

# Century maker



Braidbar has been building canal boats for nearly 25 years and the impressive build quality of its hundredth boat demonstrates the secrets behind its success

STORY KEVIN BLICK PICTURES DAVID OAKES

**B**atsmen often stutter through the nervous nineties as the magic century draws close but Braidbar Boats had the Geoffrey Boycott approach – steadily and carefully accumulating a score and even knowing well in advance where that vital hundredth strike would be.

When we visited the company's Macclesfield Canal base at the end of 2005 to test *Skye*, his 85th boat, Iain Bryceland already had a firm idea about exactly what No100 would be and Crick 2007 was his target to have it ready.

Not only did he have it ready but the magnificent *Braidbar* won the public's vote as 'Boat of the Show'. That's an impressive achievement given the particularly stiff competition at this year's show – and given ►







## CENTURY MAKERS

IAIN BRYCELAND DRIFTED into boatbuilding almost by accident after spells in computer programming and mechanical engineering – and a motorcycle tour of Europe that ended when his wife Luisa announced she was pregnant. Now, 24 years after he fitted out his first boat the couple run a family firm with daughter Maria and son Josh both involved. Usually working with regular partners, shell builder Tim Tyler and painter Andy Russell, this thoroughly likeable family team builds around eight high quality boats a year.



## BOAT TEST Braidbar Boats 70ft



Distressed wide oak plank flooring looks terrific in the roomy saloon

◀ that *Braidbar* is that relative rarity these days, an unashamedly traditional craft with engine room and decorated boatman's cabin.

It's also a labour of love: Iain and Luisa Bryceland are keeping this boat for themselves to live on and – once they aren't so busy building boats – to indulge in some extended cruising so not a detail has been overlooked.

*Braidbar* was devised as the ultimate expression of the sort of boats the firm likes



**GOOD  
IDEA**

Tv swings out for viewing or is secured back by stay



to build rather than any flashily different trick shot. (Could the cricketers among you ever have imagined 'Sir Geoffrey' reaching a century with an exotic reverse sweep?)

The firm builds classically executed craft to a very high standard on finely detailed Tim Tyler shells and beautifully painted by Andy Russell. That's what *Braidbar* is – there's just more of it.

### DESIGN & LAYOUT

To start with it's a full 70 feet long. And every inch of it is a beauty. On the expanse of Tixall Wide on the Staffs & Worcs where it was possible to stand back and fully appreciate the elegance of the Tim Tyler shell.

Sheer elegance you might say, since it is the sheer of the long hull that gives the craft its handsome look. The hull sweeps in a long gentle curve down from the planked double curvature Joser bows towards the centre of the boat then returns up toward the stern.

It's a look that is not easy to achieve: usually gunwales are formed by folding the steel sheet that is used for the hull sides but here the sides have to be cut to shape and the gunwales welded to them, with a D-section strip of steel concealing the join. The finishing touch is a line of replica rivets below this – typical of the boat, there are enough to be pleasing rather than overpowering.

The shell boasts numerous detail touches from recessed panels at the rear to decorated handrail ends (a motif found everywhere from the well deck drain holes to the ends of the hatch slides). Thoughtful touches include the use of flat top roof

**Grille in cupboard base is to duct in the ventilation. Note cruciform details in step**



Appliances are secreted behind cupboard doors in elegant, roomy galley

vents rather than mushrooms and letter-box style lower vents so these modern necessities are as unobtrusive as possible. Equally low-key are prism-style roof lights.

Gleaming Andy Russell paintwork signs off the exterior, the red rear panels with their beautiful signwriting and the brightly decorated hatches contrasting with the rich green of the cabin sides. The roof above the boatman's cabin is finished in traditional style with scumbled 'planking' on the steel.

*Braidbar* is conventionally laid out inside, with a long front saloon leading into the galley. A convertible Pullman style dinette is behind this and, beyond, a bathroom leading through to the master cabin.

