

The Hunter 38 barrels out of Chicago Harbor, showing its good performance side.



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Hunter 38

This Henderson-designed cruiser heralds Hunter's new quest for quality and performance

There is a buzz at Hunter Marine these days. You can feel it in the air at the boat shows and you can feel it on the water when you sail the company's new models. Hunter has long been one of America's most prolific builders, now it is serving notice that it can produce boats that stand up to any competitor. The fresh-out-of-the-mold 38 is an example of Hunter's new approach to design and manufacturing. The handsome aft cockpit sloop includes Hunter's trademark concepts of comfort, convenience, innovation and a great sailaway price. However, the 38 also demonstrates an evolved construction ethos, upgraded materials and inventory, and a focused design philosophy blending form and function.

Hunter Marine has been building sailboats for more than 30

years and is one of the industry's enduring success stories. Brothers Warren and John Luhrs, descended from a long line of boatbuilders, knew what they were doing when they launched a rakish Cherubini-designed 25-foot sloop in 1973. The boat was an immediate hit and in just a few short years Hunter was on its way to becoming a force in the industry. Warren Luhrs is a relentless innovator and his bluewater exploits aboard *Thursday's Child* and *Hunter's Child* have been, in effect, floating test tracks for ideas that have now become Hunter hallmarks, including B&R rigs and cockpit arches.

I recently tested the Hunter 38. In fact, it was hull No. 1 of what promises to be a long production run. We sailed out of Chicago Harbor on a perfect fall day. The 10- to 15-knot northeast

breeze had a bit of chill to it, but was otherwise ideal to get the feel of the latest Glenn Henderson design. The boat was fitted with the optional Seldon in-mast furling mainsail and it didn't take long to set sail, shut down the 40-horsepower Yanmar diesel and head for the blue water beckoning beyond the breakwalls.

The details

The 38 felt solid in the water and under foot as I made my way around the deck. The hull is balsa-cored above the waterline and solid laminate from the waterline south. This is the best way to make use of the weight savings, insulating qualities and panel stiffness of sandwich construction while maintaining the impact resistance of solid fiberglass. In addition, Kevlar is added to the hull from the stem to the keel sump, the area most likely to be impacted in the event of a collision. The 5-foot draft wing keel is antimonious lead and fastened to the structural grid network with stainless bolts. A 6-foot, 6-inch deep keel is also available.

The hull and deck are joined on an external or outer-lip flange, bonded with 3M 5200 and through-bolted. Although this joint is strong and also makes access and inspection easier, it is prone to damage from docking misadventures. However, the standard heavy-duty, high-density vinyl rubrail minimizes this risk and also helps protect shiny topsides. Speaking of shiny, Hunter has developed a new deck gel-coat, MaxGuard, and claims that it reduces fading and crazing.

The 38 continues Hunter's use of modular construction. For the most part the interior is built outside the boat using computer con-



Hunter 38

LOA 38'2"; LWL 34'8"; Beam 12'11";
Draft 5' (shoal), 6'6" (deep);
Displacement 17,674 lbs. (shoal),
17,250 lbs. (deep); Sail Area 699 sq. ft.

Base boat price \$148,990

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The B&R rig eliminates the backstay and a stainless steel arch raises the traveler off the cockpit sole, opening up the cockpit.

trolled jiggling that reduces labor costs and also improves quality due to precision cutting and easy access. The molded units are then bonded to the hull. Incidentally, longtime readers will note that I have stopped whining about modular construction. The techniques and materials are greatly improved, especially when it comes to hull bonding, and the process of molding interior components simply makes sense for the sailboat industry. Fitting custom-made bulkheads and furniture into boats is time consuming and just contributes to the already outrageous prices of many new boats.

Back on the lake we were easing along on a close reach, cutting nicely through the chop.

Henderson's hull shape is a result of state-of-the-art 3D simulation software used for testing hulls without actually building a working model. "In the past, designers relied primarily on keels for lift and resisting leeway. We discovered that using a large rudder and smaller keel was better, the result is a more responsive boat," Henderson said. Henderson was also intent on increasing stability by lowering the center of gravity. Not only is the overall profile lower than previous models, but small touches like switching from a heavy fiberglass to a vinyl headliner help. "The 38 shouldn't have a lot of pitch and shouldn't pound," he said. Out on the lake the boat was proving him right.

On deck

The 38 has a user-friendly cockpit, and that's putting it mildly. The B&R rig eliminates the backstay and this coupled with the stainless steel arch that supports the traveler and mainsheet creates an open, uncluttered cockpit. Trimming the main and traveler from the side supports of the arch is a bit awkward at first but the tradeoff for more space is one most cruisers will make without hesitating. The arch also pro-



The Hunter 38 sails rail down past the Chicago Harbor light, above. The Glenn Henderson design clips along at more than 6 knots, below.

vides a perfect perch for mounting cockpit lights or stereo speakers and offers a solid support for the bimini.

