



Boat Test Aqua Narrowboats 60ft

30 November 2011 Canal Boat



# A work of art and crafts



*Honesty* is a most unusual boat – while it looks very traditional, it has a secret tucked away at its heart

WORDS ADAM PORTER PICTURES ANDY R ANNABLE

**T**here are fears in many quarters that real craftsmanship is under threat in this country, that it's being killed off by mass production, multi-national companies, and supermarkets. It seems impossible that individually-produced items, often made by hand, could survive the growing demand for cheap goods.

But there are people who value the skill of the craftsman. Jan Callender is one of them, and her passion for properly made, beautiful things, is clear when you look at the narrowboat she and her husband John commissioned.

For the shell, they went to one of the best in the business, Graham Edgson at Norton Canes, and were lucky enough

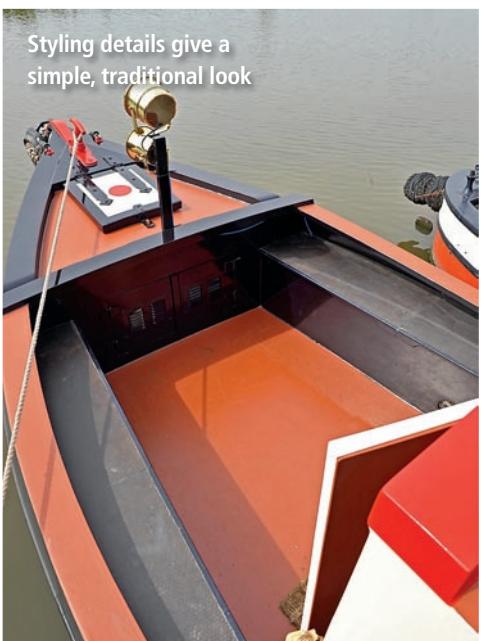
to get the 100th boat he'd produced. The couple also like to support local businesses, so for the fitout they turned to Aqua Narrowboats, their local boat builders, who'd impressed them with earlier examples of their work.

For fixtures and fittings, they commissioned stained glass panels and had ironwork specially made by local people. They also found unique ceramics from Mexico (okay, not exactly local, but imported by a firm based close by). And that's not to mention the finishing touches which Jan has made herself, and the works of art she's collected over the years.

As we'll see, *Honesty* is a boat which is full of craftsmanship. ▶



## Boat Test **Aqua Narrowboats 60ft**



Styling details give a simple, traditional look



Honesty looks as if it will be traditional throughout, but...

### ◀ EXTERIOR

*Honesty's* Norton Canes shell is a thing of beauty. From the Josher-inspired curves of the bow to the kick-up of the back counter, the lines are spot on. The cabin is lower than many boats and the tumblehome of the cabin sides is slightly more pronounced, meaning it's easier to walk along the wide gunwales. At the stern, the cabin curves in, making the gunwales even wider and providing plenty of standing room – important on a trad-sterned boat.

There are nice little details everywhere, including rings on the forward cabin bulkhead, scrolls in the handrail (but not

too many), and a chunky boatman's beam. There are three pigeon boxes in the roof, two of which are fitted with prisms to let in plenty of light, which makes a nice change from a line of mushroom vents. There are two side hatches each side of the boat. One is just a pair of doors, while the others have a lift-up hatch and steps inside to make them into exits. The portholes are chunky brass numbers that suit the boat perfectly.

The quality of craftsmanship on this boat really shines through when you look at the smoothness of the cabin sides and the crispness of the edges. Graham Edgson is a man who treats steel like a living material

that needs to be nurtured into shape. He's reluctant to give away the trade secrets that allow him to produce such excellent steelwork, but time is certainly a factor. A Norton Canes shell isn't turned out in a matter of days. When it's complete, Graham believes in leaving it to rest for a few months so the welds can settle and a layer of rust can form. Then the whole shell is grit-blasted ready for painting.

The paintwork also has a look of quality, being deep and rich. The colour scheme is a Norton Canes classic, and another master craftsman, Dave Moore, has been employed for the sign-writing which is fresh and lively.



So many things to look at, there's no TV – and quite right too!



On a more mundane level, plenty of storage has been incorporated into the design of the hull. The well deck is large (Jan wanted plenty of space to sit outside and watch the world go by) and has lockers down each side. The gas locker is in the nose and consists of a box which is only as deep as it needs to be. It means there's a large storage area underneath, accessed from a pair of doors in the forward bulkhead. John refers to this as his shed. Under the well deck there's large water tank.

There are two diesel tanks, one at the stern for a small stove and one for the engine under the floor of the engine room.

