

SAILING TODAY

A photograph of a Hanse 301 sailboat on the water. The boat has a dark blue hull with a white stripe and a white sail. Two people are on board: a man in a yellow jacket looking at a chart, and a woman in a red jacket. The background shows a forested shoreline under a warm, golden light.

Hanse 301

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East German boatbuilder Hanse produces the cheapest 30ft cruising yachts in Europe, making the 301 an irresistible bargain.



The cockpit is comfortable both in harbour and when the boat is well heeled

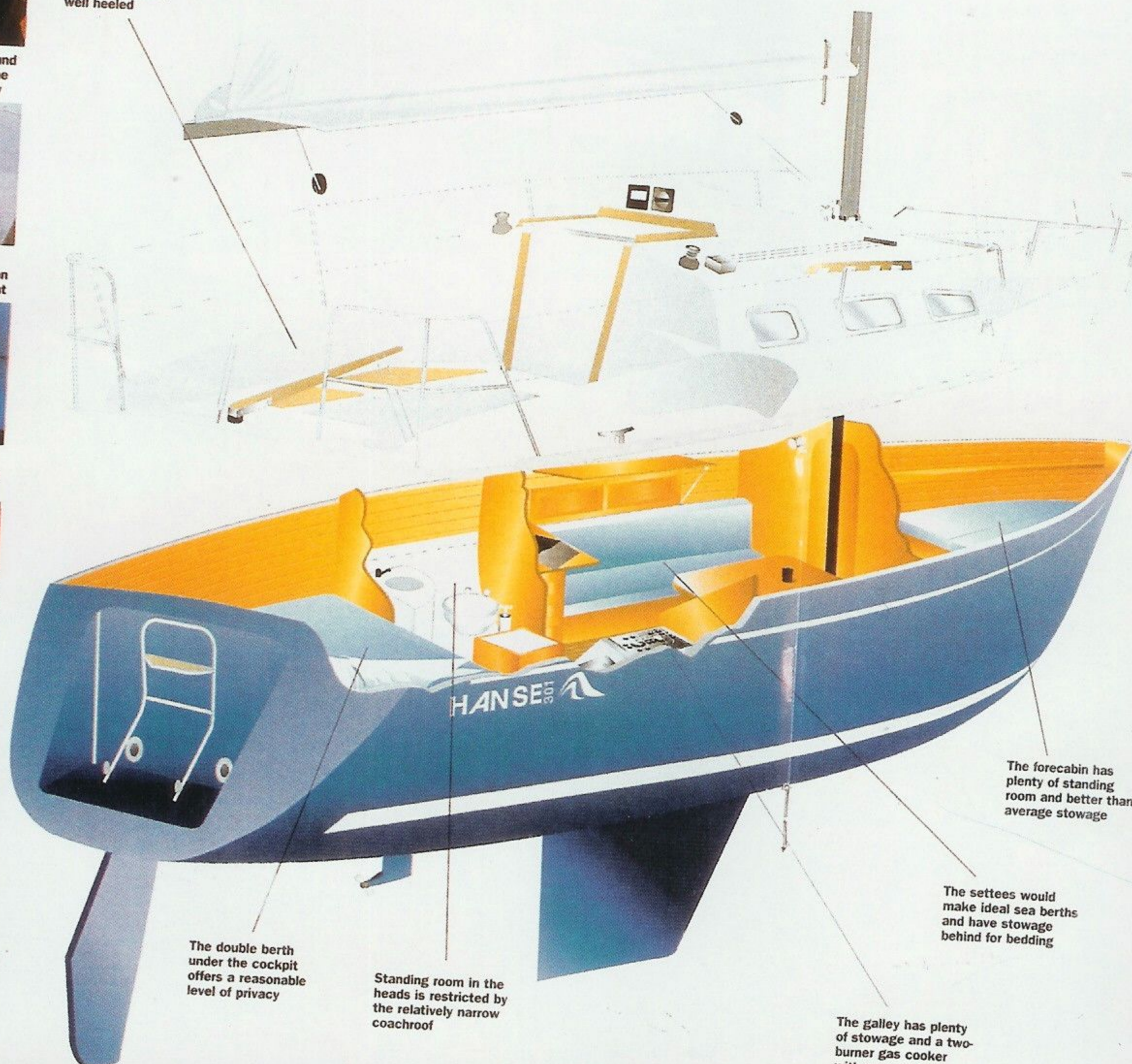
Stowage is good in the galley, and occupants of the berth under the cockpit have reasonable privacy

A moulded finish in the heads makes it easy to clean. Ventilation is provided by an opening portlight

