

MERIDIAN 341



Good things, like affordability, still come in small packages especially on the Meridian 341 family cruiser that's minimalist only in price and length.

Grand baby

Many people have a fondness for flybridge cruisers and like driving from up top, especially in skinny marinas or the new Sentosa Cove waterways. Only in recent times these have grown into behemoths that measure up more like megayachts that many admire but few could really afford or need one. The smaller flybridge cruiser has gone largely unnoticed and, while far from a booming segment, there is always room for a smart, compact flybridge cruiser for a family to gad about for days or weeks at a time.



Enter the Meridian 341 Sedan. A 36-footer flybridge yacht from American marine giant Brunswick Corporation, Meridian builds big pilothouse cruisers pitched at the top-end of town, but also entry-level flybridge cruisers in both Motoryacht and Sedan ranges that cater for families. And, considering many recently fell into this category, especially residence at Sentosa Cove with a size restrictions of 40 feet and below, this Meridian 341 is certain to stirred a level of excitement.

Yet the 341 is a baby grand in that it's much bigger than it appears on paper. While the cockpit is modest, the saloon is just huge. Besides, the extended flybridge is intended as the primary outdoor entertaining area.

Meantime, the 341 has two big cabins in which to retire, with the guest's or kids cabin able to be converted from single berths to a double in no time. Plus there's a sofa bed in the saloon and a big galley to boot. Not to mention the man-sized shower.



Thanks to some smart options, the standard off-the-shelf 341 was an even more accomplished cruiser for the waters here in Singapore. This 341 was fitted with a pair of 330hp QSB Cummins diesels with SmartCraft engine management. Meridian says it goes to some lengths to reduce vibration in the mounts, too. There is a matching 7kW generator for powering, among other things, that two-zone ducted air-con, microwave oven, two-burner cooktop, and the 240V outlets in the cabins.

The 341 also had something called DOC, short for Docking On Command. Basically, it's a single controller for the bow and stern thrusters that lets you park with aplomb and shift the boat sideways like a crab. Many say it's the next best thing to the joystick controller for the Zeus or IPS pod drives. And with the device, this little flyer is a snap to berth, meaning it's double family friendly.

NUTS AND BOLTS

Under floor, the lazarette is actually an extension of the engine room and with the engine mounted back here it's very accessible and super quiet. Also, note Meridian uses underwater exhausts on all its boats, so they are quiet when running too.

From a servicing point of view, there are good access to the Racor filter for the generator, the batteries and water pumps and the sea strainers and dripless shaft seals at the aft end of the engine room. Engine access is via a central floor hatch in the saloon.

The Cummins QSB 330s have a long track record for reliability and now with common rail electronic fuel injection they're way more powerful - they can actually get 480hp from a 5.9lt block - virtually smoke free and frugal. We like that.

Construction is tried-and-proven, with a solid GRP running surface, cored hull and deck, and through-bolted deck-to-hull join. Vinylester resin is used to ward against osmosis, wiring looms are coded, and the safety glass windscreen is bedded to prevent any chance of leaks, says Meridian.

The 341 has a two-year warranty on everything right down to light switches, five years on gelcoat blistering and 10 years on hull and deck, and is well backed here by SGboating.

DECKED OUT

The cockpit has room for a few folding chairs around a small teak table. There's an aft lounge for two or three with stainless steel drink holders nearby and storage below the base. The swim platform and ladder are a decent size and you get a hot/cold transom shower. The fuel filters are in the transom corners.

The boat has a boot, so to speak, with the Shorepower leads and dockside connections for water and TV at marinas. There is room left over for stowing a few mooring lines and small fenders, in-floor storage bins with polypropylene inserts, LED courtesy lights, and full camper covers should the weather set in.

To further enhance its family friendliness, there are moulded cockpit steps to the relatively wide sidedecks, backed by a grab rail, moulded toe rails and virtually a full-length extended bow rail - safety in mind there. There are sun pads on the foredeck backed by more grab rails.

