

ALLAN WHITING tries out two Hunter yachts on Sydney Harbour — the deep draft 27 keelboat and the multi-purpose Edge that is Hunter’s challenge to the MacGregor 26 in the powersailer market



HEDGING YOUR BETS

According to John Peterson, Hunter’s US-based director of sales and marketing, the 27 was developed in response to buyer requests for a roomy, but more affordable, Hunter. “This innovative new boat is in direct response to that demand,” Peterson told *Trade-a-Boat*.

Having figured out that the new boat would most likely be bought by novice sailors, the Hunter design team, led by sailboat designer and racer Glenn Henderson, with input from Hunter founder and chairman Warren Luhrs, came up with a 27-footer with a big-boat feel that would be forgiving to sail.

Designing the 27 began from the inside out, drawn around a large open-plan saloon with

1.9m headroom. An innovative vee-berth sits forward of the dinette and is large enough to sleep a pair of kids, but can be extended to double berth adult-size by folding down the athwartships settee and using those cushions as fillers. Very clever.

A huge aft cabin resides under the cockpit floor, incorporating an athwartships queen-size berth, hanging locker and built-in cushioned seat with storage space beneath. The cabin has a roof hatch that opens under one of the cockpit seats, meaning it can be left open in wet weather without the risk of rain pouring into the cabin. In fine weather, the hatch and the seat can both be open.

Almond wood, trimmed with teak, is used

for cabinetry and bulkheads because its light colour makes the interior appear larger. A fully enclosed head, with portable dunny, built-in vanity with mirror and wet gear storage, is standard.

COOKING WITH GAS

The starboard L-shaped galley has a single-burner gas cooktop — gas plus an electric hotplate in the Deluxe version — a deep stainless steel sink and a convenient rollout portable fridge drawer. Counters are fiddled with teak and under-counter shelves provide additional galley storage.

The Deluxe Cruising package includes optional pressurised hot and cold water,





Clockwise from above: Deluxe Cruising package includes Everwear flooring that mimics wood planking; Doors either side of the companionway lead to the aft cabin on the left and to the head opposite; The mainsail powered the beamy boat quite well with five-knots-plus realised in less than 10kts of true wind; The aft cabin.



marine head and shower, microwave oven, Yanmar 14hp engine upgrade, and Everwear main cabin flooring that mimics traditional teak/ash planking.

The Hunter 27 has a plethora of handholds, above and below decks and one of the safest companionways I've seen on any yacht, regardless of price.

Hunter has solved the crockery stowage problem by providing hanging mesh bags that stow plates so they can't slide about. This trick also means you can stow the crockery wet after wash-up and they'll drip-dry (bloke input).

The Hunter 27 is built to a very competitive price and you can see details, such as cupboard door alignment, where a fastidious owner could improve on the factory fit and finish. A glaring mistake is the swing-up engine cover/companionway stair that hits the edge of the redesigned galley top: it needs a cut-out section to clear the bench.

THE CONSTRUCTION

Hunter yachts are built with a combination of solid FRP and Baltek and plywood sandwich materials. On larger Hunters, the hull below the waterline is monolithic FRP and above the waterline it's end-grain balsa sandwich. But for the Hunter 27, monolithic FRP is used for the entire hull structure. The chainplates are on the outside of the hull, which is reinforced with additional laminations.

All Hunter hull designs must withstand a sand beach grounding as part of the construction validation process.

The deck gelcoat is Maxguard that is said to be more flexible than most finishes and also highly UV-resistant. The outer hull skin

is Ashland AME-5000 modified epoxy for maximum osmosis resistance.

The deck-to-hull attachment has Hunter's trademark vinyl rubrail, behind which are 3M 5200-bonded and bolted hull and deck flanges. The prominent rubrail may not be everyone's cup of tea, but Hunter makes the point that it's very practical and easily replaced after a pile smack.

The 27's standard lead keel has a shoal draft of 1.05m, but the test boat was fitted with an optional deep (1.52m) keel.

UP THE MAST

Hunter yachts are distinguished by rigs that do without backstays, thereby freeing cockpit and transom design, and allowing mainsails with generous roach.

The B&R rig was developed by Lars Bergstrom and Sven Ridder in the 1960s, for use on shorthanded, around-the-world yachts. The shrouds and the forestay are disposed at 120-degree intervals, triangulating the mast support. Hunter adopted the B&R rig in 1993.

