



Simply furnished saloon.

set menu *or* à la carte?

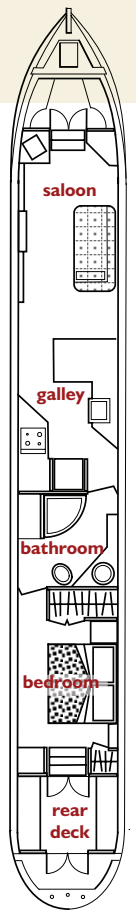
A Cheshire boat-builder is bucking the trend by offering both bespoke and affordable off-the-peg narrowboats. **GRAHAM BOOTH** asks what you get for your money

Given the variety of lengths, styles and specifications available to the narrowboat buyer, it is not surprising that many boat-builders tend to concentrate their efforts in just one part of

the market. However, for every rule, there is an exception and one builder who has decided to spread his net more widely is Steve Wedgwood, owner of Wedgwood Narrowboats in Middlewich.



Note the three tunnel bands at the rear.





As well as building generously equipped bespoke boats in the style and layout the customer chooses, he has developed a compact, cruiser-style narrowboat with a set plan that is designed to appeal particularly to first time buyers. And for those who want to do the fitting-out work themselves, there are basic and lined sailaways in lengths from 38ft to 65ft.

Against All Odds

Steve's latest bespoke boat is the 57ft 9in long *Against All Odds*, commissioned by Bob and Sharon Whittington. Spotting the manufacturer of a narrowboat shell is a game you find yourself playing the more you write about them but I must say, this one had me stumped. It is, in fact, built to Steve's own shape and detailing by Liverpool Narrowboats, run by Stan McNaughton. This company is completely separate from Liverpool Boats which Stan started and is now run by his son, Alan.

Steve's influence starts at the very back of the boat where there are three 'tunnel bands' around the counter rather than the usual two, giving a welcome traditional flavour to the stern. From here, two rubbing strakes pass down the whole length of the hull for additional protection when mooring.

The semi-traditional rear deck has lockers on either side which double as seats, with one containing the gas bottles. Having the gas locker at the rear makes it easier to change the bottles and, being situated higher in the boat, the drain hole is well above water level so there is no chance of the locker being flooded.

Under the plywood hatch is a Vetus M4.17 engine with Vetus water-lubricated rear seal and a hospital generator

The hint of a pinch in the bow plates.

"The bow has just the hint of a traditional pinch"

silencer. Alongside it in the engine bay are the calorifier, the Webasto diesel boiler and six batteries – five domestic and one starter. These are located on the opposite side of the boat from the gas bottles to balance the trim. The integral fuel tank in the counter extends well forward to give a good volume, although this does restrict the width of the weed hatch slightly.

At the other end of the ripple-free cabin, the bow is pleasantly proportioned with just the hint of a pinch to the hull plates to give a further traditional flavour. Having relegated the gas locker to the rear deck, the space it normally occupies in the bow is cleverly used as a coal store. Fuel is dropped in through the locker lid and removed – in the shelter of the cratch cover – through a door under the deck beam. Below the deck

right
Panelled roof and semi-traditional rear deck.

below left
The rear gas locker is easier to get at.

below
Conveniently placed coal store.

below right
Neatly installed Vetus engine and services.





are the stainless steel water tank and a Vetus 55 kgf bow-thruster.

The cabin sides and roof have a well executed two-tone colour scheme using Craftmaster paints. The roof is divided into several panels which are painted in Raddle Cream – a development of the popular Raddle Red. This has an eggshell finish which is a good compromise between full gloss and sand textured paintwork. As on the cabin sides, the roof panels have a double coachline to add interest to this normally under-played area. Signwriting and the Wedgwood Narrowboats trademark were added to the rear panels by Martyn King of Vimart Signwriting.

Interior

First impressions count a great deal when entering a narrowboat – is the layout obvious at one glance, or does

it make you want to explore further? Are the materials and colours well balanced and inviting, or do they jar your senses? The impression on *Against All Odds* is of an interesting but relaxed interior with occasional accents of colour to avoid blandness.

With the exception of the varnished floor, the entire oak fit-out is finished in Danish oil. This gives an almost completely matt surface which – until you have adjusted your mind to it – can look as if it has no finish at all. It is certainly better looking than a gloss varnished interior and it is claimed that scuff marks can be removed easily from the surface. I must admit I could not help thinking that a semi-matt varnish would look just as good and probably not show the marks in the first place.

above left
The extended worktop forms a dining area.

above right
The galley is very much in the modern idiom.



