

# DEHLER 34 RS



PHOTOS: RUPERT HOLMES

The market place for new 34ft cruiser-racers is becoming increasingly crowded. **Rupert Holmes** puts the latest race-optimised model from Dehler through her paces.

**D**ehler's new Simonis and Voogd-designed Dehler 34 reflects a strategic decision by the company to increase the performance of its boats across the entire range. This boat replaces the previous 34 model, which was an in-house design dating from 2001.

Simonis and Voogd are well-known names in the southern hemisphere, especially for one-off designs, including the maxis 'Nicorette' and

'Nicorette II'. They have been commissioned to produce an entirely new range for the German manufacturer, with the aim of blending their design flair with Dehler's reputation for build quality. The 34 is the second boat in the new line up, a 44 having been launched last year to much acclaim, including winning European Yacht of the Year, an award for which the 34 has been nominated.

The 34 is offered in two versions in the UK - an

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**Right** The 34RS proved light and responsive, with just a touch of weather helm when close-hauled in lighter airs.



RS 'racing spec' model and a CR cruiser-racer variant. Both versions are the same price and have identical interiors. 'We identified a gap in the market for IRC boats racing on windward-leeward courses with conventional spinnakers – that's where we're pitching the 34RS,' says UK Dehler distributor Russell Hodgson 'The boat is affordable to a wide market and there's renewed demand for smaller boats in IRC.'

The design brief included creating a boat that would work in a wide range of wind conditions, from light airs up to 30 knots and more, with an IRC-friendly 9/10s rig, large mainsail, and non-overlapping headsail. Two boats (hulls 1 and 3) have been entered in Class 2 of the Garmin Hamble Winter Series. At the time of writing one of these, 'Righteous', was third in class with seven races sailed, following a very consistent run of respectable results. Hodgson expects a further three boats afloat in time to compete in the 2008 Raymarine Warsash Spring Series, offering the prospect of a small level-rating group within the larger IRC class.

Although no attempt has been made to create a strict one-design, with all boats expected to weigh within one per cent of each other, there are plans for level-rating racing (the two boats currently in the UK both rate 1.029), including a class championship in 2009.

## Design and build

Dehler UK and Harken have put a considerable amount of effort and attention to detail into the

deck layout of RS specification boats to optimise it for fully crewed racing. The prime aim of this was to eliminate the need for racing owners to upgrade the boat, and in doing so have created a boat that is genuinely ready to race straight out of the box.

Changes to the standard specification include kicker and pole downhauls that are adjustable from the rail on both sides of the boat; towable genoa cars with an 8:1 purchase; an up-rated mainsheet – with a powerful fine tune and backstay – run to the mainsheet trimmer on both sides of the cockpit; and a 30mm spinnaker pole track on a ball-bearing car. The RS spec boats are supplied from the factory without any rope – a full race pack is added in the UK, including jackets over the 8mm spinnaker halyards to prevent slip at the clutches.

Also included in the RS price are a forestay chainplate positioned as far forward on the bow as possible (increasing the J measurement by 23 cm) and rod rigging. The cruising specification boat has a below-deck furler (hence the forestay being further aft) which may be a preferable option for racing owners who plan to sail longer distances in exposed areas – on the west coast for instance. However, with non-overlapping headsails it's not difficult to make a sail change even when short-handed.

CR models have a different backstay – the latter has a 16:1 cascade, which enables a pair of optional removable storage boxes to be mounted on the transom. The price of the CR model includes cruising sails and a basic electronics package.

Both models are otherwise identical, with a low centre of gravity iron/lead composite keel that has 60 per cent of its weight in the flared lead bulge at its base, and a relatively deep 1.95m draught. Significantly, the Dehler 34's rudder is only around 20cm shorter than the keel, which should give good control in lively conditions.

