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- | *Windy 35 Khamsin*
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Speed; one of our society's most potent and lasting obsessions. With things as they are, though, maybe you should forever forego your dreams of a furiously fast and glamorous boat, and stick to some mundane plodder with smaller engines. After all, with fuel prices climbing inexorably, if you're trying to save a bob or two, the obvious solution is to think slow.

Well, not quite. The intelligent man knows that the very opposite can be true. It's not the increasingly voluminous mid-30-knot cruisers that are the fuel-efficient ones; far from it. Instead, it's the high-speed brigade with their light, slender, easily-driven hulls and their beautifully streamlined decks that

hold the promise of lower running costs. The fact that they have huge snarling engines propelling them along doesn't dent their efficiency, it simply makes them go faster.

Let's not forget that we're talking about the thinking man's performance boat, not record-breaking-man-who-thinks-human suffering-is-a-virtue boat. So our ideal performance boat should pack a punch, but also be able to pack a lunch, along with a few of the luxuries that its more corpulent brethren usually offer. And if it's an open boat which is simply too physically small to absorb these indulgences, it should at least be able to safely speed its occupants from one champagne and oyster bar to another with minimum fuss and maximum enjoyment.

Is there an ultimate thinking man's performance boat? Well, we think so. To this end, we found three brilliant models all vying for the crown. The only trouble is, all three of us have completely different ideas about which is best. So in the interests of explaining why the other two are so wrong, we took all three boats out for the mother of all head-to-heads. Prepare to be surprised.

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The thinking man's **ROCKETSHIPS**

Three men, three sportsboats – one epic head-to-head. But whose choice makes the most sense back in the real world?

Text: **Dave Marsh, Jack Haines & Greg Copp** Photos: **Lester McCarthy**

Dave's choice Hunton

»...XRS43

There's no denying it, I do have high regard for the other two boats, both of which I've tested. So it came as a surprise to discover just how one-sided this contest was. Let's be grown up and put subjective, emotive things to one side. Things like looks, for instance. I guess if you were partially sighted, you might consider the Scorpion Strike or the Windy Khamsin to be the most attractive boat. Personally, the reason I take in fenders is because they're not the prettiest of accessories. Whereas the Strike – like all RIBs – can't escape the fact that it's just one big floating fender. Still, some people find rubber does it for them. Likewise, if you genuinely find the XRS43's arching, sinuous, golden curves less attractive than the comparatively plain shape of the lily-white Khamsin, then so be it – meaningless understatement is not strictly a crime.

Enough of fripperies; some hard facts to ponder. And this is where the real surprises live. Not only is the XRS43 the fastest boat by a comfortable margin, but flat out at 58 knots, it is more fuel efficient than the Khamsin is at its relatively modest 46.8-knot top speed. For a boat that is 23% longer and 37% heavier, that's an astonishing achievement. Unexpectedly, Hunton's stepped-hull XRS43 still had a tiny edge when it was ambling along at 40 knots. Only when the speed drops to 30 knots do the efficiencies begin to tail off and the Khamsin's conventional Volvo Duoprop sterndrives edge



Shades of Bentley with stitched logos on leather headrests



The XRS43 uses a double-stepped hull which produces remarkable fuel efficiency



The XRS43 is the fastest boat by a comfortable margin, yet flat out at 58 knots it's more fuel efficient than the 47-knot Khamsin

ahead to the tune of 7% or so. But who's going to dawdle at 30 knots in these three missiles?

Weighing in at 1.7 tonnes against the XRS43's seven, it's no surprise that the diddy Strike doesn't burn as much fuel. But the underlying figures are startling. Petrol costs around £1.50/litre and 60/40 diesel around £1.05. So at a cruising speed of 40 knots, for every mile travelled it's costing the owner of the XRS43 just 18% more in fuel. My colleagues will drone on about the performance of the conventionally powered Khamsin and the Strike being much more accessible than the XRS43. And I'd have to agree; the NXT drives demand a lot more twiddling to get the XRS43 up onto the plane. But I offer three solutions: learn how to twiddle; don't slow down needlessly; or if you're happy with a modest 50 knots, simply fit the same D6-370hp Volvo sterndrives that power the 46.8-knot Khamsin (that's right, the XRS43 will still be faster!)

Let's remind ourselves that this is the thinking man's performance boat contest. So as much as I marvel at the bladder control necessary on the toilet-free Strike, most people's pleasure boating involves the occasional drinky. The consequences may not bother all men. But women, well...

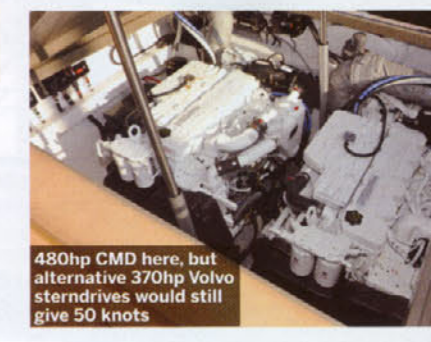
Okay, the Khamsin has a heads compartment, but the XRS43's interior is so much more thinking man than the Scandinavian boat. Few owners will overnight on these boats, but when they do, what's needed is a thundering big bed with plenty of breathing space, not something squeezed under the cockpit with barely any room above the mattress. I'm thinking two things here: getting in without dislocating limbs, and romance. In both departments, the XRS43 wins hands down. Other things in the XRS43's favour: at any speed it has by far the biggest range of the three boats, Hunton are happy to fit even bigger engines to take the speed beyond 70 knots and



Almost everything you see here is bonded in to the XRS43's hull to increase its strength



Stylish dash. And the tinny holders double as excellent grab handles



480hp CMD here, but alternative 370hp Volvo sterndrives would still give 50 knots

they will customise to a degree that Windy owners can only dream of. All told, the glamorous, fast, beautifully built XRS43 is surely the ultimate thinking man's performance boat. In the interest of a balanced summing up, I'd like to offer these mature, thinking man's words to my two rivals: eat my wake, losers!