

The new Dehler 38: voted the 2013 'Yacht of the Year' in France. Price from £154,800



Dehler today

With 50 years of boatbuilding under its belt, the Dehler marque is alive and kicking. Peter K Poland reflects on the hard times and the good in this second part of the Dehler story

From the day he founded his company in the 1960s, Willi Dehler's fertile mind and engineering skills always ensured that his boats stayed near to the front of the fast cruiser fleet.

And when his son Karl brought his production management and engineering qualifications to the party in 1986, design and development moved up another gear.

Having carried off the World ¾ Ton Championships in a Dehler db2 in 1984, Karl's sights were set firmly on performance. He recalls that when working as a partner with his father, it was he who 'pushed for the development of good performance under sail, building light and strong and using effective keels and sail plans'.

Completing this partnership, designer Cees van Tongeren (of van de Stadt) was only too happy to continue pursuing the performance goal. Along with Willi and Karl, he introduced many new elements to

the sport of sailing fast. In particular, he wanted to simplify things, making it possible for just a couple of people – typically a husband and wife team – to get the best out of their Dehler's performance potential without busting a gut or scaring themselves silly. Cees and the team wanted this to be achievable without having to fill the weather rail with biped ballast.

After much thought and planning, the first model to be aimed at this market was the **Dehler 36 CWS**, which stood for Central Winch System. 'I was no longer on board with my parents,' Karl says. 'They



Dehler 36 CWS: from around £37,300 second-hand

David Harding

needed to hoist the sails by themselves!'

Running through an array of sheaves and stoppers, numerous control lines (halyards, reefs etc) are led to a powerful electric winch mounted centrally on a bridge deck located immediately in front of the wheel at the rear of the cockpit. This means that once they remember which line does which job, the helmsman or crew can handle a multitude of tasks without moving forward. Then, to further simplify sail handling, a single jib sheet controls a self-tacking headsail, so the boat can be short-tacked up a narrow channel without

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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ABOVE The Central Winch System, as introduced on the Dehler 36 CWS

LEFT Willi Dehler's son Karl joined the company in 1986

the crew or helmsman touching a single string. Obviously this requires a fractional set-up with large main and small headsail, but van Tongeren and Dehler preferred to rig their boats that way, with or without a self-tacker.

To maximise stability under sail, van Tongeren developed his ‘upside down’ keel design. Put simply, this means that the base of the keel is longer than the root and the section fattens as it gets deeper, these two factors working together to throw the centre of gravity really low. Combined with a ballast ratio of around 40%, this makes for a stiff yacht, while the relatively long base adds to directional stability. All in all the 36 CWS set new standards for fast and easy cruising. And – with the addition of a spinnaker – it still acquits itself well on a club racecourse.

One of my Hunter clients, who had graduated from a Medina 20 to a Dehler 31, moved on to a 36 CWS and loved it. His children had flown the nest so were now only occasionally available as crew but, thanks to the CWS gizmos, he and his wife were able to set sail by themselves whenever they wanted. The 36 CWS also broke new ground with its then unorthodox accommodation layout. Thanks to a beam of 3.5m and LWL of 9m, there’s plenty of space, and it is skilfully used.

A long linear galley with acres of work surface and loads of lockers runs down the port side of the saloon, opposite a spacious U-shaped settee and dining table area to starboard. The navigator has plenty of room to work thanks to Dehler’s trademark pivoting chair and outboard-facing chart table, and despite its relatively low freeboard the 36 CWS fits in an aft double cabin and WC compartment.

As a final concession to modernity, an optional ‘Nova’ décor (first introduced on the Dehler

34 and 31 models) was offered. Instead of a traditional, relatively dark finish, the ‘Nova’ option features white bulkheads and trim down below, turning the cabin into a light and airy place. It caused quite a stir at the time. Only recently have other European builders started offering lighter finishes as an alternative to sombre teak or mahogany.

