

The congenial

36er

A wide beam, deep draft and shorthanded sailing set-up are just some of the features of the upgraded American-built Hunter 36 that assure it remains a popular choice for new and old sailors alike, writes David Lockwood.



Every boat has its best seat and on the Hunter 36 you'll find two of them in P Row, that is, the aft rail-mounted pushpit seats with teak slats from which you can overlook the cockpit, see the sails billow above, watch the bow knifing through the water, and enjoy the views while relinquishing all control to the crew or just the skipper. Being an American yacht you also get a drinkholder alongside each seat in P Row, which shows they know a thing or two about sailing and the

customary coldie on the downwind leg. But, per-lease, hold the Budweiser.

With more than 50 Hunter yachts sold here by US Yachts in recent years, the antipodean agents and Hunter itself must be doing something right in local sailors. It is and on a massive scale right around the world. Hunter is America's biggest-selling yacht and the yard builds 1300 keelboats and about 500 trailersailers and dinghies each year on production lines modelled on the automotive industry.

Naturally, the yachts have mass-market (read global) appeal and, say the local agents, they even sway newbies considering buying a powerboat as well as the cruising fraternity. To this end, ease of sailing is very much a Hunter trait, as is providing a lot of boat for your buck.

Width-wise, this is a mighty 36 footer and, with the beam carried well aft, it's akin to a supersized yacht that lets you pack a party aboard. Because the traveller is above the cockpit on a stainless steel arch, because most

owners go for the in-mast furling mainsail option, and as the primary winches for the furling genoa are alongside the wheel, you can sail these yachts single-handedly and consign non-sailing crew to P Row.

I'm told the Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club on Pittwater from whence we set sail has an owner of the now superseded 36 who, in his seventies, enjoys sailing his Hunter shorthanded, while there's a Hunter owner in his 80s still sailing on Lake Macquarie. Then there are all the Hunters in the affiliated

Sydney by Sail charter and learn-to-sail fleet that are being put through their paces. Thumbs up for putting more bums on, well, pushpit seats there too.

So it was with this new Hunter 36 released in America in April, displayed at the Sydney International Boat Show in August, and sailed by *Trade-a-Boat* later that month. We had hull #3, but at the time of writing three other 36s were on order. But this isn't so amazing when you stop to consider the 36 is replacing one of the most popular Hunters of all time,

the former 36, which was modelled on the 356 that won a Boat of the Year award in America.

However, there are many changes in the new yacht, not least being to the hull shape and its construction. Also, it's comforting knowing that the Hunters are in charter fleets, as there's a requirement there with engineering to meet survey standards. But, if you still doubt the Hunters' seaworthiness, then you can always take a leaf out of American sailor Mike Hawker's book and sail one around the world.



HIGHS

- Lots of yacht for your money
- Very easily sailed
- Plenty of cockpit room and seating to enjoy the spoils with non-sailors, family and friends
- Good finish and flat decks for easy access
- A huge 36 footer below decks
- Massive transverse master cabin back aft
- Galley will appeal to those who like to sail and entertain
- Good support locally and the option of share management

LOWS

- High-volume, beamy hull with fixed blade prop isn't the quickest yacht around the cans
- No freezer as standard
- Needs an inverter so you can use the microwave away from the dock
- The helmsman could do with better footing via angled deck mouldings
- Aft-facing seating at the nav. station isn't so comfortable
- Not so many opening ports down below

A speaker at the Sydney International Boat Show, Hawker was midway through his second circumnavigation on a Hunter 49 having been around the globe before on a Hunter 46.

He buys his yachts, I'm told, but is assisted with the running costs by Hunter, who apparently uses the footloose skipper as a kind of test pilot.

Clockwise from top left: New hull helps boat cut through the chop; Bimini and traveller ride on a steel arch, thus reducing sail controls in the cockpit; Wide beam and deep draft open up the interior.

BUILDING BLOCKS

The new 36 has a new wide GRP grid pan that, with double the (Plexus) bonding area, stiffens the hull. Construction comprises GRP below the waterline with an epoxy layer to prevent osmosis, balsa-cored decks, Kevlar reinforcing in the forward sections, and a strengthened mid section to support the chainplates and rig loads.

The demo boat had the last of the solid lead keels, with future 36s having a cast iron/lead hybrid. We sailed the deep 1.96m draft version. A shoal-draft keel reaching 1.50m is an option. With 2283kg of the yacht's 6318kg displacement being ballast, the deep-draft boat is sufficiently stiff for cruising.

