

HANSE 291

ABOUT THE OWNER

Andy Hind was working in sales for Westerly Yachts in Hampshire back in 1993 when he spotted the Hanse 291 at Hamburg Boat Show. A keen racer with a quarter tonner he fancied moving up to a 30 footer and was bowled over by the seemingly giveaway price of the Hanse at the time. Andy upgraded all the boat's deck hardware for racing and over the years has picked up many wins in Cowes Week and a 4th overall in the Round the Island.

TESTED



HANSE 291

If the thought of an early 90s mass produced German yacht fills you with horror **Jake Frith** suggests that Hanse's inaugural 291 model might make a pleasant surprise.

When Michael Schmidt started building Hanses in 1993 in the old shipbuilding town of Griefswald in the former East Germany he set out with the aim of becoming the largest yacht manufacturer in Europe. The Griefswald yard had suffered under communism and just 3 years after the reunification of Germany its skilled labour force was unemployed and hopes for a bright new future were tarnishing fast. Schmidt's aim, with the help of various incentives designed to bring the former East Germany up to speed with the west, was to bring profitable boatbuilding back to Griefswald. The 291 was the first model, and came about when Schmidt bought the moulds and tooling of the successful Aphrodite 291 from Carl Beyer in Sweden. It was a shrewd move, as the Aphrodite was and still is a very well respected cruiser racer, and still a very common sight in the fjords. Hanse produced various iterations of this hull in the '90s, gradually upgrading the interior and calling it the 300 and then 301. It was replaced by the all new 311 which had a Hanse commissioned design aimed more squarely at the cruising man.

Now here comes something of a

confession. When I heard I would be testing an early, sub 30 foot mass produced German yacht, I was not expecting a pleasant day on the water. I have always mentally put early Hanses in the same bracket as early Bavarias and thought back with dread of the pallour across Sam Jefferson's face when he returned to the office following a blustery day testing a 1988 Bavaria 26. He had never before experienced such frequent, sudden and uncontrollable broaching in a sailing boat. Approaching *White Mischief*, Andy Hind's 1993 Hanse 291 in the ST RIB my mind was immediately put at rest. She is a sleek and pretty boat, that looks like she will sail well. As many an old salt has commented in boatyards and sailing club bars far and wide, boats that look like they will sail well usually do. *White Mischief* cost Andy just £18000 including VAT in 1993, but he admits she came with a very basic spec. Her self tacking jib meant she didn't even have a pair of foresail sheet winches or tracks for genoa cars. There was just a single coachroof winch for the whole boat, a couple of jammers and a deadeye in the middle of the cockpit to control the mainsail.

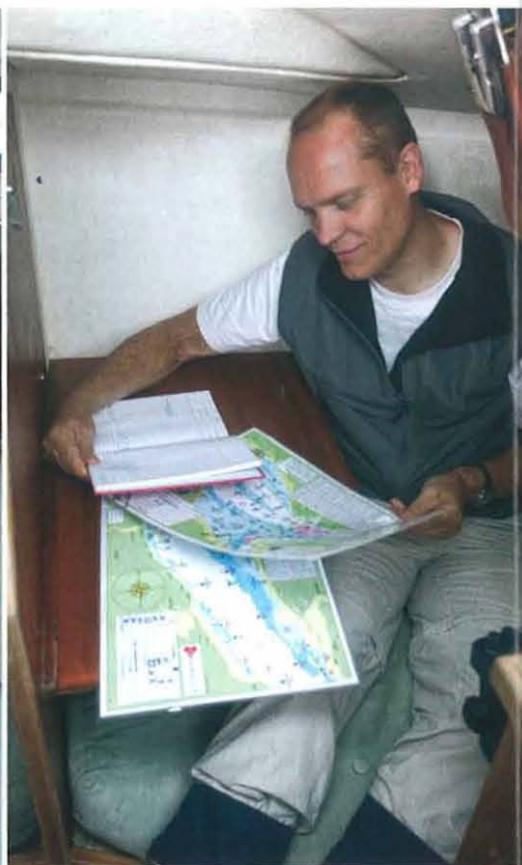
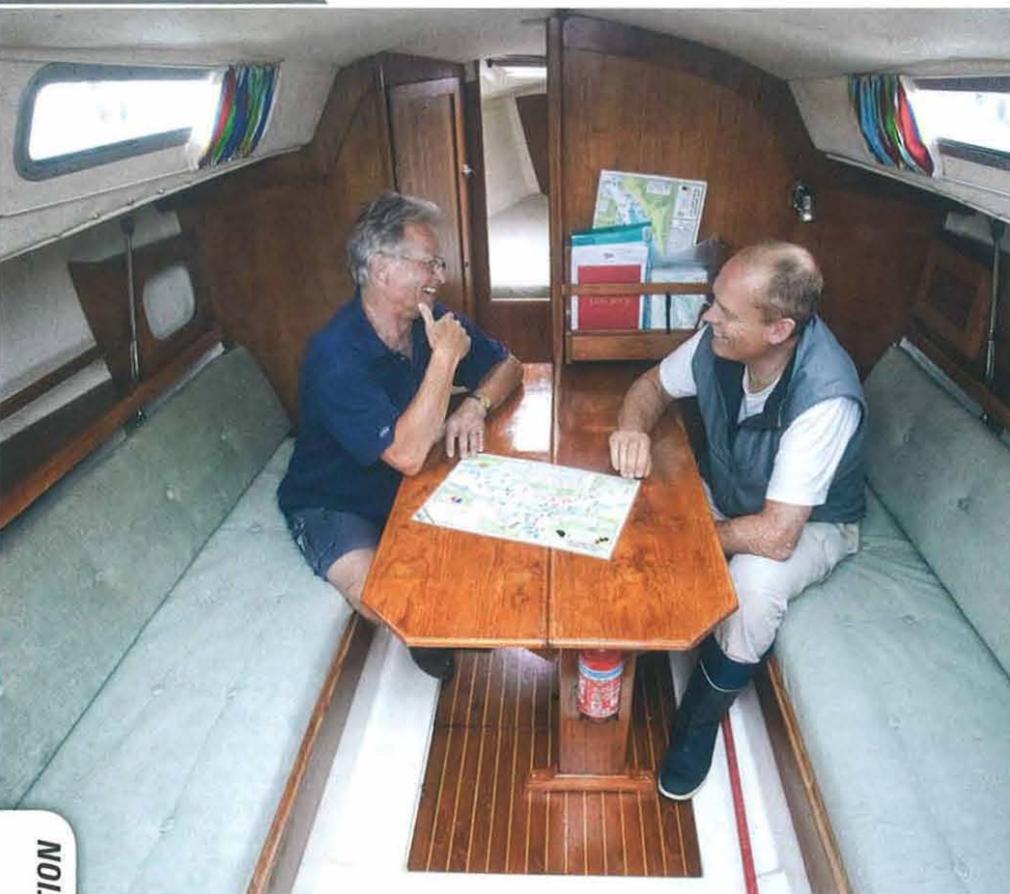
THE SPEC