Around 800 Dehler 36 CWS boats were built, and Cees van Tongeren names it among his favourite designs. That doesn’t surprise me: few fast cruising yachts have rivalled its mix of pretty lines, sparkling performance and innovative interior.

Space-age speedster

If the 36 CWS raised eyebrows, its even sportier sister – the **DB 36** – was really way out. Based on the same hull lines, the DB 36 boasts a deeper and finer fin keel with a heavy wing-cum-bulb at its base, a considerably bigger racing rig (with running backstays) and a lighter, space-age interior.

Designed to carry a large racing crew, the DB 36 has two double cabins aft, a double-berth forepeak and superb saloon settee berths with flip-over backrests that



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Dehler 37 CWS: from £42,250 second-hand

swing inboard to provide upholstered lee-bolsters (as opposed to lee-cloths). A huge central WC compartment, linear galley and full-size chart table complete the picture. The eye-grabbing red, white and grey interior décor is functional and somehow wholly appropriate.

I contacted old friend and serial Hunter owner Mike Webster, who graduated to a DB 36, and asked what he made of the boat. His first reaction was: ‘Oh dear, you shouldn’t have asked me. I have had to open up my photos and remind myself of the one boat that I should never have sold!’

Mike raced her successfully with a full crew and cruised with his wife and daughters. He says: ‘The mainsail was a bit large to play around with for short-handed

The boat can be short-tacked up a narrow channel without touching a single string

sailing. However, with an extra pair of hands everything was possible.

‘She was solid, not in the slightest skittish... the large bulb (or rather, wedge) on the keel made her so stable, and the rudder was like a barn door... but it did need some grunt when sailing downwind in a Force 6 to 7 with the kite up to maintain a dead-straight course and keep my heart out of my mouth!’

Quality build

The **Dehler 37 CWS** (not to be confused with the earlier Dehler 37/372) was another cracker; elegant, spacious and easy to sail. For a first-hand and very experienced opinion I contacted former Commodore of the Royal Southern Yacht Club, Barry Peddley. He told me: ‘Ann and I purchased our Dehler 37 in 1997. She was originally commissioned in 1994 and fitted out to a high standard for a boat of this type at that time. The galley is linear, which we have found workable when there are two of us aboard, but on balance we prefer the conventional layout of our previous boats, especially when there are more people on



van de Stadt

Dehler DB 36: from £46,500 second-hand

board. It does however allow for a sizeable saloon for a boat of this size.’

Barry adds: ‘My previous boats included a Contessa 32, two Moodys (a 33 and a 376) and two Sigma 41s. Build quality and engineering are good – possibly better than the British alternatives we have owned. The quality of the moulding and finish both

internally and externally are good, and almost 19 years on the gel coat finish remains fine. Apart

from routine maintenance there have only been two items of major expenditure, namely the failure of the holding tank through corrosion and the delamination of the rudder, possibly triggered by impact damage to the leading edge’.

His 37 is not the first Dehler with a rudder blade problem, so get a survey when buying. Power comes from a Yanmar 3GM30F engine with shaft drive and two-bladed folding propeller.

‘The engine has been serviced regularly,’ Barry says. ‘It has now done 1,300 hours and has never faltered. It drives the boat comfortably at 6-7 knots. However, the engine compartment is rather inaccessible and necessitates the removal of the sound and insulation box.’

‘We were more competitive in our previous boats but have raced in club events, more recently white sail, the Round the Island Race etc.’

‘We have frequently raced double-handed which is quite manageable, though the primary electric winches are placed far aft, requiring the crew to face the wrong way when tacking. We have cruised comfortably



with 3-4 on board to France, Brittany and the Channel Islands.

'Set up properly she is responsive – whether cruising or racing – and easy on the helm unless over-canvassed. Single line reefing is easily operated and controlled by the two primary winches.'

Barry concludes: 'We have never owned a boat for as long as we have owned *Illywhacker*, and as we grow older we find we can still comfortably sail her together in all reasonable conditions.'

