Motorboat Owner

NOVEMBER 2020

Affordable practical boating

BOAT TEST

Robalo R272

PRACTICAL

Boat-sharing Clubs

Fairline Phantom 38/41 ● Keyhaven ● Blu Thru Engine Rinsing Kit

Robalo R272

BOAT TEST

Length (LOA): 8.33m / 27ft 4in
Beam: 2.9m / 9ft 6in
Displacement: 3,175kg
Fuel capacity: 681 litres
Engine as tested: 2 x 250hp Yamaha
Other engine options: Twins 400-500hp total
RCD category: C10
Price from **£143,950**
Price as tested **£164,495**

The world of centre console sportsfisher style boats is a very busy one. At one end of the spectrum there are some great little affordable models like Bayliner's Element range, and the Dolfor 500. At the other, there are some truly spectacular boats with huge amounts of power and breathtaking performance. You could quite literally spend anything from about £20k up to £1m+ in this sector and you would probably be as happy a bunny as the next man, regardless of where your budget falls. Centre console boats are a bit of a leveller. Yes some may be faster, some may have a bit more in the way of creature comforts, and of course some are much, much bigger, but in reality they all offer the same thing. A fast, easy to use boat that is as perfect for a spot of fishing with your friends as it is to take your family out for a days picnicking or watersports. In terms of versatility, they are,

perhaps, the rigid boat equivalent of a RIB.

With so many brands competing in this market, it won't come as a surprise to find that you may not have heard of them all. Boston Whaler may be the ubiquitous name, but like Hoovers, Biros and JetSkis there is a whole world of other brands that do a similar thing. Robalo is probably one of those names that doesn't roll off the tongue when thinking about centre console boats, but is it one that you should think about if you are in the market for this style of boat? We took to Southampton Water on a R272 to find out.

"Quality and detail, this US-built Robalo just oozes it"

The R272 is the 7th largest in a line-up of nine boats that Robalo place in their 'Centre Console' range. These start at just 16ft and go all the way up to 36ft. The company also offer a three boat 'Explorer CC' range from 20 to 24ft and four-model 'Bay Boat' range, also from 20 to 24ft.

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Having never set foot on one of their boats, I was very keen to see what they offer. It's not everyday that a new brand falls under our microscope.

Stepping onboard the 272 is easy, thanks to its twin bathing platform arrangement that wraps itself around the engine well. There is also a useful slither of platform ahead of the engines to make moving across the platform easy. This access is even available when the engines are fully tilted, with just enough room to slip in front of them. The whole platform on our test boat was covered in soft non-slip decking, which continued on into the boat on every accessible bit of deck. This is a standard feature on UK boats, but fitted in the UK. This means that if you prefer a standard GRP non-slip deck, perhaps because you find it easier to hose away the evidence of your fishing trip, you do have the option of not having it. A bathing ladder is fitted on the starboard side of the platform, neatly concealed beneath a lifting hatch cover. On each aft corner the platform is fitted with a cleat. These are the flush mounted kind that lift when required. While this is great to keep the bathing platform free of any toe stubbing surprises, you do have to remember to push them down when not in use.

Entry into the cockpit is via a transom door and a small step down, which creates extra depth, up to 90cm, and therefore safety for the boat's crew. Just behind the transom door is a locker containing all of the master electrics, nicely placed to allow you to fire it up when stepping onboard. Across the transom there is a bench seat that easily folds up to provide more aft cockpit space for fishing or just moving about. On the port corner of the transom there is a bait well and on the transom coaming are a pair of dual purpose cup/rod holders. The whole transom seat assembly lifts on stainless steel gas struts to provide access to the boat's batteries and other technical equipment. A hatch in the aft cockpit floor provides access to a deep and long self-draining locker that is ideal for ropes, fenders or watersports equipment.

In the port side of the aft cockpit there is a gunwale door. Here you have the option of a slot-in bathing ladder to provide a second easy way to get in and out of the water. The quality of build is quite obvious all around the boat, noticeable every time you open a hatch or move a seat, but it is perhaps most obvious at this side door, where the heavily built door closes against high quality seals to keep the water out and all the metal work from the hinges to the catches are chunky and solid feeling.

It is worth noting that, although by its very design you can easily walk around the whole boat, the gunwales are topped with around 20-23 cm of flat non-slip surface. This means that you can also, quite literally, walk around this boat at gunwale height as well.

