

LIVELY LEVANT

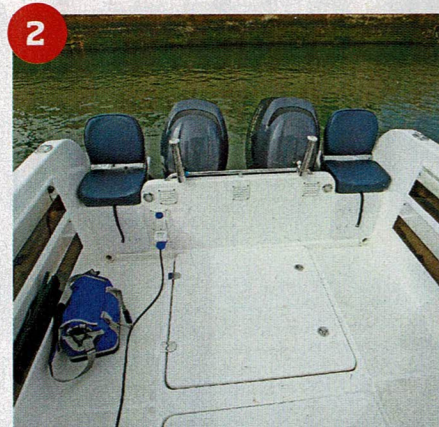
A fantastic new, vessel built and designed in Portugal, which is set to turn the UK boat market on its head



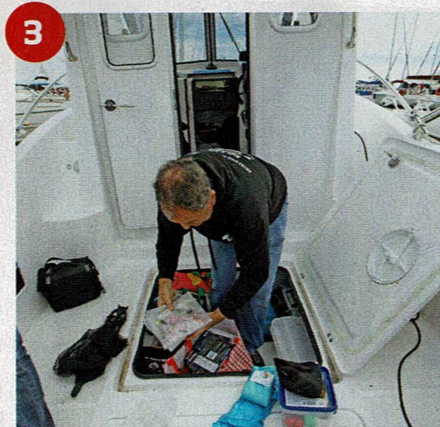
She's very stable to fish from, even in a choppy sea



1 There is plenty of room inside the cabin



2 The 700 has plenty of clean deck space



3 Use this hatch for storage or a livebait well



Words and photography by **Dave Barham**

A FEW MONTHS BACK I WAS INVITED to Portugal by a Facebook friend, Mark Shreeve, to have a look at his new pride and joy – a custom-built 700 Sport Fishing from Levant. Little did I know what I was about to discover – one of the best small fishing boats that I have ever been on.

I arrived at Faro airport to be greeted by Mark's wife, Stephanie, and the boat's builder Francisco Alexandre. They took me to the only hotel in Villa Real de Santo Antonio, where Levant Boats is based.

It turns out that Francisco is one of only three naval architects in Portugal. After serving his time designing and repairing various hulls, he decided to start up his own business building pleasure craft. So, the 700 Sport Fishing, as with all of the Levant boats, is designed from scratch – not reshaped from moulds that are already in circulation.

Another thing worth mentioning at this point is that Mark's boat 'My Garden Shed' is currently the 39th 700 Sport Fishing boat that has been built – so Levant are by no means a 'new company', as far as having boats on the water is concerned. In fact, the first 700 was built in 2003, and since then Francisco has made very few changes to the hull design.

The hull length of the 700 equates to just over 22ft, and with the engines slapped on the back, it brings the overall length to just over 23ft. She has an 8ft beam, and draws just 1ft 6in. That's akin to other boats like the Arvor 690 Pilothouse or Quicksilver 675 Pilothouse.

As soon as I stepped on deck of the 700 I was surprised at the amount of freeboard. I'm 6ft 5in tall, and the gunnels come right up to my hip. I think in order to get this boat coded in the UK, you need only three or four inches of stainless railing.

The other thing that grabbed my attention was the sheer amount of deck space on a closed cuddy boat. There's nothing on deck to trip you up or get in your way – it's all fishing space.

The majority of the original Levant 700s have open cuddies, but Mark wanted a closed,

lockable cuddy, and so Francisco obliged; you want it, you got it!

SERIOUS POWER

It's not often that you see a 22ft boat with twin 150s on the back. In fact, I think this was a first for me. Mark managed to acquire both the engines from a RiB. Yamaha serviced the engines, and assured Mark that by running twin 150s, rather than a single larger engine, he would actually be getting better fuel economy – although that's not the reason why Mark decided to go for twin screws.

The real reason was peace of mind and safety. Basically, if Mark is fishing well offshore and has trouble with one of the engines, he'll be able to get home quite happily on a single.

