

Story and pictures by Robert Mountjoy

A year in a Westport Pilot 6

Plymouth angler **Robert Mountjoy** wanted to move up to a bigger boat, but where should he start, and what should he buy? Here he tells you how and why he eventually arrived at a Westport Pilot 6

Just over a year ago I bought a new fishing boat. It wasn't a rash decision - I had been mulling it over for a long time. Prior to that I'd been running an Orkney Dory with a 40hp Yamaha bolted to the back. It was stored on my drive and, when conditions permitted, I would tow it down to Plymouth where I launched it at one of the public slips. Bungy, as she was named, proved a good fishing platform in calm conditions - great for fly-fishing, throwing plugs and drifting with live sandeels. It was easy to launch single handed, very cheap to run and gave me years of fun, but it had its limitations.

First, it was a wet boat, and a full set of oilies had to be worn on all but the most balmy of days. Second, I did not have the control over the speed and the economy that I really wanted.

Slow ahead was fine, so was flat out (20-plus knots) but speed had to be cut back when there was any wave action. I took her to the Eddystone and back on one occasion (with a buddy boat) but coming back I had to throttle back to eight knots and this proved to be a very fuel-inefficient speed.

The grandchildren were probably the clinching factor. The prospect of 'going fishing with grandad' was looming and I pictured them bouncing across the waves on

Bungy. Great fun, but granny would have a heart attack. A boat with more freeboard was needed.

So I started exploring the options. I knew more or less what I was looking for.

Of course, I wanted a boat as big as possible but I needed to be able to tow and launch it short handed (on a sheltered slipway).

A boat about 5m long would be as much as I could handle on my own, but would like to have space for a family picnic. I liked the idea of a cuddy - just somewhere to get out of the wind and rain - but a full cabin was not needed.

I wanted economy, but I also wished for a craft that could handle uncomfortable weather. There were so many compromises to weigh up, but the short list of makes and models began to shape up and I eventually started to look for second-hand boats.

A new or a used boat?

There was a surprising dearth of second-hand craft of the class I was looking for, and those on the market were holding their prices remarkably well.

I wasted a lot of time looking at boats that had been well used and abused, or were strangely customised. It looked like I was going to have to buy new. So it was back to browsing through the

brochures and making comparisons.

The Southampton Boat Show provided the opportunity to go and look at a range of craft and compare like for like.

It was good to step aboard a few of them while they were on the water - boats that looked solid and stable in the photographs could be quite the opposite when you stepped aboard.

What had been my favourite on paper turned out to be the least practical when I stepped aboard. Lack of stability surprised me with some of the market leaders. And then I saw the Westport Pilot 6.

I was immediately drawn to the traditional lines, and when I looked over the gunnels and saw the expanse of deck space I looked again and again in disbelief. Initially I thought it was a little larger than I could handle, but I spoke to the builder to discover that the boat was built in Plymouth at Crownhill Fort - not that far from where I worked - and that he had a Pilot 4 in stock that I could look over.

Over the following week several lunchtimes were spent looking over the 3 and 6, trying to make up my mind. The 3 was eminently towable and designed to fit in the average domestic garage, but the 6 had all those extra 'acres' of deck space. I priced mooring options and decided that I could just afford to keep it on a marina but might have to trailer it once I retired. So I signed up for the Pilot 6.

Performance and speed

Roma, my new Pilot 6, was fitted with a 60hp Yamaha and launched just before Christmas. Sea trials completed, she lived up to all



At the wheel Happiness is owning your own boat - and a good 'un into the bargain.

TOP TIP
ALWAYS VIEW A BOAT 'IN THE FLESH' FIRST BEFORE YOU DECIDE TO PURCHASE IT



expectations and was soon taking me and a few chosen friends out to bash the whiting around the inside wrecks.

While she looks fairly traditional above the waterline she has none of those concessions to modernism, which quickly date and look naff. Under the surface is a contemporary and efficient hull design. She is a pretty boat with exceptionally good control and economy over a quite wide range of speeds.

The cuddy, relatively high freeboard and free draining decks keep her high, dry and safe.

I fitted a 60hp Yamaha 4 stroke outboard, which gives all

the power the boat needs, and although she was built to take up to 90hp engines I have never felt that I have needed more.

The 'Yammy' gives me good control at trolling speed and seems to burn 0.2 gallons per hour at 1,000 rpm and I guess does about 17 miles for the gallon at this setting.

