



First Look

PROPER JOB

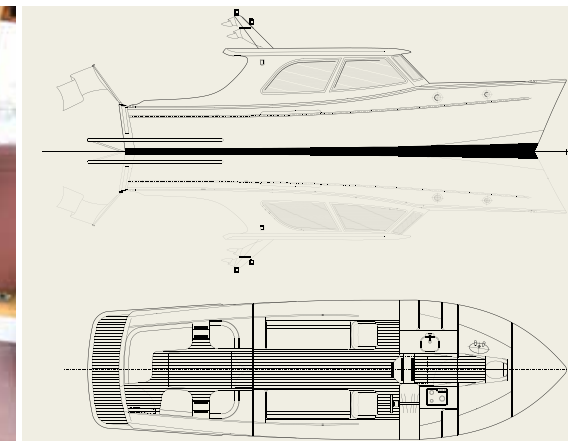
Tradition and modernity come together seamlessly in Cornish builder Cockwells latest wooden custom launch

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We might, at least ostensibly, be living in conscientious times, supposedly scalded by brushes with the intemperate notions of our recent past: things like mindless speed, aggressive individualism and a wanton regard for fossil fuel consumption. But still today, most of the world's motorboat builders continue to build planing cabin boats, built for top-end speed and not much else. More often than not, you will see these craft ploughing a clumsy furrow through the water as they squat on their sterns at anything less than planing speed. And once on the plane, many of these boats have an uncomfortable slamming motion that stresses hull and crew alike and keeps these boats in port, even on nice, lively days. Comfort, seaworthiness and a broad range of usable, economical speed have been, to paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, very costly sacrifices upon the altar of speed. In a small, open sports boat, it's the best formula for thrills and spills, but in larger boats, there must be a better way.

*Above: sea trials off the Cornish coast
Right: fly-by-wire cockpit controls*





COCKWELLS 33

LOA	DISPLACEMENT
33ft (10m) + swim platform	7 tonnes
LWL	ENGINE
30ft (9.1m)	Yanmar 6BY3, 260hp
BEAM	FUEL TANK
10ft 2in (3.1m)	500 litres
DRAUGHT	PRICE
3ft 1in (94cm)	c£400K inc VAT



Enter the semi-displacement hull form. Like so many sensible solutions, it is hardly radical. Most boats that work in rough conditions day-in, day-out, like RNLI launches and harbour pilot boats, are of this type, with a rounded bilge, very shallow deadrise and a long keel.

Nine years ago, we shared a stand with Dave Cockwell at the Southampton Boat Show – or, as Dave puts it – “you lot squatted on my stand”. Back then, he had a wooden pilot cutter yacht in frame and the first of what has turned out to be a line of semi-displacement, traditionally styled, wooden custom motor yachts. They are drawn by one of Britain’s best naval architects working in this area, Andrew Wolstenholme, with a long line of credits in semi-displacement motorboats, including the Broom and Hardy ranges. *Impulsive* is in this mould, with her rounded bottom complemented by a hard spray chine running down each flank (mostly hidden under the water). Sat quayside, the Cockwells custom motor yacht is highly distinctive with its lovely stepped sheerline (Wolstenholme also uses this to good effect on the Bristol range of retro power boats built by Star Yachts), wooden cabinsides and large windows.

It was one of those boat tests that came together on the spot: a sunny day, and a waiting chase boat in the form of another Cockwells launch, the Duchy 27 moored alongside on the pontoon. Photographer Gary Blake turned up out of the blue looking for work, so off we went for a quick, impromptu ‘first impressions’ test on Southampton Water.

ABOARD

Dave’s custom motor launches range in size, so far between 33ft and 39ft (10-12m). This one is a relative baby at 33ft, recently launched, and named *Impulsive*

– after the manner in which her owner ordered her.

These days, 33ft is not a big yacht, sailing or power, but after stepping aboard through swim platform and gated transom, *Impulsive* feels enormous due to the lack of step between saloon and cockpit. The deck level is split roughly equally between these two areas – and a cockpit awning effectively doubles the sheltered space when necessary. Both areas are capable of taking six for sit-down dining, thanks to the drop-leaf table in each.

