.

## WW'S VERDICT

Stokeboats has made another superb craft, which brings a different flavour to the semi-trad-style, incorporating tug details but without making the interior feel cramped. The quality of the steelwork is superb, with exceptionally neat welding and no visible frame markings on the cabin side. The boat feels solid on the outside, with a pleasantly heavy tiller that falls comfortably to hand. There are modern tweaks, such as the 4G aerial, as

well as Stokeboats' roof light, but the boat has an unashamed traditional feel.

The interior is a mix of good design, pragmatism for a cruising boat and comfort. All services are easily accessible while the fit-out is very well planned. Having a larger forward cockpit on a tug-style boat is always going to reduce the cabin length, and on this boat it is felt in the saloon. By omitting a solid-fuel stove, however, and using

a breakfast bar rather than trying to cram in a dinette, Mike has managed to ensure the room retains a decent amount of floor space.

Overall, this boat (as yet unnamed) is an excellent example of Stokeboats' long heritage. For a serious cruising couple who want more than a token amount of traditional features, this could be the ideal builder. The design and style are superb and the boat definitely looks the part.

