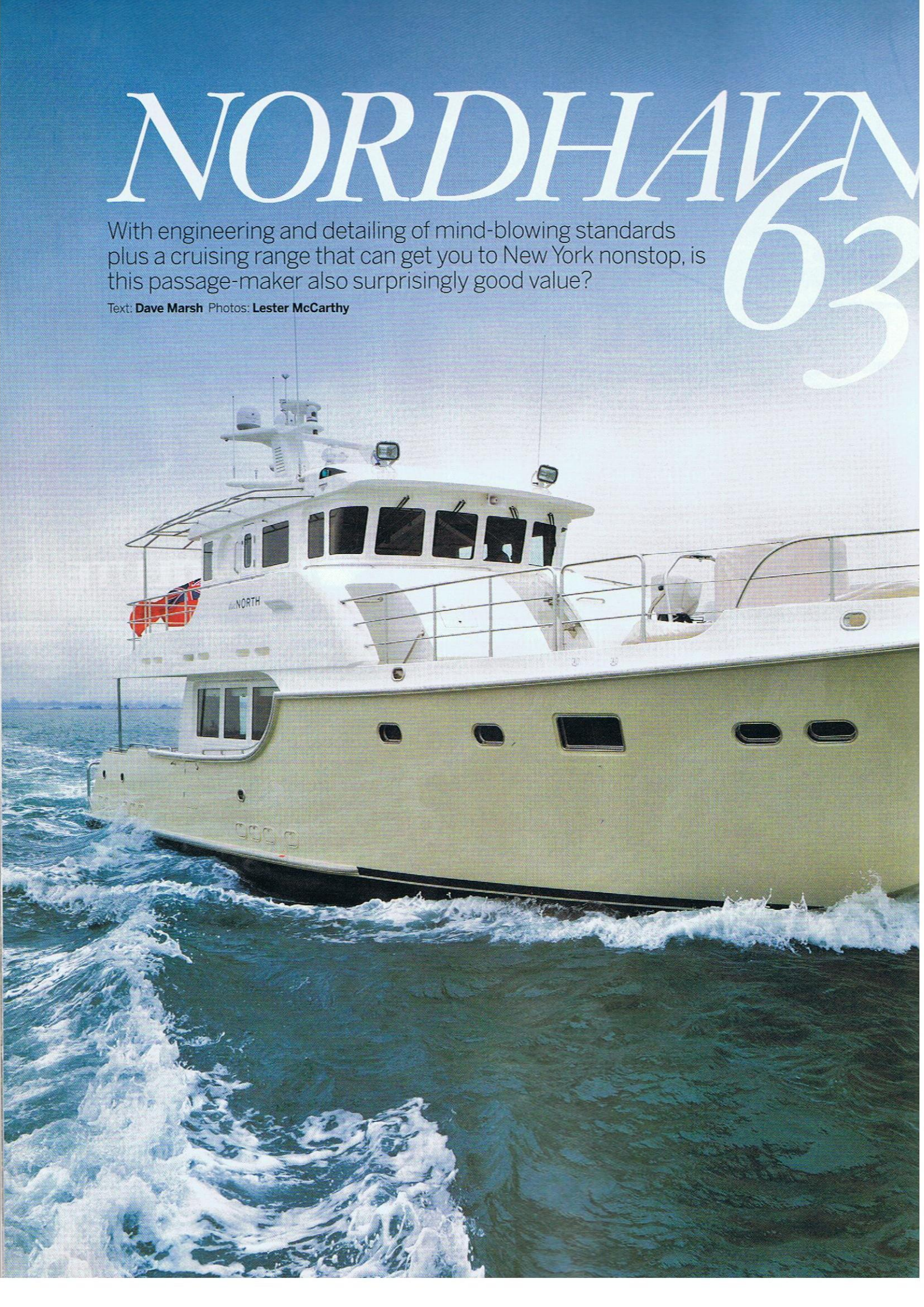
NORDHAVN 63

With engineering and detailing of mind-blowing standards plus a cruising range that can get you to New York nonstop, is this passage-maker also surprisingly good value?