But the big change touted by Hunter is the evolutionary hull for better performance without sacrificing space. Designer Glenn Henderson tweaked the forward sections, adding 15cm to the waterline via a plum bow, which now has scalloped sections behind the entry to reduce pounding in a seaway.

With the new rounded Euro-style portlights and deck design, the Hunter 36 looks more contemporary without losing its lineage. With the bimini it looks like a cruisy yacht.

The 36 comes with just one motor option: the Yanmar 3YM30, a 29hp diesel inboard with shaft drive and three-blade 16in prop that, during out test in strong winds, drove the hull to a continuous speed of about 6kts. The companionway steps lift on a gas strut and, with side hatches, engine access is excellent.

I noted a fire suppression system comes standard, there are all bronze through-hull fittings, separate bilge pumps in respective compartments, and double hose clips on the plumbing lines below the waterline.

The test yacht had an additional 200amp house battery, but there was no inverter so you could use the (small) Tappan microwave away from dock. The yacht's manuals were mighty impressive, however, and great thought had gone into serviceability.

DANCING ON THE DECKS

The deck-stepped alloy Selden stick with double swept-back spreaders and solid rod kicker or vang has twin shrouds but no backstay. This adds to the accommodating nature of the cockpit. In-mast furling is a popular option, though there is no option for an electric halyard winch to make the job of

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setting the main even easier. The Doyle sails were factory supplied.

But the mainsail is raised easily enough and, importantly, without leaving the cockpit with all the halyards leading across the cabin to Spinlock clutches and then two-speed Lewmar 30s on the cabin top. There is also a single-line reefing system. The primary two-speed self-tailing Lewmar 40s are alongside the wheel. The 110 per cent furling genoa — furler from Hood — is sheeted via inboard jib tracks with adjustable cars.

The mainsheet, meanwhile, is controlled by jammers on the inside of the stainless steel arch that carries the bimini above, as well as the traveller itself. Thus, the cockpit remains free of sailing controls, allowing crew more room to move and kickback on the moulded seats that were topped with Flexiteak. Or sit on those box seats on the aft rail.

The portside seat/sail locker is massive, big enough to step inside and stow the rollup tender and outboard, as well as the fenders and perhaps spare sails if you decide against the furling 'wardrobe'. The gas locker takes two 4kg bottles, and there are wet lockers in the transom, which has a handy central ladder and a hot/cold shower — bound to be the best shower — within arm's reach.

With flat decks and a flat cabin top, the Hunter 36 is a breeze to get around even while the yacht is heeled over. This is made doubly so by the sturdy stanchions, double lifelines and moulded toe rails — this isn't a boat on which you will ride on the rail — plus a good grade of non skid and stainless steel handrails on the coachhouse. The mooring cleats are easy to reach, there are double



bowrollers up front, a deep anchor locker and Lewmar windlass to make anchor retrieval a push-button affair. How we like it.

The big binnacle puts everything ahead of the skipper and acts as a mounting spot for the 36in folding leather wheel. Ready to cruise, our 36 called *Hebe Heaven* had a Raymarine C80, ST60 wind gauge, ST 6002 wheel autopilot, and ST 40 depth gauge and separate speedo above the companionway, plus Icom VHF radio, outdoor speakers for the stereo, and the gearshift for the Yanmar, whose control panel was a reach away.

Behind all this are those pushpit seats and, about the cockpit, I counted six drinkholders. Add the foldout table and you can lunch beneath the bimini while others are consigned to sitting down below to find legroom. A good social yacht by any measure.

ACCOMMODATION PLANS

The Hunter 36 now comes in two and three cabin versions, the latter perhaps appealing to the charter market. The aft stateroom

Clockwise from top: The hunter features a revolutionary hull; One of the pushpit seats; Galley is big w/ gas stove and bar-sized fridge; The head has an upgraded electric loo and separate shower stall.

will seduce most prospective owners. With a massive double bed athwartships, you are bound to sleep snugly. The cabin entrance is to starboard and there are lockers, including a hanging number and room to dress.

The V-berth in the second cabin in the bow is 1.95m long, with more storage and a hanging locker, but it's the signature aperture in the bulkhead that reminds you you're on a Hunter. With the cabin door open and the louvred 'window' swung across, you can see right to the bow for an open-plan layout.

The dinette converts into a double bed and there is a long lounge opposite that can be used as a berth. So it is possible to sleep seven on the two-cabin 36, which could be fun in school holidays.