The boat also had a Lewmar windlass, freshwater deck wash, spotlight and a good grade of diamond-pattern non-skid. The recessed 25cm cleats looked big enough for an average line, but you will like the amount of freeboard in the bow even more.

At low speed, this boat doesn't run bow down and there's no reverse sheer but a more rounded, flared deck line that makes for an exceptionally dry boat.

CROSSING THE BRIDGE

Families will welcome the moulded staircase (with safety hatch that baffles engine noise) leading to the flybridge. The big non-skid deck will be easy to clean, too, or you can cover it with optional clip-out carpet. The bridge deck is cambered to drain water and comes with a bimini top and clears. The air-conditioning was ducted up here, too.



You can seat four around the lounge and moulded table up top. Amenities range from a fridge to an optional ice maker. The helm chair is a bucket type and there's room for two crew to ride on a small lounge to port.

There wasn't anything missing at the dash, either. The Docking on Command controller with optional wireless remote, lets you berth this baby grand from, say, the aft end of the bridge. And dock it one up, no fuss, no mess, no problem!

Electronics ran from Northstar 6100i GPS chart plotter and depth sounder to the spread of SmartCraft gauges, a big switch panel including windlass control, trim tabs, tilt wheel and (optional) fuel transfer pump.

HOLIDAY HOUSE

While the saloon dominates the 341, it's not pokey. There's a big sliding door and side-opening windows that bring the outdoors indoors without allowing the ingress of rain. Split windows offer views when standing - this big little boat has a great amount of head and shoulder room - and seated.

The decor included latte-coloured upholstery, cream berber pile carpet, chocolate suede trim, cherry wood joinery of course, and nice mood lighting. A portable high/low burl-topped timber table doubles as a dinette/drinks or card table. Seating ranges from a portside two-seater lounge to an opposing L-shaped lounge for four with a sofa bed function. Once reclined, you can watch the LCD TV with DVD/AM/FM/CD and karaoke mode.

There are also speakers up to the bridge.

The boat's AC/DC panel includes the generator starter and a combo tank gauge for the 341lt water tank and 132lt holding tank - big enough for four or five days away from the dock - while the galley to port is just that: one big long galley!

Traced by solid counters, galley features run from a deep sink and cover to a fridge, small microwave and, unusually, a two-burner recessed cook top on a separate cabinet in the centre of the boat.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

Meridian recognises the two must-haves in its 341 family flybridge cruiser - big comfortable beds and a supersized shower - which there are in the two-cabin/one head layout. The stateroom forward has an island berth flanked by escape hatch and opening ports, hanging lockers and drawers. A door leads from the stateroom into the en suite, which has a second door for day use. It has solid counters, a Vacuflush loo, opening port and a massive shower stall. The guest's cabin has a single berth and a $\frac{3}{4}$ -length berth alongside that, with supplied infill, convert to a double if you sleep across the boat transverse.

SINGAPORE CRUISING

Thanks to the Docking on Command device you can move the boat out of berthing with ease and, at the helm, you'll welcomed the commanding views for which flybridge cruisers are popular. You could glimpse the port quarter of the swim platform with throttles in hand and an optional remote for the DOC would make life even easier.

The Meridian come to plane at 11.5kts turning in at 2200rpm, and cruising at 16 to 18kts at 2400rpm. A handy cruise of 20 to 22kts was recorded at 2600rpm, which is fast enough to get places but not so fast that, in typical conditions, the boat will leap out of the water and be uncomfortable. This was a dry boat and the 946lt of fuel will let you plot a course beyond the shores of Singapore easily.

Top speed was 27.5kts but more importantly, the motion was smooth, surprisingly so, and the boat didn't unduly hobbyhorse, which can happen with some smaller flybridge cruisers. Despite shaft drives, the handling was also snappy. The Meridian's 341 prove that good things come in small packages. And with everything costing more these days, you can enjoy the cruising experience for a lot less outlay. Hail the return of the compact family flybridge cruiser.

REMARKS

The Meridian 341 is now available @ One 15 Marina for viewing and inspection. For an appointment, please contact Eric @ 9119 1872 or 6405 9329. www.SGBoating.com