Text: **Dave Marsh** Photos: **Lester McCarthy**



SEE THE VIDEO
mby.com/n63

Talk about extremes. The last 63ft boat I tested was the Princess V62. Comparing raw data can sometimes be dull, but in this case it is mind-blowing to contrast the figures. Devoid of fuel and water, Princess's boat tips the scales at around 26 tonnes. Nordhavn's 63 doesn't so much tip as crush its scales at 59 tonnes. And that's before you add the ten tonnes of fuel and water it can swallow.

Our nippy V62 was happy cruising at 33 knots. At this speed its 2,400 horses gobbled 380 litres of diesel every hour and it had a no-reserve range of about 300 miles. Our Nordhavn 63's power plant was a single 340hp engine, so no surprise that it proved more sedate. Cruising at 8 knots, its John Deere diesel sipped an almost teetotal-like 25 litres per hour. That's right, ¼ the speed maybe, but only 1/15 the fuel consumption, even though a single fully fuelled Nordhavn 63 weighs more than a trio of V62s. No surprise then that this giant won't run dry until it has travelled over 3,000 miles at this speed.

FUEL FOR THOUGHT

Do these figures tell us anything worthwhile though? Foremost, that with all the recent hullabaloo surrounding pod-drive efficiency and the potential efficacy of hybrid boats, travelling a lot more slowly remains the most effective way to save the planet. If you've ever seen a Nordhavn out of the water, you'll know that their full-displacement hulls do not profit from a low-drag under body. Most sport big fin stabilisers, their keels are enormous, and their rudders are the size of the proverbial barn door. Plus, the keel cooler that Nordhavn uses to eliminate the need for engine seacocks takes the form of a chunky latticework of externally mounted pipes, adding yet more drag. But despite these impediments, and its immense mass, by dint of its graciously sedate speed, the Nordhavn 63 sips like a reformed alcoholic.

The figures reveal something else too. Granted, 10,000 pounds of the 63's weight comprises ballast, but that still leaves 55 tonnes of boat. And every one of those 55,000 kilogrammes is built and engineered to extraordinarily high standards. So it's a bit of a mystery why the 63 doesn't cost more than its £1.4 million asking price. Of course, the Nordhavn 63 only has a diddy 340hp diesel on its balance sheet, whereas Princess has to absorb the considerable cost of those whopping 1,200hp engines. But if you take into account the Nordhavn's impressive standard specification and the exceptional calibre of its engineering installation, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that it cost 'only' 10% more than Princess's sportscruiser.

FULL SPEED AHEAD

In our case, full speed was a whisker under 10 knots. Like all heavy full-displacement cruisers, our 63 obeyed the law of rapidly diminishing returns. So when we dropped just 15% below its top speed of 9.8 knots to 8.3, our 63's fuel consumption more than halved. Those dramatic gains do tail off to a degree, but the benefits of slowing down further are still marked. For instance, reduce speed to 5.5 knots and the 63 has a no-reserve range greater than 5,000 miles. Southampton to New York nonstop, without refuelling, with plenty of diesel still sloshing around.

Unmatched peace and quiet is the other advantage of life in the slow lane. The lowest sound levels we recorded were in the enclosed off-watch cabin at the back of the pilothouse. Here, the 52dB(A) we recorded was the same level as the gentle hum that emanates from my desktop computer. Although slightly louder elsewhere, tranquillity reigned in most other places too. Only in the saloon did the levels ever exceed 70dB(A) – (light conversation hovers around 65) – and then only by a single decibel when the 63 was flat out.

Sadly, the Solent refused to dish up the splendid gale-force conditions we had for our Nordhavn 57 test (*MBY* December 2004); instead calm seas and light winds were the order of the day. With no flybridge to provide an unfettered panoramic view, visibility from an enclosed pilothouse such as the 63's is never going to be completely unencumbered. That said, it's more than adequate. Twin pilothouse side doors allow the skipper to nip out onto the side decks for a quick peek aft, or onto the protected Portuguese bridge for a completely

For sociable cruising the layout works very well. Two ensuite cabins lie two steps down from the saloon, giving exceptionally easy access

uninterrupted view forward. Boats like these are increasingly employing remote cameras wired into their chartplotters – our 63 had one in the engineroom – and others can easily be added to face aft. And although the off-watch cabin and the adjacent heads will block the view aft when their doors are closed and their blinds pulled down, they otherwise sport multiple windows that provide a good view aft.

