A crowd pleaser

Under new management – does the new Dehler 38 live up to its respected name? Duncan Kent thinks she does

Dehler yachts have always been designed to satisfy a yearning for speed and performance under sail – and the new 38 is definitely no exception.

The German company has had its fair share of financial ups and downs over the past decade, but now, as part of the giant Hanse Yachts group, the brand appears to have steadied itself once again and is back to producing top-class sailing cruisers.

The Dehler 38 first appeared at the 2013 Düsseldorf boat show, where she attracted a swarm of enthusiastic sailors keen to see if the new ownership had produced results. It appears that it has. This brand-new design by renowned naval architects, Judel/Vrolijk, certainly fits the design brief for a comfortable and fast offshore cruising yacht. Despite the J/V team also being the creators of the new, and slightly more sedate Hanse cruising range, the two are by no means clones. Plenty of input and advice from the brand's founder, Karl Dehler, has ensured that this yacht has retained many of the finer points of the well respected brand, such as the lightweight balsa sandwich for her hull and deck, a keel-stepped mast and a mainsheet track across the cockpit – to name but a few.

She now not only sports twin wheels and drop-down transom platform (both almost mandatory nowadays), but also bristles with numerous other smart ideas and pragmatic solutions.

In a Hamble marina filled with beamy new cruising yachts she looks somewhat waif-like, sporting a fine bow and conservative beam (by today's standards). While this gives her an arrow-like overall appearance, it consequently also reduces the amount of interior volume – albeit not by a massive amount.

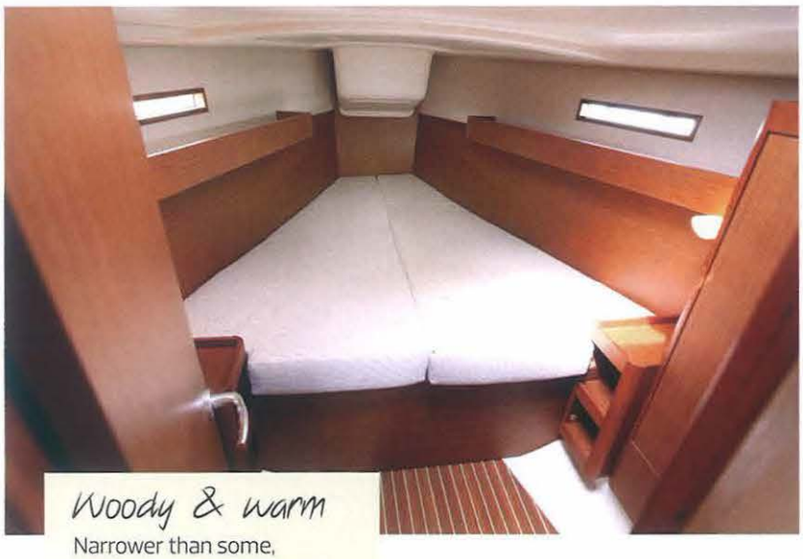
Near vertical ends make the most of her waterline length and give her a powerful demeanour, while her sleek superstructure, flush hatches and gently rising sheerline combine to produce a look that demands a second glance.

Her decks are easy to negotiate and clear of any toe-stubbing obstructions. The cockpit-adjustable genoa tracks are tucked well inboard, giving her

Cockpit
Not as ludicrously wide as some modern cockpits, the Dehler's has everything to hand for the short-handed sailer, but enough space to relax too

ALL PICTURES: JOE McCARTHY

HARKEN
HARKEN
Dehler 38



Woody & warm

Narrower than some, however there's still plenty of room in the forecabin

headsail a nice tight sheeting angle as well as keeping the side decks free from trip or snagging hazards. Her foredeck is spacious and the coachroof melds into it with just the slightest step down, so headsail and ground tackle handling is both safe and easy.

Her cockpit is pragmatically arranged and is likely to appeal to sailors and cruising passengers alike. Most of the sail controls are easily within reach from the helms, while still giving clear access aft to the large transom platform for accessing the water or dinghy.

Two lockers beneath the sole behind the wheels provide some useful stowage for deck gear and a liferaft. If you choose the twin aft cabins, then you have to settle for two shallow cockpit seat lockers, but in the single cabin model the portside locker is full depth.

