



The Norfolk Explorer

It couldn't have been a more perfect morning at Morston for our Norfolk Explorer test. Although an early start was needed to catch the tide, even at 7am the June sun had enough strength to allow us the luxury of motoring out of the creek in just shorts.



It was a test I was both excited about and faced with a little trepidation. I am a great fan of the modern traditional looking yachts. Whilst living in Cornwall I regularly sailed a Cornish Crabber, so I am naturally drawn to the traditional lines of the Norfolk range of sailing craft built by Neil Thompson Boats up in North Norfolk. Today though, it was not one of these wind powered icons of North Norfolk sailing but his newest addition to the range, the Norfolk Explorer, a versatile 5m, open plan motor launch with a twin cylinder 14hp inboard.

The first thing that strikes you is that the Explorer's lines are undeniably cut from the same cloth as the other craft in the range. In fact the hull has been based on the ever popular Norfolk Oyster, of which there are many moored along the creek as we motor out to the open water of Blakeney Pit. The simulated clinker hull and deck mouldings, like the Oyster, are made using the highest quality resins, with a clear gelcoat below the waterline to prevent osmosis. The trim and finishing all ooze quality and practicality, and glancing across at her sister boat cutting through the glassy tones of Blakeney Pit that morning, it's clear that this little motor launch already has the makings of a modern classic.

Inside and the interior is roomy, making the launch feel a lot bigger than her length of just over 5m would suggest. The low foredeck area makes for safe and easy mooring and anchoring, and provides an extra large area of seating forward, which is both safe and practical. The ample seating along both sides makes it easily roomy enough for six adults, and extremely good for children, with an open but safe environment for them to get out on the water. What I particularly liked was that the

engine box has been designed in such a way that it adds to the interior of the launch. Unlike a lot of similar boats of this size, it is pleasing in both its design and functionality. Used as an extra seat or a table, it just feels right, and in no way takes up an inordinate amount of space as many do.

Under that box is a very capable and reliable Kubota twin cylinder diesel 14hp engine driving a 14in propeller. It delivers plenty of power and is responsive to subtle throttle changes. Although it only had to push Neil and me along this day, the power would be ample to get up to 6kn fully laden. Access to the engine is also easy, with the the engine box lifting from the front. It is designed so all sides of the engine can be reached, as well as the batteries in a separate compartment just in front. It's all very thoughtfully laid out and there are no space saving compromises which are often found in inboard launches of this size. Controlwise it's simple and all weather with everything easily accessible whilst at the tiller in a sitting or standing position. Handlingwise the combination of a well calibrated throttle and an excellently responsive tiller give it the manoeuvrability you would expect of a launch of her size. The Explorer has an excellent turning circle, making for easy manoeuvring in marinas, dykes or on inland waterways. She is also light and responsive in astern making for subtle adjustments.

Storagewise, the Explorer comes with two large lockers fore and aft. The forward one comes with gas struts as standard and both have enough room for everyday kit as well as anything for a day trip. Space within the boat is also ample and even with a full complement there is plenty of room for dry bags or other gear for a day trip without it becoming >>



The Explorer's classic lines immediately give away her Norfolk Boats lineage

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<< overcrowded or a hazard. Although not available yet, there are a number of optional extras also coming for the boat; a pram style sprayhood, rod holders and bait boxes and cushions to turn the Explorer into a full on gentleman's launch are all in the pipeline. All make the boat even more complete and allow owners to customise this already capable launch to their exact requirements.

The Norfolk Explorer was a pleasant surprise for someone who is predominantly a sailor. Her thoughtful classic lines as well as being extremely practical left me with two overriding reasons for wanting to own one. Firstly she is a beautiful boat, following on the lineage of the other Norfolk boats, she looks good. Both internally and externally the design is considered and pleasing to the eye on all fronts, even the engine box.



Looking across at her sistership throughout the test I couldn't help but admire her easy form as she cut through a perfect morning out at Blakeney. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, is just how practical and versatile this boat is.

As a family dayboat she would be second to none. Roomy and safe for kids, the Explorer would be at home pottering on our region's tidal rivers, in open water or inland with no problem at all. With a few extras, some cushions and a table and she would make an excellent high end launch, practical and capable of turning heads. At the other end of the scale fit some rod holders and you have a very capable fishing boat, not to mention her suitability as a very good tender for a larger boat. Because of this she is a worthy addition to the Norfolk range and another excellent boat to come out of Neil Thompson's North Norfolk yard, and one that you should really take a look at if you are after this sort of boat. ■

Everything onboard is well thought out. The engine box is well designed and access to the 14 horse twin cylinder diesel is easy. The controls are accessible both from a standing and a sitting position. The forward locker is particularly large and well supported with gas struts

Specification

Length overall (incl. pulpit)	16ft 9in (5.1m)
Draught	Approx 15in
Beam	6ft 2in (1.86m)
Weight	Approx 650kg
Price	£23,125
Available from	Neil Thompson Boats
Telephone	01263 741172
Website	www.neilthompsonboats.co.uk