During our trip I had the opportunity to man the helm, and was also treated to the most impressive helmsman experience that I've ever had, when Francisco took control and brought us back in from a fishing trip at remarkable speed, during worsening sea conditions.

I have never seen anybody work dual throttle controls like that before – we literally never dropped a wave, thanks to Francisco constantly upping and lowering the revs to keep us steady at 20 knots, for the best part of half-an-hour.

I put 'My Garden Shed' through her paces, just like I would any other boat, and we had some pretty good conditions throughout the trip, including a good Force 5/6, plus flat calm. The first thing I noticed while at the helm was the way the 700 crept up on the plane. She gets up quick, and once up, with a little bit of trim she settles nicely and you can really pile on the power.

That's when I discovered another advantage of this unique hull – there's no slap, even in a short chop she just rides over it, or gently lowers you back on to the next wave without any sudden jolts. She's an absolute joy to ride and even more fun to helm.

INSTANT RESPONSE

Once we hit the safety of the river, Francisco really showed us what his boat can do. As he pushed the throttles up to near maximum, the 700 responded instantly and skipped us along at an impressive 48.5 knots. It's even more impressive when I tell you that there were five

of us on board, plus she was fully loaded with fuel, a full freshwater tank and all of our fishing and camera gear.

As if the speed demonstration wasn't enough, he then set about doing a few doughnuts and 180-degree turns – at speed. The boat just responded like a happy puppy, and there was no evidence of yawing as we hit the waves we'd been creating. Even in the tight turns at ridiculous speed, the boat remains stable, and she hardly leans at all – just a few degrees.

The Levant 700 is the most stable small fishing boat that I've been on. We even tried heading out in a two-metre choppy swell one

"There's no slap, even in a short chop she just rides over it"

day to try some offshore fishing. It was only Francisco who stopped us after 20 minutes to say that the weather would be better the following day. The Portuguese rarely go out in such conditions – but for me, it was just a typical 'bad' day in the UK, and the boat was handling it with ease – although we didn't get much above 12 knots.

I was mightily impressed with this boat. I think that once a few of them creep their way into marinas in the UK, we're going to see an explosion of demand and ownership.

For a little over £24,000, you're getting a whole lot of boat and outboard, with handling and sea-keeping qualities that I've yet to encounter on anything else I've fished on in the UK. ■

THE DETAILS

BOAT SPECIFICATIONS

Length overall:	7.12m
Hull length:	6.76m
Beam:	2.53m
Weight:	1,500kg
Draft:	0.44m
Maximum power:	300hp
Fuel tank capacity:	140/280lt
CE category:	C3
Maximum capacity:	8 persons

PRICES

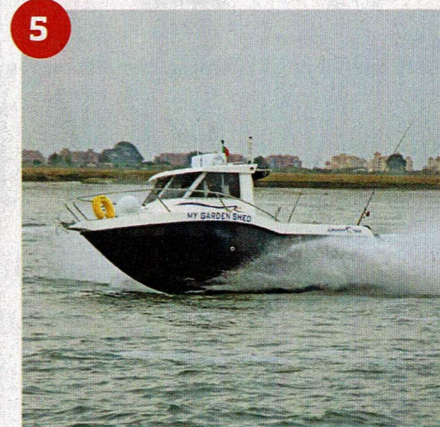
- 700 Sport/ Selva Killer Whale 150hp - £24,521/€34,330
- 700 Sport/ 2x Selva Killer Whale 150hp XSRs - £36,806/€51,529
- 700 Fun/ Selva Killer Whale 150hp - £23,728/€33,220
- 700 Fun/ 2x Selva Killer Whale 150hp XSRs - £36,013/€50,419

INFORMATION

- For more details on this model and others in the range, visit the website: www.levantboats.wix.com/levant-eng
- Tel: 00351 281 543 250.
- Email: tomorrowsunset.levant@gmail.com or geral@levantboats.com



4 Whoosh! Twin outboards pushing 48.5 knots



5 The hull cuts through the water very cleanly