HUNTER 36

PRICE AS TESTED

Approx \$270,000 w/ 29hp Yanmar, two-cabin layout and options

OPTIONS FITTED

Raymarine electronics and VHF radio, extra house battery, deep keel, three-blade prop, electric flush toilet, bimini and Hunter Mariner Package including adjustable mainsheet traveller, windlass, in-mast furling, LPG stove with oven, folding leather wheel, CD stereo and fridge

PRICED FROM

Approx \$245,000 w/ 29hp Yanmar

GENERAL

Material:GRP hull, balsa-cored sides and deck, Kevlar reinforcing
Type:Monohull
Hull length:10.56m
Waterline length:9.45m
Beam:3.66m
Draft: 1.96m (deep-draft lead keel)
Displacement:6318kg (dry)
Ballast:2283kg (deep lead keel)

CAPACITIES

Berths:4 + 3
Fuel:144lt
Water:284lt
Fridge:n/a
Holding tank:114lt

ENGINE

Make/model:Yanmar 3YM30
Type: Three-cylinder diesel inboard engine
Rated HP:29
Drive:Shaft
Prop:Fixed three-blade

SAIL AREA

Furling genoa and main:66.61m²
I:13.66m²
J:4.01m²
P:13.70m²
E:4.57m²

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Clockwise from top: Big binnacle puts everything in front of the skipper; More Hunters are carrying battenless furling main and 110 per cent genoa; Nav. station has a big chart table.



Hunter taps into the mindset of cruising boaters by offering an especially big galley at the foot of the companionway steps, from where you can serve the crew up top, or prepare meals for more formal occasions at the dinette forward.

The Corian serveries with fiddles are just huge, there are twin sinks, a recessed garbage bin, good pot lockers and underfloor storage. But the piece de resistance is the dish-drying locker with light, electric vent and drain... almost as good as a dishwasher and she won't drink your champagne.

Galleying gourmets will embrace the two-burner gimballled gas stove, with oven and grill, and there's a handy fridge a bit bigger than bar-sized. It has a freezer tray and a dedicated freezer is optional. Cruising sailors will want a freezer, I'd think. Also, with no inverter fitted, you could only use the microwave oven while tied to the dock or rafted up with someone who has AC power.

The dinette with U-shaped seating can cater for four with room to seat two more on the lounge opposite. You use the aft-most edge of that lounge as the seat for the nav. station, which has a big chart table. The underseat storage has hinged bases for easier access than hatches with loose boards.

Naturally, with two cabins, the 36 footer boasts a big head, with an upgraded electric loo in the separate shower stall, which has a sliding rose on the wall, and a linen press or hanging locker for the wet-weather gear. The vanity and sink are separate, allowing you to keep your change of clothes dry while showering. The yacht has a 23lt hot-water tank and a useful 284lt freshwater supply.



As ever, headroom is a highpoint in the Hunter, there's cherrywood instead of teak joinery, and nice light vinyl liners and upholstery. Extra portlights and hatches add to the lively ambience, however, there are only four opening ports and three hatches, which isn't as well ventilated as some Euro yachts.

But the arrangement of handholds and fiddles is good, making going forward safe in a seaway and, up top with the boom above the bimini, and down below where there's a surfeit of headroom, you never feel like you're going to hit your noggin. The companionway is a big one, as well, so you can scoot down below without thinking about it.

STORM SAIL

Typically, more Hunters have the battenless furling main and 110 per cent genoa these days. On the 36 you can do this in up to 17kts apparent upwind, with reefing required beyond 19kts, I'm told. We had up to 25kts apparent on our test, so 70 per cent of sail working home in the sprightly southerly.

But even when pressed, the balanced spade rudder felt balanced and the yacht never rounded-up alarmingly. That much I know. It is, as Hunter intended, an easy yacht to sail. In fact, with the autopilot on hand, I performed some quasi coastal cruising along Pittwater, pressing a button to summons Ray' to do the helming, hitting another to have him put us through a tack. All handsfree.

Ah, the modern way of sailing. We maintained about 5.5kts upwind and hit 6 to 7kts downwind with, at times, the headsail goosewinged. The Hunter 36 isn't especially fast, but from the helm to the head it's accommodating. And on the pushpit seat, it offers champagne sailing for the masses.

With the agents owning the charter fleet, you can try before you buy. There is also a new 36 up for syndication, with a 10 per cent share of \$29,500 plus \$4840 annually for management and marina fees. Every which way to get on the big American.

