

LEVANT 700 SPORT FISHING

BFM Ed, Dave Barham reveals a fantastic new boat that is built and designed in Portugal, which is set to turn the UK boat market on its head!

I was recently invited over 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 – quite possibly one of the best small fishing boats that I have ever been on!

My Garden Shed

It was a strange chat that Mark and I first had on Private Message. “Would you like to come over and see My Garden Shed?” is not the kind of question I get asked very often. In fact, it was the first and possibly last time that I have ever been asked that question!

After a little bit of banter, it transpired that ‘My Garden Shed’ is the name of Mark’s new boat, built and designed by a certain Francisco Alexandre – the main man at Levant Boats.

Of course, I couldn’t turn down such an opportunity, and Mark was insistent that I bring BFM photographer along, as well as some fishing gear, to make a very welcome four-day break out of it!

Also joining us on the trip was Jamie Day, another Facebook friend, who also knows a thing or two about boats – having owned many different hulls himself over the years, and even working from some of them commercially.

We’re Here!

When we arrived at Faro airport we were greeted by Mark’s wife, Stephanie, and Francisco’s partner in crime ‘Fonseca’. They had kindly arranged to pick us up and transport us to the one and only hotel in Villa Real de Santo Antonio, where Levant Boats is based.

That evening we all went out



The boat hardly moves in a tight turn – even at 40-knots!

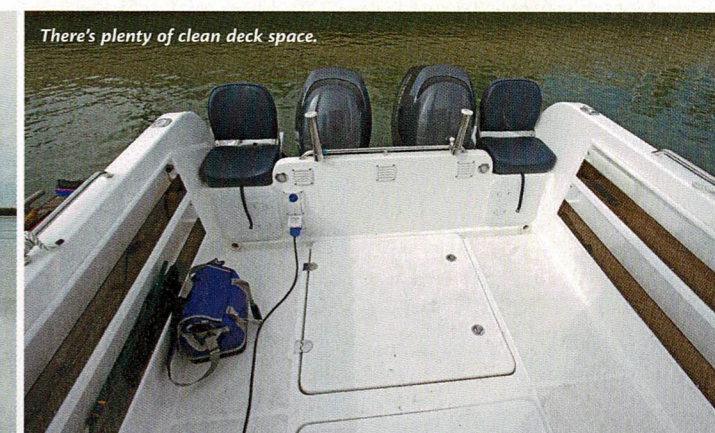
for a fantastic meal in the local tapas bar ‘O Tapas’, where we were treated to all manner of dishes, including fresh spider crab and my newfound addiction, sardine pate! It was during this meal that I got talking to Francisco, who’s English is better than mine! And I was amazed at what I found out about him.

About Francisco

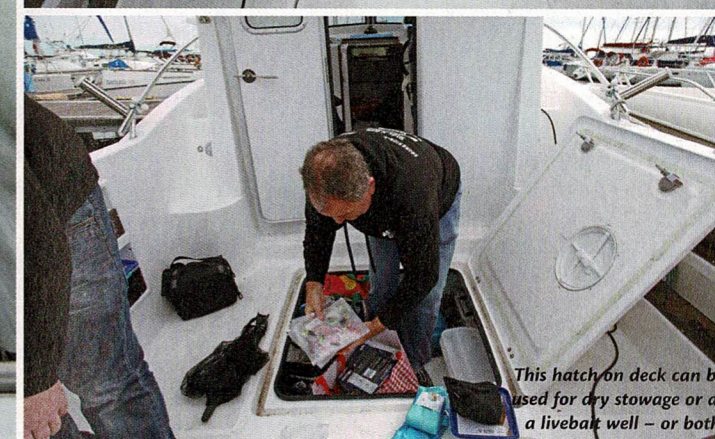
It turns out that Francisco is one of only three Naval Architects in the whole of Portugal. After serving his time designing and repairing various hulls such as fast patrol boats, he decided to start up his own business building pleasure craft. So, the 700 Sport Fishing, as with all of the Levant



Twin 150 Yams – Mark’s little babies!



There’s plenty of clean deck space.



This hatch on deck can be used for dry storage or as a livebait well – or both!

boats, is designed from scratch – not re-shaped from moulds already in circulation. And, what’s more, they’re designed by a Naval Architect! You can’t really have better credentials than that for a boat-building company.

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 back in 2003, and since then Francisco has made very few changes to the hull design.

