

A touch of Finesse

Rocinante	
	£170,000
LENGTH:	64ft
STYLE:	Trad-stern
BERTHS:	2+2
LAYOUT:	Standard
POWER:	Beta 50



Tyler Wilson has just started its own boat-fitting operation and *Rocinante* is its first boat – so we found out how well shell building has evolved into fit-outs

WORDS ADAM PORTER PICTURES ANDY R ANNABLE

A new name in boat fitting was launched at the Crick Show back in May, but in a pretty low key fashion – so low key, in fact, you might have missed it. At that stage, Finesse Boats didn't have a boat to show because their first one wasn't finished. While Finesse might be new,

there are familiar names behind it. The company has grown out of Tyler Wilson, one of the biggest and best known names in the steelwork side of boat building. Recently, the firm has been doing a small amount of fitting-out, but on a rather ad hoc basis; now that's all been

brought together under the Finesse name and the firm is being run by the next generation of the family. Louis Wilson is Jonathan Wilson's son, while Ricky Lee is his son-in-law. They've also brought in expertise from outside with Ken and Julia Warriner who ran Fernwood for years before retiring, as consultants.

Now the firm's first boat, *Rocinante*, is finished and they're off to a flying start. There's absolutely no sense that they've begun with something simple and straightforward; instead, this is a boat that is very much bespoke and shows off the firm's skills in both design and manufacture.

EXTERIOR

As you might expect, this boat is built on a Tyler Wilson shell, and a very fine one at that. The first thing you notice is that

it's bright – very bright. The colour scheme of green with white coach lines and a white roof along with red panels at the stern really stands out in a crowd. The painting, which is sprayed using a yacht paint, has been done in Tyler Wilson's huge and relatively new paint shed in Sheffield. Take a closer look and there's an enormous amount to enjoy about this boat. It is a sheerline Jasher, so there's a very pretty curvy bow and a lovely sweeping line along the side. The

traditional look is emphasised by rivets. But look closer and there's more to see. The gunwales are sharp rather than rolled, and protrude slightly to make it look as though they're made of wood in the traditional way, rather than metal. There's a similar story with the handrails which also protrude slightly to imply they're wooden (but they do also have a finger-grip on the inside edge). There are recessed panels at the stern, carrying Andy Russell sign-writing. The traditional look is completed with

THE BOAT TEST



In the new fit-out workshop

'There are hidden depths to this shell, literally. The owner is 6ft 5in tall and one of his main concerns was having plenty of headroom'



brass portholes and mushroom vents. In short, this boat has fantastic lines. It's the sort of boat you could look at for hours and never get bored; you'd get pleasure every time you saw it.

And there are hidden depths to this shell, literally. The owner, Andrew Ridley, is 6ft 5in tall and one of his main concerns was that the boat should have plenty of headroom inside. So Jonathan Wilson has increased the height of the hull sides by around six inches; so that the boat looks right, all

of these extra inches are below the water, meaning it's deeper draughted than many modern boats (although it's still not as deep as some of the old working boats).

On a practical level, there's a gas locker in the nose. The well deck has a set of little doors in the forward bulkhead, which gives access to the bow thruster tube, and the deck also has lockers both sides, useful for storage and for somewhere to sit. The boat will also have a cover over the cratch.

LAYOUT AND FIT-OUT

This is a 64ft boat, with a traditional stern and a standard layout, so the saloon is at the bow, followed by a Pullman dinette and a galley. A corridor on one side has access to a sort of utility area and a shower room. The cabin is towards the stern, with a modern engine room behind.

The fit-out uses a combination of oak tongue and groove below the gunwales, with painted panels on the cabin sides. These panels are made from ash, so the



The galley has tremendous style



Drawers and cupboards everywhere



Saloon has a very modern style – and look at those sweeping steps



grain still shows through the paint giving some nice texture, and they're framed with more oak. A nice detail is that some of the trim is walnut, to give a pleasant variation in colour. The floor looks like oak, but is, in fact, hardwearing Karndean.

SALOON

Attractive stable doors lead from the well deck into the saloon and you find yourself walking down some deliciously curvy steps into the boat. They're like a statement of intent, showcasing the skills needed to fit-out a boat in a stylish way.

On one side there's a corner cupboard, while on the other there's a diesel-fired Lockgate Refleks stove. There's no hearth of any sort, which produces a very sleek look. Diesel stoves are much more controllable than solid fuel ones and don't get as hot, so there aren't the same stringent installation guidelines.

Lockgate do recommend, though, that there's a tray underneath in case of a fuel spill during maintenance.

