

# PRACTICAL CENTRE COCKPIT CRUISER

THE CENTRE COCKPIT HUNTER 45CC IS A PRACTICAL BOAT FOR COMFORTABLE LONG DISTANCE FAMILY CRUISING.

*By Barry Tranter*

Centre-cockpit yachts, like Ugh boots or soccer, seem to go in and out of fashion. Perhaps because of that people have strong opinions about centre-cockpits, some of them silly. One yacht tester, I read, got quite hysterical because he thought his kids might fall out of a 38-footer's centre cockpit. Another said that the height of the centre cockpit stopped him from feeling at one with the ocean; for the cruising sailor, after a few months at sea, that could be a blessing.

Neither criticism applies to the US-built Hunter 45CC. The designers have cleverly kept the yacht's profile low and it doesn't look bulky from any angle. But the benefits which the centre cockpit configuration confers on the living quarters below are invaluable for long-term live-aboards. On this 45-footer the stern cabin qualifies as a stateroom, vital for comfort if you live aboard and vital for privacy if you have guests.

The hull is solid laminate below the waterline. The topsides are cored, by a combination of Cormat and Baltek balsa and the deck is reinforced by marine ply. Kevlar is included in the laminate in the bow area to add strength in case of impact. You can have a shoal keel (see specs panel) which is heavier than the deeper one to offset the lost righting moment. The lead fin keel bolts to a deep sump.

You can't discuss any Hunter without talking about the rig. The story has been told many times, about how Warren Luhrs built single-handed racers with the B&R rig (Bergstrom & Ridder) and he adopted the rig for the Hunter range.

There is no backstay; the mast is supported by heavily-raked spreaders and what US Yachts' Matt Hayes calls "reverse diagonals", a cross-hatching of light shrouds which support the centre sections of the light mast section. The single lowers terminate at inboard chainplates; here, too, you find the lower end of the struts which meet and support the mast just above the gooseneck. The loads from this inner chainplate are fed through an internal strut to a moulded hull grid. The cap shrouds terminate at chainplates set in the hull topsides. The smallish mast section, says Hayes, has a low centre of gravity which translates to reduced pitching motion offshore.

With no backstay you can have a small headsail – easy to tack and furl – because you can have a big, heavily-roached main. You can also specify in-mast furling, on a taller mast. "I'm a bit of a Corinthian", says Matt, by which I think he means he likes simple boats, "but now that I've sailed these boats up and down the coast I would have the in-mast furler, especially when you're short-handed.

"If you get caught in a bit of a storm, you just roll away the main and you don't have to go to the mast, complete the stow and zip up the boom bag".

The mainsheet traveller is mounted on the stainless steel arch which spans the cockpit and supports the bimini.

The hull has that huge stateroom aft, a saloon which is a good size compromise, and a good cabin forward, all with plenty of headroom (6ft 9in in the saloon). The dinette in the saloon can be lowered to form a double berth, but Ed Penn from local agents US Yachts reckons the boat was designed to carry two couples long distances in comfort.

This is a roomy boat, and the interior is nicely trimmed in teak. The living aspects have been well thought out. The galley is big but the cook gets physical support from the companionway structure. The waste bucket is very deep and lifts out of the bench; the stove is big (two-burner standard, three-burner on this boat) and there's a split front-opening freezer/fridge and a top-opener freezer (an option) set in the workbench.



The cabins are roomy, each with its own head. The owner's cabin aft has room and appointments to burn, including a settee, small vanity and a chest of drawers.

For a cruising family, the engineering should be as important as the luxuries. Beneath the companionway is room for a generator; the engine is aft of that with access from the walkway. You can reach the important bits from the walkway, or you can climb in. You change the engine oil with the powered pump set behind the engine (invaluable). In the engine bay is an automatic fire extinguisher; when bottle pressure drops you can't start the engine without throwing an override switch.

The through-hull stop-cocks are bronze, and there's a stop-cock on the engine water inlet (not all boats have them). The cocks are grouped together, behind the keel, below the companionway.

The standard toilets are manual Jabsco models; this boat has the optional Quiet flush heads. The toilets use freshwater to eliminate the smell salt can produce. The waste can go to a holding tank for later pump out, or to the macerator then over the side, when offshore.

We were about to call off our sail because there was no wind, when Matt checked his favourite weather website which showed plenty of breeze out on the harbour. The 75hp Yanmar turbo four with a fixed three-blade prop (a feathering prop is optional) pushed us out at 6.5 knots over the ground at 2600 revs. A happy cruise speed is 2900-3200 revs, more than seven knots.

Ed, bless his heart, does all the work; Matt has hurt his foot and my body is making up its mind whether to accept or reject some sort of virus. Ed uses muscle to get the main 70 per cent of the way up, then resorts to



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the electric Lewmar to finish the job. The headsail unrolls manually.

Five minutes later we have 6.7 knots on the wind in 13 knots True. The hull is lively, couldn't be happier. A clear panel in the bimini enables the helmsman to see what the main is up to, but you can see both the masthead and the headsail tufts if you lean out. The main looks good but the leech falls away a bit. We were too comfortable to do anything about it.

Ed reckons one prospective buyer thought the cockpit to be small but it can seat at least six, there are two perch-seats in the pushpit, and a new option is a storage bin/seat which sits on the deck immediately aft of the cockpit and answers that criticism.

This is a modern hull; it accelerates, tacks and tracks well, the steering gearing and weight are fine. The decks are easy to move around when under way; when going forward you walk between the lower and upper shrouds.

Bill Springer, writing for Sailmagazine.com about Hunter's earlier days, says: "The boats were affordable but you got what you paid for." In 1998, Glenn Henderson joined the company and redesigned the entire lineup; nine new models have been introduced since 2001. Below decks, the 20th Century Hunters tended to be dowdy, but the current range are a different breed and yield no ground to the European competition.

Cruiser/racers are always compromised to some degree but the 45CC is a cruiser and the designers have revelled in the simpler design brief. There is little to criticise. The standard boat is \$490,000, but I think the Americans have been sensible in their options list as all cruising sailors don't want aircon or electric toilets.

But there is one standard feature which is special. After you wash the dishes you stack them in a rack in a locker, and then a small fan swooshes air through the compartment to do the drying.

*Details from US Yachts Pty. Ltd. View at Sydney by Sail, Festival Pontoon Darling Harbour, Sydney. Phone (02) 9281 4422. info@usyachts.com.au or www.usyachts.com.au* ○



## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS



13.72 m (45 ft)	LENGTH OVERALL
12.83 m	HULL LENGTH
11.94 m	WATERLINE LENGTH
4.42 m	MAX. BEAM
1.52 m	DRAUGHT (SHOAL)
1.98 m	DRAUGHT (DEEP)
10,404 kg	DISPLACEMENT
3352 kg	BALLAST (SHOAL)
3283 kg	BALLAST (DEEP)
89.37 sq m	SAIL AREA (STANDARD)
82.03 sq m	SAIL AREA (FURLING)
88 sq m	SAIL AREA (FURLING VERT. BATTENS)
75 hp Yanmar, four cylinder turbo diesel	ENGINE
288 litres	FUEL
564 litres	WATER
182 litres	HOLDING TANK
42 litres	WATER HEATER
From \$490,000	PRICE