

Princess 64 sea trial



SIXTY-FOUR PROOF

We've all read them, but what actually goes on in a magazine sea trial? We meet the most thorough team in the business

Words Graham Scott
Photography Lester McCarthy



Testing vehicles for magazines, whether they're boats, bikes or cars, ought to be quite simple. Run the trial, take the photographs, write the report, job done. Of course, some writers are more thorough than others. The car and bike industry – my background – is full of murmured scandals, like the time a test car was returned to the manufacturer by a famous journalist with barely enough miles on the clock to get down his drive. And in the old days, some hacks seemed to think a thorough test was a long session with the press pack in some cosy bar.

These memories came back on a crisp autumn morning at the Princess Motor Yacht Sales base at Swanwick, near Southampton. My mission, which I'd chosen to accept, was to see how the respected journalist Dave Marsh actually put a boat through its paces for *Motor Boat & Yachting* magazine.

Stepping on deck into the big saloon was like sliding into a luxury car. There was the same feeling of opulence, of crafted, quality materials, of the maximum use of the latest electronics, and the same obsession with using all available space.

This was a new boat, launched to some acclaim at the Southampton boat show. On board we had the *MBY* team: Dave Marsh the tester, Jack the staff writer – with special responsibility for Tweeting – and Lester the photographer, as well as Mark Pyle, sales manager at Princess Yachts. Along with a crewman, Lester went aboard the Princess V45 which would be used as the photo boat.



“THIS IS BOAT TEST NUMBER 476 FOR ME, AND I'VE NEVER SCRATCHED ANYTHING,” DAVE SAYS PROUDLY, WHILE SEARCHING FOR SOME WOOD TO TOUCH



Wandering up to the flybridge in the chill of a late autumn morning, I found Dave at the 64's wheel, ready to get us out of a tight mooring. This was a hugely valuable boat, just sold to a Turkish businessman, and Dave had never been at the controls before – yet he was starting to shuffle us out of a mooring with inches to spare. I asked him the obvious question.

“I am a bit nervous,” he laughed, adjusting bow thruster and throttles. “Normally they don't let me take boats in and out of moorings.” Terrific news. But after failing to cause a million-pound pile-up, Dave soon had us heading slowly downriver. “This is boat test number 476 for me, and I've never scratched anything,” he said proudly, while searching for some wood to touch.

Out at sea the radios started chattering between Lester on the V45 and Dave on the flybridge. Rapid acceleration, and we started to manoeuvre. This served the dual purpose of allowing Lester to get some photographs while Dave tested the 64's handling and seakeeping. While Lester had us charging around, crossing his wake, and generally behaving like no sane owner ever would so that he got the shots he wanted, Dave never lost concentration. We came very close to the stern of the V45 at high speed quite a few times, and Lester wasn't even in the boat with his expensive cameras, but right down on the bathing platform.

About six months ago one of the *MBY* photographers narrowly escaped being killed when this manoeuvre went wrong and the two boats collided. A journalist from another magazine was driving. The photo boat ended up wedged



under the other one and started to sink, with the photographer jammed in the gap. The cameras were fine.

We were running at top speed, about 31 knots, which allowed Dave and Jack to check out handling, trim, vibration, controls (which on the flybridge are fully fly-by-wire) and much more. Dave was gathering information by the second, and Lester was getting his pictures. Compared to motorbike testing, it felt totally safe and secure.

I remember testing an 1100cc bike going round the speed bowl at Millbrook. The photographer was crouched behind the Armco on the outer rim. I was flat out in the steepest, fastest lane nearest the barriers at about 145mph (such a bike would do at least 180 now). It was a rough ride, and I had my work cut out to keep control, but I only got the full picture when I pulled back into the pits. The photographer was aghast. "I got the shot but then I threw myself behind the barrier. The bike was wobbling so much I was sure it was going to chuck you off."

With Dave at the controls and the Princess tracking true, we had no such dramas, just a reminder that we had to stay on the flybridge as Lester likes to have people in the photos. It was really cold and a bit grey and not remotely like the Med, and my smile could accurately be described as frozen. I complained. "I thought these photo sessions always had pretty girls in bikinis?" It was the only time in the day when Dave looked less than enthusiastic. "Yeah, I know. It's never like that. Never."

On car launches you often do tracking shots, as we were doing here. I'd been on one the week before, driving a big



Various views of the fab Princess 64, introduced at the 2010 Southampton Boat Show. Opposite: Dave Marsh puts the yacht through her paces. Above: searching for shortcomings – in vain, as it turned out.

