

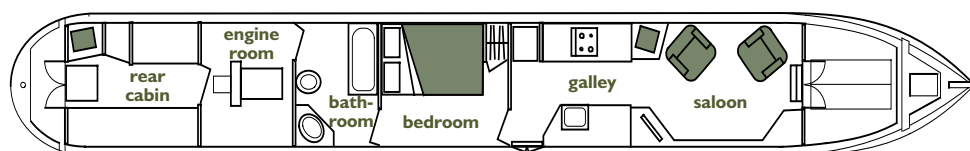
ancient and modern

Can you combine modern cruising comforts with traditional looks?

GRAHAM BOOTH inspects the latest from long-established boat-builders Braidbar

Aside from the occasional pianist or model train enthusiast, most couples planning to retire and live on a narrowboat need to accommodate the same sort of things, and the design of the boats tends to reflect this. I was therefore especially interested to hear about a retirement boat that contained a traditional Gardner 2LW engine and – an even more endangered species – a boatman’s cabin.

The owners, Paul and Sue Spray, previously had a share in a Challenger Syndicateships boat with a traditional engine and boatman’s cabin, and were determined not to give these up when they commissioned their own boat. While looking for a boatbuilder, they discovered *Dispatch*, built by Iain Bryceland of Braidbar Boats and reviewed



in *Waterways World* in July 1999. They liked the long, low lines of the shell but preferred the natural wood finishes used in the majority of Iain’s interiors. Since Braidbar specialises in bespoke boats, it did not take long to agree a specification and layout that exactly suited the Sprays’ needs.

Bows

The 61ft 6in boat, called *Leonard*, has a tug-style foredeck which gives it a very purposeful look. Access to the space under the deck is via two hinged trap doors which open outwards. Underneath, there is plenty of room for storing garden chairs, barbeques and all the necessities of life on the move.

It also provides excellent access to the BCS 24-volt electric bow thruster. This is the first of this type that Iain has fitted and he is impressed by the amount of power it delivers. Unusually, the tube does not have a weed hatch and relies on fine mesh screens at either end to keep the propeller free of debris.

Leonard’s traditional lines are emphasised by a planked Josher bow and recessed rear panels. It has 15mm base-plate, rather than the usual 10mm, which allowed Iain to use

“The proven consistency would appeal to first-time buyers”





left
**Planked
 Jasher bow.**



below left
**Good access but no
 weed hatch for the
 bow thruster.**

right
**A variety of wood
 finishes in the
 saloon.**

below
**A flap in the centre
 of the shelves lifts
 to create...
below right
 ...a dining table
 for two.**



less ballast and, thereby, increase the amount of underfloor ventilation.

Along with the greater canal cred that you acquire from a raised tug deck comes a rather long drop through the front doors to the cabin floor. The near vertical, three-tread flight of steps that gets you into the saloon is not as easy to negotiate as the usual single step – especially on the way down – although I am sure that it would become easier with practice.

Saloon

Once inside, you realise how much Iain and his customers like their wood. The cabin sides and ceiling are covered in ash plywood to which ash framing and solid oak beading are added to give a panelled appearance. This works well and avoids the elongating effect of the solid T&G boarded alternative. The hull sides are covered in vertical ash T&G, reminiscent of a wainscot, and solid oak is used for the fixed furniture. On the floor, planks of Douglas fir separated by 4mm expansion strips of stained wood reminded me of the caulked deck of a yacht.

Paul and Sue opted to use upholstered stoppers rather than curtains for the portholes which light the whole of the interior. This is a neat solution, but it means that, during the day, there are no fabrics

to soften the wood finishes so their impact is all the greater.

The saloon has fixed shelves and cupboards on the starboard side and a solid fuel stove against the galley on the opposite side. Seating is provided by two free-standing Stressless leather recliners and stools. In the centre of the symmetrically arranged shelves there is a hinged flap that can be raised to the horizontal and propped with brackets to make a two person dining table. When guests are on board, the top can be opened out and supported by a separate leg which doubles the area.

Galley

Galleys usually give the joiners a chance to show what they can do and this one is no exception. The doors and drawer fronts are all solid wood and have attractive mouldings around the raised panels. Many of Braidbar's boats have →

**Starboard side
 of the galley.**



high level cupboards on either side with arched sections where they pass over portholes. On *Leonard*, the doors have been omitted on one side to turn the cupboard into a plate rack.

An amazing amount of equipment has been crammed into the galley's 7ft 9in length. At the rear, there is a floor to ceiling unit containing a microwave on top of a New World gas oven

Matching high level cupboards in the bedroom.