Hull and deck laminates are of conventional hand-laid wet lay-ups, with balsa core used throughout, except around deck fittings, hull skin fittings, and keel and rudder post mountings, where solid glass is used. A glassed-in internal structural grid distributes the loads from

**Below** The CR and RS versions have the same interior with two cabins and one heads.

**Below right** The galley is a good size but lacks a little worktop space, while the saloon is comfortable for cruising or deliveries.



keelbolts, shroud plates and the maststep, while a further non-structural inner moulding takes the interior furniture.

The hull-deck joint is fully glassed over inside to create a waterproof effective monocoque structure. Aluminium plates, with threads tapped to take bolts, are bonded in for all deck fittings.

## Deck layout

The 34's cockpit sports a big (140cm) wheel, which helps to provide an excellent helming position – there's plenty of space to move around behind it, even with a tactician there, and a good view of the headsail luff when sitting to windward with feet securely braced on the pedestal. The CR version has optional removable transom storage boxes, but as there's already a huge cockpit locker, further stowage space aft under the cockpit and under-cockpit liferaft stowage near the companionway, anyone who's even vaguely serious about racing won't need or want the extra weight aft.

Teak bonded onto the cockpit seats and floor looks attractive and provides a good non-slip footing, without incurring the weight penalty or maintenance of a full teak deck. The deck surfaces elsewhere have a very effective moulded-in non-slip pattern, side decks are relatively wide, and by cruiser-racer standards the foredeck is reasonably good. However, there's no disguising the large coachroof, but all hatches are flush-mounted, which gives a smooth profile.

A moulded toerail runs the entire length of the boat. It's contoured to allow comfortable hiking, and does provide additional security for those working aft of the mast. The six folding mooring cleats are another sign of the design's dual-purpose roles, but Dehler is happy to omit the midships cleats (which would make hiking more comfortable), or even to replace the fore and aft items with padeyes.

Deck gear is all top quality and, as mentioned earlier, a considerable amount of thought has gone into it. Our test boat had just three small optional extras – a cunningham, jib sheet inhaulers and a carbon (rather than aluminium) pole.

## Under sail

Our test boat was equipped with North 3DL sails, with the main running on luff slides. The standard Selden boom has two single-line slab reefs, plus a conventional pennant for the third reef. The sails set predictably well and the rig proved to be tweaky and responsive.

Our test took place in a wind varying from 7-14 knots true, sailing with five crew and the Code 2 headsail. The 34RS proved to be light and responsive on the helm at all times, with just a touch of weather helm when close-hauled in the lighter airs, building to a maximum of less than a quarter of a turn in the stronger puffs. The powerful backstay requires lots of rope to be pulled through, but it makes a big difference, with speed building noticeably as it's hardened on.

At the lower end of the wind range we made around six knots close-hauled, a figure that climbed to a maximum of 7.2 as the wind increased. In the flat water of the Solent there was not enough wind to get us surfing under spinnaker, but we managed a very unruffled 8.1



knots. Even when reaching with a big spinnaker control always remained positive in the gusts, with the boat responding immediately to the helm.

Overall, the 34 feels like a boat with legs and predictable, well mannered handling that would be a good choice for offshore work.

## Interior

The fully fitted interior of both models are identical, with a two cabin plus saloon layout that will make for comfortable cruising, offshore racing and deliveries. The general impression is of the accommodation having plenty of light and ventilation – the large coachroof window is a huge opening port, which will be ideal for hot climates, although perhaps raises some concerns about weather-tight integrity in extreme conditions.

The galley is of a good size and well appointed, with twin sinks, large fridge, cooker with two burners and oven, and ample stowage. The main criticism is the lack of any fixed worktop space – the top of the fridge doubles as the only useable space for this purpose and, although the raised fiddles in the galley are well placed in other respects, on port tack there's nothing to prevent items placed here falling into the sinks.

The aft cabin is aft of the galley, it's also of a good size, with plenty of clearance above the large double berth. However, the only natural light and ventilation in this area is via a small opening port to the cockpit well, making it feel somewhat claustrophobic when the door to the saloon is closed. A well-appointed heads compartment is opposite the quarter cabin. Immediately forward of this there's a proper large forward-facing chart table with its own seat and ample space for mounting instruments.