This rig relies on a wide shroud base for its swept-back-spreader layout, so Hunter yachts have traditional, hull-exterior chainplates and

HIGHS

- Outstanding value for money
- Generous accommodation
- Ease of sail handling

LOWS

- Two-blade prop vibration
- Engine cover fitment
- Rattly door catches



long spreaders. That design can hamper headsail sheeting geometry, but the 27 solves that problem by having a shallow (110 per cent) genoa overlap on a 7/8 rig and optional tracks that provide inboard and outboard sheeting, through moveable cars. Two additional Harken 30s are part of the double-track sheeting option, located aft on the cockpit coamings, where they serve double duty should an MPS be fitted.

The cockpit on the test boat was divided laterally by an optional mainsheet traveller and longitudinally by the wheel-steering pedestal. However, access to the cockpit from the transom is eased by the fact that the helmsman's seat can be slipped out of its slots and the optional wheel rim folds inwards. Six can be seated comfortably in the cockpit, thanks to aft quarter benches. The standard arrangement sees the mainsheet attached to the top of the steering pedestal hoop.

CRUISING WITH ZING

Our test on Sydney Harbour was done in light air for the most part, with the breeze freshening to around 12kts late in the program. The boat proved very easy to manoeuvre out of a tight berth adjacent to the Australian National Maritime Museum and it motored briskly with the powerful Yanmar engine underfoot. Yanmars are boringly reliable, but are not the smoothest running diesels in the world and this donk was no exception, exciting some of the cockpit panels and the cabin doors to chatter annoyingly. A delve into the spec' books revealed the dreaded two-blade propeller, so an upgrade to a smoother running three-blader is one we'd suggest to potential buyers.

Once in the main channel, we hoisted the mainsail without drama and the headsail unrolled as easily as grandma's blind. Then we were away. The sails were cruising-oriented, with a high clew on the headsail and the boom position elevated above the optional bimini.

HUNTER 27 KEEL

PRICE AS TESTED

\$130,000

OPTIONS FITTED

Deep keel, marine head with holding tank, vanity with hot and cold shower, hot and cold transom shower, 14hp engine, Raymarine ST40, VHF radio, battery charger, 240V outlets, 12V outlet, high-water bilge alarm, AM/FM CD player, bimini, mainsheet traveller, folding leather-bound steering wheel, outboard sheeting and aft winches, anchor with chain and warp, spinnaker halyard, pedestal cover, cockpit cushions, pressure water system, 12V fridge, and water heater

PRICED FROM

\$115,000 (H27); \$125,000 (H27X)

GENERAL

Material: FRP monolithic hull and balsa sandwich deck

Type: Monohull

Length overall: 8.33m (H27X w/ extended bowsprit)

Hull length: 8.23m (H27)

Waterline length: 7.18m

Beam: 3.02m

Draft: .. 1.05m (1.52m optional H27; 1.60m H27X)

Mast height: 12.12m (13.31m, furling mast; 12.29m H27X)

Weight: 3476kg shoal draft; 3407kg deep keel; 3650kg H27X

CAPACITIES

Berths: Two doubles and two single settee berths

Fuel: 57lt (45lt H27X)

Water: 76lt

Holding tank: 38lt (H27)

SAILS

Sail area (standard): 35.86m²

Sail area (with mast-furling main): 4.28m²

Sail area (H27X): 41.26m²

Asymmetric spinnaker: Optional

ENGINE

Make/model: Yanmar diesel

Type: Shaft drive

Rated HP: 10 (14 optional)

Prop: Fixed two-blade

SUPPLIED BY

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Clockwise from far left: The test boat featured the optional fold-in wheel for extra cockpit room; Huge aft cabin has a roof hatch that opens under one of the cockpit seats; Hatched anchorwell; The Hunter 27 was comfortable sitting to windward and steering with two fingers on the wheel rim.



The Hunter 27 was surprisingly close-winded and could be made more so with a blade sheeted inboard. The partially battened, roachy main powered the beamy boat quite well and we saw five-plus-knots in less than 10kts of true wind. A clear panel in the optional bimini allowed the helmsman to sight the mainsail tufts.