The main piece of furniture is a large leather sofa, built in-house, with a magazine rack in each end. Boxes pull out from underneath to provide storage, or as a footstool, or even as somewhere to perch if you've got lots of people on board.

At one side of the sofa there's a little flip up table on the hull side, for a drink or a book. Opposite there's a TV unit with shelves, under the gunwale. The half-height bulkhead between the saloon and the dinette provides more shelves and cupboards.

It's once you're inside the boat that you really notice the extra headroom. Andrew Ridley says even he has several inches to spare, so there's no danger of banging his head or having to stoop. It feels even more spacious thanks to a

Houdini hatch in the ceiling, which even has little LED lights set into the surround. The portholes have chrome liners, giving a modern feel.

DINETTE

The Pullman dinette is raised and there's a set of side doors with glazed inner doors to give a view. The plinth has linked drawers for storage, so the whole space can be used: pull one drawer out, and it brings out a second from behind. There's also access to the space in the bench seats, through doors in the ends.

The seats themselves have raked backrests for increased comfort, but these also push back to the vertical when the dinette converts into a guest bed.

GALLEY

The galley is made up of two L-shaped runs of units, as the route through the



The shower room really is classy

boat switches from one side to the other. The problem of two potentially dead corners is solved by having pull out units – a design familiar from past Fernwood boats. On one side of the boat there's a lovely Belfast sink with side doors over, while on the other side there's a Hotpoint oven, and a Hoover four-burner hob with a stainless steel splashback, and an extractor fan above. The worktop is an attractive sparkly off-white quartz.

The bulkhead at the stern end of the galley has a pan rack designed especially for the owner and a couple of drawers above the worktop. These borrow some space from the big cupboard behind which is accessed from the corridor and

has folding doors. The top half contains a freezer and the bottom half has a washing machine, which is set right back in the space, so Andrew can have a laundry basket conveniently positioned in front.

The corridor makes use of the space

'This shower room is a very stylish space. The walls are lined with laminate in a distressed slate finish which looks very contemporary'



under the gunwales, with narrow cupboards all the way along, opened with push catches rather than handles.

SHOWER ROOM

The shower room is an off-corridor design, which seems less fashionable these days than a walk-through. The advantage is that it's still possible to walk through the boat even when someone else is using the room.

This one is a very stylish space. The walls are lined with laminate in a distressed slate finish which looks very contemporary. The basin is in a traditional washstand style unit, with drawers underneath. There are more hidden under gunwale cupboards for additional storage.

The loo is a Jabsco macerating unit, with the holding tank set across the boat at the stern. This means there's quite a lot of pipework to investigate should anything ever become blocked. The shower is a good size rectangular unit, with a removable panel alongside to give access to the shower pump should it be needed.

CABIN

One of Andrew Ridley's main requirements was a bed that was long enough for him to use in comfort, so it's not surprising that he's gone for an in-line design. It extends to 5ft wide, thanks to a pull-out section. There are drawers underneath it which are again linked to more behind,

to make use of all the available space. There's also a run of high-level cupboards and a sizeable wardrobe, offering hanging space and drawers. On the side of the wardrobe, next to the steps leading up into the engine room, there's a bookcase. This also has a folding door, that divides the cabin from the engine room.

ENGINE ROOM

This is a modern engine room, with the engine under the floor. Steps take you up over the engine and this is the only part of the boat that feels a bit tight. Someone of Andrew's height in particular will have to be careful not to bang their head when getting out onto the back deck. There's a range of

THE OWNER

ANDREW RIDLEY'S LOVE of canals began when he used to cycle the towpaths of London. Then a friend bought a boat and he saw the appeal of living afloat. He bought his first boat in 2012 and has been on board since retiring in March 2015.

That first boat could hardly be more different from *Rocinante*: it was just 42ft 6in long and had a cruiser stern. He chose it mainly because it was virtually the only one of those he looked at that he could stand up in. Since then, he's come to appreciate the look of traditional boats and the extra interior space offered by a trad stern.

Andrew had already spoken to Jonathan Wilson about building the shell for his new boat when he

read *Canal Boat*'s review of the Tyler Wilson Sheffield Keel widebeam, which had also been fitted out by the company. Before then, he hadn't realised they did any fitting-out. By the time he came to place an order, Finesse Boats had been formed and Andrew saw the case for having the whole boat built in the same place.

Choosing a name for a boat is often problematic, but Andrew was reading Don Quixote at the time and liked the name of his horse. Just don't let the boat look up *Rocinante*'s Wikipedia entry, which says the horse is Don Quixote's double: 'Awkward, past his prime, and engaged in a task beyond his capabilities'!

cupboards in the engine room, including one with all the fuses and gauges, and another containing the inverter. The calorifier is also in a cupboard here, set vertically.