4x4 at about 60mph on the wrong side of the road, with the rear hatch up and a photographer strapped into the boot shooting the other car. There's always the chance of dropping the camera, but at least you can pick up the pieces – whereas Lester and his thousands of pounds' worth of bodies and lenses were hanging out over the water. There was also the tricky moment when we pulled into Osborne Bay so we could transfer Lester onto the 64. Watching him pass all his kit between the boats was quite nerve-wracking.

With Lester now snapping away on the 64, it was time for Dave to do a walkabout. In a car feature this doesn't tend to take terribly long, but with 20 metres of boat to explore it was obvious it would take a while. And that's before you consider that Dave likes to open every single drawer and cupboard on board – and I mean every one. He told me in some detail why the Perspex fiddles that Princess use in their cupboards are better than just about anyone else's.

He likes to get behind the surface of things. Car journalists tend to open the bonnet and peer rather blankly at the moulded covers that hide just about everything on a modern engine, then they'll open the boot, sit in the back to check headroom and legroom, and maybe tap the headlining in a vague way.

Dave, on the other hand, looks at everything, in depth. I was wandering round the owner's suite, a beautiful space, serene and stylish. I was enjoying the deep pile of the carpet through my socks but then noticed Dave had the corner of the carpet up and was scrabbling at the sound-proofing below. Mark from Princess told me it's heavy. Dave told





PRINCESS 64

Length overall

64ft 10in (19.70m)

Beam

16ft 6in (5.03m)

Draught

4ft 9in (1.45m)

Displacement

30 tons approx

Fuel capacity

750 gal (3,409 lt)

Fresh water capacity (total)

200 gal (909 lt)

Black water tank

60 gal (272 lt)

Guest berths

8 in 4 cabins

Crew berths

2 in 1 cabin

Engines

2 x 900mhp Volvo D13-900

2 x 1,015mhp Caterpillar C18

2 x 1,150mhp Caterpillar C18 ACERT

Performance

up to 32 knots max

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me it's brilliant. "Princess has just transformed its sound deadening measures. The V62 is uncannily quiet and that's spreading through the range. It's this amazing material, Thinsulate, that converts sound into heat." Once we'd walked through the luxuriously appointed cabins and he'd actually stood in the shower to check for space, we made our way back to the saloon.

We both noticed that there's a rather attractive glass screen between the galley and the saloon, which can be electrically opened or closed, presumably depending on the temperament of the chef or whether the dinner's burning. Dave instantly started asking technical questions about how the electric motor worked that operated the glass panels. I simply noticed the way the light in the top of the panels made pretty patterns on the glass.

It must be said that in some respects boat testing is more thorough than testing bikes or cars, or at least it is when Dave Marsh is in control. Noise levels tend not to be tested that much on things with wheels but Dave did decibel testing to a level I'd never seen before. At full revs (2,330rpm), then

at 100rpm increments down from there, at four locations on the boat, which went in two directions for each test. If he says this is a quiet boat, which he did, you know he can back up that claim.

The light was fading by this time and we still had the delights of the engineroom – with two massive 1,015hp Cat C18s – for Dave to enthuse over. I can tell you he particularly liked the way everything was sensibly laid out, like the water strainers and various filters. I just liked that it was lovely and warm down there.

Still ahead for the happy crew was another complete walk round of the boat with Lester taking more stills and video, Dave taking his own pictures to remind him of salient points, and Jack sending some more Tweets. It took another whole day before the test was done, which is standard procedure for every boat they test.

It was quite a big effort for Princess too, and not just because of the 500 litres of fuel used. Mark explained why they did it. "Magazine test are really important. About 80 per cent of our buyers read *Motor Boat & Yachting*. Testers like Dave and Jack have tried lots of the competitors' boats whereas our designers may not have done, so any criticism is really listened to and acted upon."

So, after his exhaustive test, what did Dave think of the Princess 64? "As usual, another annoyingly accomplished boat from Princess," he said. "Beyond subjective likes and dislikes, it is difficult to find any strictly objective flaws on the new 64. It will always be impossible to please all of the people all of the time, but no builder I know comes closer to achieving that aim."

Believe me, that's an opinion that he didn't leap to lightly. And it's an opinion that's worth listening to, from a man who has earned the respect of his peers and his industry. I thought the boat was quite nice too.

The author

Graham Scott has worked for everyone from *Top Gear* to *SuperBike* and *MBY*. He likes fast things: 132mph in a Class One powerboat, 170mph in a Chrysler Viper and 180mph on a Kawasaki.

Labour saving – the photo shoot is an ideal chance to test the 64's handling. Right: Dave Marsh evaluates service access in the engineroom.