All of these are fitted out in the firm's modern 'house' style using ash panels for the roof lining and horizontal tongue & groove ash planking along the upper cabin sides with solid oak for the trims and joinery. Beyond, one returns to the more





traditional world of an engine room and finally the boatman's cabin – again exquisitely detailed and painted.

### **SALOON**

As one steps down through half-glazed doors it's the floor that immediately catches the eye – the wide oak planks look like they're straight out of a country cottage. In fact these European oak boards are 'burned and brushed' to achieve this patina of age.

What you get in a Braidbar boat is high quality joinery: raised and fielded doors, neat mouldings, elegant carving and solutions to small but often ignored problems. One familiar decorative detail is also soon seen; the hallmark cruciform cut-outs found on all Braidbar's boats. This time around there are more of them and it's an amusing pursuit to try and spot them tucked about the place.

Finally, a side-hatch midway along the ►



It's those cruciforms again – careful detailing can be seen in the dinette area





Bed extends to full double width in cabin. Storage space is generous



**Bathroom is a little small but very well organised – and spot the cruciform here too**

◀ saloon and the extra light from the roof prism mean that the portholed interior does not feel in any way gloomy.

### **GALLEY & DINETTE**

The saloon feeds, open plan into an eight foot galley, the absence of bulkheads making this front section of the boat feel even roomier. Overhead cupboards line either side of the galley, each decoratively engraved '1983 – 2007'. The main section of galley is to starboard, an angled cupboard extending the under-gunwale unit of the

saloon out to full worktop width at the entrance to the galley.

The worktop itself is in handsome blue-pearl granite. The large single bowl sink is inset near the forward end while a Stoves 500DT cooker is at its aft end leaving plenty of preparation area in between. Below the worktop, concealed behind cupboard doors, are a 12v Shoreline fridge and three-quarter size Zanussi 1300 washing machine.

On the port side below the wall cupboard is a matching large dresser base unit of drawers and storage cupboards under an



oak top, while there's a useful further under-gunwale cupboard below the side hatch – it's shallow but still has room for plenty of jars and packets without taking up any significant internal floor space.

Opposite the side hatch and separated from the galley by an elegant, oak trimmed crescent shaped half-bulkhead (another Braidbar Boats feature) is the dinette, raised on a plinth so users can get a good view out while eating. The plinth provides extra storage as do the seat boxes).

The dinette table top has a subtle inlay and decoratively finished leg while above it is a delicate display shelf unit.

### **BATHROOM & CABIN**

Perhaps surprisingly for a boat of its length, the bathroom is modestly sized and off to the starboard side of the corridor, rather than being a more generously proportioned full-width walk-through design.

Access is via inward opening half-width double doors – solving the problem of trying to negotiate a full-width door in a confined space. There's a good sized square shower cubicle immediately to the left on entry and the space between it and the cabin side is occupied by a cupboard holding the calorifier (spot the cruciform on the front) and above it the airing cupboard.