Working from aft forwards, the cockpit has seating for at least six in comfort – and a flight of two steps cut into each side from sole to deck level make accessing the laid teak side decks a breeze. A cabin-top handrail removes some of the peril from using them to access the flat, laid-teak foredeck. The whole cockpit structure is in GRP, and storage under the sole, accessed by a lifting hatch, is abyssal – easily big enough to take dive gear, inflatable tenders and a lot more. You could climb in to rummage around if necessary. Full-height doors lead forward into the spacious saloon where settees runs down each side of the big, drop-leaf table. At the forward end are helmsman’s and navigator’s seats with lifting seat pads, then three steps take you down to a good-sized galley and, forward of that, a comfortable heads. This one has been designed as a dayboat (Dave refers to them somewhat modestly as ‘picnic boats’), although other owners have specified cabins.

The hull is in inch-thick yellow cedar on plywood bulkheads, strip-planked in a single layer and glassed and epoxied inside and out. Beyond that, everything on these boats is custom. This one is decked out in sweet chestnut, a seldom-used timber, but very traditional, particularly in the build of upper Thames rowing boats, and teak, giving a pleasant two-tone wood effect.

Above: full-height doors between cockpit and saloon; under way with canopy erected; hidden LCD TV that rises up on a motor; opening helm’s window



Paint accents are in white, two-pack Awlgrip, about the most resilient paint finish there is. Seating is in pale-brown leather, from the same upholsterers who do Aston Martin cars. It’s a little automotive for this tester, and it’s important to remember that these are custom boats: everything but the hull is a blank canvas.

Everywhere aboard this boat, the quality is apparent: Dave shows off the smooth, heavy gliding motion of the dovetail-joined drawers, a set of custom glassware from Sark Glass, and the world’s most beautiful toolkit in its own custom-made chest. In terms of systems, this is, in common with others of Cockwells’ custom launches, a very modern boat: steering is either by wheel or by a fly-by-wire joystick and shuttle wheel that balance the engine, bow thruster, and stern and trim tabs. This system doubles as an autohelm, and will do all sorts of clever things like holding a specific place, heading or both. The whole thing can run off a plug-in remote for easy berthing and, when married to the appropriate MOB device, will even follow an MOB, maintaining a safe distance.

The entire saloon sole, table and all, rises up at the press of a button for very good access to the single Yanmar diesel. Behind us, a flat screen TV rises up out of nowhere, at the press of another button. Subtle ‘mood’ lighting is hidden under the saloon seat fronts. All this comfort and convenience, along with those huge windows that really come into their own when you are inside, create a very luxurious space – a sort of floating sitting room. “You don’t test a boat like this by driving it,” says Dave. “You get a really good bottle of wine, sit here in some lovely spot, drink it, and ask yourself – do I feel good?” To this end, the owner has specified a nice little six-bottle wine ‘cellar’ (*pictured right*).

ON THE WATER

Thankfully, the boat does drive well too – actually, like a dream. We head out into Southampton Water, the red Duchy 27 running alongside in the last of the afternoon light. The first thing you notice about *Impulsive* is the visibility from every angle and at any speed from those positively panoramic windows.

We quickly ran the single Yanmar diesel up to its sweet spot of 3,400rpm and 14 knots, then all the way up to 3,800rpm where we are making just over 17 knots through the water, the boat’s top whack.

The vibration is minimal, the noise reasonably well muted, given that the engine is right behind us under the sole boards in the saloon. There is no sensation of rising up onto the plane – the view changes very little. It only becomes apparent when coming off the power suddenly, as she slows down fast, taking in some water through the walk-in transom.

Cornering is completely flat – throwing the helm over hard (or using the diminutive shuttle wheel) gives a decent turning circle at only 3 to 4 degrees of heel. It’s quite a common trait in rounded-bottom, semi-displacement types, and a very different feel to that of a typical planing boat, which will fall onto its deadrise angle and bank into a turn. I only spent a short time at the helm but it was apparent that this is a boat happy at any speed, and doubtless in rougher weather, particularly upwind, where it would be firmer rooted than a planing boat. The ride is silken and sure-footed, but with enough plane and power to feel some excitement as you glide over the waves. As a compromise between speed and sensibility, it seems extraordinarily good.

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Above: the saloon sole lifts at the press of a button to expose the engine; comfortable, secure heads; cockpit steps leading to side decks
Below: neat storage for six bottles of wine