Opposite the transom seat you have a choice. Our boat was fitted with the optional wet bar, but a second seat, rear facing, can also be chosen to provide a more sociable aft cockpit area, perhaps a better choice for a family day boat as opposed to the more fishing/watersports friendly version we were onboard. The wet bar brings a small sink, a second bait well and a large coolbox that slides out on

"A fisherman's friend, the R272 has all the makings of a fisher, but is a featureful dayboat as well"

Onboard facilities. The toilet compartment is a particulary useful feature on this 27ft family dayboat

runners at deck level.

Moving forward past the helm console, which I'll come back to in a bit, it's good to see that there is a minimum 53cm gap down either side, which makes getting forward very easy. A nice little touch is the padded section on the top few inches of gunwale along the full length of the boat down both sides, to absorb any knocks you may have while making your way forward or moving around the boat when underway. On the starboard side, alongside the wet bar/helm, there is fishing rod storage built into the cockpit coaming, with a convenient toe rail along the bottom.

In the bow there is a flexible array of configurations. You can set it up like our test boat, with two forward facing lounge seats and centrally mounted table. The backrests can be removed and it becomes a multiple person dinette area, you can drop the table and add an infill to create a sunpad area, or you can remove all of the cushions and, with the table dropped, have a large flat, non-slip raised foredeck, which is great as an up-tide fishing platform. Hatches beneath these bow seats lift for access to fully lined lockers below. The hatches themselves are stayed with gas struts, and you don't even need to remove the cushions to gain access. A further self-draining locker can be found beneath the forwardmost section of bow seating and another hatch in the floor between the seats provides access to a large bilge storage area. Up on the raised bow area, there is an electric anchor winch concealed beneath a hatch, with friction hitches so that it stays where you put it, with an anchor locker below.

In front of the helm is a single forward facing seat mounted to a door that leads down into the boat's toilet compartment. This doesn't offer standing headroom, but does deliver a comfortable, roomy and private seated area, which will be particularly appreciated by your female crew members. Our test boat had a sea toilet installed here and a small porthole and LED light means that it is far from claustrophobic, even with the door closed. This space also offers a great place to store cushions, tables and other deckware when the boat is not in use.

At the helm you get a pair of comfortable and supportive seats, both with lifting bolsters. A small 'rubbish bin' locker is conveniently placed in the seat base, with access to the space behind it available at the flick of a catch. The skipper and crew get a two-tier footrest and the helm is equipped with an adjustable steering wheel. This, together with the combination of adjustable seats, lifting bolsters and two foot rests means that it is easy to find a comfortable and commanding driving position, regardless of your physique and whether you want to sit, stand or lean at the helm. The steering wheel has one of those knobs that allows easy and fast one-handed steering, which is a feature I really like on this style of boat. It's a little thing, but again provides an insight to the approach taken to quality by Robalo. I just love the way the bearings in this knob run so easily and smoothly. If you get a chance to get onboard, just try it.

The helm console has space for a couple of decent sized multifunction displays, and on our test boat these incorporated the engine instrumentation, leaving the

PERFORMANCE

As tested 30% fuel, 1 crew, Force 2

RPM	Knots	LPH	GPH	MPG	Range (nm)
600 (idle)	3.6	5.0	1.1	3.27	490
1000	5.1	9.1	2.0	2.55	382
1500	7.5	14.5	3.2	2.34	350
2000	8.9	25.0	5.5	1.62	242
2500	13.8	35.1	7.7	1.79	268
3000	21.8	47.7	10.5	2.08	311
3500	25.4	58.3	12.8	1.99	298
4000	29.9	78.1	17.2	1.74	260
4500	33.6	96.9	21.3	1.58	236
5000	38.0	127.0	27.9	1.36	203
5500	41.7	147.0	32.3	1.29	192
6000	44.9	191.0	42.0	1.07	160

helm uncluttered by traditional dials and gauges. There is a small glove box, a holder for your phone, a cup holder and two self-draining storage trays for all your personal bits and pieces. Overhead there is a solid T-bar arrangement and this provides a couple of further lockers high up, as well as some sturdy grabrails down either side of the console. The front section of the console is enclosed on three sides by glass panels that provide almost complete protection from wind, rain and spray coming from ahead. It also brings with it the useful addition of a windscreen wiper. While this arrangement is great for the UK climate, it does of course, to a large extent, remove the open boat, wind in your hair experience. To go some way to alleviating a lack of air flow over the helm on nice days, Robalo has installed an electrically opening vent window on top of the forward windscreen. The whole helm console can also be enclosed by canvas either when underway or just for protection/security when on a mooring.