A nice feature is that there's a small but deep stainless steel sink in the engine room. There's a power point here too, so as Andrew single-hands most of the time, there's the option of being able to have a small electric kettle to make some tea while waiting for a lock.

The boards over the engine are all removable to give access for servicing. If even better access is needed, the metal framework can also be unbolted.

TECHNICAL

Rocinante is powered by a Beta 50 engine, which should be plenty of power for a boat of this size, even with the extra weight of steel. There's also a Lewmar hydraulic bow thruster.

The boat has a 24-volt electrical system which Ken Warriner has long promoted as being more stable than 12 volts. The six domestic batteries on board give a total of 330Ah at 24 volts. A 240-volt supply comes from a Victron 3kW inverter charger, and there's also a 3.5kW TravelPower, an engine-driven generator.

ON THE WATER

We've always liked the way Tyler Wilson boats handle, and this one is no exception. The long swims means turning is quick and precise. This boat is ►



Big bed for a big owner and it extends to 5ft wide

THE BOAT TEST



Engine room sink is a good idea

- heavier and sits deeper in the water than usual, but that doesn't seem to have affected the handling.

The Lewmar bow thruster is effective; the advantage of a hydraulic one rather than electric is that there's no limit on the amount of time you can use it. If necessary, you can keep your finger on the button for minutes at a time, something that's not possible with an electric one.

At the helm the Morse control is comfortably to hand. The floor just inside the boat is a couple of inches too low for my ideal steering position, but for Andrew, who's taller, it should work well.

CONCLUSION

This boat is a confident start from Finesse as you might expect from a firm that has such a wealth of experience behind it. That it's a quality shell goes almost without saying, but this is matched by the quality of the

FINESSE BOATS

TYLER WILSON HAS been doing some boat-fitting for some time, but they'll admit it was all rather haphazard. It also led to some confusion: when someone said they had a Tyler Wilson boat, did they mean the shell, or the fit-out too? So the decision was made to put the boat-fitting side into a separate business and it made sense to emphasise that division by putting control in the hands of the next generation.

Louis Wilson and Ricky Lee have both worked at the family firm for some time, but Finesse is very

much their project.

Louis still also works on the shell building side, while Ricky brings his previous experience as an automotive engineer. There's been a considerable investment in facilities, with a large shed converted to a joinery workshop.

The order book is filling up, too. The firm is a matter of weeks away from completing the second boat and there are more in the pipeline.



workmanship inside, too. Everything is well made, everything feels solid, and everything fits properly.

Such quality comes at a price, of course. Finesse say a 64ft boat starts at £150,000; *Rocinante* has a host of extras, though, including the additions to the hull, the hydraulic bow thruster, the TravelPower, and the bespoke sofa, so we estimate the final price to have been around £170,000. That sounds like a lot, but it's what you'd expect to pay for a boat of this quality and style in today's market.

The launch of Finesse Boats may have been low key, but the first boat they've produced is anything but. It makes a loud statement that as well as some of

the best hulls you can buy, the Tyler Wilson family of companies can provide top quality fitting out, too.

CB

Verdict:
'A great start to
a new company
from the younger
generation'

DESIGN

AND DECOR

- Lockgate Refleks stove:
lockgate.com £650.00
- Hob: Hoover HGL64SCX
argos.co.uk £119.99
- Flooring: Karndean
kamdean.com around £50 sqm

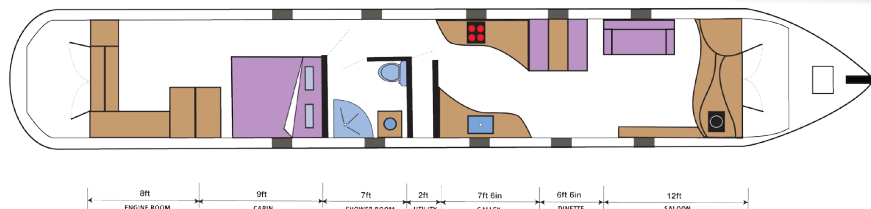
All prices are approximate and may depend on supplier and any discounts obtained



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Rocinante

c. £170,000



LENGTH: 64ft
BEAM: 6ft 10in
SHELL: Tyler Wilson
tylerwilsonboats.com
STYLE: Trad
LAYOUT: Standard
BERTHS: 2+2
FIT-OUT: Oak

ENGINE: Beta 50
Tel: 01452 723492
betamarine.co.uk
INVERTER: Victron 3kW
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BOW THRUSTER: Lewmar
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