THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Every arrival from the Grand Banks yard is eagerly anticipated by those with a love of all things timeless and traditional. But the 47 boasts a new hull form to meet our need for speed. Have they succeeded in preserving their core qualities, while adding a new level of performance? Text: David Marsh Photos: Lester McCarthy

At a Glance

Length
50ft 9in (15.47m)

Flat out
21.2 knots on test
(24 knots expected)

Test engines
Twin 510hp CAT C9

Price from
£640,927 inc UK VAT
(twin 455hp CATs)

Grand Banks 47 Heritage Europa

+ We like

The same qualities we have always loved in all Grand Banks: superb engineering and construction combined with excellent day-to-day practicality, wrapped up in a package with timeless looks.

– We don't like

The fact that the transition to a planing form has not been accompanied by more speed.

The simple dash works well. Behind and below it is a huge storage area.

What the fishes see when they gaze up at the Grand Banks 47 Heritage Europa is decidedly new


A stainless handrail would be a welcome addition here.


The engineroom access is superb.


Gentle incline makes for safe steps.


The Stidd seats are possibly the most comfortable and classy you can buy.

Grand Banks – the name has become a synonym for: solid, safe, reliable, unchanging. There's no doubt that the first three qualities are still there, but that last characteristic has come under increasing pressure as the years roll by. And all because of customer demand. Owners of traditional-looking craft may well profess that they are happy pottering along at sub-planing cruising speeds. But in reality, if you give most owners the opportunity they will fit the most powerful engines possible, and then some – 'just in case' is the usual defence.

That is all very well with a planing boat where the laws of hydrodynamics dictate that bigger engines often burn no more fuel per mile than their smaller relations, and sometimes even less. And planing forms are designed to handle the specific demands of high-speed travel. That is most definitely not the case with the original Grand Banks hull, a hard-chine form with knife-like bow sections and a deep keel. This first saw the light of day in the 1960s as the 36ft (11m) wooden *Spray*, and subsequently in glassfibre form when the 32, 36 and 42 rolled out of their Jurong yard in Singapore. Despite the boat's unavoidable speed limitations, customers have been bullying Grand Banks into squeezing ever more powerful engines into hull shapes that were optimised for life in the slow lane. Something had to give.

All change?

What gave was the hull shape. Grand Banks commissioned legendary US design company Sparkman & Stevens, "to develop a design that would efficiently tame engines with ever increasing horsepower while maintaining good seakeeping characteristics". So although what you see above the waterline appears to be classic Grand Banks fare, what the fishes see when they gaze up at the Grand Banks 47 Heritage Europa is decidedly new.

The side windows are darkly tinted and bonded in place, without the need for frames.

Solid GRP instead of canvas dodgers on the flybridge.

Teak capped handrails have been replaced by maintenance-free stainless.

The hull extends under the bathing platform.

What S&S came up with was a modified deep-vee shape with propeller tunnels. Its gestation was not entirely painless. Initial testing produced too much bow-up trim, so Grand Banks extended the hull considerably to add buoyancy aft – instead of the original overhanging teak grating the hull bottom is now in line with the back of the moulded bathing platform. The modifications have worked wonders because our boat happily ran along with exceptionally low running angles of around 3.0°. This is about 1-2.5° less than a conventional 30-knot planing boat, and it is helpful on this type of boat where the high bow and bulky anchor platform can obscure the helmsman's view from the lower helm.

Usefully, this low trim was achieved without the help of trim tabs, so theoretically there's still plenty of scope to push the bow down or trim the boat effectively in a crosswind. In practice, the trim tabs felt less effective than usual, although the GB47 never behaved as though it needed more trimming.