Nordhavn's three optional control stations are a must have, and very affordable options too. They comprise throttles, bow and stern thrusters, plus the windlass controls – one station in the cockpit, and a 'wing' pair aloft alongside the pilothouse. Manoeuvring the towering 63 away from the dock at Hamble Point Marina, these stations left me feeling more relaxed and in control than previously. It was all to do with being in the spot that provided the optimum vantage point for the manoeuvre in question, in this case springing off a pontoon. It's not just the dockside view either, being right outboard made communicating with the crew handling the lines so much easier. I can't recommend them too highly.

LOFTY LIVING

The 63's great height above and below the water yields an unusual layout. As you would expect, the saloon floor lies above the waterline. The difference is that the 63's great height forward sees the two ensuite cabins pushed far higher than usual, so they lie just two steps down from the saloon, which makes for exceptionally easy day-to-day access. Beneath these cabins sits another whole machinery area. Like the engineroom proper and the lazarette, it's exceptionally brightly lit and very effectively laid out for servicing and inspection.

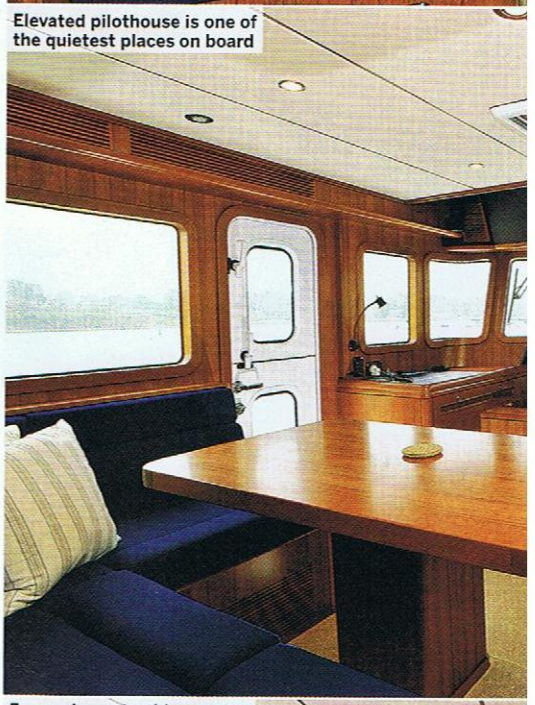
The accommodation is straightforward and workable – what stands out is the terrific practical detailing. It's virtually impossible to find any sharp corners to fall against. In particular, anything sited lower down, such as a coffee table, boasts large rounded corners. With safety in mind again, there's a gate at the top of the tallest steps. Naturally, every countertop has a fiddle, shaped so that it doubles as a handhold. Lockers are all cedar-lined, doors all have positive locks, and tables are bolted firmly to the floor. Locker doors have louvred grills for ventilation, and only an electrical megastore would have this many plug sockets. Only two things jarred amongst the virtuosity. It's a mystery to me why Nordhavn continues to fit solid plastic drawer runners when even the cheapest kitchens nowadays sport smoothly wheeled runners that self-close at the end of an effortless glide. And the finish inside its rudimentary shower cubicles seems wholly at odds with the elevated quality of the fit-out everywhere else. Panache doesn't have to mean flash, and the former costs next to nothing – but at least I uncovered something to criticise.