Pushing her on, at 2500 rpm she reaches about nine knots and is consuming about nine miles per gallon. At this speed she behaves impeccably and provided there is no tide against her, she is at her optimum efficiency.

When the throttle is pulled back she climbs quickly on to the plane and at 4,000 rpm she reaches 16

knots and is burning about 2.2 gph, giving about 7.2 mpg.

She seems to be able to cope well with any sea you would want to be out in at this speed but is inclined to fall off and on the plane in uneven seas.

Conditions permitting, further acceleration is swift and at 5,000 rpm she is steaming at 25 knots and is burning about 3.3 gph (but giving about 7.5 mpg). This is her most efficient cruising speed and a trip to the Eddystone (11 miles) takes about 36 minutes when the sea is smooth or slight.

My logs show that I burn an average of 18 litres on these trips, leaving a good safety margin in the

tank, but the aft locker has space for two 25-litre tanks.

I have developed the system of keeping one full fuel tank on the boat and taking the partially used one away to fill up, rotating them on each trip. This way I always set out with 50 litres, enough for five hours' continuous motoring, and at 20 knots this gives her a potential range of about 75 miles.

On a flat sea additional power and some adjustment of the tilt will see her reach 32 knots and a number of trials in different conditions seem to confirm that this is her top speed.

But coming off any wash at this velocity is a bit uncomfortable,

and I prefer to throttle back to between 20 and 25 mph for most work.

Let me show you round

Across the stern are three very generous lockers. The starboard one holds the battery and has space for cleaning materials and more odds and ends. The central locker is huge and takes the two 25-litre fuel tanks along with buckets, boat hook and emergency paddles.

The port locker was designed to be adapted to a livebait box but it has square corners. I prefer to use it to stow away all fenders and warps while underway. Forward and under the cuddy, port and starboard lockers provide more than adequate storage for lifejackets, flares and all other necessary paraphernalia.

My Lowrance fish-finder/plotter came off the dory and it proved easy to run the cables through the tubes thoughtfully placed between the starboard side hulls to the transom fitted transducer and the battery compartment located in the starboard aft locker.

It sits on the small dashboard in front of the wheel and enables me to find and plot favourite marks and locate the wreck and reefs.

A DFS radio is inset into the forward facing panel of the

dash with the mic rest placed just to starboard of the wheel and in easy reach of the helmsman.

This is set up when I leave port and the button on the mic is the only thing I then need to touch while steaming.

She has proved a great fishing platform, roomier than many of her competitors and fast and stable, and during the first year she logged 29 trips running the engine for 54.9 hours while exploring most of the reefs between Salcombe and the Eddystone reef.

She feels safe in any sea and has pushed through Force 5/6 storms with no problem, though on occasions the crew were groundbaiting excessively.

Have I caught more fish?

My family are prone to groan when I return with yet another good catch so I have had to become more selective.

I am not a fan of deliberate catch and release, and when I have caught enough I leave the rest untroubled for others to enjoy.

What would I change?

I still have not fixed any permanent rod holders. I would prefer to have had fitted ones inserted into the gunnels but this was not an option at the time she was bought.

Fitting any rocket holder type to the inner sides would spoil the wonderful clear space of the deck.

This problem has yet to be solved.

Another slight drawback is that the boat was built to cope with a bigger engine.

The Honda 90 is 52kg heavier than my Yamaha 60, and while I was initially pleased that I would be hauling a lighter load this makes her lie a little low in the bow

when berthed in the marina.

Subsequently any water on the deck runs forward instead of aft and pools under the cuddy. This rapidly disappears through the self-draining ports when she is underway, but it is a bit of a pain when scrubbing down after a fishing trip.

But I have certainly had my most enjoyable sea fishing year to date. I have had some excellent whiting fishing from late summer through to Christmas. I took my first plaice from Plymouth Sound, and the spring pollack fishing was of surprising quality, peaking with a fish of 15lb taken just north of the Eddystone.

Not a bad reef fish from your own boat, but it was my passion for bass fishing that drove my desire to buy the craft. Through

the summer I enjoyed a few days' drifting Plymouth Sound with live eels but it was during the spring tides of autumn that the boat was to come into her own.

Feathering up some bait mackerel at the drop-off and then steaming back to the bass hot spots at 20-plus knots I had some cracking sport, peaking with a pair weighing 8lb and 9lb 4oz – the latter a personal best.

Next year a 10-pounder is my bass target. SA



My grandson appreciates the boat too!

Eddystone cracker
This 15lb pollack almost single-handedly justified buying the Westport 6.