

HYBRID SEMI-TRAD

Setting the Braidbar

Braidbar's latest is a 62ft semi-trad with hybrid propulsion and a wealth of unique design features. **Mark Langley** heads to the Macclesfield Canal to find out more...

BRAIDBAR BOATS is hitting a major milestone this year, with the celebration of its 200th build – no mean feat for a boat-builder that specialises in bespoke craft. No 200, *Reginald*, will be on display at this year's Crick Boat Show and is quite different to most other Braidbars. Here, we look at No 201, *Curiosity*, which, due to quirks of equipment supplies, was actually launched before *Reginald*. As we'll see, this also has a unique design.

The owners, Steve and Kathy Goodenough, are typical of Braidbars' customers in that they are experienced boaters, with a clear vision of what they wanted. Steve's sister had Braidbar No 80 and the couple cruised extensively on that boat, as well as hiring craft (for a number of years, Braidbar ran a single hire-boat, which the couple used). So, with retirement approaching, the Cheshire boat-builder was a natural choice for the commission of a cruising boat for a couple with the ability to host guests aboard.

Their specification was for a reverse-layout boat, with hybrid propulsion, ease of cruising and plenty of space. The length was settled at 62ft, with a semi-trad stern, to ensure they could fit everything in, and still squeeze along the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, should they get that far north.

Shell & exterior

The Tim Tyler shell is of the usual very high standard, with shapely features above and below the water. The superb brush-applied paint finish, in dark blues, red and black, highlights the attention to detail of the shell. A long forward cockpit is lined with Tek Dek teak-effect flooring, unusually without side locker seats. Instead, there is a raised seat across the front, which has the Vetus thruster and batteries inside its own watertight compartment, as well as storage above. As this is a gas-free boat, the forepeak locker is given over to storage. In the forward cabin bulkhead there are two large vents that provide indirect, low-level ventilation to the cabin – an arrangement that is repeated on the aft bulkhead as well. A tonneau cover has been fitted for when the boat is moored up – the owners did not want a cratch and

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Excellent lines and usual superb paintwork on this first-class boat from Braidbar.

FAST FACTS

NAME *Curiosity*
LENGTH 62ft
BERTHS 2+4
ENGINE Beta 43 hybrid

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The ability to steer astern without using the bow-thruster on a shallow canal shows a good hull design.

INSIDE

The saloon is spacious with an excellent sofa.



canopy as they felt that it would make life more difficult on a cruising boat and not provide much in return.

On the roof there are eight 160W solar panels, which are quite narrow and bonded to the deck. Chrome-finish mushroom vents are along the centreline of the roof, with a small pigeon box right aft and the boat pole fitting between the solar panels. Without room for a plank, a folding aluminium gangplank is stowed away under the bow cockpit floor, which is accessed from inside the cabin. There is a 4G aerial for the onboard systems and, as Steve is an electrical engineer by profession, he asked for an additional deck fitting and internal conduit, with tracer wire, so any future upgrades can be easily fitted.

The cabin has double-glazed windows with solid traditional-style handrails. The superb Andy Russell signwriting has the usual Braidbar styling, with a very cute, curious owl painted on the hatch slide. There are also some very discreet cats, dogs and paw prints hidden in the boat's decoration. The owners lost their dog and cat while *Curiosity* was in build, so memories of them are now embedded in the boat.

The aft deck has more teak-effect covering, which is really easy to keep clean as well as being very slip resistant, and providing additional sound deadening capacity. One of the secure seat lockers reveals an amazingly well-organised set of cruising gear. Steve is an avid woodworking enthusiast and built a storage system in heavily varnished wood for all the pins, hammers, windlasses, hooks and mooring chains that an owner could ever need. There is even a box for a knife and gloves for dealing with weedhatch incidents. He also added powerful magnets to most of the components so that, when in their holders, they remain in place. Steve has made a base (held down by more magnets) which accommodates a leg and table stored in the opposite locker – this can be used in both cockpits, and the table adjusts in height to suit both seating arrangements. There is also a dog-wash on the aft deck, for when the owners get another canine companion.

Galley

Heading into the cabin, the top step is a small



A GOOD IDEA

Folding steps that allow easy access to cupboards either side and a protected space for a fire extinguisher.



EXTERIOR

Above right: A curious owl, painted by Andy Russell, is one of a number of unusual decorations aboard.

