

Falcon BR7

Bella boats have launched a new range of aluminium runabouts known as the Falcon range. **Alex Smith** headed to Finland's Nauvo region to check it out ...

ON TEST

Bella boats have come up with some fine leisure platforms over the years. They've been responsible for the Aquador, Bella and Flipper lines, all of which have been radically (and very successfully) redesigned in recent years, and now they have added to that with an entirely new brand known as Falcon.

This new four-strong fleet of 'bowrider day cruisers' is evidently designed to tap into the modern market's extraordinary appetite for hybrid craft with aluminium hulls and fibreglass trim. And while Bella's most recent offerings (most notably the 600 and 700 BR models) are fiercely capable front runners in their own right, it seems these new aluminium-built Falcon craft are

expected to encompass an even broader range of recreational applications. Though still conceived as sporting platforms, they are supposed to be heavier-duty, more versatile boats, capable of turning their hand to commuting, cruising, water sports, fishing and sunbathing – and not just in the summer months but all year round. In essence, they are supposed to provide the ownership practicality a fibreglass bowrider inevitably appears to lack.

Understated intelligence

When you approach the BR7, it's not quite as substantial as you imagine. Though the name suggests something in the region of 7 metres in length (or around 23 feet), the BR7 measures just a little over 21 feet. That's not a problem in itself, particularly as it means quite an even spacing of around 18 inches between each of the new Falcon models. It just means it's got to work a little harder

to impress – and in many ways it achieves exactly that ...

While the internal layout looks very formulaic, there are some subtle ways in which it excels. For instance, while the cockpit features the commonplace arrangement of twin helm seats ahead of an aft bench, that bench is sufficiently narrow to generate a pair of lateral walkways for easy boarding and easy access to the swim platforms. The seat lid, meanwhile, can be lifted with one hand, without the removal of any cushions, and the backrest plays host to a classical Nordic ready-rigged bimini.

Similarly, while any potential storage space beneath the aft bench seat is pretty much spoken for by the battery boxes, the fire extinguisher and the fuel tank, that shortcoming is ably compensated for elsewhere. In addition to a pair of swim platform boxes, you get a very tidy space



ONBOARD THE FALCON BR7...

The BR7 is every bit as sound as you would expect a boat from the Bella stable to be.



The cockpit layout is pretty standard fare.



The detailing is impressive.



The port storage space is very easy to access



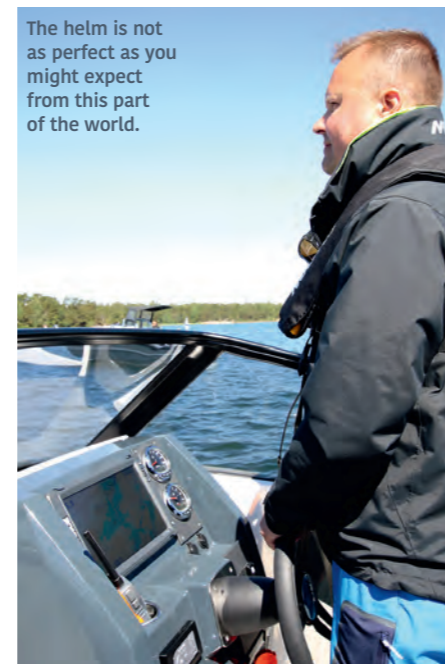
Aft storage is not as voluminous as the seat box suggests.

inside the helm console plus a huge section inside the port console, accessed not by means of a narrow-aperture lid but with a fully hinged aft fascia. You also get an under-deck compartment, which is far deeper and more accommodating than you might expect, and in the bow there's an intelligent mix of open quick-fix spaces and closed secure compartments. Cutaway cushions and sturdy rams make it a simple job to gain entry to all the major spaces, and every storage box is lined, drained and finished with an impressive degree of care.

It's also interesting to note that, with the sunbathing platforms deployed, everything from the transom to the forepeak is transformed into a lounging space, leaving just the helm seats and consoles marooned in the middle. And while that's obviously good news for sun worshippers, it will also appeal to keen fishermen who want to use these areas as casting platforms. Better still, as we've seen on Espen Thorup designs from the Bella range, both the forward and aft infills are already connected to their seat bases, enabling you to swing them over and into position without having to store them remotely or manhandle them into place.

A refined runabout?

With a hull built from 5083 aluminium and a shape reminiscent of various craft that have performed so well in Bella's established fibreglass range, it's reasonable to expect good things from the Falcon BR7 – and equipped with the maximum outboard in the form of Mercury's new 175, the BR7 immediately shows itself to be a capable and confidence-inspiring boat. It leaps onto the plane in a shade over 3 seconds and powers on through the 40-knot mark in under 20. A healthy cruising speed of around 30 knots is achieved in just 7 seconds, and at that point the ride is efficient as well as comfortable. You're burning around a litre per nautical mile, bringing a range well in excess of 100 nautical miles from the 130-litre fuel tank, and if you ease that back to the low 20s you can expect a range of between 130 and 140 nautical miles.