## LAYOUT AND FITOUT

*Honesty* has a fairly standard layout, but with a couple of twists. The galley and saloon are open-plan at the front, but around the other way from usual, so the front doors lead into the galley, with the saloon beyond.

Next comes a through bathroom (with a bath), followed by the engine room. But the classic engine you might expect to find here is missing; instead there's a modern engine hidden from view in a box, offset to one side. Finally, there's a traditional back cabin, which the couple use as their bedroom.

The fit-out uses oak, and Jan says they've

Boatman's cabin is the main cabin



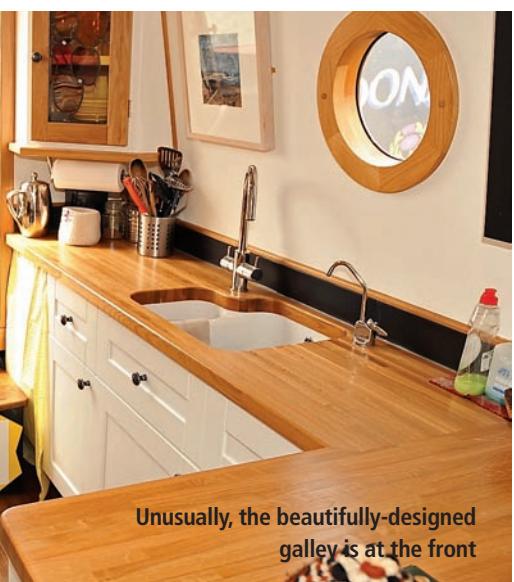
tried to use as much solid wood as possible. There's vertical oak tongue and groove below the gunwales, teamed with white painted birch ply above to give a light, airy feel. The floor is a beautiful distressed oak. Jan has nothing but praise for Aqua's joiner, Jordan Brindley (yes, apparently he is related!); not only has he built everything in the boat, but he has also come up with some clever design solutions.

## GALLEY AND SALOON

Stepping down into the galley is like entering a homely farmhouse kitchen. There's a short run of units on one side, and an



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### THE OWNERS



JAN AND JOHN CALLENDAR have long boating histories, having started hiring in the 1980s. They

quickly realised that a week a year wasn't enough, but they couldn't really afford to do more. So in the early 90s, Jan advertised for like-minded people, and started her own shared boat syndicate, first with six members, then eight. The group is still going today.

The couple have both retired. Jan was a teacher, while John was a safety and reliability engineer at Rolls-Royce. They've sold their house and moved on board *Honesty*. "The children think we're mad," says Jan, "but fortunately some of the madness has been passed on to them."

► L-shaped run on the other. The worktops are made of thick oak and the shorter run ends in an attractive curve, with matching shelves below. There's an attractive honed slate splashback and a one-and-a-half bowl Belfast sink, and white painted cabinet doors complement the look. The other modern appliance in the galley, a microwave, has been cunningly hidden behind a gingham curtain; it slides out on a shelf when it's needed. Jan's planning to make another curtain to hide the Shoreline 12-volt fridge.

Although the galley is relatively small, there's plenty of storage, not least under the well deck. The step from the front doors moves out of the way to reveal about two feet of space, useful for items you're not likely to need very often.

Either side of the front doors are high-level corner cupboards with specially-made stained glass fronts showing an honesty plant seed pod design. They were made by Dave Griffin at his studio in the Peak District.

There's a small Nelson two-burner hob with a grill and oven for cooking – but in fact it's only there as a summer option. In the winter, the couple use the huge Evergreen stove that's around the corner in the saloon on a large riven slate hearth. Not only does it provide for their cooking needs, it has a back boiler for hot water. Jan commissioned a number of iron accessories from Hayley Powell, who has a forge just along the canal at Burton-upon-Trent.

The saloon is a comfortable, lived-in space, with a large sofa and a couple of stools. The steps leading up to the side hatch were designed by Jordan Brindley, and cleverly fold up out of the way when not in use.

The walls are covered in paintings. "I've never been able to resist an art gallery," says Jan, "and because I nearly always end up buying something, I've built up quite a large collection of work over the years." Only the smaller pieces fitted onto the boat, and they're lit by another clever piece of design work by Jordan. Angled oak blocks on the ceiling contain what would otherwise be rather ugly LED lights which wash the walls with light.

Jan's work is also on display, with braided light pulls and her homemade porthole bungs, insulated with a polystyrene core and sheep's wool, to keep the heat in and ensure there's no condensation.



## BATHROOM

The door from the saloon to the bathroom contains another piece of spectacular stained glass, and the room it leads into has plenty of surprises.