Overhead cupboards transformed into a plate rack.

Either door of the fridge/freezer can be opened separately.



on top of a Zanussi Aquacycle washing machine. A Vanette gas hob is set into the granite worktop and, on the other side, there is an Electrolux Zanussi combined fridge and freezer with two doors so that all the cold does not escape when you open one.

double bed, a wardrobe and some high level cupboards matching those in the galley.

From the bedroom, you get a glimpse of the through bathroom that separates the living accommodation from the engine room. At 5ft 6in, it is relatively short and this, combined with the fact that the doors in and out are on opposite sides of the boat, means that you have some fairly abrupt turns to make as you pass through it. However, the layout of the fittings and the detailing

Bedroom and bathroom

Beyond the galley, the corridor switches to the starboard side and passes through the bedroom. This is furnished simply with a fixed



Solid joinery details in the galley.

Rear of the saloon looking through to the galley.

The glass screen over the bath turns it into a shower cubicle.

The attractive through bathroom.





Switch and instrument panel over the Gardner 2LW.

Well thought out and manufactured control gear.

of the joinery give the space great eye appeal. The bath has a hinged glass screen along most of the long side so that it can double as a shower compartment.

Engine and back cabin

As you go through the far door, the natural wood finishes give way to varnished scumble, dark green paint and traditional decoration. The two cylinder Gardner takes pride of place in the engine room and even has its own radiator to keep it warm. It was restored by



Braidbar's secure door lock.

The traditional elements of the boatman's cabin.



Charles Mills who also produced the traditional control gear. Having seen some that has been cobbled together using parts of a hand-drill, it is a pleasure to find a well thought out and manufactured installation that compliments the engine perfectly.

The engine room also houses – suitably concealed – a Mastervolt 3.5kW generator, a Victron 2kW Multi inverter charger and a calorifier. A panel containing the switches and instruments is mounted on the front bulkhead. The boat's wiring system is basically 24-volt although this is stepped down locally to 12 volts to serve items like the cooker ignition and hi-fi.

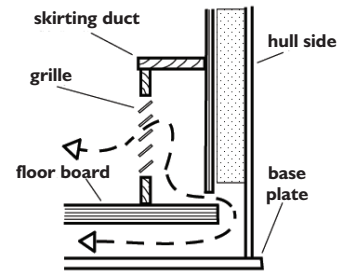
Finally, the boatman's cabin has all the traditional elements and lacks only the plates, brass and lace – which will be added soon – to give it its authentic character. All the graining and lively roses and castles decoration was done by Andy Russell who also did the external signwriting. Braidbar's joiners have entered into the spirit very well and produced some appropriate details of their own. I like the way the edge of the shelf that supports the stove echoes the shape of the stove's feet.

The rear doors are secured with a simple but effective locking device developed by Braidbar. It comprises two brass knobs which are screwed onto bolts projecting from the doors. One has a pivoting hook behind it which can be swung down onto the bolt on the other door and clamped by tightening the knob. This type of lock is also used on the side and front doors.

Behind the scenes

After we had finished looking over *Leonard*, Iain showed me two being fitted out to demonstrate some of the 'behind the scenes' details. The first impression is how well screwed together it all is.

To ensure that there is no unevenness between the boards that cover the floor and hull sides, strips of plywood are screwed to the back edge of one board, then



Section through skirting duct.

the next one is screwed through to it so that the joint is continuously supported. The floor is always covered with 18mm birch plywood and, when solid floorboards are specified, these are fixed on top of this – with lots of screws.

This form of construction does not allow the floor to be lifted for inspection so Iain includes a hatch at the rearmost part of the cabin. If there is any moisture from condensation or spillages, this is

“Once inside, you realise how much Braidbar like their wood”

where it will collect, and the hatch allows it to be mopped out. One possible cause of water in the bilges is leaking plumbing joints, so these are all exposed or have their own inspection panel so that repairs can be carried out easily.

Air for permanent ventilation enters through grilles in the front bulkhead and is then ducted down to floor level, where it enters ducts behind the skirting boards and →

Bright ideas

- 15mm base-plate reduces the amount of ballast needed, boosting the under-floor ventilation.
- The side-by-side fridge/freezer sits under the worktop, but has two doors to minimise the chances of the cold 'escaping'.
- All plumbing joints are either exposed or have their own inspection panel, so leaks don't go undetected.



cupboards. These have grilles at intervals to let the air enter the cabin. Coupled with this, the hull linings are fixed with the lower edge slightly above floor level to encourage ventilation of the bilges.