The saloon has a single settee to starboard, and a large 'U'-shaped one to port, with a pull-out to create a third double berth in this area. There's a folding table arranged around the keel-stepped mast, but it can't easily be removed for packing sails. There's good provision for stowage under the berths (apart from the port settee, which houses the water tank).

**Above and left** The RS specification 34 includes split vang and pole controls, genoa cars that are adjustable from the rail, a beefed-up mainsheet system and covered halyards.

**Above top** There is under-cockpit liferaft stowage near the companionway.

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The forecabin is a reasonable size, and includes a standing/changing area at the head of the berth. This cabin has a lighter and airier feel than the aft cabin, and so is likely to be first choice of most owners.

## Overall

The Dehler 34RS is a boat that stands out in an increasingly crowded market for cruiser-racers of this size. It's a well mannered design and the attention to detail that has gone into improving the deck layout is commendable. ■

**Above The 34's cockpit sports a big (140cm) wheel, with an excellent helming position – there's plenty of space to move around or for a tactician behind it, and the helmsman gets a good view of the headsail luff when sitting to windward with feet braced on the pedestal.**

## ANSWER BACK

from Russell Hodgson

First of all, many thanks for trialing our new Dehler 34. The boat which was being tested was the first production boat off the line and was first seen at Southampton Boat Show.

Our idea for the RS was to supply a proper cruiser-racer that is ready to sail – without the owner having a huge extra expense afterwards to get it to a race standard – and equally to have the comfort to cruise with the family.

The test rightly noticed some small points in the galley area. Since the test took place Dehler has made the decision to fit a divide between fridge and sink top, teak lids for the sinks and removable work surface over the cooker, all as standard. The comments regarding the light in the aft cabin can also be addressed as there is an option for a second opening porthole in the aft cabin.

Since the boat was tested we have had the boat IRC-endorsed and the rating has come out 1.027.

Many thanks, Dehler UK

## Dehler 34RS specifications

DESIGN:	Simonis and Voogd	
LWL:	10.51m	
LOA:	9.38m	
BEAM:	3.49m	
DRAUGHT:	1.95m	
DISPLACEMENT:	5,110kg	
BALLAST:	1,850kg	
SAIL AREA:	MAIN	42sq m
	GENOA	33sq m
	SPINNAKER	100sq m
<b>PRICE:</b> (inc racing package)	<b>£99,750</b>	

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## COMPARISONS... Where does the DEHLER 34RS fit in? Here are some alternatives...



■ **X-34**  
Another brand new and likeable 34ft and likeable 34ft cruiser-racer, benefiting from the long experience of the X-Yachts team.

LOA:	10.36m
BEAM:	3.4m
DRAUGHT:	1.9m
DISPLACEMENT:	5,300kg
BALLAST:	2,200kg
SAIL AREA:	
	Upwind 67.9sq m
	Spinnaker 92.5sq m
GUIDE PRICE:	£109,600*



■ **Elan 340**  
A longer waterline and more interior volume than its predecessor the 333, as well as faster performance, especially in light airs.

LOA:	9.99m
BEAM:	3.48m
DRAUGHT:	2.1m
DISPLACEMENT:	5,000kg
BALLAST:	1,490kg
SAIL AREA:	
	Upwind 71.6sq m
	Spinnaker 89.1sq m
GUIDE PRICE:	£78,100*



■ **J/109**  
A somewhat different design in that it's optimised for reaching, with a big asymmetric kite. Deservedly popular.

LOA:	10.75m
BEAM:	3.51m
DRAUGHT:	2.1m
DISPLACEMENT:	4,944kg
BALLAST:	1,769kg
SAIL AREA:	
	Upwind 71.67sq m
	Spinnaker 108sq m
GUIDE PRICE:	£155,000*