HANSE 291: PRICE FROM £15,000

LOA
29ft 2in (8.9m)
LWL
25ft 6in (7.8m)
Beam
8ft 9in (4.20m)
Draught
5ft 3in (1.62m)
Displacement
2,600kg (5,732lb)
Ballast
1,050kg (2,315lb)

Sail Area
464ft² (41m²)
Berths
6
Production
1993 - 1995
Designers
Carl Beyer
Builder
Hanse Yachts (GER)



SALOON

This was the very first Hanse to come into the UK and unbelievably the interior woodwork from new was unvarnished. Andy spent weeks varnishing the interior woodwork and adding a few nicer touches such as a locker lids and a corner table over the port pilot berth. As he worked for Westerly Yachts, he was able to acquire some bits of woodwork he was able to adapt for his new boat. The fact that the rejected joinery that Westerly were putting in their skip was able to significantly upgrade the quality of this interior bears testament to the very different business models of the two companies. Hanse, as time went on improved the interior finish, and *White Mischief* is raced hard so there has been little effort to make this space much more than a receptacle for wet sails. Headroom at the companionway end of the saloon is 5ft 7in (170cm), declining to 5ft 3in (160cm) at the forward bulkhead. The backrests of the two saloon berths remove to create more sleeping width.

QUARTERBERTH

The starboard quarterberth is shown on some general arrangement diagrams as a double berth. Good luck with that. While there would probably be enough space for two close friends once they had got in there, the process of the second person getting in or out would entail knees in the face and such like shenanigans thanks to the part bulkhead directly forward of this space. For one person though it's perfect and generously sized at 7ft (213cm) long and 2ft 9in (84cm) wide at the head. There is also a shallow space under the cockpit sole for storage, knee room and access to a removable engine maintenance panel.

HEADS

The forepeak and heads can be shut apart from the rest of the boat to provide some privacy. There is loads of space in the heads as the full width of the boat is utilised. The inner moulding from the saloon carries through the heads providing wipe clean, mildew free surfaces and a modern feel.

NAVIGATION AREA

This is a very basic, unfiddled fold down plywood flap at the forward end of the quarterberth. In port it was awkward for a large man to get in and out of this so at sea it would be a non starter. This and the lack of chart storage space anywhere nearby would suggest that chartwork would be better performed at the saloon table or on the hoof elsewhere.

FORECABIN

Thankfully the inner moulding stops at the forepeak berths, leaving access beneath them to the outer hull for mounting the various transducers. There is lots of space under these berths as the tanks are kept elsewhere, a good idea with a hull shape like this, with its relatively fine ends. That fine entry though means that the forepeak is not the largest, measuring 5ft 9in (176cm) wide at the head by 6ft 1in (186cm) long. With an anchor locker forward the forepeak thankfully does not taper to a point.



GALLEY

This is located to the port side of the companionway and is a compact collection of the bare minimum required on a cruising boat. As standard the boat came with an Origo meths cooker, which Andy did not get along with, so replaced it with a gas cooker with bottle in a cockpit locker draining overboard. This would be a common alteration made to UK boats as they were all imported with these meths cookers which are unpopular in the UK.