These shelves can be swung forward to reveal...



...a washing machine!

Bright ideas

- ◆ The bow is designed as a coal store, with the gas bottles moved to the back
- ◆ Swing-out shelves in the kitchen conceal a washing machine
- ◆ Drawer runners make extending the bed easy



Drop-down kick-boards give more storage.



Saloon and galley

At the front of the boat is a large saloon furnished with a free-standing modern chaise longue. An LCD television is mounted on the wall opposite with encased radiators on either side. The solid fuel stove is adjacent to the front doors and near to its supply of coal. Halogen lighting in the ceiling is supplemented by LED lighting under the gunwales.

The double 'L' galley which follows has an extended worktop facing towards the saloon to act as a dining area. Under this are two banks of useful shelves that, on closer inspection, provide an ingenious solution to the dead corner problem. The outer bank is hinged and can be swung forward – like those secret panels in an old library – to reveal a Candy washing machine in the space behind it. Power for the washing machine is provided by the batteries via a 3kW Victron Multi plus inverter/charger.

The rest of the galley is very much in the modern idiom with black granite worktops, Belfast sink, stacked units and a high level cupboard for glasses. All the doors and drawers here and throughout the boat are hand-made on site by the joinery team. Additional cool storage is provided by hinging the kick-boards under the units so that they drop down. ➤

above
The stove is near to
the coal store.

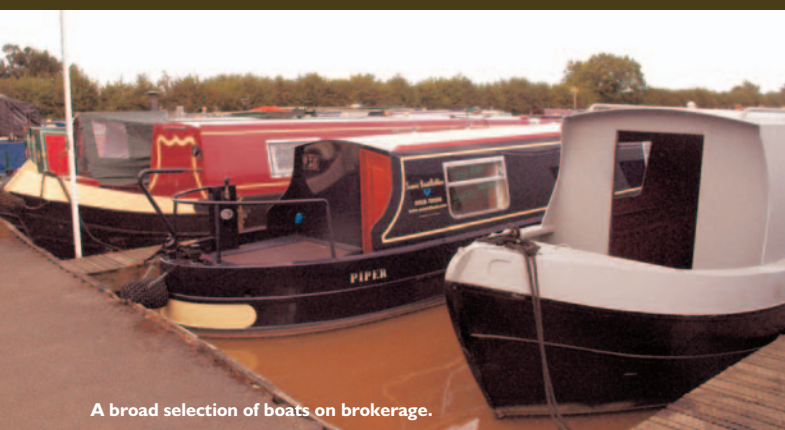
Wedgwood Narrowboats

Steve Wedgwood started his career working as a race engineer on touring cars. About ten years ago, he and his wife, Sheena, hired a narrowboat. Having enjoyed that experience so much, they hired twice more in the same year. Looking at the amount they had paid for this, Steve decided that it would be worth buying a boat of their own. By the time the boat was lengthened and remodelled to Steve's liking, he decided he preferred working on slow narrowboats to fast cars.

In 2003, he bought Kings Lock Chandlery from Vetus agent, Mick Sivewright, who still has an engineering business on the same site. Although small in area, the shop stocks an enormous range of products, many of which demonstrate a continuing loyalty to Vetus.

Shortly after he took over the chandlery, Steve started fitting out under the name Wedgwood Narrowboats. From small beginnings, he now aims for a yearly output of around three bespoke boats, nine fully fitted off-the-pegs and as many 'bespoke sailaways' as he can fit in.

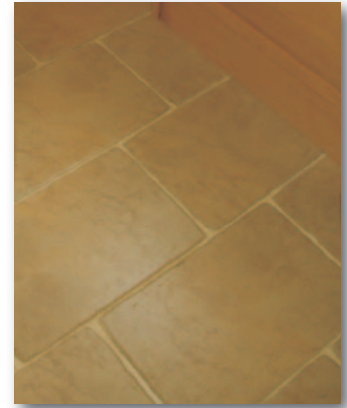
In April of this year, Steve acquired the chandlery and brokerage at Venetian Marina on the Middlewich arm of the Shropshire Union Canal. The extra floor space gives him the opportunity to present cookers and fridges in realistic settings and to have whole ranges of paint and ironmongery on display. Meanwhile, the brokerage has sold boats with a broad selection of styles and prices, their prices ranging from £7,000 to £90,000.



