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DIESEL DEBATE

John “The Bear” Willis weighs up the pros and cons of diesel power in a Whittley CR2600 Cruiser fitted with a Volvo Penta D3-220.

What price do you put on boating safety? Does \$16,000 sound fair? That’s how much extra it will cost you to fit a Volvo Penta D3-220 2.4lt — a five-cylinder, aluminium-block diesel engine — to a Whittley CR2600 Cruiser, over the price of the standard 5.7lt V8 petrol alternative. At around \$160,000 for the total package, it’s not an outlandish proposition, especially if the boat’s destined for plenty of use.

When I tested this Volvo-Penta-equipped Whittley CR2600 last year it returned a pleasing 29lt/h at a fast cruising speed of 26.4kts (48.9kmh) at 3500rpm. When I opened her up to a speedy 31.5kts (58.3kmh) at 4000rpm, she was only using 44lt/h. This represents big savings for keen boat users.

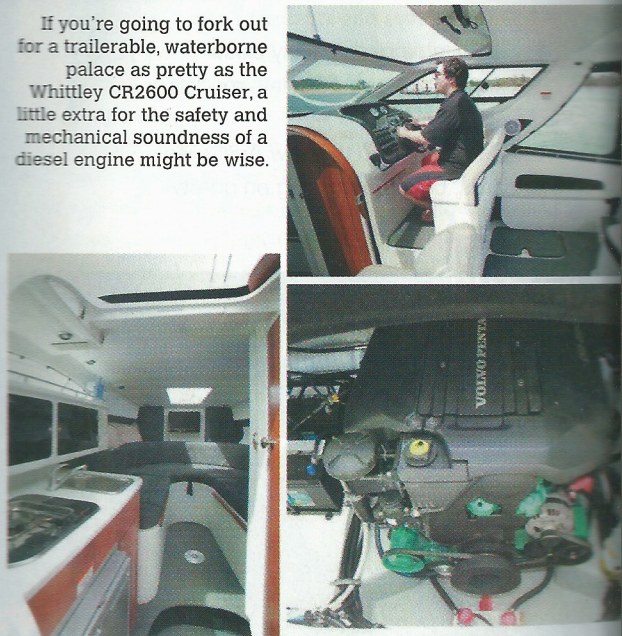
With proper fuel filtration systems a diesel should keep any fuel contamination issues to a minimum, with no loss of octane levels as often experienced with unleaded petrol, especially when purchased from marinas with a slow fuel turnover.

Diesel engines also display incredible longevity compared to petrol units, with many commercial engines completing tens of thousands of hours. The cooling systems and drive components still require the same maintenance, but the Volvo Penta’s aluminium block will reduce many of the corrosion and rust problems common in cast-iron alternatives. This Volvo unit is also far lighter — it weighs 150kg less than the 5.7lt petrol V8, and this saving suits the CR2600 hull well.

However, the biggest advantage is safety. Diesel is far less volatile than petrol — what price can you put on that?

On the water, the Penta-powered CR2600 Cruiser worked a treat, the torquey powerplant and D3 Duo Prop delivering immediate response at low speed. The power is more than

If you’re going to fork out for a trailerable, waterborne palace as pretty as the Whittley CR2600 Cruiser, a little extra for the safety and mechanical soundness of a diesel engine might be wise.



satisfying and the drive allowed firm control of the trim. Understandably, she gets a little floaty at high speed, but a mere touch on the trim controls her beautifully. She jumps onto the plane well for a diesel, with very little bow rise considering the long deep-vee.

The engine noise at low revs was the only downside. Turbos traditionally used to kick in at high revs, but the Penta’s VNT Turbo (a variable-geometry turbocharger) boosts air induction throughout the rev range and particularly down low, right where you need it. It provides great performance at low and cruising revs but the trade-off is increased noise.

The D3 is undoubtedly an advanced, compact, lightweight and efficient unit, lending the big Whittley both exhilarating performance and reliable torque. It has a common-rail fuel-injection system capable of multiple injections per cycle through its piezoelectric injectors. All vital engine components are monitored by Volvo’s electronic EVC system for precise diagnostics and a clear digital dashboard display.

The price of diesels has come down in the motor vehicle market as the format’s market share increases. Let’s hope the same will happen in marine. To diesel or not to diesel — that’s the \$16,000 question... 🚗