Right: The forward cockpit looks even bigger than many boats, by only having a front seat locker.





A GOOD IDEA

A proper-sized bin, easy access to the fire blanket and a shallow tin cupboard under the gunwale.



GALLEY

Top: The galley and saloon are very spacious, with stunning light-finish woodwork.
Above centre: Three big, deep drawers are exceptionally practical.
Above right: One of two underfloor wine lockers.
Right centre: A slimline dishwasher makes sense on a boat with ample 230V power.
Far right: The two-burner induction hob and electric oven with a proper splashback.
Right: The glazed side doors and portholes keep the interior bright. Dimmable reading lights for the dinette and sofa are nice touches.



storage box, with the main step covering the battery compartment, then with two more open-tread steps below. These are very sturdy but easily fold flat to the floor, so making access to the cupboards either side very straightforward. The port cupboard slides out, with a couple of athwartship shelves in (and a backing to stop things falling out) which is an excellent use of space. The aft fire extinguisher is tucked away behind the folding steps – visible and accessible but not where it will catch anything.

The galley is linear with long, deep drawers that allow all pans and crockery to be stored away easily. While the owners were tempted to opt for an all-porthole boat, a pair of large windows in the galley and also in the aft doors were selected to give this area even more light, and it works well. Like all the windows aboard, the pigeon box is double glazed. The owners also wanted the galley to be clutter free, so there is very little on the worktop. A pair of high-level cupboards on the aft bulkheads are useful for glasses and mugs – being deeper than usual adds to their volume without being obtrusive.

To starboard, a deep sink has a grooved drainer in the worktop and filtered water on tap. However, not much washing up will need to be done here, as a slimline Bosch dishwasher is fitted on the opposite side. With a hybrid boat, there is a good 230V supply and a dishwasher uses less water (and doesn't deplete the calorifier) than washing by hand. Though it may seem



A GOOD IDEA

Dedicated storage space for slats to cover glazed side doors.



Left: The TV unit houses the DAB radio as well as the wifi router and an additional conduit to the roof for future upgrades.

DINETTE

Below: The raised dinette serves as an office, dining space and double berth.



Left: A Sofa Barn settee makes another double bed but is also supremely comfortable to lounge on.

Below: A small freezer under the dinette is accessed directly from the galley.



A GOOD IDEA

Low-level ventilation aft is ducted through the electrical cupboards and battery bank to give cooling and draught-free airflow.



slightly odd to have the dishwasher opposite the sink, it makes loading surprisingly easy and utilises the space below the worktop more efficiently. Under the drainer of the sink is a large integrated Bosch 230V fridge.

There is a Neff induction 'two-burner' hob with the oven below on the port side, next to the dishwasher, with a small freezer below the dinette hiding in a wooden cupboard. Two lockers in the floor provide illuminated storage for wine and beer – their lids are made from the same Karndean flooring as runs through the rest of the boat. As the walkways move over to starboard to the dinette, there is a small tin cupboard under the gunwale, which is not as large as many Braidbar boats have as next to it is a large waste bin – essential but often missed at the boat-planning stage.

Saloon

The raised dinette comfortably seats four and converts to a double-berth. As the Goodenoughs are not yet retired, they still need to be able to work from the boat when out cruising, and the wifi system and ample power points throughout the boat make this easy. The dinette serves as an excellent office too, and, as the table overlaps with the seating, also provides a good dining function, with adjustable sections enabling it to drop to a bed easily. There is a lot of storage underneath the berths and plinth, with a glazed side door giving more daylight. As well as the roof LED lights and variable RGBW LED strips under the gunwales, neat,



touch-dimmable reading lights are fitted along the port cabin side, for the dinette and above the sofa.

The sofa-bed is a hybrid model, with a mix of a sprung base and a memory foam back making it very comfortable for sitting and sleeping upon. There is a pair of matching footstools as well, which nestle against the forward bulkhead, by the drip-feed Reflex diesel stove in its own lovely tiled hearth. The stove's blend of copper and stainless steel finishes is very attractive



Above left: A pull-out linen cupboard over the calorifier is an excellent use of space. **Above:** Space between the shower and cabin side houses the calorifier and plumbing, including expansion and pressure vessels.

BATHROOM

Left: A large shower in the spacious bathroom.