Driving the GB47

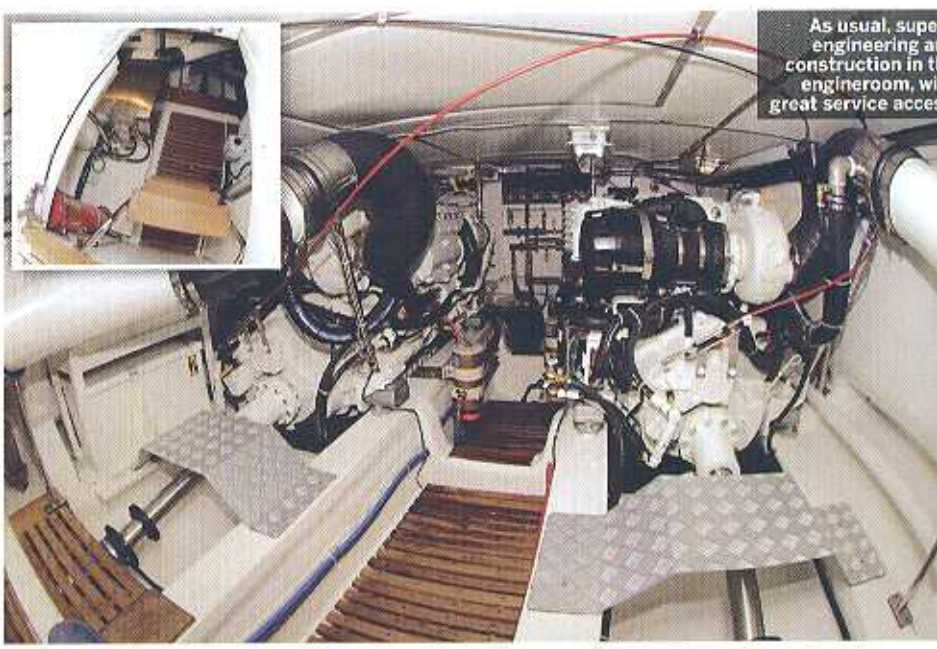
Out on the water, the GB47 did not feel or handle like a conventional planing boat. Weighing in at 20.2 tonnes light (23.1 tonnes with 100% fuel and water), it is comparable to the 20.6-tonne (light) Sunseeker Manhattan 50 – but that is where the similarities end. Like most long-keel semi-displacement forms, it cornered almost completely flat even at top speed, whipping around far more quickly and tightly than a conventional planing boat. And at lower speeds, when it was not going fast enough to generate significant dynamic stability, the lanky GB47 still rolled gently in waves.

So what changes or benefits has the switch to a planing form produced? The Achilles' heel of the original Ken Smith hull forms always used to be their wayward behaviour in big quartering seas, and here the new GB47 should be streets ahead. A combination of propeller tunnels channelling the water more resolutely along the hull, along with the extra dynamic stability provided by the deep-vee shape and the greater speed, should produce a boat with far better downwind manners. Although we can't unequivocally confirm this because the conditions on the day of our test were undemanding for a boat this size, the GB47 was far steadier at speed than the GB46 Europa we tested (*MBY* April 2002), and I would be astonished if there wasn't much-improved downwind handling.

These mild test conditions also made it difficult to evaluate the inevitable downside of planing forms compared with their semi-displacement rivals: the increasing bumpiness of the upwind ride

Spot the changes: secondary teak capping rails now maintenance-free stainless; darkly tinted windows now bonded in place with no frames; solid GRP instead of canvas dodgers.

> It cornered almost flat, whipping around far more quickly and tightly than a conventional planing boat



As usual, supe engineering a construction in t engineroom, wi great service acce

Above: traditional furniture, with hints of modern styling. Left: foul play – barnacles affected our speed data.

Our test boat had – surprisingly – not been antifouled, but it still reached 21.2 knots

Overhead handrail contributes to safety in bumpy conditions.

as conditions deteriorate. From the few small lumps and bumps we found going through Hurst Narrows in the Solent, I would judge the GB47's ride to be fine. Given that the GB47 clearly behaves differently to a conventional planing boat, this may or may not get comparatively better as the weather worsens. Grand Banks are clearly expecting better. As Richard Ahl, GB's research and development head, explains: "The longitudinal centre of gravity is much further forward than is typical of a high-speed hull, which allows for much deeper forward sections improving the ride and reducing resistance at low speed." Although I'd dispute the 'much deeper' claim, I'm otherwise inclined to agree with him. Although the GB47 clearly pitched more abruptly going upwind than the outgoing Ken Smith form, its fine bow never rose very far out of the water, so although it may prove wetter than others, it will probably drive its way smoothly through the waves.

I asked Grand Banks why, given the GB47's 23-24-knot top speed and their history of building boats with a spectacularly smooth, slam-free upwind ride, they had chosen a modified deep-vee planing form rather than a high-speed semi-displacement or transition form, such as those used for the Hardy 50, the Sea Ranger 30, or the Aqua-Star 48.

"After reviewing some of the recent advances in semi-displacement hull forms, we felt that they all had some handicap that rendered them unsuitable for our application. Some of these hulls have high running angles, poor downhill stability or are simply troublesome to trim. A good deep-vee hull would exhibit none of these problems and would be capable of maintaining speed in the rough. We suspect that you will not find a semi-displacement hull to challenge the GB47's handling in a following sea," they said.

Given that the three boats mentioned above are capable of between 27 and 30 knots with the right engines, it would seem that ultimate speed was not the overriding issue, more

Below: plastic shower trays are practical but look cheap set against the elevated quality elsewhere.

that Grand Banks chose a deliberate trade: a bumpier ride upwind in return for far better downwind manners. Still, although some semi-displacement or transition forms can exhibit the handicaps cited by Grand Banks, that has not been my experience on the best that I have driven.