Firstly, there's a decent sized bath, with shower, set across the boat, then there's the loo, an Air Head composting unit that takes the prize as the most compact composting loo I've seen. Jan and John say it's simple to operate, convenient and (crucially) doesn't smell. Liquids go into a small tank at the front and can be emptied at an Elsan point. There's a larger tank at the back for solids. The makers say a couple living on board could go a month without having to empty the tank; Jan and John say it lasts much longer. While we were on board there was no hint of any bathroom smells.

The basin adds a splash of colour to the bathroom. Set into a unit, it was handmade in Mexico and imported by another local Derbyshire company. The smart tap coming

out of the wall provides a dramatic contrast.

On the other side of the room a cupboard contains the calorifier, with an airing cupboard above. There's also a set of valves that change the water heating from the engine to the stove. The room itself is lined with Wet Walls laminate that curves under the gunwale – no mean feat.

## ENGINE ROOM

When we visited *Honesty*, the engine room was unfinished. To keep costs down the couple had opted to do some work themselves – and painting the engine room is one job they haven't yet got around to.

At first glance, there's not much to see because everything is boxed in. But take off the lids and there's plenty going on.

The engine – a common or garden Beta 43 – is in a box on one side, together with all the hydraulics that allow it to be offset from the centre line. All the electrical equipment is on the other side. The batteries are

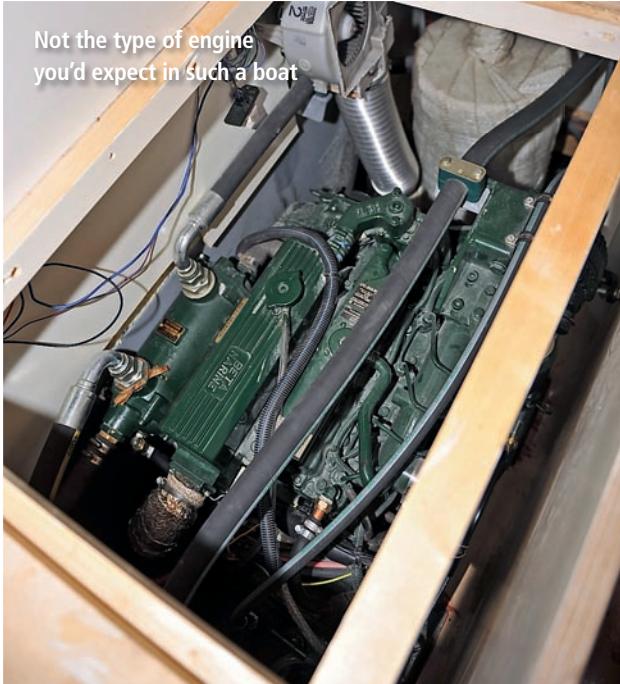
hidden below the steps to the side hatch. The other main piece of equipment, again hidden in a box, is a washing machine.

## BACK CABIN

Entering the back cabin is a bit like going back in time, thanks to the traditional design and the scumbling and decoration, expertly painted by Dave Moore.

What's also obvious is that this is a back cabin with plenty of headroom. A room like this would usually have a raised floor because of the propshaft running underneath. But the hydraulic drive means there's no long shaft so no need to raise the floor and no loss of headroom. The back steps dismantle, to give access to the point where the hydraulics meet the propshaft.

The traditional bed hole contains a deep, comfortable mattress, made in sections. All the usual storage places are there too, and the drop-down table makes the perfect sewing or computing area. A non-traditional ▶





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◀ option is a Glembring diesel heater where the boatman's stove would normally be because it's more controllable.

### TECHNICAL

As we've said, this boat is powered by the ubiquitous Beta 43, chosen for reliability and ease of maintenance (the box around the engine dismantles, for easy access). Only the hydraulic drive system, supplied by Beta, makes this installation unusual.

A 12-volt electrical supply is provided by a bank of six two-volt deep-cycle cells from Pb batteries, giving a total of 560Ah. The makers say they're able to withstand a deeper discharge than normal batteries, and should last two or three times as long. For a 240-volt supply, there's a 3kW Victron inverter/charger. There's also a Dometic Travel Power engine-driven generator.

### ON THE WATER

On the move, *Honesty* feels solid and reliable. The rudder is a big heavy plate of steel, yet the steering isn't at all difficult and because its post is set at an angle, the rudder centres itself. The boat is exceptionally responsive and precise. There aren't any bow thrusters, but when you've got a boat which handles this well, you don't need them.

