

LUXURY CRUISING

Braidbar Boats are well-known for their top of the range narrowboats. Mark Langley tests two of their boats: one built for sale, one for hire...

Last time *Waterways World* visited Braidbar Boats, it was to review a boat that was intended as a cruising boat for a retired couple. It happens that again, the boat we tested was built for Keith and Allison Evemy to use for some serious cruising, now that Keith has recently retired from the hectic life of a cardiologist in Newcastle.

Janet Grant is a 58ft 6in semi-trad narrowboat (named after Keith's mother), built, as are all Braidbar boats, on a Tim Tyler shell. The hull is designed to Braidbar's own specification, resulting in a well-proportioned forward cockpit and aft deck, avoiding the sometimes squashed dimensions of "go-anywhere" length boats, that try and fit the proverbial quart into a pint-pot. The bow is graceful and has curves in the right places, while the stern has a very subtle rise to hull and cabin.

The hull, in 10/6/5/4mm, has 13ft swims at both ends, which gives predictable handling. The slightly thicker 5mm cabin sides avoid the waviness that can sometimes occur, especially when portholes are used and would otherwise be highlighted by the very deep gloss paint finish. *Janet Grant* has been finished with chrome-plated fittings, including the portholes (with 14in glass - slightly larger than normal) and the roof vents and twin Houdini hatches. Two rectangular decklight prisms also give more light to the saloon and bathroom. All this is set off by a dark blue and cream paint scheme to the cabin side, with red details, and a traditional red-oxide colour finish to the roof. The hull is black all the way to, and including, the gunnel, which gives the boat a far better look than having coloured gloss on the top-bend.

Aft Deck

On the aft deck, the tiller is set at a comfortable height - not too high, and is pleasantly firm. Underneath, a hatch in the counter gives access to a Tim Tyler special - the weed hatch, which is encased completely, so that there is no chance of flooding the boat should the hatch fail.

The aft cockpit has a locker to each side, scalloped to allow the cabin doors to open fully. The lockers on this boat are front opening (and easily securable), giving useful space for storing fenders and lines. Braidbar will customise the lockers as required - some owners prefer full length, while others have a shorter locker to starboard, to give a "dog-sitting" space, and also a lead attachment point on the cockpit floor, to stop man's best friend making a bid for freedom at an inopportune moment!

Engine room

Under a lightweight aluminium checker plate deckboard is the Beta Marine 43hp engine. The engine drives

FAST FACTS

Boat *Janet Grant*, 58ft 6in

Builder Braidbar Boats

Price £125,000



Graceful lines underway.



Neat signwriting and mute colour scheme suits this craft.

through a PRM hydraulic box, which, at the time of testing, was dusted with talcum powder, to check for any leaks. This shows the level of dedication that the Braidbar team put into a pre-delivery inspection before handover to the customer. A 45 amp alternator charges the engine starter battery, with the huge 170 amp one charging the domestic batteries (four 110Ah), plus a feed to the bowthruster (which has two batteries). The engine panel has a digital fuel gauge (with similar for the fresh water and waste tank inside), which uses a more reliable sensor than a traditional float switch.

The Webasto diesel-fired central heating boiler is installed properly, with vibration coils in the copper supply piping to reduce noise of the supply pump, and a silencer in the exhaust - as well as being plumbed in 22mm Hep2O pipe-work, rather than the 15mm which some builders economise on. As with the rest of the plumbing, long lengths are used, to avoid joints, but where joints are needed, then these are all easily accessible.

Galley

The steel hatch above the doors slides back easily, and the steps are not too steep, descending straight into the galley. Under the steps are the battery isolation switches - far more sensible than being buried in an engine room, where they would be hard to get to in an emergency. The 12V and 230V switch panels, changeover controls and battery monitor system are set to port, with a cupboard containing the Victron 3KW combined inverter/charger unit below. An open fronted wet locker is opposite: large enough to take a whole crew's dripping wet waterproofs.

The galley is quite generous at 9ft 3in, but it packs in a lot. To port, under the worktop, is a large fridge, Zanussi Studio compact washing machine and a large double cupboard under the inset stainless steel sink. The worktop material is actually manufactured by Samsung - it is called Staron, and is a thick laminate, with a dense core, which can be cut and glued, with no visible join. This is also used as a short splash back.



