



BOAT REVIEW BY JEREMY McGEARY

Spacious Coastal Capsule

The Hunter 31 wraps big-boat comforts within small-boat dimensions

HUNTER MARINE HAS IN RECENT years revised its market appeal upward, to distance itself a little from other large-volume producers of cruising sailboats. At the same time, it still has to attract first-time buyers so as to gain their loyalty toward the brand as they progress from boat to boat. The company describes the Hunter 31 as exactly that entry-level boat, but it has some of the features of the more sophisticated boats in the Hunter lineup to attract sailors moving the opposite way. “You can put some stuff in it,” says Hunter’s Eric Macklin, “that someone moving down, say after they’ve done their big cruise, will appreciate.”

For sure, nobody moving down from a bigger boat will find elbow room wanting belowdecks. Hunter’s goal was to convey a sense of luxury: The saloon is huge by any measure, the galley is uncommonly generous for a 31-footer, and there’s a double berth at

each end of the boat.

Some of the stuff that comes standard in the boat is somewhat surprising, including the carbon-monoxide detector and the halogen fire suppression in the engine space. Both are listed in the boatbuilding standards currently promulgated by the American Boat & Yacht Council (ABYC). Another piece of standard equipment that caught the attention of one of the Boat of the Year judges, ABYC training maven Ed Sherman, was the isolation transformer, which performs a valuable safety function in separating the boat’s electrical system, and therefore its crew, from marina wiring of possibly doubtful integrity.

The 31 has Hunter’s backstayless rig, and although this permits the standard high-roach, full-battened mainsail, most customers, according to Macklin, choose the Seldén in-mast furling sail, which Hunter has designed to be of similar area and center of effort. Eliminating the backstay permits the Hunter trademark stainless-steel arch and full over-the-cockpit bimini. Hunter engineers have redesigned the arch so it folds down over the cockpit to meet highway-clearance limitations.

Under sail, the shoal-draft-

version Hunter 31 was a little disappointing, feeling tender in the mid-teens breeze and troubled by the wind-driven chop mixed with powerboat wakes we experienced in the Severn River off Annapolis. That’s the inevitable tradeoff for the high-volume interior—and the high freeboard. Once cracked off the wind a little and in less confused waters, the boat responded in a more spirited way, and certainly it performs well enough for the weekend and local-area cruising Hunter sees as its primary use. The 110-percent jib on a roller furler tacks easily and can be sheeted to tracks on the deck or the cabin top.

Always mindful of other

Sophisticated in design and execution, the Hunter 31 appeals to both the new and the seasoned cruiser.

people’s property, before jibing I asked Steve Pettengill, Hunter’s director of offshore testing, if he wanted time to sheet in the mainsail. “Heck, no,” he replied. “Let her rip.” So I did, and the boom swung over with a satisfying clang. It’s part of Pettengill’s job to crash-jibe Hunter’s boats in much heavier conditions, and that he does it with some relish must be comforting to any sailor, entry level or re-entry level.

Jeremy McGeary writes from the bucolic peace of Virginia’s Northern Neck.

HUNTER 31

LOA	30' 10" (9.40 m.)
Hull Length	30' 0" (9.14 m.)
LWL	28' 1" (8.56 m.)
Beam	11' 1" (3.38 m.)
Draft (shoal/deep)	3' 11" / 5' 5" (1.19 m. / 1.65 m.)
Sail Area (100%)	423 sq. ft. (39.3 sq. m.)
Displacement	8,505 lb./8,353 lb.
(shoal/deep)	(3,866 kg./3,797 kg.)
Water	50 gal. (190 l.)
Fuel	20 gal. (76 l.)
Engine	21-hp. Yanmar
Designer	Glenn Henderson and Hunter Design Group

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