

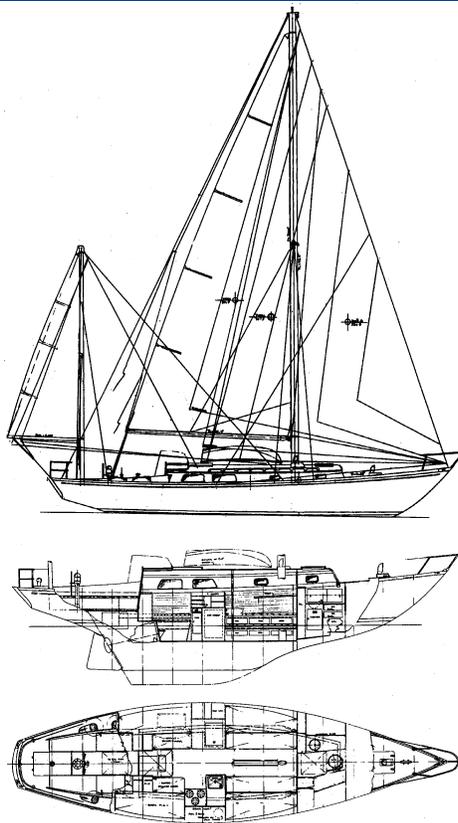
Subscriber Survey: Bristol 40 is dependable, not flashy

Judging from our Subscriber Survey, the venerable Bristol 40 is an attractive and dependable passagemaker with a few shortcomings one might expect of a '70s-vintage CCA design with long overhangs. The owner of a 1978 model summed it up eloquently: "Excellent, but slow, offshore, and a classic design that looks great at the mooring."

Passagemaking Qualities: Bristol 40 owners obviously like to take their boats offshore, but none of our survey respondents had recorded passages longer than 650 miles, and that was the Marion-Bermuda Race. Owners rated motion in a seaway good to excellent. Cockpit protection and deck dryness received good to excellent (scores of 8 and 9 on a scale in which 10 is perfect), but dinghy stowage was considered poor, with scores of 5 and 6.

Construction: Having been built by Bristol Yachts in Bristol, Rhode Island, between 1971 and 1986, you know the Forty's hull is bullet-proof. Apparently, the owners know this, too, for scores ran between 7 and 10, with 8s and 9s predominating. Ironically, the only 7s came from a skipper whose overall comments about the boat were unabashedly enthusiastic: "Over sixteen summers, an overall excellent boat; very pleased." Hey, over 16 summers, one gets to accept a boat - warts and all. One respondent gave 8s to all categories with the comment "excellent" throughout. This is a conservative design, and owners are appropriately conservative in their scoring. The lowest score for a construction category was a rock-bottom 1 for shaft and prop, followed by the comment: "Can't remove prop without removing shaft."

Rig & Rigging: The keel-stepped mast and partners received high grades, as did the standing rigging and hardware. Most respondents had replaced the original traveler with Harken Big Boat Travelers, a common upgrade that garnered very high scores. One owner apparently nurtures a love/hate relationship with the original equipment, saying: "Useless traveler; old-type system with lifting springs, but too expensive to replace." A typical comment



Often available for less than \$60,000, the Bristol 40 is a seagoing boat that won't break the bank.

about the overall rig is: "Very pleased with the quality of the rig." The standard rig was a sloop; interestingly, one respondent - the owner of the Marion-Bermuda veteran - reported sailing a cutter-rigged Forty.

Accommodation: "It's an old design, but works well," wrote one skipper, and therein lies the secret of the Bristol 40's success below decks. Traditional cruising layouts usually provided a number of good sea berths. The Bristol 40 was available in numerous below-decks configurations: To port, buyers had a choice of pull-out transom berth, pull-out double berth, convertible dinette, and quarter-berth, which they could add to the standard starboard-side layout of pull-out transom lower and pipe berth over. A simple, efficient living area could easily be configured. The weak link was the galley, which most respondents gave fair-to-middling scores, with 6s and 7s dominating. The sink always

seemed to have been jammed in as an afterthought under or near the companionway or cockpit box, making washing dishes in a seaway a trial. Personal Storage received high marks (many 9s), as did the main cabin table. The head received rave reviews ("wonderful head," "spacious head and shower") and 10s. The scores for Below-Decks Plan for Living Aboard or Offshore Sailing were good (7s and 8s) for living aboard and excellent (mostly 9s) for offshore. With excellent ventilation (8s and 10s) and all those potential seaberths, we can see why.

Performance Ratings: From the Performance Under Power scores (generally, from 3 to 6), you get the impression that the boat steers like barge, which is understandable for a heavy-displacement, full-keel design. Docking scores are consistently low (from 4 to 6) —again, understandable— but one master at maneuvering gave his Bristol an 8.

The Forty's displacement/length ratio of 376 is really too high for overall sailing excellence. Upwind Performance brought many scores of 8; Downwind Performance averaged between 6 and 7. The average Roll Factor score was an even 6. Light-Air Performance scores averaged between 5 and 6, and these low scores are borne out by a low sail area/displacement ratio of 16.4. Tracking Ability ratings oddly ranged from a low of 5 to a high of a perfect 10. The boat with a Marion-Bermuda race under its keel was given a 7 for Tracking Ability, which should hold water. Strong Wind and Storm Handling saw a preponderance of 8s, which is not surprising, for these boats, when properly reefed, love a breeze of wind.

Summary: The Bristol 40 is a classic that endures because of its stout hull construction, well-made rig and simple, timeless and fail-safe design. With its 27'6" waterline, she's not going to reel off many 150-mile days, but she'll cross oceans in businesslike fashion with minimal crew fatigue and gear breakage. And she'll be a delight to view as you row away from her as she lies at her mooring after another relaxing passage.