

REVIEWS

New technology, boats, and gear for the cruising sailor

BOAT TEST BY DIETER LOIBNER

A Familiar Form Refined

The Hunter 38 spices up the class of production cruisers under 40 feet with a dash of performance and a helping of comfort

AS WE STEPPED ABOARD THE new Hunter 38 last fall in Annapolis, something seemed different. At first glance, all of Hunter's trademark details were there: the stainless-steel arch that carries the main-

sheet traveler, the comprehensive bimini, the corner seats in the stern rail. Yet the hollow waterlines and fine bow sections indicated that designer Glenn Henderson and his team had refined the Hunter hull form to bring out more pep and agility. Henderson's written brief for the boat describes a "very responsive and maneuverable yacht that would be very forgiving to sail in a breeze and easy to maneuver in close quarters such as docking." He highlighted two performance-related objectives: to minimize the pitching motion and improve boat speed in midrange con-

ditions, and to boost the boat's pointing ability with a low-drag keel and a large rudder that helps generate lift. All these attributes needed to be wrapped into a package that offered exceptional comfort and easy handling and that was suitable for shorthanded sailing and for newcomers who might like to explore Catalina, Martha's Vineyard, or the Bahamas.

Cruising World's Boat of the Year judges immediately picked up on the look and feel during the dockside inspection, which revealed well-conceived ideas and good execution, all focused on the

Deemed the best production cruiser under 40 feet in the 2005 Boat of the Year contest, the Hunter 38 is an exemplary blend of livability and sailing performance.

purpose of the vessel and the target audience. "I'm more impressed with this than with any other Hunter I've seen," said Steve Callahan, a BOTY judge whose career background includes boatbuilding and yacht design.

Hunter builds the hull with balsa-cored sandwich above the waterline and solid glass with Kevlar reinforcements below. It's a cost-effective and proven method that keeps



With stainless-steel tie-rods and posts supporting the rig and deck—and with plenty of portlights and hatches in the overhead—the Hunter's interior is especially light and open.



Lewmar's 36-inch folding wheel is a neat solution to the problem of opening access from the swim platform through the cockpit and into the companionway.

weight down and increases impact resistance where it matters. The deck is bonded to the hull and through-bolted on an outward flange. Hunter protects the hull/deck joint from bumps and bruises with a stainless steel-capped vinyl rubrail. The lead/antimony keel is connected to the structural hull grid with stainless-steel bolts. The test boat had the shallow-draft version, with a bulb that keeps the center of gravity low without creating excessive drag. Augmenting the efficiency of the lateral plane is a large, balanced spade rudder that has a composite stock.

Deck and Cockpit

Hunter continually talks to its customers; based upon those conversations, comfort, low maintenance, and ease of use figure prominently on its boats. Molded-in nonskid surfaces on deck are complemented by low-maintenance Flexiteek surfaces on the cockpit seats. Precut into sheets and precaulked, this material might not meet the aesthetic standards of dyed-in-the-wool traditionalists, but it's easy to replace at the end of its useful life, which, according to Hunter, is expected to be about 15 years.

What registered with the BOTY judges was Hunter's attention to important details, which put the 38 a step ahead of other boats in the same category. "The chocks and cleats were fine, the emergency steering was very functional, deck flow and handholds were good," noted BOTY judge Alvah Simon. "The anchoring drills went very well. The 38 had twin rollers that can both be used, and everything worked properly. There was a cleat behind the fairlead of the port roller and a pin placement on the roller; you can quickly lock down the anchor until everything's set up right. The well was good, and the electric windlass had up/down switches, which you don't expect in this price range."

As with other Hunters, the integrated stainless-steel arch and bimini over the cockpit is a defining trait. While the judges felt that mounting the traveler track on top of this arch removed clutter from the cockpit, they all agreed that the canvas bimini could be improved with more see-through panels to give a better view of the sails.

Aside from this issue, which also surfaced on several other boats, the cockpit was a good workplace, once one got used

to the concept of reaching up for traveler adjustments. "I just love to see things, and not knowing where the traveler is took me a while to get used to," said Simon. Kibitzers sat in the corner seats on the stern rail, watching the skipper work the Lewmar folding wheel and the crew trim the sails at the self-tailing winches. The primaries were mounted well aft, so the cockpit layout satisfied an important requirement for safe shorthanded sailing: easy access to the sheets for the person at the helm so he or she doesn't have to step away from the wheel to execute a tack or an emergency maneuver.

Life Below

Making his way into the saloon, judge Bill Lee noted that the first step of the companionway was deep, well sized, and properly surfaced with nonskid. "A big top step is really nice because people like to stand in the hatch," he said.

