

# RATTLING *the* SABRE

Actually, the Sabre 38 doesn't so much shake, rattle or roll as sock it to 'em, says pleasure-seeker **TONY MACKAY**



Boats like the Sabre 38 Express are one thing our Yankee brothers get right, particularly in the looks department. Among the myriad of nice touches is the minimalist varnished teak toerails tracing the sidedecks to the bow (opposite).



**P**icture this. Sydney Heads, a stiff southeasterly wind zipping through the heads and a short swell of a few metres with some nasty wind chop thrown in for good measure. Many boats heading out may have opted to turn back rather than bash into this mess. Waiting for me in the lee of Middle Head sat the hardtop Sabre 38 Express, long and lean and like its namesake, ready to cut a swathe through any irritating seas that would cross her path. It was time for our photo shoot.

You have absolutely no idea how much fun it was for the next hour or so. With complete respect for the customer who ordered the boat, I was initially very ginger with the speed and heading. No need to beat-up a new boat and then be hunted down by the new owner and/or his wife, both wielding photographic evidence of my transgressions.

No, no, it was all care and consideration until I realised that the Sabre had absolutely no need to be “handled” at all. She

slices through waves, roars up swells, flies over breaking chop with barely a flutter or crunch, deftly turning in ever diminishing circles, and blazing back the other way to do it all again.

Under the floor, a pair of Volvo IPS450 drives, with the forward-facing propeller pods,

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dazzled with their power and performance, tracking the Sabre as though she was on rails. The hydraulic steering with upright helm was feather light while the electronic throttle controls drummed-up endless squirts of power with a flick of the wrist.

Am I allowed to tell you: I have

not had such fun driving a boat for years. And I was being paid to do it. And the fuel was free. And they brought lunch. What a gig this is!

### MAINE COUSINS

Devotees of our magazine who pay attention to our edifying articles will realise that the previously tested Back Cove models and the Sabre are related in the corporate traditions of boatbuilding in Maine, USA. It is all the same company, however, the Sabres are perhaps the top of the line in the range, being detailed with high-end finishes. They call them “stick built” — piece by piece by shipwrights.

The pleasing thing about both lobster-boat ranges is that they are stylish, without the flash-in-the-pan looks from the trendsetters. They have evolved from solid and proven design concepts in construction and engineering, blending old and new in a package brimming with handsome charm. (Is this my own CV?). And they run well — fabulously well, as I have already proven. Forty years of doing it the





Pick your level, the terraced cockpit (opposite) is a great place to entertain or chill, and leads up to the covered helm deck (this photo) and more entertaining options, including a starboardside wetbar (below left)



right way, infused with Maine's proud boatbuilding heritage that dates back to 1607. It's quite a CV of their own.

The "picnic and/or lobster boat" genre has become a popular revival of old-style boating, many owners tiring of soft-top sportscruisers, particularly in foul weather or our scorching sun or becoming unbearably ugly a few short years down the track.

The hardtop Sabre 38 Express is indeed a boat for all seasons, combining the open cockpit for swimmers, fishermen, sun worshippers and the cocktail crowd, with a partially enclosed bridgedeck for those intent on navigation duties. The galley and dinette below, with a very

comfortable forward island-berth cabin, offer a yacht-like cosy retreat for winter or inclement entertaining, be it in the horizontal or vertical positions.

**HEY, GOOD LOOKIN'**

She is, first and foremost, a very handsome boat, with a well-raked bow and straight sheer lines complemented by a gold cove line and varnished teak toerails. The almost full-length stainless steel bow and side rails enhance the stainless steel portholes, window frames and engineroom ventilators. It is all a "class act" as they say in the vernacular.

The navy-blue hull looks particularly sharp with a crème boot top and the crisp green antifouling, all blending seamlessly with the off-white superstructure and varnished teak trims. Some will moan about maintenance of teak trims but they do provide a very tasteful accent and allow a proud owner to keep things in Bristol condition. After all, a well-maintained boat speaks volumes about its owner.

A full-width swimplatform has a starboardside transom

door leading to a well-considered cockpit, with convertible seating along the aft coaming and additional side seating. Add an awning and a table and lunch can be immediately served. Or you can sit back, let the skipper do all the work and watch the world whiz by, spray-free.

