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Fun runner

Can the 23.1 pack the punch of its bigger and much-admired Targa siblings?
TEXT: JACK HAINES PHOTOS: LESTER MCCARTHY



Solid woodwork but wheelhouse feels cramped.



Neat galley works well.

Somebody once said that good things come in small packages and that's an adage Botnia have adhered to with the Targa 23.1. On the water the boat does look very small indeed, especially when moored next to its big brother the 44, but thankfully the big-boat features that make the 44 a success haven't been forgotten – full walkaround side decks, waist-high grabrails and excellent mooring gear throughout. Fender storage is plentiful, with deep lockers in the bow and a dedicated area behind the wheelhouse. The aft cockpit is left clear for toys or fishing paraphernalia but a bench does flip down from the wheelhouse to create a reasonable perch facing aft. The main seating area (as there is no table in the wheelhouse) is at the bow where a table, which is stored in a beautifully designed bow locker, creates a comfortable outside eating area.

In the wheelhouse, the feeling of space diminishes somewhat. With just two of us inside it felt cramped. We were shoulder to shoulder at the helm, and when all the windows steamed up as we charged around for the photo shoot the feeling of claustrophobia only increased. I wanted to open one of the sliding doors to ventilate the area but the sea conditions were such that a lot of spray was finding its way inboard so they had to remain closed. Demisters are fitted, but they didn't seem to be working on test and my only solution was to wipe down the windows with my bobble hat.

These points aside, the helmsman's lot is good with an adjustable seat and a helm station that tilts, meaning the steering wheel and throttle can either be upright when you are standing or tilted when you choose to sit. Paired gauges and plenty of room for an extra plotter or two complete the well-thought-out design. The navigator gets an equally comfortable seat, as well as a large flat chart area, which lifts to reveal a sink and hob. The same unit is home to plenty of drawers for cutlery, and other odds and ends. Handholds are excellent for the skipper and navigator, who get plenty of sturdy grab-handles, but unfortunately not so good for the crew on the bench behind them, who have nothing to keep them steady apart from the seat in front.

There are two berths aft below the bench seat, ideal for children, but the fact that they are narrow at both ends could make them uncomfortable for larger

adults. There is, however, a very neat toilet installation that slides out easily from the step down to the berths. Again, it may only be used in emergencies but it works well and is comforting to have on board. Overall quality inside feels very good – the woodwork is sumptuous and well crafted, with chunky handholds and sturdy sliding doors adding to the impression of reliability.

Out on the water, the Targa hull's pocket-battleship reputation was soon put to the test. What looked like a flat-calm day in Poole Harbour turned out to be a very choppy affair outside, testing the 23.1 thoroughly. The boat is very sensitive to trim, and this changes its character: trim it up and it happily hops over the waves like a nimble RIB; trim it down and you can surge through them with gusto. No matter what we threw at it, the 23.1 refused to be overwhelmed, with only the odd crash and shudder in the wheelhouse.

What really impressed was the turn of speed. No matter where I was in the rev band, there was always bags of oomph from the single 300hp Volvo Penta D4. From standing, it was up to 20 knots in six seconds and went on to an impressive 38.1 knots. The only criticism is that it was a bit noisy in the wheelhouse – not necessarily engine thrum but more a booming noise coming from the hull, perhaps because the open side decks and tall bulwarks create an echo chamber. The handling was nothing short of brilliant, with lots of grip from the DPH leg and no speed loss even in the tightest of turns. The 23.1 is wonderfully agile and genuinely fun to drive – more like a small RIB than a cruiser with a wheelhouse and twin berths. The boat tracked very straight in the marina and was incredibly simple to berth.

The last word

In essence, this is a good boat; it has plenty of pace, can cruise comfortably and will punch well above its weight in rough seas, giving you real confidence to push on in conditions that similar-sized boats would have to shelter from. Let's also not forget that there is real fun to be had with the 23.1's agile and safe handling, and the opportunity to trim it up and wave jump to your heart's content is a real boon. This would not be the Botnia Targa for me, though; it just feels like too much has been shoehorned into an impressive but ultimately overly small package. If it were my money, I would wait until I had the extra £9,000 for the 25.1, with its upper driving position and separate heads. **MBY**



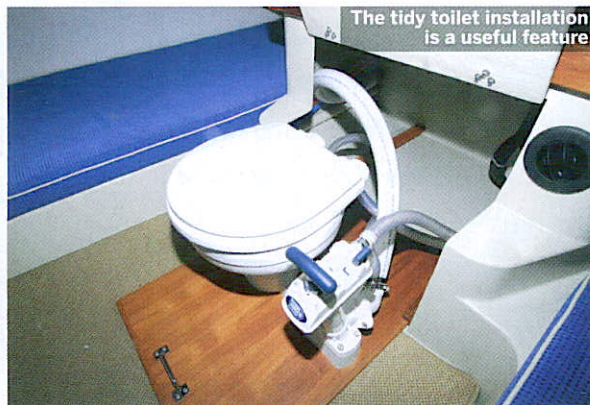
Clever stuff – the table folds down into a well-crafted rack.



Data	
Overall length	25ft 2in (7.66m)
Beam	8ft 9in (2.72m)
Engines	Single 225hp or 300hp Volvo Penta D4 diesel
Top speed	38 knots with 300hp engine
Price from	£80,443 inc UK VAT
Price as tested	£114,000 inc UK VAT (300hp Volvo D4)
Contact	Wessex Marine. Tel: +44 (0)1202 700702. Website: www.wessexmarine.co.uk



Daily engine checks are easy to complete.



The tidy toilet installation is a useful feature



Berths are good for kids but a squeeze for adults.