The results of our subsequent speed trials need qualifying. Unbeknown to us, our boat had not been antifouled, and as our barnacle-encrusted photos show (facing page), it's surprising we even achieved 21.2 knots. When I first drove the GB47 in the Solent, I saw 23-plus knots register on the GPS. Likewise, the UK dealers are adamant that with full tanks they achieved 24.0 knots at 2,500rpm. So our range and consumption figures should all improve by up to 13% – a considerable lift. There is also an extra knot available, courtesy of the optional 560hp version of the 510hp C9 CATs.

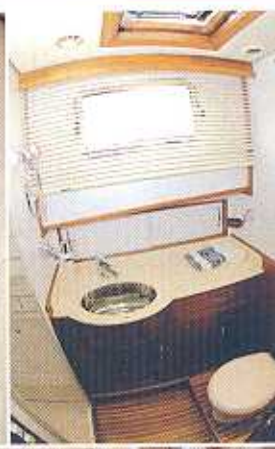
Above and below decks

Although it is definitely not all change here, there are several subtle but significant shifts compared with the outgoing GB42. Gone are the teak-capped handrails; in their place are comparatively maintenance-free stainless tubes. Gone too are the dodgers that protected the back end of the flybridge. The integral glassfibre mouldings that now serve the same purpose provide better wind protection, but they do make the flybridge look bulky and I'd be tempted to string dummy blue dodgers over the top.

Grand Banks have been fitting tinted saloon windows for some time – in response to customer demand, they say. Bonding these windows into place is a good idea: they are stronger and less likely to leak than the outgoing conventional frames. Whatever customers say though, under the glow of the evening sun, the tint made the GB47's lovely saloon feel far dimmer inside than the three older Grand Banks boats sitting alongside. Grand Banks say that they leave the forward

The beautiful joinery has lost none of its timeless appeal, yet it now has a subtle contemporary edge

Twin guest cabin to starboard.



Good view from flybridge and wheelhouse helms, thanks to low running angles at any speed.

Moving around this boat could not be easier and the boat is a doddle to moor short handed

Mooring facilities do not get any better than this – the 47 is a joy to berth, even short handed.

screens untinted for safety reasons, and given that keeping a safe lookout involves more than simply staring straight ahead, the tinted side screens seem at odds with GB's otherwise exemplary attitude to safety at sea.

When it comes to style, subjective though it is, I'd judge Grand Banks' changes inside to be a success. Somehow their beautifully assembled joinery has lost none of its timeless appeal, yet it clearly has a subtly contemporary edge to it now, and this new detailing flows through into things like the overhead handrails in the saloon with their sleek stainless steel end supports. With 14in (355mm) more beam than the 42, the GB47 was bound to be more voluminous throughout, but this extra room is particularly noticeable in the owner's cabin, which has space to spare even with two people inside. There is bags of stowage for one's long-term cruising gear.

Grand Banks have also provided the most impressive engineroom access this side of, well, a Grand Banks Eastbay 58. The entire moulding for the cockpit steps hinges skywards and you pass through this great opening and descend into engineering nirvana down large teak steps. It could only be bettered if Grand Banks provided wheelchair access.

Elsewhere, it is business as usual, which for Grand Banks means good business. Moving around this boat couldn't be easier or safer, and the superlative mooring gear means the boat is a doddle to moor short handed. The big door onto the starboard side deck combines with the large opening windows to provide excellent ventilation, and the overhanging flybridge helps to keep the sun off the aft deck and side decks.

The engineering and construction quality is first rate, the headroom and berth sizes are generous all round, the lighting is good (19 halogens in the saloon, for example), the mattresses are fully sprung, the countertops fiddled, the drawers dovetailed, and the fully adjustable Stidd seats on the flybridge are fantastic. I could go on, but you get the picture.

Datafile **Grand Banks 47 Heritage Europa**

Verdict

The 'stop-press' headline news is without doubt the new Sparkman & Stevens-designed deep-vee planing hull. How important this is to you in the overall scheme of things depends on two points: how fast you want to travel, and how you feel about the trade-off between the GB47's greatly improved handling in a following sea and its unavoidably bumpier upwind ride if you do choose to use all of its 25-knot potential when the going gets rough.

If you truly need noticeably more speed than the previous generation of Grand Banks boats, a little lateral thinking might lead you to the 30-plus-knot Grand Banks 47 Eastbay flybridge. As an owner of a 47 Eastbay, blessed with a similar amount of accommodation and around 31 knots rather than 25, you'd only miss the overhanging flybridge and the deep walkaround decks. Likewise, if your agenda is traditional looks and fine build quality, along with speed in the mid-20s or above, there are other faster boats that you could consider, like the Hardy 50 and the Aqua-Star 48.