VERDICT

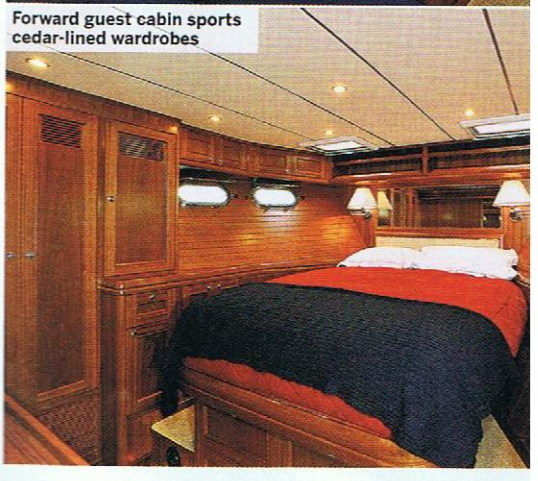
If this Nordhavn report doesn't read that differently to any others you might have seen, it's because this eminent builder has thankfully not forsaken the winning formula that it resolved almost a decade ago. Foremost, Nordhavn steadfastly refuses to sacrifice function for form, so everything on board is supremely practical.

The builder pays scant attention to the weight of anything, so everything of importance can be over-engineered to withstand the worst that nature can throw at it. Nordhavn tops this off with an outstanding engineering installation, designed to function and be worked upon with the greatest of ease in the middle of an unfriendly ocean, not just tied unmoving to a comfortable dockside. Listing the plus points for the terrific fuel system alone would absorb this whole report. It's an engineer's dream and everything appears to be oversized yet beautifully engineered, especially the colossal rudder assembly.

With its 10-knot top speed and towering explorer yacht looks, it's hard not to pigeonhole this 63 as an ocean-crossing plodder. And yet its strengths – practicality, solidity, and engineering excellence – are surely just as beneficial to anybody going cruising. When the 63 is under way its great height demands a fair bit of stair climbing, but its warm and welcoming accommodation deck could not be easier to move around – for sociable cruising the layout works very well indeed. And with fuel costs on an unstoppable upward spiral, and with almost all of the joys

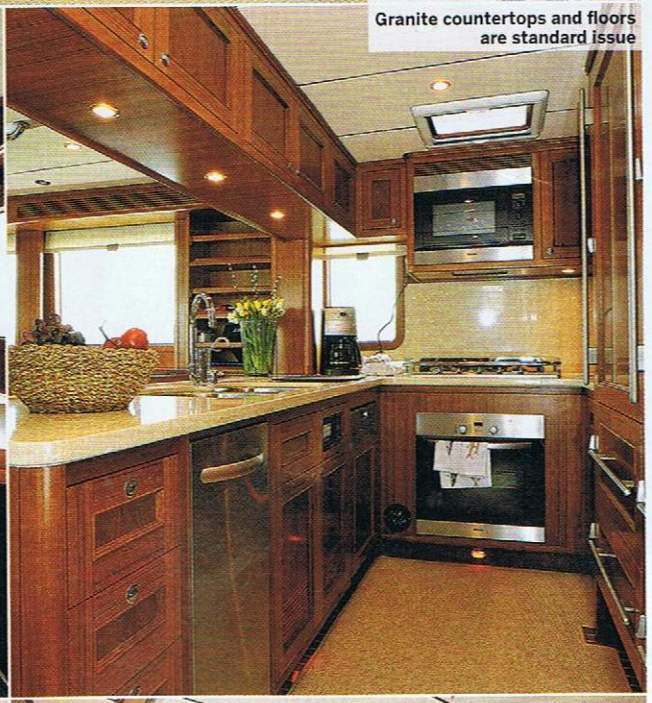


Elevated pilothouse is one of the quietest places on board



Forward guest cabin sports cedar-lined wardrobes

Superb joinery quality throughout – note louvres on every locker door, designed to keep contents fresh



Granite countertops and floors are standard issue

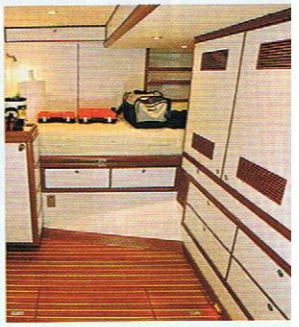
Pilothouse heads is invaluable for overnight passages

Owner's ensuite cabin amidships is bursting with stowage

A CLOSER LOOK
WITH DAVE MARSH

LAUNDRY & CREW

Long-distance cruising produces different needs, hence this roomy fully equipped laundry, complete with washer, dryer, ironing board, wash basin, another freezer, a big crew berth, plus a whole cabin's worth of extra stowage.