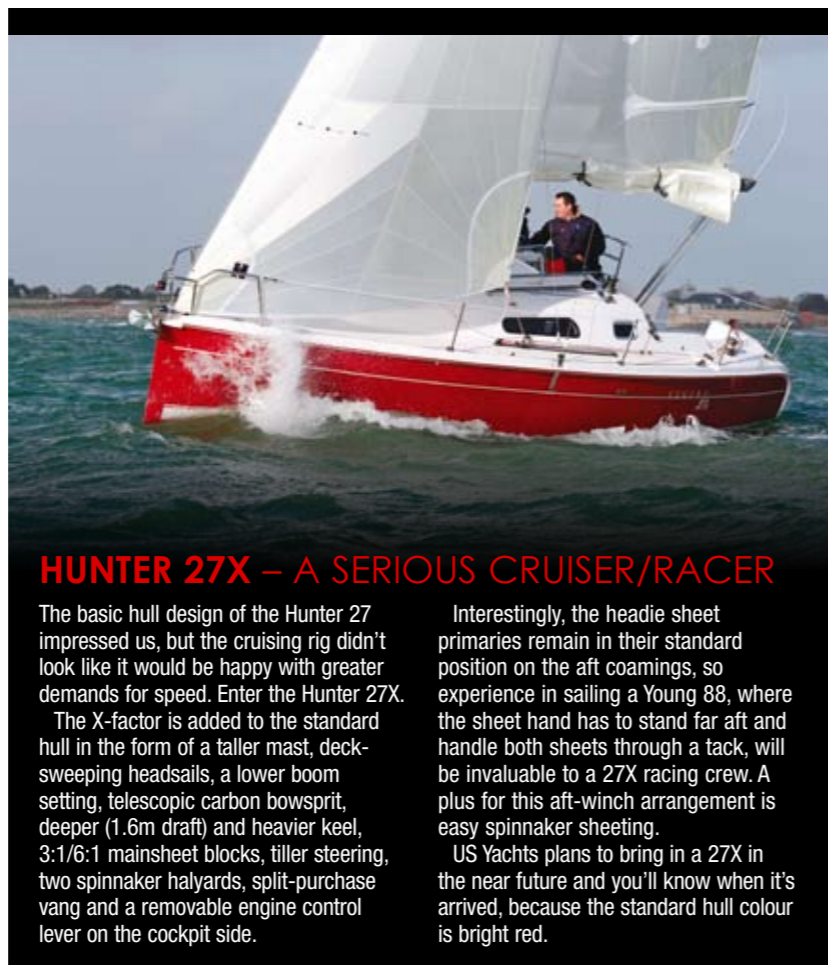
The main is controlled by a two-fall sheeting system with fine tuner and the headsail sheets to cabin-top or optional coaming-mounted winches. The test boat was fitted with single-line slab reefing, but in-mast furling is optional.

It was comfy to sit to windward and steer, with only two fingers on the wheel rim, where I could easily sight the jib tufts. But I reckon the 27 is crying out for tiller steering to allow quicker, more positive response to its dinghy-like movement through choppy water.

That said, the primary aim of this boat is cruising, with only social racing in mind, so the standard layout will suit most buyers to a tee.

The Hunter 27 looks racier than most yachts from this maker and offers outstanding value for money, coming in cheaper than many used boats that have less performance, less interior space and fewer features.

This is a well-equipped, compact cruising yacht that hits the market in one of the most popular used-yacht price brackets — ideal for these difficult economic times. With the entire Hunter range available through US Yachts, you can find a boat for all bents and budgets.



HUNTER 27X – A SERIOUS CRUISER/RACER

The basic hull design of the Hunter 27 impressed us, but the cruising rig didn't look like it would be happy with greater demands for speed. Enter the Hunter 27X.

The X-factor is added to the standard hull in the form of a taller mast, deck-sweeping headsails, a lower boom setting, telescopic carbon bowsprit, deeper (1.6m draft) and heavier keel, 3:1/6:1 mainsheet blocks, tiller steering, two spinnaker halyards, split-purchase vang and a removable engine control lever on the cockpit side.

Interestingly, the headie sheet primaries remain in their standard position on the aft coamings, so experience in sailing a Young 88, where the sheet hand has to stand far aft and handle both sheets through a tack, will be invaluable to a 27X racing crew. A plus for this aft-winch arrangement is easy spinnaker sheeting.

US Yachts plans to bring in a 27X in the near future and you'll know when it's arrived, because the standard hull colour is bright red.



Hybrid EDGE

Powersailers like the Hunter Edge bridge the gap between a yacht and a motorboat. But do they work? **ALLAN WHITING tests the tillers**

I sat bobbing up and down in the Sydney By Sail RIB just off Bradley's Head, waiting for the Hunter Edge to motor by so that I could click off some happy snaps. I could make out US Yachts principal, Matt Hayes, and my better half, Keryn, down near Rose Bay, packing the sails away on the Edge following our Sydney Harbour sailing test. I thought I'd have a long wait for them to motor within shooting range... but I was wrong.