Even though there's no trad engine, there

### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS



**Honesty 60ft**

**circa £140,000**

are traditional controls: a speedwheel for the throttle and a grab handle for forward and reverse, all made by Norton Canes. The marriage of traditional controls and hydraulic drive sounds odd, particularly when you see the rods running along the back cabin ceiling and taking a sharp left turn towards the engine. But they're a delight to use, and you almost forget you're controlling an everyday engine. It's the noise that gives it away – or rather the lack of it. With the engine some distance away and cocooned in its box, this is a very quiet boat.

### CONCLUSION

This is a highly individual boat, which as we said in the introduction is a testament to the power of craftsmanship. The shell is a work of art, the fit-out is well thought

out, well designed, and well made. The paintwork and decoration, the stained glass and the individually-designed ironwork all contribute to the feeling of quality.

Of course such individuality doesn't come cheap, although Jan and John have done their best to keep costs down by doing some work themselves and sourcing many items. Even so, they say they've spent £140,000, but according to Aqua their efforts have probably saved around £40,000.

When you see a boat like *Honesty* the value of a craftsman's skill shines through. It's clearly made a deep impression on Jan: "We've got so many beautiful things on this boat", she says. "I can spend all evening just looking at them, so we don't need a TV."

As long as there are people who appreciate craftsmanship like that, it's sure to survive. ☉

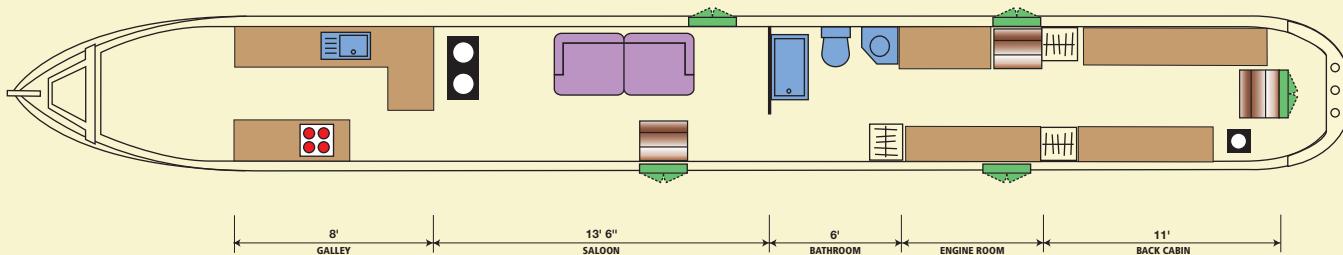
### AQUA NARROWBOATS

JUSTIN HUDSON-OLDROYD started Aqua as a hire firm in 2004 when he fitted out his first boat by himself. At the time he still had a full-time job with a local authority. A second boat was added a couple of years later. Then, in 2008 when Mercia Marina opened at Willington in Derbyshire, Justin and his wife Jane leased the workshop and went full time.

These days, the hire fleet consists of five highly-specified boats, four of which are sponsored. Each spends four years in the fleet before being replaced. Building bespoke boats was a natural extension of the business, with the first one being ordered by



customers who'd been regular hirers. *Honesty* was something of a departure from the contemporary style of most Aqua boats. "It's been good for us as a business to do something different", says Justin.



<b>LENGTH:</b>	60ft
<b>BEAM:</b>	6ft 10in
<b>SHELL:</b>	Norton Canes Boat Builders <a href="http://nortoncanesboatbuilders.co.uk">nortoncanesboatbuilders.co.uk</a>
<b>STYLE:</b>	Trad
<b>FIT-OUT:</b>	Oak and painted birch

<b>ENGINE:</b>	Beta 43
	Tel: 01452 723492 <a href="http://betamarine.co.uk">betamarine.co.uk</a>
<b>BATTERIES:</b>	Pb Batteries
	<a href="http://pbatteries.com">pbatteries.com</a>
<b>COMPOSING TOILET:</b>	AirHead <a href="http://airheadtoilet.com">airheadtoilet.com</a>

<b>STAINED GLASS:</b>	Dave Griffin <a href="http://dave-griffin.co.uk">dave-griffin.co.uk</a>
<b>IRONWORK:</b>	Hayley Powell <a href="http://foreverforged.co.uk">foreverforged.co.uk</a>
<b>BASIN:</b>	<a href="http://mexicanrugcompany.co.uk">mexicanrugcompany.co.uk</a>
<b>DIESEL STOVE:</b>	Glembring <a href="http://glembring.se">glembring.se</a>

**AQUA NARROWBOATS**  
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**Verdict: 'A beautifully-crafted and interesting mix of traditional and modern'**