A broad selection of boats on brokerage.



The new chandlery at Venetian Marina.



above
Large ceramic tiles in the bathroom.

far left
The vacuum toilet is not shielded by a door.

left
Quadrant shower cubicle in the bathroom.

Bathroom and bedroom

In the through bathroom, the floor changes from diagonally laid oak boards to large buff-coloured ceramic tiles. These were apparently not the easiest things to lay but the final result justifies the effort. The bathroom fittings tick all

Venetian 38

Having sampled the top-of-the-range offering, it was time to make the short journey to Venetian Marina to inspect a recently sold off-the-peg boat. The Venetian 38, as the model is known, is also based on a shell supplied by Liverpool Narrowboats.

Packing a 27ft cabin into a 38ft overall length does not leave much room for front and rear decks. To make the front well deck as large as possible, the gas locker

is again located at the back and the front locker reduced to minimum size. The rear deck has a square rather than a rounded stern which, although less elegant, gives a greater floor area. Underneath is a 3-cylinder Vetus M3.28 engine that should ensure there is plenty of power on both canals and rivers.

The internal accommodation is designed for a crew of two plus two occasional guests. Detailing and finishes are simpler

than on the bespoke boats but are still to a good standard. At the rear is a fixed double bed with a small, half-height wardrobe/electrical cupboard over the foot end. This does not allow a great deal of room for clothes but it is supplemented by a full height cupboard near the front.

The bathroom is well up to the size you would expect to find on a larger boat and is equipped with a vanity unit,



Combined galley and saloon.




Centrally placed solid fuel stove.

the boxes in our recent survey of current narrowboat features, except that the toilet is not concealed by a door when the bathroom is open. It is a vacuum cassette type with the pump and cassette housed in the bottom of a wardrobe in the next-door bedroom.

Unlike many of today's narrowboats, *Against All Odds* does have a generous amount of clothes hanging space. A 4ft wide wardrobe against the bathroom wall is complimented by a slightly narrower one against the rear bulkhead. There are also bedside drawers, high level cupboards over the bed head and a low cupboard by the back steps – there are no excuses for abandoned socks or sweaters on this boat.

In the midst of this storage bonanza is the thwartships bed which extends to its full length on industrial strength drawer runners, leaving you to simply rearrange the mattress pieces before turning in. And, should you need any help in getting off to sleep, there is a second wall-mounted television.

Conclusion

Against All Odds has a generous complement of the popular features of a modern extended cruising narrowboat, assembled in a confident way to produce a very harmonious result. Deteriorating weather conditions prevented the normal cruising trial but the engine seemed vibration-free at all speeds and Steve had no difficulty in manoeuvring the boat for the pictures. All bespoke boats are individually priced but a similar example would be around £90,000. 



The bedroom has a cross bed and plenty of storage.

KINGS LOCK CHANDLERY

Booth Lane, Middlewich CW10 0JJ
01606 737564
info@kingslock.co.uk
www.kingslock.co.uk

VENETIAN CHANDLERY

01270 528538
sales@venetianbrokerage.co.uk

“Unlike many boats, there is a generous amount of clothes hanging space”

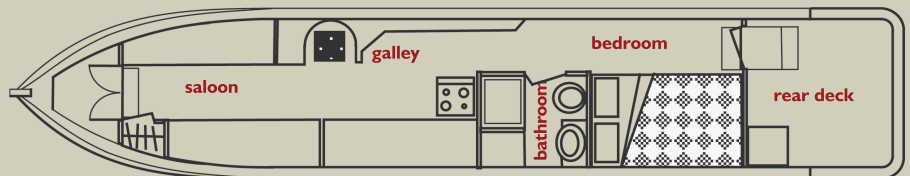
a shower cubicle and a Thetford cassette toilet. Beyond this is a combined saloon and galley area containing gas cooker, sink and drainer, and 12-volt electric fridge. The fixed saloon seating can be converted to two single berths or one double.

At the centre of this space is a small solid fuel stove with shelving on either side. On this boat, a back boiler heats a radiator in the bedroom but, in a cabin of this length, the pipework and pump that is needed to

circulate the water are barely justified.

The whole boat has a pleasant feel and should make an ideal introduction to

boat ownership. The basic price is £42,000 to which customers can add a number of optional extras.



Half-height wardrobe in the bedroom.



The Venetian 38 pictured at Middlewich.