She has a 9/10ths fractional rig with a keel-stepped, tapered alloy (carbon option) mast incorporating a fair bit of pre-bend and twin swept spreaders. The mast is supported by discontinuous cap, lower and intermediate shrouds and a bifurcated, fibre backstay with powerful 48:1 mechanical tensioner. A gas-sprung vang supports the boom without a topping lift.

The standard suite of Elvstrøm cruising sails includes a fully battened mainsail with Dehler's own Maindrop sailboat/lazy jack system and a 105 per cent tri-radial genoa on an above-deck Furlex 200 furler.

For speed freaks, options include carbon spars and performance laminate sails, including a large gennaker and/or spinnaker.

Quality accommodation

As I descended the companionway steps I was expecting a rather stark, 'stripped out' interior that many of the more performance-orientated yachts often have. I was pleasantly surprised. One of the Hanse yard's finer points is its quality and choice of interior design options and this has clearly been transferred across to its sister range.

Rather than the acres of white, hose-down plastic I'd been expecting, there were nice, traditional wooden bulkheads and lockers, teak and holly sole boards, and pleasant off-white upholstery with all the trimmings.

Two models are available – with one or two aft cabins. Ours was the former, but basically all it meant was that the second cabin to port had no upholstery and you had to walk through the heads to reach it! This made the loo/shower area fairly compact with the door shut. Apparently the plan for future boats is to make a proper, deep cockpit locker with a good size wet locker in the two-cabin model, but the owners of our test boat seemed perfectly happy with this compromise, using the bare cabin and bunk base for general stowage, while retaining the option to make up a further double berth if required.

Fridges galore 1

Her galley is surprisingly well equipped and includes two fridges, one front loading for drinks and snacks, the other top-loader has lift-out baskets for easy access

Luxurious layout

For a fast boat that is likely to be regularly raced, she has a surprisingly comfortable interior, ideal for longer cruises

Well finished

Left: Her heads compartment is a little odd in this boat, but could be much better in the standard two-cabin model

Right: The chart table is compact and slides across to improve seating around the saloon table

"She simply dug her heels in during the gusts and powered ahead regardless"

The chart table is just large enough to hold a cruising folio and slides aft to increase seating space. I'm not sure I favour having to leave locker door lids open to read the instruments or operate the VHF, but it does tidy things away neatly when in port and keeps young fingers away from the switch panel!

Other than that it's a very pleasant environment to be at sea in as the interior exudes a warm and 'woody' feel, which is further enhanced by cleverly-concealed LED lighting.

While she's not as beamy as some, apparent in the slightly smaller berth dimensions both forward and aft, who needs acres of space to be thrown around in under way? Headroom, at over 6ft (1.8m), is perfectly reasonable throughout. The berths are comfortably dimensioned, without excessive 'roll about' space, and the galley is well equipped with plenty of stowage for food and crockery, as well as both top- and front-loading fridges.

Ventilation is also surprisingly good all round, with every portlight opening and a large hatch above the saloon table bringing in light and air.

Getting under way

We were keen to get on the water to see if she would perform as well as her looks suggested. We hoisted full main and genoa in around 15 knots of wind and were very quickly beam-reaching down Southampton Water 8.2 knots. She felt beautifully balanced with no more than fingertips required on the helm. Once we were into the more open waters of the Solent we flipped her through a couple of effortless tacks, losing very little momentum through the manoeuvres. Tacking angle was an impressive 74° and, close-hauled, she pointed up to 28° off the apparent wind when pushed. Even then she was still flying along at 5.8 knots!

During the occasional strong gusts as the sea breeze filled, she simply dug her heels in and translated the extra wind into sheer forward power. Despite my slowness at de-powering the German mainsheet, not once did she hint at rounding up or straying off course to any degree. Letting the traveller down the track a little

Balanced 1

She's a powerful performer to windward, pointing up to 28° off the apparent wind

Nice lines 2

Not only does she have a sprightly performance under sail, but she looks pretty good on the water too!

allowed us to de-power her while retaining optimum mainsail trim more effectively.