All chrome fittings, plus large flexible solar panels on roof.

Further forward is a Baumatic three-burner hob set into the work surface. The dark glass unit has been described as sexy, and it is certainly powerful - the back burner is wok-sized. Underneath is a more conventional Stoves oven and grill unit, with pan storage underneath. In the roof, a chrome Houdini hatch provides more light and fresh air.

The other side of the galley has a modified Welsh dresser. Many Braidbar boats have a full-height dresser, which has become a bit of a speciality. Here, however, a full run of worktop, combined with the larger portholes, means that less space was available. Also, the cupboard doors, in solid oak, are in a shaker style on *Janet Green* which is slightly different from the norm. Worktop lighting is by a pair of powerful LED lights, which can also give a soft blue lighting at night. A small cupboard for tins makes for useful storage as the corridor dog-legs across.

Dinette and Saloon

A bulkhead divides the galley from the dinette, but this is cut away in a C-shape, which is a very common Braidbar trait; this gives a sense of separation, but without compartmentalising the boat. The dinette comfortably seats four people, as the table overhangs the seating, giving a proper dining experience. So that it can be converted to a 6ft 3in long double bed, sections of the seats remove, so the table can still be used as the infill. Under one seat a Shoreline freezer is fitted - though the newer model is slightly less convenient than the previous version, as the lid is no longer split, meaning the whole unit has to be pulled out.



C-shape cutout bulkhead a Braidbar speciality.

+ We like

- Excellent, planned ventilation of cabin and under floor space
- Oiled solid oak flooring is very practical
- Wide dinette table giving proper space for eating
- Good position of battery isolator switches



Galley has granite-like work surface one side, solid oak the other.



Porthole stoppers in place of curtain, but saloon still bright and airy.



Sexy Baumatic hob, with oven underneath.



Cupboards in bedroom contain low level ventilation.



Diesel stove in front of hand-made tiles.

In the 10ft 6in long saloon is a very neat Reflex diesel stove, in stainless steel, which has a well-shielded flue pipe. The hearth tiles are hand-made by Fired Earth and were chosen, along with the rest of the fabrics (from Janet Churchill), by the Evemy's daughter Caroline, who is an interior designer. The very pale blue tiles add a splash of colour to the interior, whilst the portholes are all covered by stoppers rather than curtains, giving the very high standard of woodwork prominence.

A low-level sideboard has bookshelves, TV shelf and a neat set of cupboards against the forward bulkhead. A side door is above the TV, with another further back on the starboard side, next to the dinette. Both of these lock with the ingenious Braidbar mechanism, which is quite simple, but very secure, and avoids bolts. Perspex infills can be used to give more light, when ventilation is not required.

Ventilation of a different sort appears to be almost an obsession within the fit-out. A characteristic cut-out design makes its way into ventilating cupboards, lockers, even around the water tank. Good ventilation is essential, and low level ventilation is guided through the base of cupboards to avoid draughts, while there are more mushroom vents than the BSS requires - which shows a good level of thought.



Cosy forward cabin.

The whole boat is floored in solid oak planks, which are fitted, then sanded, and oiled, giving a hard-wearing finish that is easily maintained - much more so than varnished surfaces. The matt treatment also brings out the texture of the wood, and so makes it safer for pets aboard. It complements the ash tongue and groove planking above the gunnel, with oak-faced ply below. The cabin roof is painted white which gives the boat a very spacious feel. Inset LED lights have the output of a 10W halogen bulb, but with a fraction of the power consumption. Indeed, during the summer, the twin 70W roof mounted solar panels can probably provide for most of the electrical demands.

Bathroom and bedroom

The 6ft long bathroom comes next and is a walk-through type - not to everyone's taste, but it does give a much larger area, at the expense of not being able to pass through the boat. A large quadrant shower, with waterproof boarding behind, is on the centreline, giving maximum headroom. The loo is directly opposite, and is a Saniflo macerator loo, which discharges to a large tank under the bed. The vanity unit is set in the same material as the galley, and a mirrored bulkhead add to the spacious feel.