CONTROL STATIONS

These three optional control stations (port, starboard, and cockpit) make manoeuvring the towering 63 a doddle. Complete with throttles, thruster levers, and even the windlass control, they're a surprisingly inexpensive option.

STABLE DOORS

All four external doors (two in the pilothouse) are rugged, watertight, and incredibly stable. Far from a gimmick, the ability to quickly stick a head out, or to regulate the ventilation through the 63, is extremely useful.

THE ENGINEROOM

Nordhavn uses a dry-stack exhaust that emerges at the top of the mast – with no underwater burbling, noise levels are exceptionally low. A keel cooler means cooling water intakes cannot be blocked with debris, because there are none. Items are so fanatically labelled that they even include guidance notes such as 'normally on'.

Side doors on both sides of pilothouse make checking for faster passing traffic a swift and easy process

Tenders live on the foredeck, with handling courtesy of the standard-issue 680kg crane

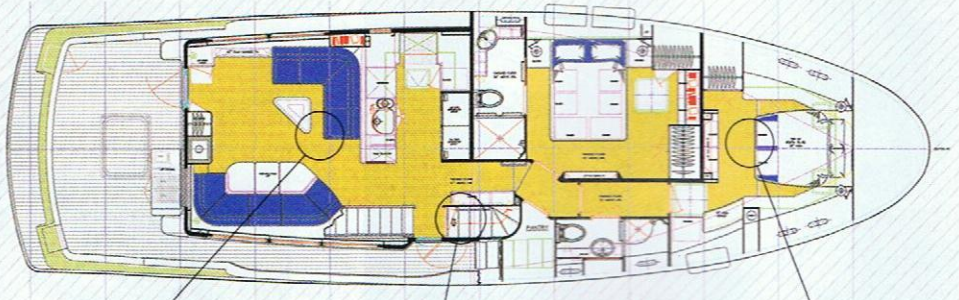
The 63 sure is tall, but TRAC stabilisers are there to assist, and can be fine-tuned to the owner's preferences

Dry-stack exhaust, shown here, is extremely quiet

THE DATA

LENGTH OVERALL 62ft 6in (19.05m)

BEAM 18ft 0in (5.49m)



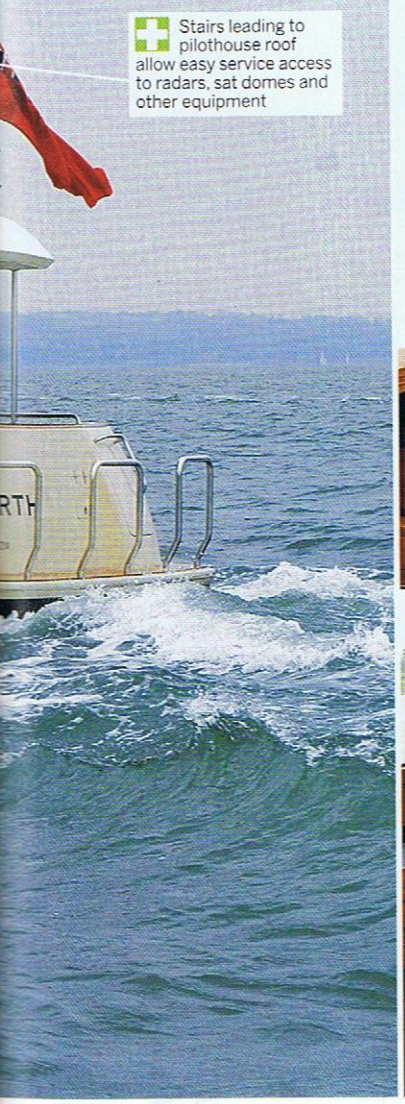
The saloon is on practically the same level as the two cabins – this makes for very easy access

Steps lead to engineroom – along the way guests pass through the laundry room and crew cabin

This is the standard twin ensuite cabin design, but there is an optional £15,840 three-cabin layout