Whitlock Direct Drive steering not only offers nice touch, it's also robust and reliable. Our test boat was fitted with a Lewmar folding wheel, and while this is certainly a clever feature, the wheel could have been a bit larger in diameter for my taste.

Three good-sized lockers gobble up gear and stowage wells keep halyard tails out of view. The helmsman's seat lifts, allowing easy access to the large stern step, which has a well-placed hot and cold shower. Hunter, along with Catalina, has truly refined the stern rail seat concept. This is one of those simple but wonderful ideas that make you wonder why manufacturers didn't think of it 30 years ago. The Hunter 38 also features Flexiteak, a composite PVC material that looks and feels like teak but requires no maintenance. It is used on the cockpit sole, seats, rail seats and stern step.

Henderson is a true believer in fractional rigs. "I won't design another masthead rig," he said. The 38 sailplan features a large roach, full-batten main and a



small, barely overlapping 110-percent roller furling jib. The main provides most of the power and the headsail is easy to control, even in a blow. The key is the B&R rig with double sweptback spreaders and no need for a backstay. And while this rig is for the most part practical and efficient, it has one limitation when sailing deep downwind because the main cannot be paid out very far without laying on the spreaders. The solution is to tack downwind, which is the way most of us sail anyway and it's invariably faster and less stressful.

A conventional main with single line slab reefing is standard, but I suspect most boats will be ordered with the in-mast furling main. All controls lines are led aft. At first glance the headsail tracks, which are set well inboard, seem short. However, the range of adjustment for the small headsail is limited anyway, so why clutter the deck with tracks you don't need. Deck gear includes all the big names, Harken, Lewmar, Spinlock and others. There is an external chain locked and double stainless steel anchor rollers forward.

Down below

The interior plan is available with either two or three private cabins. We sailed the two-cabin model and with a single amidships head. Like most Hunters, the interior focuses around a large, bright, airy saloon. The 6-foot, 6-inch headroom lends to the spaciousness. A U-shaped dinette to starboard features a beautifully finished teak table and comfortable cushions with your choice of designer fabrics. Hunter has never believed in austerity, maybe it's the company's roots in powerboats but for some reason it never believed that sailors should suffer. The cabin sole is Everware, a simulated teak that looks great and is very durable. Bulkheads and facing are finished with matt teak veneers. The quality of joinerwork and finish work is exceptional, this is not your father's Hunter.

The forward cabin berth does not have the V cutout, thank goodness, making for better

The nearly 13-foot beam has its advantages when it comes to comfort, like the large cockpit, top, and spacious saloon, top middle. There's plenty of light and ventilation, bottom middle, so you know this boat was built in Florida. The L-shaped galley features Corian countertops, right.



sleeping. There are two cedar-lined hanging lockers and shelves above. The aft cabin is the master and includes an athwartships queen and dressing seats. It also has two hanging lockers, although it would be useful to have more drawer space. Ventilation is superb—you can tell this a Florida-built boat—there are plenty of opening ports and hatches with built-in screens and shades.

The galley includes Corian countertops, double sinks, a three-burner stove/oven, microwave and top-loading fridge. There are storage lockers above the stove and drawers below. The nav station is opposite the galley, just forward of the head. There is a useful small bulkhead to house repeaters with a stout stainless steel handhold above. The chart table is small but I applaud Henderson for dedicating the space just the same. In this age of cockpit mounted instruments, it must be tempting to dispense with the nav station all together.

Under sail

Unfortunately the wind went light as the afternoon wore on. We put the boat through its paces on all points of sail. Tacking was easy, hauling the small jib over doesn't require much oomph, and the 38 comes through the wind cleanly. Reaching, we fiddled with the main, adjusting the leach line, tweaking the halyard and tightening the outhaul. It was obvious we didn't have the rig tuned properly. However, the crew at Hunter had just launched the boat and hastily assembled it for us. Still, once we found the groove the 38 showed its stuff. In 10 knots true, we eased over 6 knots on a close reach and the ride was silky smooth. Naturally we slowed as we fell off the wind, but we still maintained 5 knots. The boat balanced well, which is not always the case with a big, roachy main, and I suspect the 38 will be easy on the autopilot.

The Hunter 38, when well-equipped with the Mariner Package adds up to less than \$160,000. Yes, it is a terrific value but the Hunter 38 delivers a lot more than just a good price. I was impressed with the design and the quality, it's a thoughtfully conceived, properly executed cruiser with a nice turn of speed that deserves close inspection by anyone looking for a boat in this class.