Belowdecks, the emphasis on practicality and comfort is evident in the laminated Everwear sole, which is designed to withstand abuse much better than teak and holly, without fuss or varnish. Headroom in the main saloon is a generous 6 feet 6 inches. On the inside of the cabin top, Hunter uses a light headliner that offers easy access to deck hardware and wiring and helps keep the center of gravity low. The living space is divided between the dinette to starboard and a settee to port, ahead of the forward-facing nav station. BOTY judges noted that the saloon table lacked fiddles, but the separate stall shower in the head to port of the companionway drew praise.

Lee, a noted yacht designer in his own right, pointed out that in this size of boat, designers usually have to make a choice: "It's either a forward-facing nav station, in which

case the skipper wins," he quipped, "or it's a separate shower stall, in which case the first mate wins. Here, both of them win."

Both settees in the saloon can be converted into sea berths, at least in theory. The L-shaped galley to starboard pleased judge Tom Prior, who has a background in professional food service: "This is one of the few smaller boats we saw that had two stainless-steel sinks. I think that's real positive." Still, he would have preferred a properly gimballed three-burner stove instead of the two-burner model installed on the test boat. He appreciated the easy access to the bronze through-hulls under the galley floorboards. "They're all in one compartment and have proper labels," he said. "If you hear water sloshing in the bilge, you look here first to see where it could be coming from."

The test boat was equipped with the Mariner package, which features the folding wheel, a more powerful engine, and a Bose entertainment system complete with DVD player and bass subwoofer under the port settee. It can be expanded with a 15-inch flat-screen TV.

The master cabin in the owner's version is aft, dominated by an athwartship double berth, two lounge seats, and private access to the head and shower. Hunter also offers a three-cabin layout with two staterooms aft. Bill Lee was smitten with this part of the boat. "The aft cabin was very well-done for a 38-foot boat," he said. "I liked the passageways on both sides because such an arrangement it really helps the ventilation."

Peeking underneath the floorboards, he noted something else: "The engine has the old-fashioned shaft drive with the old-fashioned stuffing box, which is much easier to repair than a saildrive."

HUNTER 38

LOA	38' 2" (11.63 m.)
LWL	34' 8" (10.57 m.)
Beam	12' 11" (3.94 m.)
Draft (shallow/deep)	5' 0"/6' 6" (1.53/1.98 m.)
Sail Area (100%)	758 sq. ft. (70.19 sq. m.)
Ballast (shallow/deep)	6,552/6,128 lb. (2,978/2,785 kg.)
Displacement (shallow/deep)	17,674/17,250 lb. (8,006/7,814 kg.)
Ballast/D (shallow/deep)	.37/.36
D/L (shallow/deep)	189/185
SA/D (shallow/deep)	17.84/18.13
Water	75 gal. (285 l.)
Fuel	35 gal. (133 l.)
Mast Height (std./furling)	59' 1"/60' 9" (18.00/18.47 m.)
Engine	29-hp. Yanmar (40-hp. option)
Designer	Glenn Henderson/ Hunter Design Team



Hunter Marine Corporation
(386) 462-3077
www.huntermarine.com

Surprising Performance

The positive impression the judges had of the Hunter 38 at the dock was reinforced when the time came to take a spin on Chesapeake Bay. The test boat had three of what Bill Lee calls "performance inhibitors": a 5-foot shallow-draft keel, a fixed three-bladed propeller, and an in-mast mainsail furling system.

Still, under the three-point Bergstrom & Ridder rig, the boat moved at a good clip on all points of sail, even in light air. "Hunter is really consistent with this concept," Steve Callahan said of the mainsail-driven rig featuring swept-aft spreaders and a small blade jib. "It's good for Hunter's envisioned customers, including sailing couples and novices, who benefit from the easy handling of a small headsail." Callahan also praised the feeling at the helm. "The boat performed extremely well under main alone, and it also was incredibly maneuverable." During a chance encounter with a J/80 that sailed along behind us, he noted that we were "doing basically the same speed." Measured speed over ground averaged 4.5 knots under main alone, 5.8 knots

closehailed with a headsail, and close to 7 knots on a beam reach, all in about 10 knots of true wind.

Under engine, the boat kept up its good manners and maneuverability. With the optional 40-horsepower Yanmar, it managed an average speed over ground of roughly 6.5 knots at 2,500 rpm and 7.2 knots at 3,000 rpm.

In the end, the hunch about the Hunter 38 proved to be correct. Hands down, the boat convinced the judges that it was the unanimous choice to win the class of production cruisers under 40 feet. It did it with better-than-expected performance, good design ideas, and follow-through in their execution. And tellingly, value didn't enter the discussion until the final stages.

"It's a hell of a lot of boat for the buck," said Bill Lee. "Hunter is getting better design, better construction, and has price control," Alvah Simon said in summary. "I enjoyed sailing the boat, and I think other people are going to as well."

Dieter Loibner is a *Cruising World* associate editor.