FUEL CAPACITY
2,082 imp gal (9,464 litres)
WATER CAPACITY
500 imp gal (2,271 litres)
DRAUGHT
6ft 8in (2.03m)
RCD CATEGORY
A (for 8 people)
DESIGNERS
Nordhavn (Jeff Leishman)
DISPLACEMENT
59 tonnes (empty)
69 tonnes (full fuel & water)

Cruising at 8 knots, the Nordhavn 63's single 340hp diesel sips an almost teetotal-like 25 litres per hour



Stairs leading to pilothouse roof allow easy service access to radars, sat domes and other equipment

of cruising more attainable on board a quiet, stable, low-speed platform (talking, cooking, eating and drinking, rubbernecking and taking photographs, reading and so on) perhaps it's no surprise that increasing numbers of fast planing boats can be seen plodding along at exactly the same frugal speed as the 10-knot Nordhavn, especially in the Mediterranean.

What is a surprise is the Nordhavn 63's price. Although it is possible to spend a lot on extras, the 63's standard specification is impressive, especially if you factor in the minutiae of the superlative engineering installation. Yet despite this extravagant start, this is a huge amount of aquatic real estate on offer for £1.4 million. Who would have thought, a tough circumnavigator that's impressive and good value!

In the interests of balanced reporting, I'd just like to say that I think Nordhavn's primitive drawer runners are so last century. Next time the yard's chief designer Jeff Leishman is in town, I intend to kidnap him and take him to Ikea's kitchen department.

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THE HELM **VIEW**

It's easy to nip out onto the protected Portuguese bridge for a completely uninterrupted view forward

Plenty of fiddled space for those old fashioned paper chart things, and for odds and ends galore

Ultra-soft, leather-clad Stidd seat, possibly the most comfortable seat you'll ever find, comes as standard

PERFORMANCE

TEST ENGINES: Single Lugger L1276A. 340hp @ 1,800rpm. 6-cylinder 12.5-litre diesel plus a single 80hp John Deere 4045DFM75 wing engine

***MBY* TEST**		**ECO**		**SLOW**				**MAX**
RPM	750	900	1,050	1,200	1,350	1,500	1,650	1,765
Speed	4.5	5.5	6.5	7.5	8.3	8.9	9.4	9.8
LPH	6.6	10.0	14.7	19.6	28.4	41.2	54.0	62.8
GPH	1.45	2.20	3.23	4.31	6.25	9.06	11.9	13.8
MPG	3.10	2.50	2.01	1.74	1.33	0.98	0.79	0.71
Range	5161	4163	3347	2896	2212	1635	1318	1181
SOUND LEVELS dB(A)								
Pilothouse	55	54	56	57	58	59	61	62
Off watch	50	49	50	51	52	55	57	58
Saloon	58	60	62	63	64	67	69	71
Master	55	54	56	56	57	59	60	61

THE COSTS & OPTIONS

Price from	**£1.4 million (single 325hp)**
Price as tested	**£1.6 million (single 340hp)**
TRAC stabilisers	**£55,934**
20kW Northern Lights generator	**standard**
Air-conditioning 134k BTU	**£35,776**
680kg telescopic crane	**standard**
2 x wing control stations	**£12,671**
Full laundry: washer/dryer/ironing	**standard**
Fuel polishing & transfer system	**standard**
Holding tank & grey water tank	**standard**
64kg anchor & 400ft chain	**standard**
Granite countertops & galley flooring	**standard**

= Options on test boat

RIVALS

SELENE 62
Price from £1.5 million
Long range, heavy-displacement cruiser, slightly faster than the Nordhavn 63

PRIVATEER TRAWLER 60
Price from £1.74 million
Uber-tough, steel built, go-anywhere, 10-knot cruiser
Buy the test: mby.com/pt60

Speed in knots. GPH & MPG figures use imperial gallons. Range in nautical miles and allows for 20% reserve. Calculated figures based on readings from on-board fuel gauge, your figures may vary considerably. All prices include UK VAT. 35% fuel, 100% water, 6 crew, full stores, big tender, liferafts. 12°C air temp, light chop. F2 for speed trials