COCKPIT

There is a large central aft locker, in the case of *White Mischief* containing little more than the rudder tube. It would comfortably swallow all fenders, a liferaft, a tender, a small outboard for the tender and a couple of errant children to boot. There is also a generous cockpit locker to port. Andy's cockpit hardware is massively upgraded from standard with traveler, mainsheet fine tuning tackle, primary winches and more. Andy has also had an elegant and useful stainless steel helmsman's footrest fabricated.

SIDE DECKS

As a racing boat it's no surprise to note the lack of amidships cleats. Springs were made up to the shroud bases. The yacht's 2.7m beam makes for generous side decks of 18in (46cm) wide, well cambered for safe passage forward, and confidence is further reinforced by a decent aluminium toerail. The double headsail tracks further betray *White Mischief's* sporting intent. The factory non slip on *White Mischief* was balding in highly trafficked areas such as the cockpit seating so could use a sympathetic aftermarket nonslip paint.

FOREDECK

The compact foredeck has presumably endured the elephantine effects of a small army of Dubarrys over the years, but was not displaying that dispiriting springiness often found with extensively campaigned racing boats. This is perhaps due to the steep arch-like camber to the moulding increasing strength, which also contributes to a surefootedness when heeled and decent headroom in the forepeak. It also appears to be a pretty well laid up boat, with things like star cracks conspicuous by their absence throughout the hull and deck. A floppy pulpit was not so impressive however, due to it being the type that only has a single central bolt for each one of its small feet. Larger flange type feet with 3 or 4 bolts stand up much better to the ravages of time. The anchor well lid was not moulded with non slip, which seemed like a curious omission. This boat had hank on foresails so no bow roller and also an empty anchor well but this would not be the typical inventory. ▶



RIG AND SAILS

The Hanse came with a full (3/4) fractional rig with swept back spreaders. *White Mischief* was still going strong on her original Selden spars. Where she had departed from the norm was in headsail format. I'll leave it up to the dear reader to decide whether manufacturers fit self tacking jibs for cost saving or easier short handed short tacking. Whichever side of the fence you sit the Hanse 291 came with a self tacking jib, which Andy removed and replaced with the kit you see here. The boat is now a phenomenally successful Solent based racer with the usual bafflingly extensive sail wardrobe.



UNDER WAY



UNDER ENGINE

The Volvo twin cylinder saildrive was happy cruising in flat water at 5kn and she would do 6.5 when pressed. According to Andy she struggles sometimes under engine in short Solent chop and he spoke misty eyed of the 20 hp option that Hanse later offered. Despite a two bladed folding prop she was pretty viceless astern in close quarters, with a small manageable propwalk to starboard.

CLOSEHAULED

With 30kn actuals in the gusts at Bramblemet, we opted to pop the first reef in before raising sail and heading out from the Royal Lynton Yacht Club pontoons. We were overpowered in the gusts, but the few gripes to windward were progressive and easily controllable, although we took the precaution of leaving the mainsheet uncleated so we could rapidly dump any excess power. It was not the fastest progress to windward and another reef was really required, but still we tacked through an impressive 85°. In medium airs with his newer laminate sails Andy has seen tacking angles of 80°. The stainless steel helmsman's footrest came into its own as we heeled at well over 45° in the bigger gusts. The helm remained light and surprisingly well balanced despite this mistreatment; she's a very nice boat to sail. She was also surprisingly quick with 7kn showing up on the log close hauled.

REACHING

Bearing away towards what looked like a particularly photogenic stretch of the Isle of Wight coastline *White Mischief* found her groove with a surprising 8.25kn showing

on the log. With a cheeky downwind pump of the mainsheet we saw a fleeting 9kn flash up with the photography RIB having to plane to keep up. These are serious numbers for a sub 30 foot boat that can be cruised. Her fastest point of sail appeared to be 10 or so degrees off a beam reach.

DOWNWIND

Following the forecast, a recently snapped spinnaker pole and lack of a full racing crew

Andy had not packed any kind of spinnaker, but she would have held onto her standard weight symmetrical kite if racing. She also has a light air symmetrical spinnaker and an asymmetric for reaching which rigs off the standard pole passed through the pulpit. In basic spec these Hanses came with no provision for downwind sails. We were stonking along at 8kn just with the number 3 jib goosewinged so were thankful for the lack of additional spinnaker stress. ■

ST VERDICT

This was a lovely boat to sail but I was left wondering how a standard boat would have felt in comparison. We had lots of options when it came to depowering sails that would not have been available when the boat was new with her single point mainsail sheeting and self tacking jib. However, class will always show, and the Aphrodite/ Hanse 291 was clearly a very classy design. I'd certainly recommend one of these boats for fast cruising but I'd also recommend a reasonable slush fund to upgrade the standard 'poverty spec' if it's not already been done. I'd

also look at the costs of importing an Aphrodite 291 from Sweden (where there are many) before purchasing a Hanse in the UK, as the Swedes typically up-spec their boats and look after them very well.

FOR

- Pretty boat
- Great sailer
- Solid build

AGAINST

- Lack of deck hardware from new
- Stark interior
- 10 hp engine option weak