However, if the GB47's trawler-style looks, overall workings and notable cachet are non-negotiable, those factors are irrelevant. So many of the qualities that make this a fine boat are the things we all know and love from previous Grand Banks: the way the boat can be handled and moored so easily because of the vast walkaround side decks and the excellent mooring gear; the sociability and practicality of the galley-up layout alongside the feeling of absolute safety on board; the superb engineering and construction, and the boat's excellent ventilation. These are the qualities that go to make up a great cruising boat. And in these areas the GB47 has few peers. ***MBY***

Engine and drive systems

Twin CAT C9. 510hp @ 2,500rpm.
6-cylinder 8.8-litre diesels. 575hp C9 also available

Data

Overall length	50ft 9in (15.47m)
Hull length	46ft 11in (14.30m) ex pulpit & platform
Beam	15ft 3in (4.65m)
Displacement	20.2 tonnes light, 23.1 tonnes loaded (loaded = light + 100% fuel & water)
Draught	3ft 10in (1.17m)
Air draught	21ft 4in (6.50m) to top of mast
Air draught	14ft 4in (4.37m) mast etc lowered
Fuel capacity	500 imp gal (2,271 litres)
Water capacity	216 imp gal (984 litres)

RPM	1,400	1,600	1,800	2,000	2,100	2,200	2,300	2,400	2,450
SPEED	10.0	11.5	12.9	15.0	16.5	17.9	19.3	20.6	21.2
TRIM	0.0°	0.5°	2.0°	2.5°	3.0°	3.0°	3.0°	3.0°	3.0°
GPH	9.2	14.7	18.6	22.8	25.4	28.5	32.5	37.6	43.6
MPG	1.09	0.78	0.69	0.66	0.65	0.63	0.59	0.55	0.49
RANGE	435	313	277	263	260	251	238	219	194

Speed in knots; GPH & MPG figures use imperial gallons; range in nautical miles. Calculated figures based on standard (idealised) engine propeller demand data. Your figures may vary considerably. Range allows for 20% reserve. 65% fuel, 45% water, 2 crew, owner's stores. 22°C air temp, 1,010mb pressure. Completely calm for speed trials

Slow cruising	10.0 knots, 435 miles @ 1,400rpm
Cruising	16.5 knots, 260 miles @ 2,100rpm (CAT maximum continuous cruise)
Fast cruising	19.3 knots, 238 miles @ 2,300rpm (CAT maximum cruise)
Flat out	21.2 knots, 194 miles @ 2,450rpm

SOUND LEVELS dB(A)	**Helm**	**Saloon**	**Cockpit**	**Flybridge**
Slow cruising @ 10.0 knots	71	71	82	66
Cruising @ 16.5 knots	80	80	91	75
Fast cruising @ 19 knots	81	81	92	76
Flat out @ 21.2 knots	83	84	94	79

Price from	£640,927 inc UK VAT (twin 455hp)
Price as tested	£650,673 inc UK VAT (twin 510hp)
Designer	Sparkman & Stevens, 2002
RCD category	B (for 12 people)
Contact	Boat Showrooms of London
	Tel: +44 (0)23 8045 8990
	Email: hamble@boatshowrooms.com
	Website: www.grandbanks.com

Grand Banks 47 Heritage Europa layout

Thumbs up or thumbs down?

UPS

- Engineering installation
- Sociable galley-up layout
- Easy movement around boat
- Superb construction quality
- Mooring facilities
- Engineroom access
- Excellent ventilation
- On-board safety

DOWNS

- Range for serious cruiser
- Darkly tinted windows
- Plastic shower floors

Rivals

Skagen 50

If your remit is traditional looks and fine build quality, alongside speed in the mid-20s or above, the choice is remarkably good. Starting around £740,000, the voluminous Hardy 50 is slightly more expensive, but its standard 700hp diesels can propel it at 27 knots. It has a smaller flybridge than the GB47's, but it offers the unmatched privacy of an aft cabin. If its semi-displacement hull is half as impressive as the outstanding Hardy 42 (*MBY* August 2003), expect excellent handling and a serene, slam-free ride even in terrible conditions.

The Sea Ranger 50 offers similar benefits to the Hardy 50: a better turn of speed than the GB47, an aft cabin, a wonderful saloon, and a very smooth ride. And these top-notch builders offer lots of potential for customisation. The finely crafted and practically designed Sabreline 47 is a 26-knot boat, and the solidly built Aqua-Star 48 can clip along at an impressive 30 knots with D9-500hp Volvos.

For something closer in concept and styling terms, try the trawler-style Skagen 50. This long-keel boat achieves 20 knots with its standard 450hp CATs, and the large flybridge overhangs the covered aft deck like the GB47. It has a stunning interior and the enticement of an optional full-beam owner's cabin (see www.skagen50.dk).