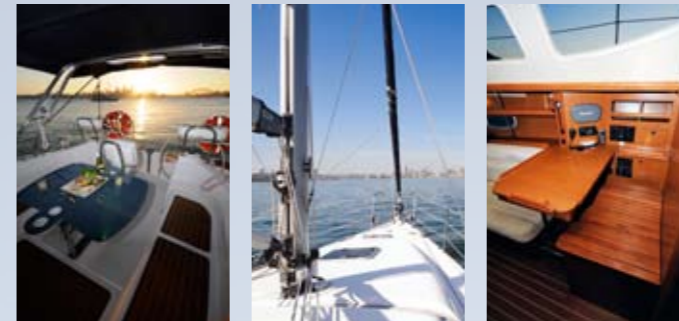




IN THE HUNT



Forget the whirlwind boat test, the token twilight race or the quasi harbour cruise. Our resident sailor, ALLAN WHITING, spent a couple of days and a night aboard the new under Hunter 45 DS to bring his on-board report

Mention "Hunter" in a group of racing sailors and you'll have instant feedback. "Won't go!" is the most common reaction. Sure, match a Hunter 45 against a First 45 and the American boat will certainly come off second best around the cans, but that's not what the Hunter range is designed to do.

It's not that the company couldn't build racing boats — from 1984 until 1995 Hunter craft were prominent in around the world racing — it's just that the Hunter brief is for specifically designed cruising boats, particularly at the top end of the length scale. In this class Hunter can match anyone's design and, when it comes to strength of construction and ease of handling, they're at the forefront.

BUILD TECHNIQUE

Hunter yachts are built with a combination of solid FRP and Baltek and plywood sandwich materials. The hull below the waterline is monolithic FRP and above the waterline it's end-grain balsa sandwich.

Hunter yachts employ unique standing rigging, with what many observers might call old-fashioned external chainplates (more on the rig later). The chainplate area of the hull is reinforced with additional laminations and a belt of reinforcement runs around the hull, from chainplate to chainplate.

The forward, underwater section of the hull, from the keel sump to the stem, is reinforced with a Kevlar layer, to strengthen the hull against an object strike.

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

Deck walking areas are plywood sandwich laminate, and Coremat reinforced FRP is used for vertical surfaces, with aluminium plates inserted at deck hardware attachments.

The deck gelcoat is Maxguard that is said to be more flexible than most finishes and also highly UV-resistant. The interior gelcoat is MicroBan, incorporating an anti-bacterial agent that is used in surface materials in hospitals and food-processing plants. The outer hull skin is Ashland AME-5000 modified epoxy, for maximum osmosis resistance.

The deck-to-hull attachment is trademarked by Hunter's vinyl rubrail with stainless steel insert. Behind the rail are 3M 5200-bonded and bolted hull and deck flanges. The American-bling 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.

Hunter used to have a composite rudder shaft to avoid corrosion, but has now adopted a solid stainless steel bar in concert with an isolation transformer to address the corrosion issue. Using bar, rather than tube, allows a thinner rudder profile.

Hunter utilised Ben Lexcen's winged keel concept in 1988 and today uses winged-bulb keel shapes to concentrate weight as low as possible, without the compromise of draft that's excessive for a cruising boat. The 45 DS can be ordered with shoal draft 1.52m keel or a 1.98m deep-draft keel.

Both keels are high-antimony lead bulbs, cast around stainless steel frames, with integral threaded rods.

The yard's production system is based on modular assembly. The galleys, cupboards, drawer units and settees are assembled in a cabinet shop. In the meantime, the interior FRP grid moulding is fitted with hoses, wiring and tanks, before being loaded into a dummy hull. This dummy has cut-outs that allow access behind the grid during subsequent assembly. Around 75 per cent of the interior fitout is done inside the dummy hull.

The part-finished interior assembly is then lowered into the hull moulding, with the bond between interior grid and hull formed by Plexus adhesive that melts the resin faces of both components. After curing, the join is said to be as strong as the original laminates and up to six times stronger than traditional FRP taped joins.

THE B&R RIG

Lars Bergstrom and Sven Ridder are best known for inventing the Windex masthead wind direction indicator. Their B&R rig was developed in the 1960s for use on shorthanded, around-the-world yachts and was distinguished by the absence of a fixed backstay or running backstays, allowing unlimited mainsail roach and easy gybing. The shrouds and the forestay were disposed at 120-degree intervals, triangulating the mast support. Hunter adopted the B&R rig in 1993.

The B&R rig relies on a wide shroud base for its swept-back-spreader layout, so



Hunter yachts have traditional, hull-exterior chainplates and long spreaders. The wide sheeting base is a plus at all points of sail other than close hauled — no real issue in the case of boats that are designed primarily for cruising. That said, it wouldn't be too difficult to rig up a barber hauler to improve windward performance.