I was blown away by the hospitality extended to us by Francisco, who is by all accounts a very modest and kind gentleman. He invited us to his house on the second and third nights of our stay, and fed us like kings! He’s also a mad keen fisherman, and that passion shines through to his boat building.

Onto The 700

Right then, let’s get down to the nitty gritty. 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 1.5ft. That’s akin to other boats like the Arvor 690 Pilothouse or Quicksilver 675 Pilothouse, both of which are nice boats, but cannot match the Levant for price or maximum horsepower ratings.

As soon as I stepped on deck of the 700 I was pleasantly 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 literally 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.

Most of the original Levant 700s have open cuddies, because that’s what boat owners in Portugal prefer – and who can blame them with their scorching hot summers. However, Mark wanted a closed, lockable cuddy on his boat, so Francisco obliged and built him one! Now would also be a good time to mention that this boat is totally customisable – 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 an ex police RiB. Yamaha serviced the engines,

The hull is extremely stable, and cuts through the water beautifully.

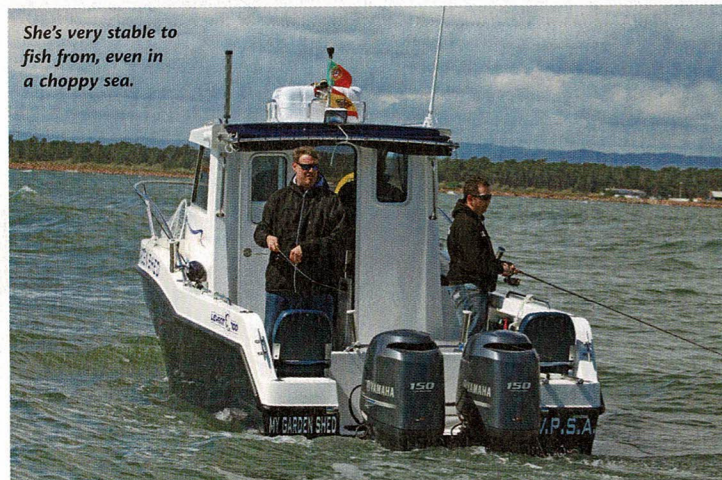


What a great name for a boat!



The cabin is spacious – even with all our clothing and camera gear ‘abandoned’ inside!





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



Whoosh! 48.5 knots!

and assured Mark that by running twin 150s, rather than a single larger engine, he would actually be getting better fuel economy – but that's not the reason why Mark decided to go for twin screws.

The real reason why the twin-engine option was chosen is a simple one – peace of mind and safety. Basically, if Mark's fishing well offshore and has trouble with one of the engines, he'll be able to get home quite happily on a single engine – which I think you'll all agree is a very sensible reason for Marks' choice of power.

Superb Handling

During our trip I had the opportunity to man the helm on more than one occasion, and I 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've 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 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. And that's when I discovered another

advantage of this unique hull – there's no slap, none at all, even in a short chop she just rides over it, or gently lowers you back onto the next wave without any sudden jolts. I've played with and fished on lots of small boats in the UK, and some of those have left me feeling like I'd just done a few rounds in the ring with Eubank after a day's fishing – not so with the 700, she's an absolute joy to ride and even more fun to helm.

It wasn't until Francisco took over on the way back in that I saw and felt exactly what this baby is capable of. I've already mentioned the throttle control while coming back in during some pretty nasty sea conditions, but once we hit the safety of the river, he really showed us what his boat can do.

As he pushed the throttles up to near max, 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 (you could say six with the size of Jim and myself), 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, Francisco 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.

I have to admit that the Levant 700 is by far the most stable small fishing boat that I've ever had the pleasure of being on. We even tried heading out in a 2-metre choppy

swell one 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, and that we may as well head back in for a few beers! It was only once we got back to the marina that I found out that 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've only got space for so many words in the magazine, but we shot plenty of video about this boat during our trip, which shows a bit more detail of the layout and the build quality, plus some of the

many options that are available. You can also check out our YouTube channel to see Francisco throwing this boat around – you'll be as impressed as we all were!

Conclusion

I think by now you'll have the impression that I am mightily impressed with this boat, and you're right! 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.

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

INFO

For more details on this model and others in the range, visit: www.levantboats.wix.com/levant-eng
 Tel: (+351) 281 543 250
 E-mail: tomorrowsunset.levant@gmail.com or geral@levantboats.com

Safety First, Never Second



EDITOR'S CHOICE

"These suits are the epitome of modern design."
Dave Barham, BFM Editor



Featured Sundridge flotation suits:

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