I saw a boat speeding towards me, with a sizeable bone in its teeth and at first sight I didn't couple it with the sailing craft I'd just stepped off. This powerboat kept bounding towards me, but I couldn't spot any telltale mast because it was lost in the Eastern Suburbs housing background. Only when the Edge closed to around 800m did I make the connection.

The Edge circled the RIB, churning the water to foam as it manoeuvred tightly around Athol Bight. I could hear Keryn's shrieks of laughter above the subdued roar of the 75hp Evinrude that was pushing this 'yacht'

to 20kts. Yep, the Edge is no ordinary 27-footer.

The new Hunter Edge is an unashamed competitor for the successful MacGregor 26, which has exploited the concept of a yacht that doubles as a powerboat — the so-called powersailer. I'd read up on the new Hunter and I knew that it could almost match the lighter MacGregor for pace, but the sight of a yacht sitting up on the plane without a gale up its tail and sails set was hard to fathom!

THE POWERSAILER CONCEPT

Mum wants a caravan, the kids want a wakeboard boat, and dad wants to revive the sailing skills he learnt in an MJ 20 years ago. That situation could lead to a big spend, with three lots of trailer insurances and registrations each year and two lots of boat regos, plus the complication of where to park all these trailerable toys. Enter the powersailer, with some of the characteristics of a caravan, a yacht and a powerboat.

MacGregor has best exploited the



multipurpose powersailer concept and now claims to be the biggest producer of trailer yachts in the world. Little wonder the boys at Hunter grew tired of watching MacGregor's success and determined to have a slice of the powersailer market for themselves.

Hunter already makes the 25 trailerable yacht but it is a conventional shoal-draft vessel with an auxiliary — not a powersailer. It's also a permit-only towing proposition in Australia, having a beam of 2.58m. The new Edge powersailer has a beam of 2.54m — technically 4mm overwidth but you'd be unlikely to be pinged for such a minor discrepancy.

IN DESIGN

The Edge resembles the class-leading MacGregor in appearance but has a Farr-like wraparound 'eyebrow' cabin window, instead of the MacGregor 26M's two-level window



Above: Down below, the Edge shares a similar layout to the Hunter 27 keelboat. Below, left to right: The boom sheets to a strong hoop forward of the steering pedestal; Rudder raised for trailering.

design. But like the MacGregor, the cabin is full-beam, without sidedecks.

The hull-deck joint is through-bolted and covered by a protective rubrail. The hull is monolithic FRP, with a swing-up 77kg centreboard, supplemented by a water ballast tank with up to 730kg capacity. Ballast intake is controlled by a transom-mounted lever.

The rudder lifts and lowers, using rope tackle, inside the helmsman's seat pod.

The walkthrough transom has a boarding platform and telescopic swim ladder. The boarding platform also serves as the mount for the Evinrude E-TEC 75hp outboard engine, which comes with hydraulic steering and electric

tilt. The engine controls and instruments are mounted on the steering pedestal.

Like all Hunters, the Edge uses a B&R rig, with wide, swept-back spreaders and no backstay. Additions not found on other Hunters are tubular braces running from the deck to the mast, to stabilise the mast during raising and lowering.

The B&R rig allows fitment of a cat-style main with ample roach and a wide headboard. The optional furling headsail is high-clew and cut to follow the line of the upswept boom. From a distance, the Edge resembles a stubby catamaran in profile.

PEOPLE PLACES

Hunter's designers are skilled at making Tardis-like boats and this expertise has been well employed in the new Edge. The pushpits can be fitted with optional stern seats, complementing cockpit seating for four, plus a dedicated helmsman's perch, allowing seven to sit comfortably on deck for day sailing. That crewing fits within the boat's rated payload of 700kg.

The cabin hatch is double-hinged and rises on gas struts, so going below is a breeze.

Below decks, the Edge resembles the Hunter 27 keelboat, featuring a fore and vee-berth that can be used for a pair of kids, or extended with bolster cushions to sleep an adult couple. The under-cockpit bed is huge and can sleep four kids or a couple of adults and one child.

At the foot of the tubular

stainless steel companionway is a lift-up panel that allows a visual check of the ballast tank.

The dinette is built around the swing-keel FRP box and the mast compression post, featuring a double-drop-side table and seating for at least six.

The galley has fiddled bench space, a deep sink with swivelling tap and there's top-loading fridge space beside the galley cupboard. A second cupboard with fiddled serving space is opposite the galley. Because the cabin is full width without sidedecks, there isn't the usual shelf space under the cabin windows, but there's ample storage under the dinette seats.

The standard enclosed head is fitted with a portable loo, but a fixed head with holding tank is optional.