The helm is not as perfect as you might expect from this part of the world.



This boat is all about enabling you to feel safe and enjoy your recreation whether you're fishing at 2 knots, wakeboarding at 20, cruising at 30 or racing at 40 ...

As for its sporting credentials, there's plenty of poke on tap, but it's by no means excessive. On the contrary, with the 175 purring away on the transom, everything feels very obedient and controllable. I couldn't help but raise an eyebrow every now and again when I glanced aft at an engine whose cowling makes it look permanently overtrimmed, but in truth, the only issues at the helm revolve around the seat and the glare ...

In the first case, while there are some very welcome (and elegant) armrests for both skipper and co-pilot, the helm seat is not the finest example of its type. It lacks a bit of

lumber support when you push hard, and it also lacks sufficient forward adjustability for those who happen to be shorter than 5' 10". And as for that glare, well, despite the sensible (and very attractive) use of matt black guard rails, there's a lot of light bouncing around on this boat. Some of it comes from the glossy white and grey fibreglass internals, but most of it is from the glistening aluminium deck plates, which operate rather like mirrors in

the heat of the sun. Pretty though they look, it would make sense to explore a more user-friendly decking option.

However, these anomalies aside, the general refinement on offer here is impressive. While comfort, security and ride softness are all very serviceable, the most pleasant surprise at the helm is the muted quality of the noise at cruising speeds of between 20 and 35 knots. The noise levels hover at around the 83-decibel



The cowling makes the new Mercury look permanently trimmed out

The modern love for aluminium-fibreglass hybrids is a big market driver



SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 6.51m
Beam: 2.34m
Weight: 1060kg
Fuel capacity: 130 litres
People capacity: 7
Max. power: 115–175 hp
Test engine: Mercury 175

PRICE

From: £45,900

CONTACT

www.flippermarin.se

ACCELERATION

0–plane: 3.5 seconds
 0–30: 7.5 seconds
 0–40: 19.5 seconds

WHAT WE THOUGHT?

FOR

- Action man styling
- Tough aluminium practicality
- Enjoyable pickup
- Big sunbathing capacity

AGAINST

- Uncomfortable helm seat
- Glare from deck

mark, which is impressive for an open sports boat – particularly one built from a material that is traditionally considered to be relatively noisy.

And not only does that say good things about the quality of the Falcon's build, but it also pays testament to the effectiveness of the boat's configuration. While the BR7 appears to have quite a raked and aggressive profile underway, the screen actually feels quite elevated when you're sitting in the helm's swivelling bucket seat. It does a great job of funnelling the elements over your head without trapping the noise of the engine, which, despite the peaked cowling, is usefully concealed from the cockpit by means of the relatively lofty aft bench. The fact that I'm talking about the refinement does of course imply that this is not the hardest-edged thrill ride in the world, but that was never the point. On the contrary, this boat is all about enabling you to feel safe and enjoy your recreation whether you're fishing at 2 knots, wakeboarding at 20, cruising at 30 or racing at 40 – and it achieves that with the utmost competence. It may come from an entirely new brand, but it looks and feels like a very well-proven marine package.

Verdict

The BR7 is every bit as sound as you would expect a boat from the Bella stable to be. It combines the yard's established expertise in compact bowriders with Finland's long heritage in aluminium to create a leisure platform that feels just a little bit more serious, a little bit tougher and more versatile,

a little less like an extravagance and more like a tool you can justify to your partner, your family and your bank manager. It's certainly not a better boat than Bella's outstanding BR 700, but if your recreation involves a lot of shallow-water work, estuary exploration and the odd bit of beaching, it's possible that Falcon's BR7 will look like the better bet. **PBR**



We're hitting 30 knots in around seven seconds.

PERFORMANCE

RPM	Speed (kn)	Fuel flow (L/h)	Noise (db)	Range (nm)
590	2.5	2.4	54.0	121.9
1000	4.5	4.2	63.0	125.4
1500	5.9	6.6	69.5	104.6
2000	7.3	11.2	74.7	76.3
2500	10.2	15.0	78.2	79.6
3000	19.5	16.2	78.9	140.8
3500	24.5	21.9	82.4	130.9
4000	29.7	31.2	83.2	111.4
4500	34.2	40.4	83.4	99.0
5000	37.5	57.9	86.0	75.8
5500	42.0	64.9	89.1	75.7