The fold-down chart table is too small for serious use, but there are three useful drawers below it

One leaf of the table folds down and there is stowage for up to eight bottles inside

Engine access is good, with removable panels on three sides and plenty of space to work



The forecabin has plenty of standing room and better than average stowage

The settees would make ideal sea berths and have stowage behind for bedding

The double berth under the cockpit offers a reasonable level of privacy

Standing room in the heads is restricted by the relatively narrow coachroof

The galley has plenty of stowage and a two-burner gas cooker with oven and grill

Anatomy of a cruising yacht

Over the past couple of decades, many boatbuilders have moved to producing ever-bigger boats, chasing richer people prepared to pay a lot of money for the advantages of owning a new vessel. The German boatyard Yachtzentrum Greifswald, however, was set up five years ago to take a different approach, and claims to produce the cheapest 30ft cruisers available. It features two boats of this size - the Hanse 292 and 301 - which share the same hull, deck and rig.

The boats have been enthusiastically received in Germany, with the 292 winning its category in the Boat of the Year awards at this year's Düsseldorf Boat Show, and the boatyard picking up the Best Value award.

We tested the first 301 to arrive in the UK - a wing keel model - on Lake Windermere in February, experiencing conditions from light airs to gusty Force 5/6.

The Hanse's sailing performance and ease of handling are as impressive as its low price. Thought has clearly gone into the deck layout, which is optimised for ease of use, and sailing with just one person on board proved to be no problem. The boat's responsive feel and the self-tacking headsail make short tacking a delight rather than a chore, and a single-line reefing system makes it possible for one person to reef the mainsail from the cockpit.

Down below the 301's layout works well, and there's more space than in most boats of a similar price, but a beam of just 9ft 1in means that the saloon feels relatively narrow compared to most new 30-footers.

The 292 is a cut price version of the 3-1, the biggest difference being that it has an open-plan interior without a separate forecabin. On deck the two boats are identical, and at just £30,990 including VAT the 292 compares well with most new 25 and 26-footers.

The two boats were launched in Germany 18 months ago, and are based on a performance Scandinavian design from Aphrodite which went out of production in the early 1990's. A completely new deck and coachroof moulding has increased the space below deck, and the boats have a modern layout. So far, 80 301's have already been sold.

There are also 33 and 40ft models in the range. These are finished to a higher standard - particularly the 40-footer - but they represent similarly good value for money. Robsons is the only UK dealer so far, but additional outlets are due to be on line by early summer.

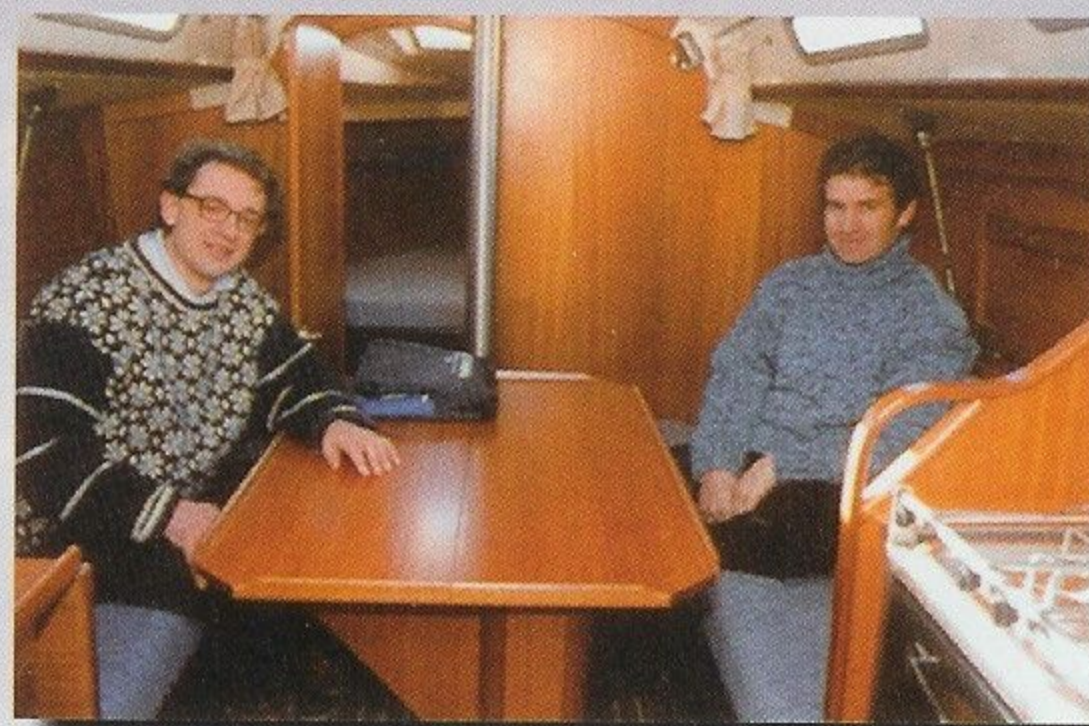
THE NEW HANSE 300

The Hanse 301 has now undergone an internal facelift to bring it in line with the distinctive styling of the rest of the Hanse range.