Iain does not use MDF or blockboard as one absorbs water and the other always seems to have a void just where you need to screw into it. Instead, he buys birch ply and sends this to be veneered to his requirements.

Modern narrowboats have a great deal of DC and AC wiring and these sometimes have to share the same route through the boat. When this happens, Iain places the AC cables in a screened conduit so that there are no problems with induction currents.

On the water

Leonard is remarkably similar in overall layout to my own boat – even the speed wheel and push/pull gear lever are in the same positions – so I felt at home on it straight away. The boat certainly feels very stable on the water with little roll. It responds well to the, as yet, slightly stiff rudder, although this will no doubt ease with use.

I was slightly surprised by the speed of the engine in relation to the canal speed. This is due to a relatively fine pitch propeller which was chosen to ensure that the engine is not working at low revs for long periods. I must confess to being rather envious of the way the bow thruster coaxed the boat round at a tight turning point as this is one facility I do not have. All in all, a good, solid performer.

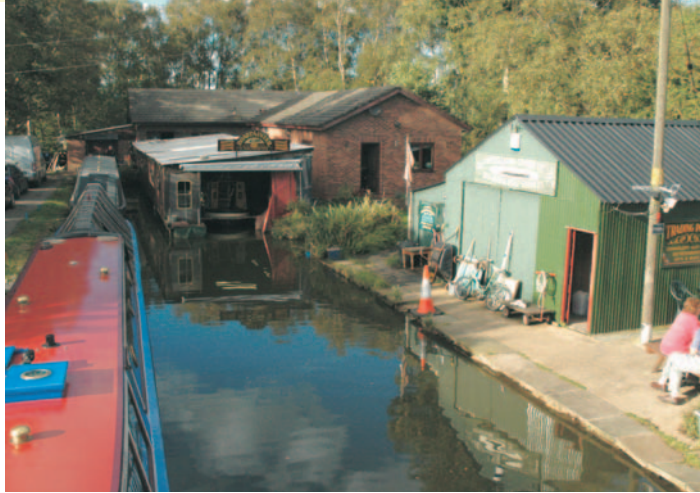


Conclusion

In the 20 years he has been building boats, Iain has developed a recognisable style which is obviously appreciated by his loyal customers – some of whom give up their time to help spread the gospel at major boat shows.

It is not difficult to imagine that Braidbar's proven consistency would appeal to people who are possibly buying a boat for the first time and are confused by the variety of offerings from an ever expanding number of boatbuilders. Nevertheless, as boats like *Dispatch* prove, if a customer has a particular requirement, Iain is willing and able to switch from *table d'hôte* to the *à la carte*.

The number on *Leonard's* side panel proclaims that this is Braidbar's 96th boat. To mark their forthcoming century, Iain and Luisa are planning to build a very special 70ft Josher replica for themselves so that they can spend more time on the water. Look out for it at next year's Crick Boat Show. 🚢



above left
Classic Marine Diesels' neatly laid out workshop.

above right
Lord Vernon's Wharf with the Trading Post on the right.

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Braidbar Boats

Braidbar Boats occupies a small arm, known as Lord Vernon's Wharf, off the Macclesfield Canal at Poynton. The company was started in 1985 by Iain and Luisa Bryceland. Iain's background is in mechanical engineering and computer programming but a spell of living on a boat convinced him that he wanted to earn his living on the canals.

He started fitting out one or two boats a year and recalls dreaming that, if he could build ten boats in his lifetime, it would be a worthwhile achievement. That assessment has had to be revised as he now builds six to eight bespoke boats in a single year.

The shells are generally supplied by Tim Tyler, although Iain has used other builders if the customer has a particular favourite. About one in ten of the boats have boatman's cabins and all contain plenty of the attractive joinery details that Iain and the team have developed over the years. Some customers have been back once or even twice for new boats as their requirements change throughout their boating careers.

To help them decide on a layout – and to examine the quality of the product more closely – Iain and Luisa have a hire-boat that is built to the same standards as their bespoke boats. This is available to anyone who has five years' experience of boating.

Lord Vernon's Wharf is also home to two other businesses. Charles Mills runs Classic Marine Diesels which restores vintage engines and produces precision engineered control systems and any other parts for traditional installations. His neatly laid-out workshop contains an incredible amount of equipment. Charles also helps out at the local Anson Engine Museum.

Kevin Herbert and Brian Austin now run the Trading Post which fronts onto the canal. They sell everything from cups of tea and ice creams to generators, and also operate a small day boat. Signwriter and coachpainter, Andy Russell lives close by and is often seen around the wet dock lettering and graining a new boat.