Underway

Leaving the River Test, and travelling in the 6 knot speed limit, the 272 felt like a dog on a leash, it just wanted to go. Little blips on the throttle hinted at what was to come as the speed limit buoy slipped astern, but I was still taken by surprise. The power of the twin 250hp Yamahas was phenomenal. Rarely does a boat put a grin on my face as quickly and easily as this one. I kept dropping back off the plane, just so that I could experience that acceleration. Once I stopped messing about and got down to some serious testing, I actually struggled to get accurate acceleration times due to the swiftness that the boat passed the different landmark speeds. Nail the throttles and the boat is on the plane in around 2 seconds. It hits 20 knots in 4 seconds and is doing 30 knots on 6 seconds. Those figures are staggering for a sports fisher and are, in my experience, only matched by out-and-out performance boats. When driven hard, the noise, like the power, from the Yamahas is a joy to behold. With these acceleration figures, the top speed, although plenty fast enough at 45 knots, is perhaps rather modest. The boat can be driven hard and fast and behaves impeccably when doing so. Tight fast turns are taken in its stride, with only a hint of prop ventilation if you push it too far to help bring everything back under control. The steering is perfectly balanced and control is pinpoint accurate at all speeds. In short the 272 is as much fun to drive as any boat I have ever been on. The downside to this is, of course, the hooligan in you wants to drive it hard and fast all the time, and this will hit you firmly in the wallet.

Our test boat was fitted with the largest engine option and the acceleration was phenomenal

"Rarely does a boat put a grin on my face as quickly and easily as this one"

Once the novelty of the power wears off, the 272 settles nicely into a cruise at what feels like a rather pedestrian 25 knots. At around 3500 rpm the noise levels are very acceptable, the ride smooth and even the fuel consumption can be lived with. In the low 20's, the twin 250s are returning in the region of a very respectable 2nmpg.

Our test day did not deliver 'testing' conditions, but with regular ferry traffic and an occasional commercial vessel heading up Southampton water we found plenty of confused and choppy bits of sea to play in. The big flared bow dealt effortlessly with any waves, deflecting spray away from the boat and subsequently helping to deliver a very dry ride. The hull performed brilliantly, and as each ship's wake was encountered I dared to leave more power on until I was hitting some decent sized waves all the way up to 40 knots, and finding the boat still remained very composed. Obviously in a rough sea with a continuous wave pattern that wouldn't be the case but it tells me enough to believe that this boat would be more than capable of maintaining a decent pace into the sort of chop that would be knocking other 27ft boats off the plane.

The helm can be enclosed with a canvas canopy

As already mentioned the driving position is good, with a comfortable stance, leaning or seated position always available with appropriate adjustment. I always felt more in control at faster speeds if I was standing or leaning, but that is often the case on this style of boat, but particularly in this case as the steering wheel was just a little too far away to use the full support of the seat, while keeping a good grip on the wheel. Just a small amount of fore and aft adjustment on the seats would have made things perfect.

The wraparound screen offers great protection from the wind, and of course any spray or rain that you may encounter, and the opening top window provides a perfect degree of ventilation to keep you cool, should it be needed.

Conclusion

I didn't really know what to expect when boarding the Robalo, it was, after all, a totally new brand to me. I was thinking that if it could mimic anything like the performance of an equivalent Boston Whaler it would be doing very well. I'm going to stick my neck out and say not only did it do that, it may well have surpassed it. The quality of build appears every bit as good, if not better, and the performance and ride was pure class. Of course a boat like this does not come cheap, but look at the other quality alternatives and you will find that it stacks up very well in that regard too. If you are in the market for a sub 30ft walkaround sportsfisher, and Robalo is not a name you have thought of, I would strongly advise that you get yourself acquainted. Not only do I think that you won't be disappointed, you may well just be as blown away as I was.

We were blown away by the Robalo R272

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