The rig, sailplan, bed options and all major features are unchanged. In order to make these changes the model is now called the Hanse 300.

Hanse
The Quality People in Yachting

Accommodation and interior



The Hanse's attractive interior has plenty of natural light and is enhanced by ample warm - but not dark - wood trim. In general, the layout is one that will work well both in harbour and at sea, although a couple of small details did not impress us.

In the saloon the settee berths are comfortable as seats and would make good sea berths, although lee cloths are not provided as standard. Headroom at the aft end of the saloon is 5ft 11in, increasing to 6ft 2in under the main hatch. At the forward end of the saloon it reduces to 5ft 5in.

There's space for storing bedding behind the backrests, which hinge up to make the berths wider for sleeping on. Elsewhere, stowage in the saloon is good, with lockers under the berths and four lockers above the settees. There is also stowage for eight bottles in the saloon table, and three useful large drawers under the chart table.

Apart from a couple of niggles, the spacious galley would be easy to use at sea. Stowage in this area is more than adequate, with a deep shelf at the back of the galley, a very large locker with three sets of shelves under the sink, a coolbox/fridge and a locker under the cooker for pots and pans. Although there is lots of worktop space, the fiddles were a disappointment, as they are too low to keep most items in place at sea.

A two-burner cooker with oven is fitted as standard, but its gimballing mechanism was awkward to operate - the cooker is mounted on a sliding bracket which needs to be pulled towards the centreline of the boat to give it room to swing. This ought to be a straightforward process, but in practice the sliding mechanism did not work smoothly. It would also be difficult, although not impossible, to fit a crash bar to prevent crew members falling against the cooker at sea.

The heads compartment is next to the main hatch making it convenient for use at sea. Maximum headroom here is relatively restricted at just 5ft 5in, and the narrow coachroof impinges on the available space.

Most UK owners will find the fold-down navigation system something of a letdown - the chart table is less than 2ft square, and there is no dedicated storage for charts, almanacs, pilot books and the like.

On the positive side the 301 has a comfortable forecabin which has good stowage, including two full-height lockers, two deep shelves which run the full length of the berth and under-berth stowage. With a width of a full 3ft, the standing/changing area is larger than that seen on many larger boats, although headroom in this cabin is limited to 5ft 5in.

Although there's no separate aft cabin, a double bunk runs transversely under the cockpit. This is easy to get into, but there is only 15 inches of clearance under the cockpit and there is no route by which crew members in this area could escape in the event of a galley fire - fitting a smoke alarm would be a sensible precaution.

Equipment and inventory

The 301 includes most basic items needed for sailing the boat, including anchor and warp, combined log and depthsounder, marine toilet and fenders and warps. The boat is also fitted with two bilge pumps, one on deck and one in the saloon. Antifouling, rigging and launching will add around £800 to the price.

Buyers would need to buy additional safety kit, including lifejackets and harnesses, jackstays, lifebuoys, dan-buoy flares, a VHF radio and fire extinguishers. This would add around £1200 to the cost of the boat.

On deck, some owners may prefer to specify a third row of reefs in the mainsail. Others would want a roller-reefing genoa (including tracks for the sheet and dedicated sheet winches), in place of the self-tacking jib.

Extras fitted to our test boat include the darkblue hull (£512) and a shoal-drought lead wing keel (£978).

Construction and build quality



For the most part the Hanse appears to be well put together, and there is little to suggest that the boat has been built to a price. Hull and deck mouldings are of sandwich construction and are hand-laid using Isothalic resin to help keep osmosis at bay.

In the places where the hull/deck join is visible it's clear that a plenty of sealant was applied to the join before the two components were bolted together.

When we pried deeply we were able to find a couple of places in which corners had been cut to keep costs down. For instance, the interior joinery has a few exposed plywood edges. This is essentially a cosmetic

defect, although it may allow water ingress in the long term. Any owners wanting to remedy this will find that it's not a big job.