**Control rods are machined from solid brass, top. Engine has commemorative plaque**

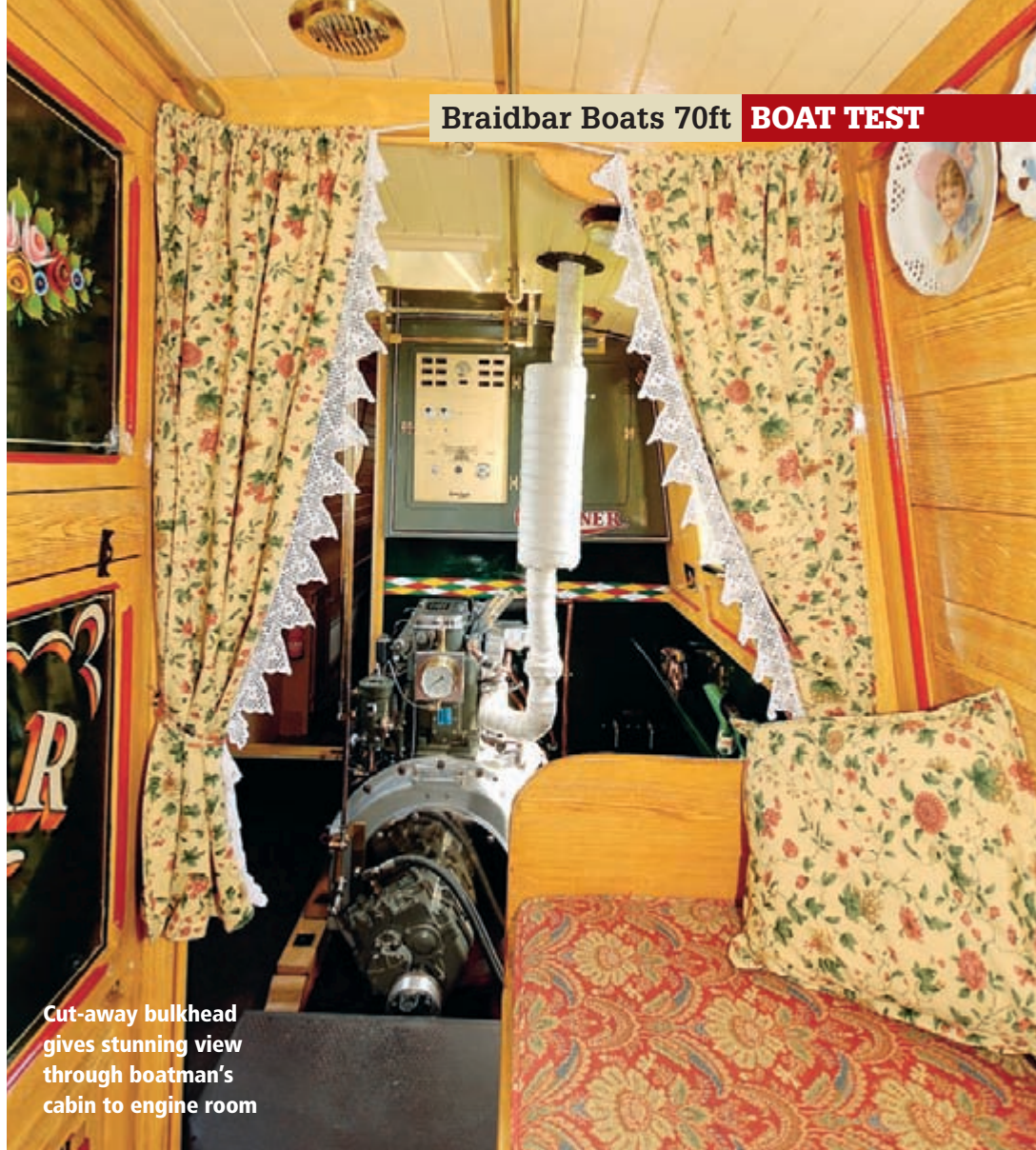
A granite topped vanity unit with an inset basin and a large mirror above occupies the rear bulkhead and there's a Saniflo macerator toilet between. The bathroom has another prism rooflight – and covering it with my notebook dramatically reduced light levels in the room demonstrating how effective a daylight source it is.

The cabin houses an extendable double bed with a memory foam mattress from Foam For Comfort – whose comfort Iain and Luisa swear by. There's plenty of storage: under the bed, in an attractive line of cupboards above it and in a double wardrobe across the rear bulkhead.

### ENGINE ROOM

The gloriously beating heart of *Braidbar* takes pride of place here – a big twin-cylinder Gardner 2LW engine, originally used as a pump in a South African gold mine, restored by Classic Maritime Diesels and christened 'Centurion' on a commemorative plaque. Immaculate in grey paint and with gleaming copper and brasswork, it looks and sounds stunning. The engine is mated to a PRM260 gearbox and is controlled with traditional speed wheel and push-pull forward-reverse gear selector via the usual complex linkage of rods, rockers and gearwheels – all of which have been specially machined from solid brass. This alone cost nearly £3000!

All this sits in an engine room finished in classical style with the sides scumbled and



**Cut-away bulkhead gives stunning view through boatman's cabin to engine room**

the roof lined in white painted t&g.