The airing cupboard makes use of the space between the shower and the cabin side. Lift-off doors are more practical, and, again, these are ventilated. A short length of finrad has been added to the engine return from the calorifier below, as modern calorifiers are so well insulated that they don't give off enough heat to the airing cupboard. Sensibly, the calorifier pressure relief valve discharges overboard through a skin fitting, which means any drips do not end up in the bilge.

The forward bedroom is sensibly sized, taking up 9ft 6in of space, and fitting in a large raised double bed, which slides out with an infill piece, to make a 5ft wide berth. Just forward of the bed is a large wardrobe, with hanging in the lower section, and shelves in the upper part - necessarily narrower, from the tumblehome of the cabin sides. A dressing table is the other side of the forward doors, and fresh air is led through the base, from vents in the bulkhead.

Forward cockpit

Under the 4ft forward cockpit, is a large stainless steel water tank, which, like the waste tank, is properly braced, to avoid flexing and "boinging" when filling. The hardwood cratch has a glazed forward panel, with the Wilson's cover having see-through panels in the roll-up sides. The 8hp bowthruster is mounted in a watertight locker, with a removable shelf for storing mooring pins and hosepipe. It also makes a useful seat or table. Right in the bow is the gas locker which, as with all boats with a cratch, can be a little tight to get into for changing bottles.

WW VERDICT

Once again Braidbar have produced a very good boat that is hard to criticise. As a top of the range boat, at around £125,000 as tested, it still works out good value when compared to some cheaper competitors, once all the extras in their specifications are added. A lot of thought and experience have gone into this boat, plus the customers' own ideas, to produce a fine cruising boat. The standard of work is excellent and, having seen round other boats in construction, it is a consistent level of craftsmanship that is maintained. No wonder that owners of these boats are happy to have the companies name signwritten on all their craft!



Not your average hire-boat.

TRY *before you* BUY

Braidbar have run a single hire boat for a number of years, partly as a luxurious hire-boat in itself, but also to give prospective buyers of new craft, an opportunity to try out, and develop ideas for their own boat. To this end, if the hirers buy, then the week's hire cost is discounted from their final invoice.

Islay was launched in March this year, and is about as close to a standard specification Braidbar boat as you can get. The idea is a luxury boat for two, with space for another couple on the convertible dinette. *Islay* is a traditional stern boat, with a large open forward cockpit. The saloon is forward, with solid fuel stove to complement the central heating and leather easy chairs. A linear galley is aft (including the full version of the Welsh dresser), then dinette, with bathroom (with large shower, macerator loo and vanity unit) set in a compartment to port. Behind this comes a large double bedroom, with extending bed, with lots of wardrobes and cupboards. The aft engine room hides the Beta 43hp engine underneath, which also supports the 230V power supply through an inverter.

This boat would be just under £100,000 as built, so naturally Braidbar require that prospective hirers have several years' experience - but you would hope that anyone considering buying a narrowboat would be experienced anyway! The all-inclusive hire price for a week (turnaround on a Friday) is from £850 to £1,400, which compares favourably with many larger fleets. A 15% discount is offered for a second consecutive week. There is the added bonus that you are afloat in a boat that does not look like a typical hire-boat - making you the envy of others around.



Welsh dresser in galley plus easy chairs in saloon.



Neat dinette and classic Braidbar bulkhead shape.

BRAIDBAR BOATS

BRAIDBAR was established in 1985 by Iain and Luisa Bryceland. However, since mid 2007 the yard, based at Bridge 15, Higher Poynton on the Macclesfield Canal, has been owned and run by Peter and Susan Mason, who have developed the wharf, as well as continuing to improve the standard of boats further. With an order book

almost full until 2012, with just a couple of slots available, they are obviously still producing the boats that people want!

Unusually, all Braidbar boats are delivered on time. This does mean some late nights and long days for the staff of eight, but it is something that the company is rightly proud

of! Work is also done on private boats, but given the pace of boatbuilding, other activities such as repaints have to be fitted around boats under construction. If you are looking for a top notch boat, then Braidbar must be high on any boater's wish list.

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