Bigger boats

The **Dehler 39 CWS** (not to be confused with the later Judel/Vrolijk-designed 39) followed close on the heels of the 37. This is another elegant Cees van Tongeren design and offers more of the same with a linear galley and two double-berth aft cabins.

Then came an even bigger CWS fast cruiser, indeed the largest yacht Cees van Tongeren was ever to design for Dehler. The **Dehler 43 CWS** is a handsome yacht, winning the coveted 'Yacht of the Year' award. Its sleek lines are pure van Tongeren, while its gracious overhangs and moderate freeboard and coachroof height make many modern, bulky and plumb-stemmed yachts look positively plain by comparison. Other clever features included an arch on the coachroof to accommodate the mainsail track and support the sprayhood (an idea only recently finding its way onto mainline cruisers like Bénéteau's) and CG-lowering wings on the base of the 'upside down' keel. There was also one other unique feature: a bath in the forepeak!

The party's over

In 1994, however, Dehler's finances started to wobble. Perhaps Willi Dehler's pursuit of performance and reluctance to develop a middle-of-the-road range of cruisers (as Bénéteau and Jeanneau had done with

their charter- and family-cruising-friendly Océanis and Sun Odyssey models) had reduced the size of his market? Perhaps the tight tolerances, precise build methods and expensive gear and materials required to maintain this high performance added to costs, thus reducing profit margins? Perhaps the growth of Bavaria had given German buyers a homegrown cruising alternative? Whatever the reasons, Dehler's bank waded in, took control, and Willi Dehler departed. It was a sad end to a glittering career that had revolutionised production boat building.

Meanwhile, the 1995 **Dehler 35 CWS** showed a few subtle design developments. The coachroof is longer in proportion to the hull and has a more defined wedge shape. And the keel – while still being 'upside down' – has a slightly narrower foil and more exaggerated, elongated base. This – combined with a 40% ballast ratio and

'We gave the boats a more "Scandinavian-looking" touch in the accommodation'

draught of 1.9m – continued Cees van Tongeren's pursuit of stability, while a DLR of 190 and sail area/displacement ratio of 22 ensure plenty of performance. The Dehler family boat *Sporthotel 2* won Kiel Week, so it was still very much a 'Willi Dehler Dehler'.

A time for change

But then everything started to change. A new firm of designers appeared on the Dehler scene. Cees van Tongeren of van de Stadt explains: 'The parents of Torsten Conradi (the third partner in Judel/Vrolijk) owned a hotel on Helgoland, where the Dehler family stayed every year during Nordseewoche. The young Karl Dehler and Torsten Conradi became close friends, and Torsten was part of the crew when Karl won the 3/4 Ton Cup in Kiel in 1984 with the db2 Positron. The Dehler 18 [still built as the Varianta 18] was the first Conradi

design, made for a design contest in *Die Yacht* in 1992.'

When asked why he thought Dehler went to Judel/Vrolijk for new designs, Conradi replies that the company 'wanted a somewhat different boat, more for small crew cruising in maximum comfort, and we felt we could do this in an attractive and still well-performing way.'

The result of this was the **Dehler 41 DS** with deck saloon, soon followed by a conventional coachroof version, the **Dehler 41 CR**.

'When we started the new Dehler 41 DS we analysed that Dehler had the image of building "plastic" boats with an "industrial-looking" interior – nicely detailed and thought out, but with comparably simple woodwork,' says Conradi.

'We tried to improve the woodwork in the boats and gave them a more "Scandinavian-looking" touch in the accommodation. We

did this not only by changing panels but tried to match the interior design better with this

type of styling. While doing so, we worked hard to keep the performance of the boat up to the best level, for instance by investigating different keel shapes to achieve low CGs with best possible upwind performance.'

'Father still liked to sail fast and easy,' Karl Dehler adds, 'while Mother no longer liked to sit down below.' Ergo the deck saloon.