Moulded steps lead up either side to the sidedecks and one is almost immediately within the safe confines of the side railings. Rather smart stainless steel fairleads are let into the varnished teak toerail, while strategically positioned deck hardware will assist with a secure raft-up or mooring procedure. A Lewmar winch deals with a bowsprit-mounted CQR or Delta anchor, the central hatch accessing the chain rode and other lines. A suitable pennant on the jackstaff will definitely enhance the snappy styling.

**HARDTOP HAVEN**

Forward and up from the cockpit we enter what could be described as the bridgedeck or helm deck, with small sink, icemaker/fridge and wetbar area to starboard and an athwartships bench seat fronted by a collapsible table to port. Two Stidd helm chairs



**[HIGHS]**

- › Fabulous exciting performance and handling
- › Timeless styling
- › Multi season/purpose layout
- › Great ventilation
- › Quality build and interior trim

**[LOWS]**

- › Broker did not bring champagne
- › But I loved it, so what can I say?

boat. Our test boat was straight off the ship and had not been fitted with any electronics, however, a faux Raymarine screen (cardboard) required minimal knowledge in its use. Perfect for me. The varnished mahogany helm was vertically mounted in the traditional manner and the Teleflex steering was possibly the best I have encountered.

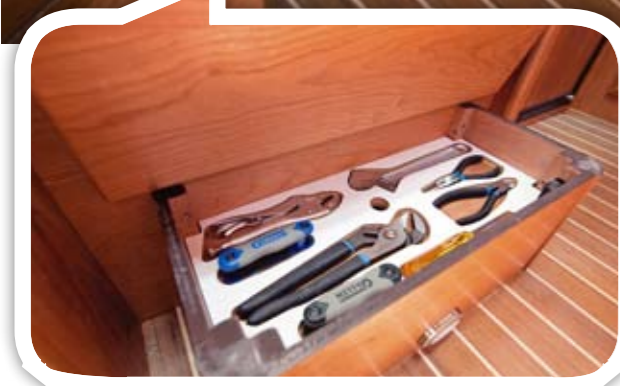
A central hatch leads into the engineroom, where our pair of Swedes, Volvo's IPS450 turbodiesels and drives with electronic EVC controls, had been doing all the work. Nearby were the 9kW Onan generator for 240V and a comprehensive package of tanks, filters, blowers and pumps as one would expect of a quality cruiser.

Closing the engineroom lid, the upper cockpit resumed its laid-teak splendour. This layout is practical, either as an entertaining or navigational layout it works very well. The cockpit guests are still connected conversationally, those on the upper sofa may commune either way and the skipper/mate seats can be turned to face aft when at rest.

Optional side-glass infills or clear covers may be ordered to enclose this upper cockpit, and would probably make this area quite useable in poor weather. Otherwise, a couple would use this upper sofa as a dining area.

**OLD MEETS NEW**

Heading down the central companionway, the main saloon blends old-world craftsmanship with contemporary design, and the American cherry timbers are warm yet bright. To port is a neat and suitably equipped galley with convection microwave, fridge-freezer, ceramic cooktop and coffee maker. A large oblong porthole will admit a welcome



The neat and suitably equipped galley (top) is immediately to port of the companionway, whose steps all incorporate nifty storage options (inset).

securely hold the skipper and mate with the three large windscreens (the centre one electrically opening) giving a panoramic view. The side windows also slide open for additional refreshment or for conversational/educational purposes with other waterway

users who may be less thoughtful than you.

Focusing on your own affairs, a nicely laid out dash panel has all the controls necessary for the safe and efficient use of the



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breeze. To starboard is an attractive L-shaped sofa and inlaid table for six that converts to a double bed. Excellent storage cupboards and electrical control panels are hidden behind stylish louvre doors.

The companionway steps open for further storage and the lower step has an inbuilt and very handy tool selection for instant use. The whole feeling of this cabin is much like a yacht and it would be a particularly cosy seduction space on a cold evening. A flatscreen TV with DVD player is set into a backlit recess, with a glass storage cabinet above. Everything is reverse-cycle air-conditioned if climate control is desired. Three Lewmar hatches with screens allow natural light and air into these cabins and there is no particular feeling of claustrophobia, rather more a cosy air of warmth and safety.

To port is the head and shower, cleverly conceived and with a door to the main cabin or forward to the stateroom for en suite use. The forward cabin has a most



An attractive cream-coloured L-shaped sofa nicely offsets the cherry timber dominated splendour of the saloon.



comfortable queen-sized island bed (which I tested) set low and with lots of storage. Cherrywood battens line the hull and teak and holly flooring is laid on the sole. The bed hinges open to reveal storage with easy access. Cedar-lined hanging lockers prohibit moths escaping your wallet and devouring treasured silk shirts.