Below: A ceramic bowl cassette loo is very practical and the neat wooden toilet paper holder is excellent. Note the radiator as well as the heated towel rail.



Twin single berths can pull together to make a double if required, or to create extra elbow room against the hull side and still get down the middle.



A GOOD IDEA

Fold-down shelves for a cuppa and charging phones.



“Unusually, the bedroom has twin single beds”

and works well with the oak framing of the woodwork and the light painted panels of the cabin side.

The sofa faces a large TV sitting on top of a good-sized sideboard, while the diesel central heating uses some very attractive grey panel radiators. The vertical T&G panelling on the hull side adds visual depth to the cabin and the temptation to cram in as many shelves as possible has been avoided – after all, this is a cruising boat, not a permanent home.

Bathroom

The walk-through bathroom has a big shower on the centreline aft, with the 'Braidbar special' of a pull-out upper linen cupboard in the space between the lined shower and the cabin side. Below that cupboard is another, big enough to take the calorifier, shower pump and still leave more useable space for those necessities you want out of the way. There is a length of finrad in here as well, to keep it dry and provide warmth to the linen. To ensure year-round warmth in the bathroom, there is a heated towel rail by the large washbasin and another radiator by the loo.

The loo is a ceramic bowl cassette, chosen for simplicity and ease of use over a macerator-and-holding-tank type. The owners asked for a dedicated toilet roll holder in wood to be fitted where it is easily reached, rather than a flimsy wire or free-standing one – an example of the level of consideration that has gone into this boat. Originally, there was going to be a discreet cat litter tray in the bathroom, but with the sad loss of their cat, this was omitted from the final build.

Bedroom

The central door from the bathroom leads into the bedroom, which, unusually, has twin single beds rather than a double. The final delay in commissioning *Curiosity* was the supply of the bespoke mattresses – these arrived a few months later than expected due to supply chain issues. The berths have their heads at the aft end, with a comfortable padded headboard and neat, fold-down shelves on each cabin side for a cuppa, plus 230V sockets for charging phones.

The berths lift easily, supported by gas-assisted struts, to allow access to all the storage space underneath. These well-ventilated spaces are also sized for plastic crates to fit in, making moving stuff to and from home easy. Under the starboard berth you can access the cassette toilet tank... and three spare cassettes too! Steve's judgement is that, as they are cheap (compared to the cost of the whole boat), it's worth carrying them, giving the couple as much as two weeks' range, if required. They are stored in a

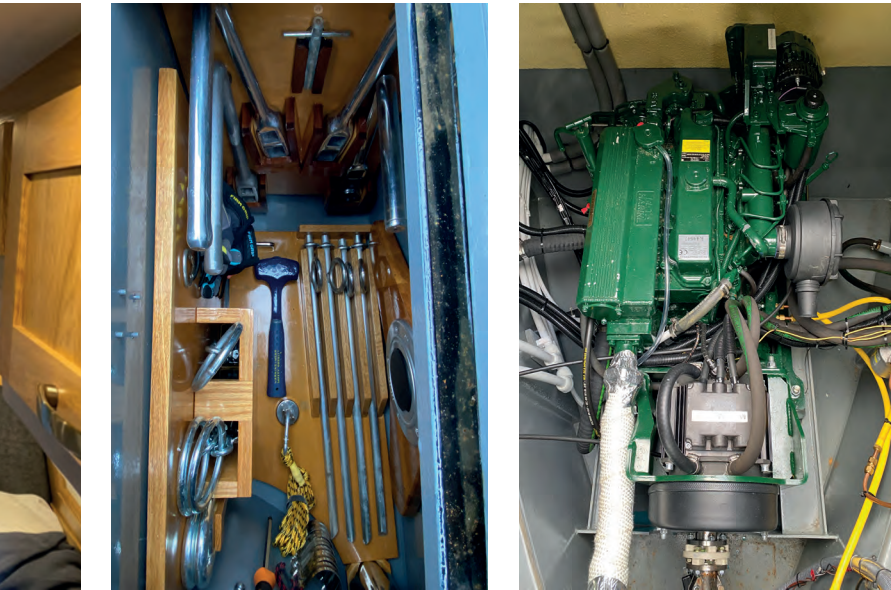
BEDROOM

Above: The forward cabin is cosy and packs in a lot more useable storage than a boat with a fixed double bed. Overhead lockers on both sides give extra storage.