On the Hunter 45 DS, the cap shrouds terminate above the asymmetric spinnaker halyard sheave and lead, conventionally, over the spreader tips to the chainplates.

Conventional diagonals run between the spreaders, but the lowers anchor at inboard chainplates, separate from the shroud chainplates. In addition, four reverse diagonals run upwards from the mast to the spreader tips.

The assembly appears extremely strong and reminiscent of the crossed diagonals seen on the latest America's Cup yachts, but in the case of the Hunter arrangement the crossovers are on either side of the mast, rather than through it.

FIRST LOOKS

Our Hunter 45 DS bobbed gently at the Sydney by Sail pontoon wharf, adjacent to the National Maritime Museum in Darling Harbour. First impressions were excellent: brilliant, smooth gelcoat finish and sparkling polished stainless steel hardware. We stepped aboard easily, via the gunwale gateway, while stern entry via the swim platform and batwing transom doors would have worked

from a lower-set wharf.

The evaluation boat was kitted out with an optional full-length bimini but the forward-raked frame allowed easy entry over a broad coaming, into the huge cockpit. With the skipper's seats behind the twin wheels, a pair of owner's seats aft and cockpit seats, the boat could comfortably seat 10 on deck. The 45 DS is actually rated to carry up to 18 people and it wouldn't be crowded, given the huge deck space for'ard and below.

Finish on deck was excellent, but the fit of the cockpit seat hatches and the halyard bins wasn't perfect and the mouldings had a typically American shape. We know that Flexiteek cockpit seats and FRP cockpit tables are extremely practical and retain their appearance for many years, but they just don't have the luxury caché of real wood. Same goes for the plethora of polished stainless steel grabrails — very seamanlike, but not luxurious in appearance.

HIGHS

- High-quality finish
- Home-like accommodation
- Cockpit-handled sail plan
- Value for money

LOWS

- Squeezy double bed in for'ard cabin
- Rattly door catches

The batwing transom and companionway doors seemed somewhat fussy to me, but my better half loved the effect. Many buyers prefer a sculptured look in contrast to clinical Euro styling, so you pays your money and you makes your choice...

Wide companionway steps led to a huge, airy saloon, with a house-sized L-shaped galley to port and a navigation station to starboard. Two front opening fridges — one could be run as a freezer — flanked a three-burner stove with oven and a deep double sink. A U-shaped dinette with highly polished, twin-pedestal table and opposite settee could comfortably seat 10.

The flat-screen TV/DVD was visible from anywhere in the saloon and also from the cockpit, with brilliant sound above and below deck from the optional Bose amp and speakers. A separate Sony sound system provided different programming on deck when required.

For'ard of the saloon was a cabin with somewhat squeezy double bed, but with ample hanging space and a vanity separate from the head/shower.

Aft of the companionway was the owner's cabin with separate entry door to a large head/shower. A cabin door allowed access to the head from the saloon. The owner's cabin was full beam, which provided ample space for storage space either side of the island queen-sized bed. There was even room for an inbuilt armchair!

The cockpit floor moulding intruded into

Opposite: At the helm are twin wheels and optional Raymarine ST-60 wind instruments. This pic: Settled into a tack, the Hunter 45 DS hummed along at six knots. Right, top down: The Hunter can seat 10 on deck and had the optional full-length bimini covering the huge cockpit; Also optioned was the Mariner Package that included mast furling and a powered rigging winch.



the roofline of this aft cabin, so the initial impression was somewhat claustrophobic, but there was standing room in front of the armchair and the wardrobe. Buyers who want more headroom in the aft cabin can opt for the centre-cockpit 45 CC version, which has a slightly smaller saloon.

The navigation station was arranged aft of the settee, so it doubled as an additional seat in the saloon. The seat was wood-slatted with a shallow U-shape, providing comfortable seating at different angles of heel on either gybe.

Access to the Yanmar engine was through a lift-up companionway panel and through removable side panels. The traditional teak/ash cabin sole was dotted with easy-lift panels that give unfettered access to wiring, plumbing, through-hull fittings and tanks. The electrical system panel was easily reached, behind the settee cushion. Troubleshooting the 45 DS' ancillary systems shouldn't be a problem.

We spent a night on board and the only problem we encountered were rattles from some of the door catches. Hunter uses simple, practical hooks and eyes to hold doors ajar and the eyes could do with some plastic snubbing.