**PICK YOUR SEASON**

This is a boat for all seasons. The summer cockpit, spring in the upper bridgedeck, winter in the

main saloon and, as for autumn, well you can just fall into the big bed and have a snooze.

Frankly, I would never convert the dining table for anyone, overstaying guests frog-marched off with a more traditional sabre. I expect this boat to be owned by a couple who wish to enjoy the quiet luxury of their own private pad, without the intrusion of guests or children by night. Joining similar friends with their own boats, all enjoying the parties, drinks and dinners, then closing shop for the

sanctuary such privacy brings. Bring others if you must.

All of this comfort and convenience should not divert attention from construction and seakeeping ability. Again the Sabre cuts through many of its competition. Designer Jim Taylor has blended modern construction with knitted biaxial structural E-glass reinforcements, vacuum bagged Divinycell foam core in the hull, vinylester resins, and so on, into a deep-vee planing hull, which I thoroughly tested with vigorous dexterity. All built to USCG, ABYC and CE category B standards for your added confidence.

Australian agent Jed Elderkin of Emarine Australia is one of the most personable and knowledgeable boat dealers about. He will lead you through the comprehensive specifications and optional extras to stamp your own style. Disposing of the cardboard nav display and ordering the real thing also allows significant customisation for the techno types. I would add an iPod and a little reading material about the joys of Maine (though perhaps not in winter) to further the quite genuine feeling that you are buying something with heart and soul. 



The Sabre 38 Express (top) has a frugal cruise around 9kts, but like her name, can race to 34kts if needs be. This photo: Cherry predominates the wood selection in the cosy forward stateroom.

**Facts & figures**

**SABRE 38 EXPRESS**

**PERFORMANCE & HANDLING**

You are unlikely to be disappointed with the performance of the Sabre, particularly with the superb handling characteristics arriving from the Volvo IPS system, hurtling our 10-tonne arrow across the water at 34kts. It is quite a slick performance.

But the IPS system is no longer a stranger to our readers. The inline six-cylinder turbo-diesel in its IPS450 guise produces 330hp at 3400rpm, the twin forward-facing-propeller pods pulling the boat through the water with significant efficiency. (The 450 badge is indicative of the horses required for a shaft drive to equal the pod performance.)

Standard electronic controls are complemented by the joystick system for foolproof maneuvering, which will de-stress the most overanxious skipper. Add the Sabre's tremendously competent hull and you will face Mother Nature's lesser moods brimming with confidence.

Sliding through the water at 1500rpm will see 9kts and 17lt/h, which is most agreeable for the frugal soul. A brisk and distance-consuming 16kts raises this to 57lt/h, while a fast cruise at 24kts slurps 83lt/h. Full-speed gave us a very impressive 34kts at 129lt/h. I rather liked the world slipping by at 16kts.

**PRICE AS TESTED**

**\$735,00** w/ options

**OPTIONS FITTED**

Engine IPS upgrade, dark hull colour, electronics mast on hardtop, teak helm deck, electric windscreen vent, saltwater washdown, and more

**PRICED FROM**

**\$695,000** w/ twin 380hp Yanmar diesel engines

**GENERAL**

**TYPE:** Deep-vee planing monohull  
**MATERIAL:** Cored FRP construction  
**LENGTH OVERALL:** 11.73m  
**BEAM:** 4.2m  
**DRAFT:** 1.01m  
**WEIGHT:** 9.8 tonnes

**CAPACITIES**

**BERTHS:** 4  
**FUEL:** 1325lt  
**WATER:** 380lt  
**HOLDING TANK:** 150lt

**LAYOUT**



**ENGINE**

**MAKE/MODEL:** 2 x Volvo IPS450  
**TYPE:** Inline six-cylinder turbo-diesel  
**RATED HP:** 330 (each)  
**DISPLACEMENT:** 5.5lt  
**WEIGHT:** 863kg (complete package)

**SUPPLIED BY**

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**OUR VERDICT**

The joys of traditional Sabre cruisers and yachts stand the test of time and the very strong resale values are testimony to the customer loyalty to these stylish and coveted cruisers.



Bowrail is almost full-length and for extra stability you'll find a handrail neatly tucked inside the roof overhang.