Below: A shoe cupboard and drying area to port of the forward doors; an aluminium folding gangplank is stored under the front deck.

Below left: Mattresses lift on gas struts for extra storage.





SERVICES

Above left: The amazingly organised cruising locker – a work of art in wood and magnets.

Above: The Beta 43 Hybrid Marine installation is first class – remote control allows full control when in locks.

Below left: A touchscreen panel showing good solar charge on a miserable winter day, as well as system levels.

Below: Four toilet cassettes are kept aboard in a dedicated locker.



coupling on the propeller shaft, which all but eliminates alignment issues and minimises vibration. The electric motor turns into a 5kW, 48V generator when the diesel engine is running, allowing quick recharge of the battery bank, or additional power for appliances, if required. The lead-acid battery bank sits in its own compartment forward of the engine room, and the remote, distilled-water top-up tank is fitted in one of the cockpit lockers. There are 24 2-volt 800Ah traction cells, giving a capacity of around 38kWh. Lead acids are more bulky than lithium-ion units and cannot be cycled as deeply, or recharged as fast, but they are cheaper, easy to maintain, potentially less problematic and much simpler to recycle.

The battery bank is also supported by the solar panels – even on a grim winter's day there was 156W of power coming out of the array at 10.30am, which indicates how efficient they now are. To supply the DC loads aboard, there is a converter from the main bank, while the 230V comes from a 5kW Victron Quattro that also charges the battery bank from shoreline. Usefully, there are shoreline points at both ends of the boat to avoid trailing cables around, but only one can be live at any point. There is a Victron touchscreen panel that also controls the central Victron Cerbo system, linking all the DC and AC systems together. The hybrid system also has its one display screen in the cockpit. The electrics cupboards are the routes for the low-level ventilation, which also keeps the electronics cooled, while still providing space for the storage of large items like the Dyson vacuum and tiller.

As with all Tim Tyler shells, the weedhatch is a dedicated chute which is easy to access and cannot sink the boat if incorrectly installed. The Tek Dek also acts as additional sound insulation to that fitted under the hatch and deck within the engine space.

Handling & underway

Tim Tyler shells have predictable handling and *Curiosity* is no exception. It cuts through the water very well, pulling virtually zero wash at tickover and not much more at cruising speed. Given the reduced depth of the Macclesfield Canal, the boat handled well and managed to reverse in a straight line for over 400 yards, responding to the tiller without any difficulties and not requiring the use of the bow-thruster – not many boats can manage that! The engine under diesel is very quiet – and exceptionally so when using electric propulsion. It stops quickly, with a well-balanced tiller and comfortable steering position.

Steve ordered the Hybrid Marine remote control to be fitted, so that he can control the engine gearbox and throttle when using electric. This is so he can go up and help Kathy with the locks, and still have full control of the boat, particularly in narrow locks. This proven technology is really useful for single-handing and a bonus of the Hybrid Marine package.

“Curiosity is yet another superb boat from Braidbar”

locker that has individual lids, so, if there is a leak, any odour will not easily penetrate the mattress.

Forward of the beds is a low cupboard for storing shoes, with space next to it for a tray on the floor for muddy shoes – an excellent idea. There is a large wardrobe opposite to starboard that has a mixture of shelves and hanging space, plus a full-sized washer/dryer (8kg wash, 4kg dry) integrated into the base – great for longer cruises away from their mooring.

Propulsion & services

The Beta 43 engine is fitted with the Hybrid Marine 10kW motor package, which neatly sits above the PRM hydraulic gearbox. There is a large, fully insulated hospital generator-type silencer, plus an Aquadrive

WW'S VERDICT

Curiosity is yet another superb boat from Braidbar. While the company's craft are truly bespoke, owners James and Donna will not build anything that won't work, so sometimes they do have to temper the ambitions of prospective buyers. Here, very experienced boaters knew what they wanted and Braidbar has turned that into reality.

Braidbar has a real community ethos, with customers frequently becoming genuine friends and even

forming a dedicated independent owners club. While the company's craft are not at all cheap, it is a genuine bespoke builder with an approachable team and quality craftsmanship. As well as its show boat at Crick (No 200, with the amazing feature of an under-tug deck bedroom!), there will also be a gathering of its boats out on the canal, with enthusiastic owners eager to explain their choice.