HUNTER UNDERWAY

An optional bowthruster made child's play of manoeuvring the big Hunter out of its tight Darling Harbour berth, but even so the 45 DS shouldn't be difficult to position



Sydneyby**sail**

Sydney by Sail operates from the same office as US Yachts, the local Hunter agents, and naturally runs a fleet of these charter boats. The company offers sailing training, from novice to skipper level; skippered, private yacht charter; sailing harbour tours; catered overnights afloat and ashore; and corporate sailing packages with team-

building content.

We had a taste — literally — of the Sydney by Sail catering, because our test boat was pre-loaded with seafood dinner, wine and breakfast. Brilliant! Sailors who are visiting Sydney without their own boats could do worse than charter a Sydney by Sail vessel and do a little harbour cruising.

Clockwise from main: Hunter has opted for a small headsail making jib handling easy for shorthanded crews; Aft full-beam owner's cabin; With the optional 75hp engine the Hunter 45 cruised quietly at six knots; Huge and airy saloon features U-shaped dinette and settee for 10 opposite; Forward cabin has a squeezey double bed but ample hanging space and separate head/shower.

without it. A broad-bladed prop and large rudder blade combined to give instant grip on the water, for quick response, while a high-set cockpit gives the helmsman good vision of the whole boat.

The optional 75hp engine pushed the big Hunter along at a comfortable six knots with very little noise and vibration, and almost no diesel smell. It'll do more, we're sure, but that speed seemed right.

When it was time to kill the 'iron spinnaker' and go sailing we began to appreciate the clever design of the Hunter 45 DS. The test boat was fitted with the company's Mariner Package that included mast furling and a powered rigging winch.

With the outhaul dropped onto the winch, the 45 DS made sail in seconds as the vertically-battened main emerged from the stick, hauled along the boom track. The vertical battens look odd at first and the leech flutters and pleats, but they make for easy furling and the simplest possible reefing.

The mainsheet traveller was mounted atop Hunter's patented TravelerArch that consisted of paired, heavy-wall stainless steel tubes that form a targa-top over the cockpit and doubled as locators for the various bimini options.

The traveller car operated via lines that led down the arch tubes to camcleats. The mainsheet was worked from the helmsman's position, using the port jib sheet winch, or from the powered halyard winch.

Hunter has opted for a small headsail, with only 110 per cent overlap, making jib handling easy for shorthanded crews and giving a suitable, reefed shape when part-furled. It pulled easily from the furler and was trimmed without much effort.



"THERE WAS EVEN ROOM FOR AN INBUILT ARMCHAIR! (IN THE OWNERS CABIN)"

We didn't anticipate much in the way of windward performance, but the Hunter 45 DS was surprisingly close-winded, albeit with more heel than we expected in a 15 to 18kts nor'easter. However, once settled into a tack, it hummed along at six knots, with just the right amount of weather helm. Puffs sent it upwind, but it didn't roundup wildly, so clawing off a lee shore or twilight racing shouldn't cause the Hunter 45 DS owner any embarrassment.

Satisfied with this experiment, we bore away onto a course more suited to gentlemen who never sail to windward and the Hunter showed its potential. With sheets eased to a broad reach, the 45 DS surged to eight knots in the puffs and seemed reluctant when we turned it away from a Tasman Sea heading.

The swept-back spreaders didn't cause as much restriction to square-running as we expected. Another surprise was the ease of flying the headie wing-a-wing. The sail dimensions and the wide sheeting base saw the

jib self-setting for square running and there was never a time when we looked for a pole to keep it out.