There's no doubt that the 41 DS is an accomplished yacht. For starters, its deck saloon is what it says it is: the panoramic views it offers onto the outside world are spectacular, both for crew sitting around the table and for the navigator at his chart table. The galley and amidships heads compartment are further forward in the



39 CWS: from around £49,000 second-hand

van de Stadt



LEFT Dehler 35 CWS: from around £46,500 second-hand

RIGHT Dehler 39: from around £89,000 second-hand

ABOVE RIGHT 43 CWS: around £84,000 second-hand

David Harding



van de Stadt





Dehler 41 CR: from around £67,000 second-hand

boat and there are double berth cabins at bow and stern. The 41 CR, on the other hand, is more like a Dehler of old. A long, low and sleek coachroof covers a layout containing two aft double cabins, another double in the forepeak, two heads compartments and a massive U-shaped saloon settee that wraps around the dining table. The chart table is aft of this and a well-equipped linear galley opposite it.

Performance of both models is good, with a ballast ratio of around 40% and a sail area/displacement ratio of just over 20. Interestingly, the beam of 3.89m is almost identical to that of the longer van de Stadt-designed 43 CWS.

Now for something different

Next off the J/V stocks came the **Dehler 33**, a very different boat. Those were the (brief) days of the IMS handicap system and, unlike the old IOR, it was kind to boats with long waterlines (in relation to their LOA) and narrowish beam. So the 33 has a dramatic-looking near-vertical stem, as opposed to the long bow overhang of yesteryear, and a beam of 2.99m: appreciably less than the old Dehler 34's 3.43m. As a result the 33's interior, though nicely finished, seems narrow compared to other cruiser-racers of that era. There are three versions – Cruising, Classic and Competition – but not many made it over to the UK.

The 1997/8 J/V-designed **Dehler 29** follows similar styling with its near-plumb bow, fine forward hull sections and vestigial aft overhang (producing an LWL of 8m on an LOA of 8.76). These features are very much in the modern idiom, and a bulbed keel (in standard, racing or shallow guise) keeps the CG low and performance high.

The beam, however, has increased in relation to overall length and, at 2.99m, is the same as that of its bigger sister, the 33. So the conventional layout of aft double cabin, aft heads, galley, saloon and V-berth forepeak is much as you'd expect, although slightly less voluminous than you may find on a plumper cruiser with no aspirations to shine in the performance stakes. It all obviously works well, as this popular 29-footer remains in production to this day.

Increasing options

The **Dehler 39** and upgraded **39SQ** (standing for 'speed and quality') were J/V's next offerings and continued with the sleek

ABOVE RIGHT Dehler 39SQ: from around £109,000 second-hand

RIGHT Dehler 41DS: from £89,000 second-hand

lines and styling that typified their 41, 33 and 29. But this time Dehler offered four different layouts: you could choose between two aft cabins or one and a big cockpit side locker, or between a forecabin with or without an en-suite heads compartment.

The large L-shaped galley, aft heads compartment, chart table and spacious, luxuriously finished saloon remain the same in each version. All in all, this 39-footer is a handsome beast and succeeds in combining the requirements of cruising and racing in one very appealing package.

Following on from the successful 39, Dehler produced a smaller sister that shared many of the same attributes. The **36** and **36SQ** have high-quality joinery and offer comfort aplenty. Twin double-stern cabins, generous galley, aft heads compartment, large saloon and twin V-berth forepeak add up to a spacious 36-footer.

To find out how well it all works, I pestered another brace of very experienced Royal Southern Yacht Club members. As Nicky Streeter recalls: 'My wife Pauline and I bought the Dehler 36SQ in 2006 to



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replace the Contessa 35 we owned for 30 years, having raced her during the One Tonner era... it was originally a five-year project but we are now in our eighth season, sailing mainly two-up along the French west coast from Camaret to La Rochelle and Île d'Oléron.

'Since I am now in my 80s and my wife is in her 60s, we needed a boat in which we could manage virtually anything from the cockpit... We are naturally fairly circumspect with regard to the weather but manage up to Force 6 and normally limit our trips to 35 miles. I started sailing in 1947 and we have both raced Dragons fairly successfully over 35 years. However, we only raced the Dehler when she was new, winning the Dehler Cup in 2006.