ON THE WATER

The Hunter Edge is at the large end of the traileryacht scale, so it needs a decent sized boat ramp for launching and retrieving. At an empty weight of 2.2 tonnes, plus the weight of a tandem-axle trailer, the Edge also requires a sizeable towing vehicle with around three-tonne towing capacity — a 4WD wagon or ute is better than a 2WD car.

HIGHS

- Good value for money
- Generous accommodation
- Multi-purpose design

LOWS

- Unusual appearance
- Heavy steering when sailing
- No sidedecks

Raising the mast, attaching the boom and the optional jib with furler, and rigging the sheets takes around 45 minutes. Ditto for retrieving and de-rigging for transport. The plus side is that the trailer hubs cool down while the boat is being rigged and are less likely to ingest sea water when the wheels are submerged.

With the trailer buried at the far end of the Little Manly ramp, the Edge slid off easily and motored into the nearby beach, where the rest of the crew clambered aboard. Being able to beach the Edge makes boarding easy.

Once clear of the shallows we opened the ballast filler, lowered the centreboard — an easy operation from the cockpit by simply releasing a cleated line — and dropped the rudder from the raised position it needs for trailering and when motoring at speed. With the ballast tank showing full we closed the valve, hoisted the main — no halyard winch needed or supplied — and unfurled the headsail. We shut down the outboard, tilted it with the flick of a switch and sailed away.

The Edge is no raceyacht but it climbed to windward at a respectable angle and slid up to five knots in a 10 to 12-knot breeze. The wheel is powerboat-size, so it's on the heavy side, because it lacks the radius needed to reduce steering effort. This heaviness makes it easy to oversteer the boat, until you get used to the feeling.

The Edge will go to windward quite well, but it felt much happier with the sheets eased to a broad reach. It won't keep up with a 27-foot racer, but it's fine for its intended purpose: family cruising.

The transition from sail to motorboat takes only a few minutes. Once the sails are packed away and anything that can blow off the deck has been stowed, the rudder and centreboard are hauled up — each a one-hand operation — and the outboard brought into attack mode. The engine is fired up, the ballast valve is opened to drain out the unnecessary weight and it's time to hold on!

You wouldn't get more than around 60nm at WOT with the standard fuel tank, but throttle back to a comfortable seven knots or so and the range goes out to around 200nm. Alternatively,



Top down: You'll need a sizeable vehicle with a three-tonne towing capacity to haul the Hunter Edge; Standard power comes from a 50hp E-TEC or option up to 75hp; Storm brewing? Then power up the Edge to race home at around 20kts if needs be.

you can go for a blast and carry additional petrol.

Most powersailer owners use full noise for a while until the novelty wears off and then they adopt a more sedate pace, but it's handy to know you can get home in a hurry if a storm is brewing.

Retrieving the boat from the water is easy thanks to a trailer design that allows accurate power-on boarding.

How will the Hunter Edge fare against the established MacGregor? Time will tell, but Hunter's profile here is somewhat higher through the US Yachts organisation. And while the Edge is more expensive than a Mac and heavier to tow, it does offer caravan space inside.

Would my beloved and I buy a Hunter Edge? It's not the boat for us, because we love to race and the HJ27X keelboat has much more appeal in this respect. But for the hapless bloke who's trying to please a caravan-keen wife, a wakeboard-mad tribe of kids and their mates, and who also wants the joy of sailing, the Edge has plenty of appeal.

HUNTER EDGE

PRICE AS TESTED

\$89,500 (including US-made aluminium/steel trailer)

OPTIONS FITTED

Evinrude E-TEC 75 outboard, cabin accordion blinds, portable fridge, icebox, marine head, vee-berth curtain, hot and cold pressure water, additional battery, electric bilge pump, speed and depth instruments, 240V shorepower connection, AM/FM stereo system, stern seats with integral speakers, bimini, mainsail cover, bowroller, compass, jib roller furling, swim ladder, and primer and anti-foul paint

PRICED FROM

\$69,150 (sans motor)

GENERAL

Material:FRP monolithic hull
Type:Monohull
Hull length: 8.03m (sans motor)
Waterline length: 7.37m
Beam: 2.54m
Draft: .048m (board up); 1.50m (board down)
Mast height: 10.08m
Weight: ..1565kg; 2290kg (with ballast)
Towing weight: 2234kg

CAPACITIES

Berths:Two doubles and two single settee berths
Fuel: 23lt
Water: 38lt

SAILS

Sail area:31.15m² (standard)

ENGINE

Make/model: Evinrude E-TEC
Type: Outboard
Rated HP: 50 (75hp optional)

SUPPLIED BY

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