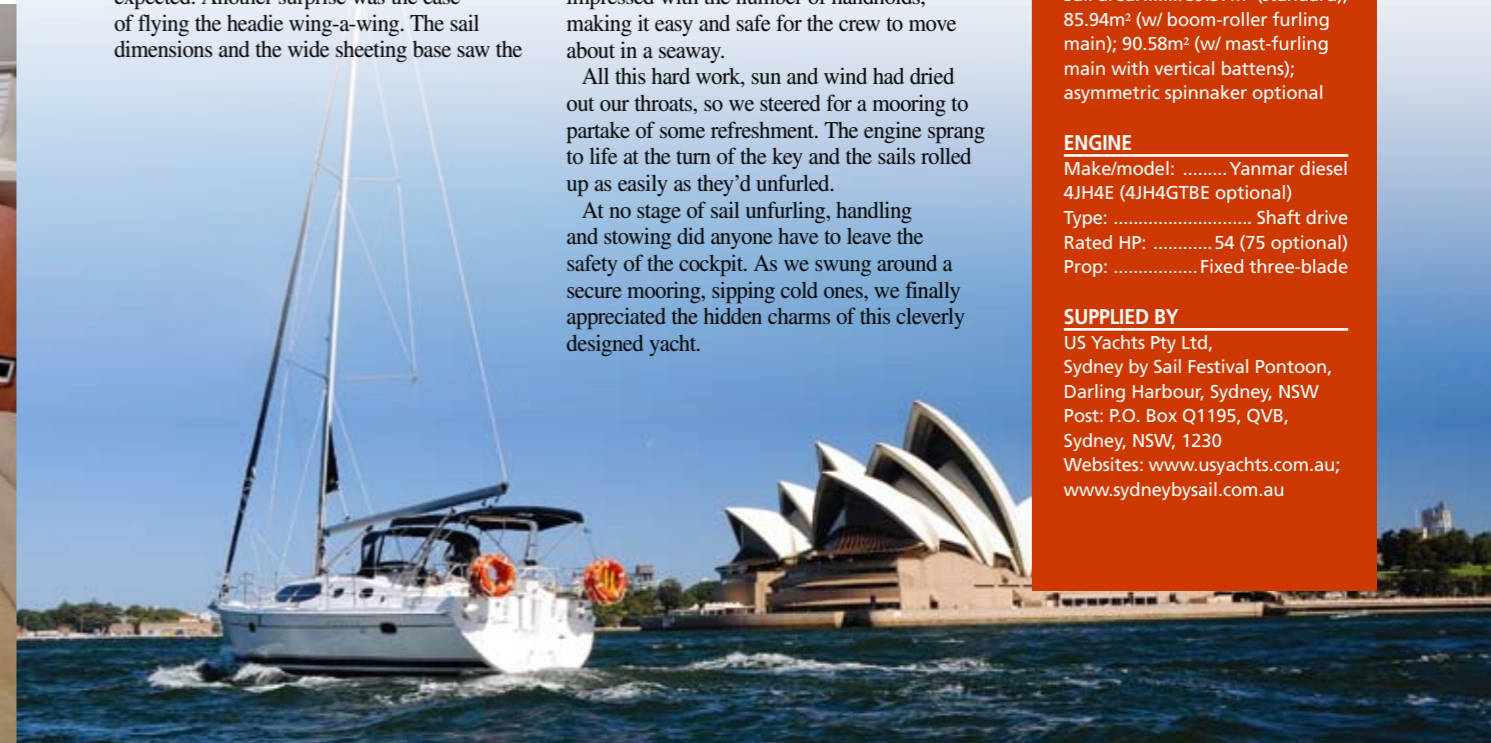
We were nervous about gybing a boat without backstay in 20kts-plus puffs, but Hunter's Matt Hayes assured us it would cause no drama at up to 40kts. (Hayes, an ex-Olympic yachtsman, can often be seen at the wheel of *Ragamuffin*, so he knows the odd thing about sailing in harsh conditions.) Even so, we're sure many shorthanded crews would opt for a granny gybe, so we threw in a couple of those as well. The easy handling rig made any changes of direction a breeze.

With a little practice it's possible to tack and gybe the Hunter 45 DS single-handedly, letting the optional autopilot take care of the steering.

Above and below decks, underway, we were impressed with the number of handholds, making it easy and safe for the crew to move about in a seaway.

All this hard work, sun and wind had dried out our throats, so we steered for a mooring to partake of some refreshment. The engine sprang to life at the turn of the key and the sails rolled up as easily as they'd unfurled.

At no stage of sail unfurling, handling and stowing did anyone have to leave the safety of the cockpit. As we swung around a secure mooring, sipping cold ones, we finally appreciated the hidden charms of this cleverly designed yacht.



Hunter 45 DS

PRICE AS TESTED
\$553,600

OPTIONS FITTED

Mariner Package (electric halyard/mainsheet winch, freezer, in-mast furling, inverter, memory foam mattress in owner's cabin, quiet-flush heads, Raymarine ST-60 wind instruments, bimini, Bose sound system, three-burner stove, flat-panel TV, deep keel, epoxy barrier coat, spray dodger, SUPERdigi TV antenna, engine upgrade, autopilot, and swivelling chartplotter at helm)

PRICED FROM
\$495,000

GENERAL

Material:FRP
monolithic and balsa sandwich hull, and plywood sandwich deck
Type: Monohull
Length overall: 13.66m
Hull length: 12.83m
Waterline length: 11.94m
Beam: 4.42m
Draft: 1.52m (1.98m optional)
Weight: 10,403kg

CAPACITIES

Berths: Two doubles (tri-cabin layout optional)
Fuel: 193lt
Water: 529lt

SAILS

Sail area: 89.37m² (standard); 85.94m² (w/ boom-roller furling main); 90.58m² (w/ mast-furling main with vertical battens); asymmetric spinnaker optional

ENGINE

Make/model: Yanmar diesel 4JH4E (4JH4GTBE optional)
Type: Shaft drive
Rated HP: 54 (75 optional)
Prop: Fixed three-blade

SUPPLIED BY

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