The boat's electric systems are contained in a suitably 'period' cupboard on the forward bulkhead. The electrics themselves have been kept relatively straightforward. The engine drives a heavy-duty 85 amp Leece Neville alternator, a large pulley maximising its speed at low engine revs.

Four domestic batteries look after the DC systems while a 2kw Mastervolt inverter/charger supplies AC. The boat has been wired with two separate AC circuits: one via the inverter or landline and a second via landline only to cater for heavier demand when suitably moored up.

### BOATMAN'S CABIN

Last but certainly not least in *Braidbar* is its magnificently finished boatman's cabin where Andy Russell has displayed his full range of scumbling and decorative painting skills, including his own interpretation of the roses and castles theme on the table. Signwriting on the drop-down bed boldly signifies the significance of the boat. ►

**The full boatman's 'bling' and fine paint**



**Decorated panel slips onto drop bed rests as extra seat**

**GOOD IDEA**





## BOAT TEST Braidbar Boats 70ft

**GOOD IDEA**

Prism roof lights are discrete and very efficient. Right and below: glorious paint details can be found everywhere



### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Braidbar**

**£150,000**



The cabin does not have the usual doors closing it off from the engine room. Iain has reduced the bulkhead to seat level to create a more open, lighter feel to the rear of the boat. It works well; stepping in from the rear deck and seeing right through the cabin to the engine room is a visual treat.

### ON THE WATER

You'll probably have guessed that a traditional craft like this would definitely not come with bow thrusters, despite its length, relying instead on the skill of the steerer and the shape of the hull.

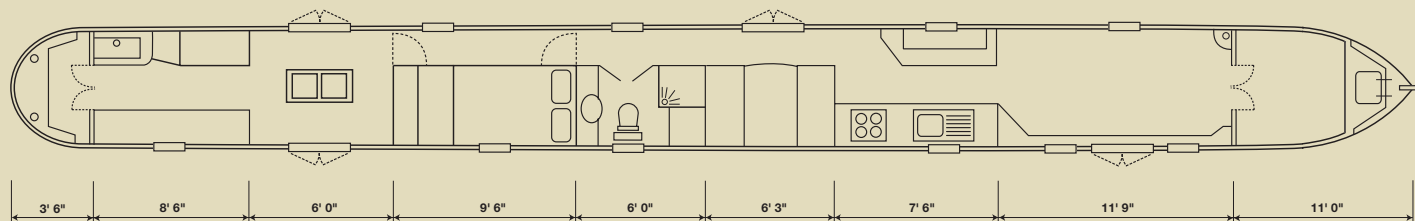
Certainly for all its size, it was light to helm and very responsive to the touch, almost feeling its own way in the natural channel of the cut, the big engine beating slowly and steadily. And out on the Wide

Iain was able to demonstrate that the skilled steerer in a good boat can easily do without artificial aids to turning as a combination of gears, power and rudder saw the boat virtually turning about its own centrepont.

### CONCLUSION

To replicate *Braidbar* would cost about £150,000 – a prodigious sum. What would that buy? Certainly not a flashy show-off of a craft, bristling with fancy electronics or exotic interior treatments. In comparison with some, it's actually quite a simple boat.

But the real meat of *Braidbar* is its superbly crafted shell, its magnificent engine, glorious paintwork and carefully crafted interior. Everything about it reeks of quality, care and craftsmanship – a perfect way to celebrate its builder's century. **CB**



**Length:** 70ft 0in  
**Beam:** 6ft 10in  
**Draught:** 2ft 6in  
**Stern design:** Traditional  
**Fit-out:** Ash & oak

**Shell:** Josher style  
by Tim Tyler  
(Tel: 01889 271414)  
**Paintwork:** Andy Russell  
(Tel: 01625 850853)

**Engine:** Gardner 2LW 24HP  
**Restored by:** Classic Maritime  
Diesels (Tel: 07712 052 635)  
**Electrics:** 2kw Mastervolt  
combi, 4 leisure batteries

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**VERDICT 'Everything about *Braidbar* reeks of quality, care and craftsmanship'**