'Naturally, while cruising we race



Dehler 29: from around £33,500 second-hand



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Dehler 33: from around £40,000 second-hand

David Harding



Dehler

Dehler 41: from around £101,000 second-hand

everything in sight and generally see off anything up to 40ft and sometimes above, much to the chagrin of their owners.

'I do feel that she is rather tender and it does pay to take a slab in early, when the boat speed invariably increases. We found that in light and lumpy conditions we needed a larger headsail to keep her moving.

'In comparison to the Contessa, having a wheel takes away the delight of using a tiller especially going to windward. Downwind the Dehler is much more stable and faster by some margin. We averaged 8.4 knots between Alderney and the Needles!

'We stay on the boat in four-week periods and live in some comfort. Using the two aft cabins we can accommodate six people not using the saloon berths but we prefer sailing with up to four. We are continually delighted with the Dehler and would not replace her with any other similar cruiser/racer.'

New team

In 2003-4, Dehler then introduced another design team to its range. As Maarten Voogd of Simonis Voogd explains: 'We got involved when Dehler was purchased by a Dutch consortium... our task was to make Dehler stand out from the competition in performance and style.

'We achieved this by putting a lot of emphasis on production techniques to save weight and incorporate styling ideas like

an invisible hull/deck joint, flush hatches and customised windows to set the Dehler range apart from the competition. In 2006 this was not done by any other mass producer and it created a lot of hype in the market: hence the **Dehler 44** was chosen as European Boat of the Year in 2007.'

And an elegant, rakish-looking boat it is too. The finely-shaped bulbed keel and deep rudder will undoubtedly ensure top performance and control, yet the lavishly equipped and finished interior makes the 44 a fine cruiser. Two aft cabins, two heads, a voluminous owner's forecabin and a well-styled saloon combine to lift this yacht into the luxury league. Meanwhile, the styling of hull and superstructure remain quintessentially 'Dehler'.

Simonis and Voogd then went on to design the equally striking Dehler 45 and 35, which is still in production today in the form of the **35SQ**. This model has been a success, combining as it does a contemporary and practical cruising layout with real race-winning potential.

Hanse takes over

Hanse's takeover of Dehler in 2009 enabled it to offer two Judel/ Vrolijk ranges: Hanse cruisers and Dehler cruiser-racers. Which makes commercial sense. Hanse founder Michael Schmidt told me: 'I saw Dehler as an in-house competitor to Hanse with a different



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Dehler 36SQ: from around £89,000 second-hand

target group. More speed and higher level of fit-out. And I saw a chance to get Dehler profitable with our purchasing and organisational power.'

Like the Hanses, the latest Dehler models hail from J/V. The **32** offers three keel options (standard, racing or short) so owners can choose which 'gear' they want to select, combining this with what has now become the default 9.7m (32ft) cruiser layout.

The **41** opts for T-shaped bulbed keel options, a broad transom and two choices of layout, both of which will appeal to cruising owners.

But perhaps the star of the current show is the new **38**. Karl Dehler has been heavily involved from the outset, and - shades of his db2 victories nearly 30 years ago - won Kiel Week and the overall ORC championship in Germany in 2013.

Yet this is no stripped-out machine: quite the reverse. I went aboard at the PSP Southampton Boat Show and was bowled over by the 38's style, quality and comfort down below.

This boat proves that, with Hanse input, Dehler is again at the top of its game, having produced more than 23,000 yachts in its 50-year history.

Karl concludes: 'My father passed away in 1999 - I think if he could see the new products carrying his name, he would be very proud, as we are. Here at the Hanse factory we follow the best industrial standards for building yachts - and once again the skill of the Dehler family is involved.'



Dehler

LEFT Dehler 44: from around £85,000 second-hand

BELOW LEFT Dehler 35 and 35SQ: new from £111,740

BELOW Dehler 32: new from around £82,500

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