Off the wind, she cried out for the extra sail area we didn't have on board as, having only been commissioned the previous day, our test boat had just the standard wardrobe. With her large main sheltering the conservative genoa our downwind speed was far less than it could have been, but nevertheless we still managed a healthy 5.8 knots in 12 knots of true wind.

For video of this test, scan the QR code with a smartphone or see www.sailingtoday.co.uk

Top speed of the day was 8.4 knots at between 70° and 80° off the apparent wind but, so well is she set up that you don't really notice how quickly she's moving until you suddenly find yourself right beside what was a distant mark a few minutes earlier!

To sum up her performance – she's an absolute delight to sail. Well balanced, sprightly through tacks, light on the helm, tracks as if she's on rails and generally feels like a fully-spec'd racing machine – but without the twitchiness of a thoroughbred racer.

Under engine she's a cinch to manoeuvre, spinning in her own length and cruising along at a quiet and effortless 6 knots at an economical 2,000rpm in calm waters. Pushed to 2,500rpm nudged the log to just over 7 knots, and flat-out she made 8.2 knots at 2,800rpm – while remaining surprisingly quiet and vibration-free.

Foldaway cleats

On a yacht that is likely to be raced competitively as well as cruised it's good to reduce the number of possible decks snags

Deck stowage

Stowage for deck items and sails is remarkably good for a modern performance yacht and there's a dedicated liferaft locker as well

DUNCAN'S VERDICT

As one might have expected knowing that Karl Dehler himself had a hand in the design of this new 38, her sailing credentials are unquestionable. What is surprising – and clearly this is where Hanse's influence has dominated – is the quality of fit-out in the accommodation.

This is a sailor's yacht, which, with the addition of a few more performance options, can be raced competitively if desired. However, she will perform equally well as a comfortable and safe offshore cruiser for less ambitious family holidays.

The basic price is very competitive, given how much good quality gear comes with her in the standard package, but if you get carried away and add too many of the highly desirable options you will soon see the end price escalate to a rather more disconcerting level!

SAILING ABILITY: ★★★★☆
COMFORT: ★★★☆☆
BLUEWATER: ★★★☆☆

SPECIFICATION

PRICE: FROM £155,148 (BASIC SAIL-AWAY)

LOA: 37ft 1in (11.3m)
LWL: 34ft 1in (10.4m)
Beam: 12ft 4in (3.8m)
Draught: 6ft 7in (2m)
Displacement: 7,100kg (15,620lb)
Ballast: 2,250kg (4,950lb)
Sail Area: 852sqft (79.3m²)
Fuel: 160lt (35gal)
Water: 300lt (66gal)
Berths: 4/6
Engine: 28hp Volvo D1-30 diesel
Transmission: Saildrive/2-blade folding prop
Designer: Judel / Vrolijk
Builder: Hanse Yachts/Dehler www.dehler.com
UK agent: Inspiration Marine Group, 023 8045 7008, www.inspirationmarine.co.uk

PERFORMANCE

AVS: 135°
Sail area/Displ ratio: 21.8
Displ/LWL ratio: 176

For a fuller explanation of stability and performance figures see ***www.sailingtoday.co.uk***

IF THE DEHLER 38'S NOT RIGHT FOR YOU...

X-YACHTS XP38

FROM c£245,000

One of a new generation of performance X-Yachts sporting vacuum-infused, epoxy foam sandwich hulls and substantial load-bearing carbon-fibre hull/keel girders. Her composite interior is bright and airy, with surprisingly comfortable accommodation.

X-Yachts GB, www.x-yachtsgb.com +44 (0)23 8045 3377

JEANNEAU SUN FAST 3600

FROM £130,750

Jeanneau's latest performance yacht should prove a hit with fans of the Sun Fast range. Her vacuum-infused hull has a hard chine at her quarters, twin wheels and rudders, a deep lead keel and a generous 69.8m² sail area. Below is a comfortable and practical cruising layout with three spacious cabins.

www.jeanneau.com for nearest UK dealer

ELAN 400

FROM £169,000

The new Humphreys-designed Elan 400 sports contemporary twin rudders and hard chines to ensure improved stiffness and more precise tracking. She's built using the latest vacuum infusion techniques to ensure hull strength and integrity whilst keeping her weight down.

SD Marine. +44 (0)23 8045 7278 www.sdmarine.co.uk