We found just two places in which the standard of finish was poor - some untidy trim behind a shelf in the heads (pictured) and inadequate sealing and waterproofing around the galley worktop. In other respects, the standard of the fittings is commendable - for instance all pipes are secured to their skin fittings with Jubilee clips. Even the ventilation pipe for the gas locker is double-clipped to a skin fitting.

On deck and under way



The 301's deck layout is well thought out and makes the boat unusually easy to handle. The self-tacking headsail takes all the effort out of short tacking, even in strong winds, and a single-line mainsail reefing system enables one person to reef from the cockpit.

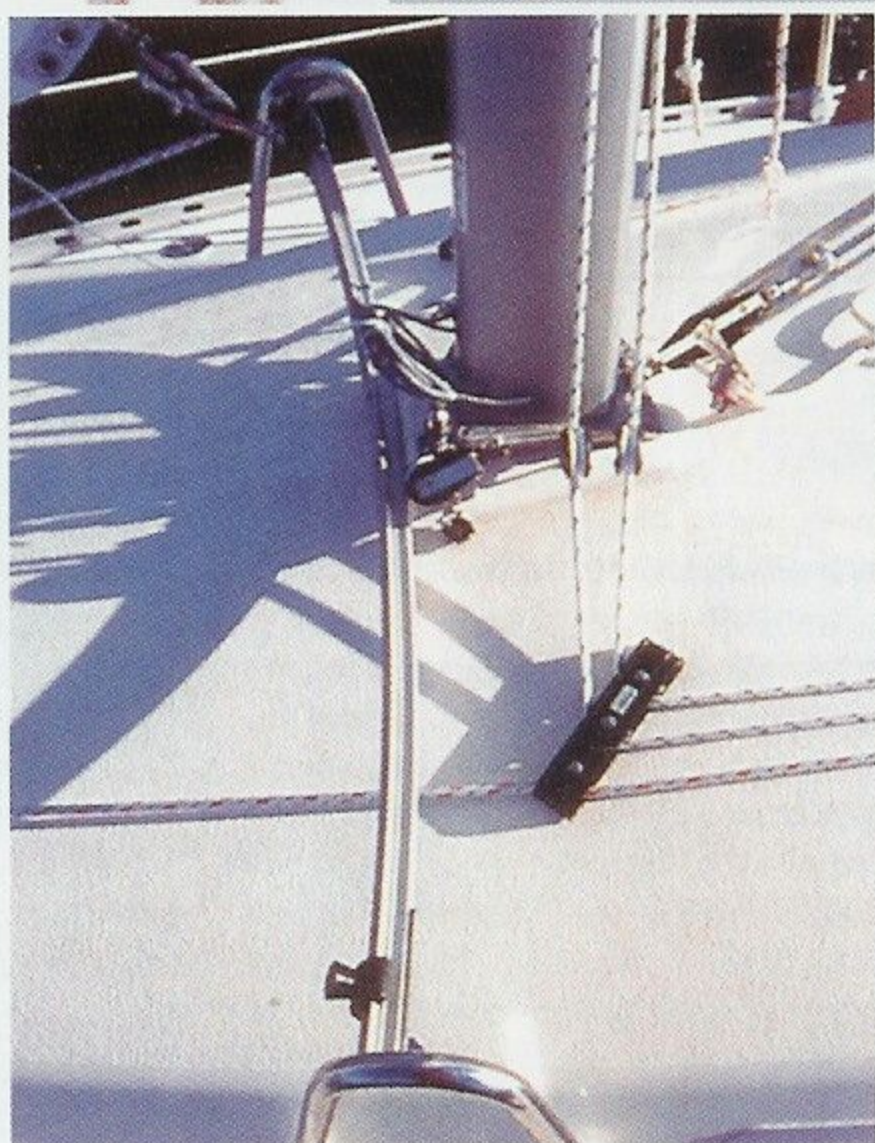
Unfortunately, there was a lot of friction in the system fitted to our test boat which made putting the second reef in unnecessarily difficult. We did not, however, experience the same trouble when we sailed the Hanse 331, so it's likely

to be an isolated problem with the particular boat we sailed.

The mainsheet falls easily to hand from helm, but its 4:1 purchase system proved to be slightly underpowered when the sail is fully powered up. The addition of a traveller would help here, as much of the power could be dumped from the sail before easing the sheet. All other controls - halyards, reefing lines and the headsail sheet - could be reached when steering with the tiller extension. The Hanse is an easy boat to sail short-handed.

A pair of coachroof-mounted Harken single-speed number 8 winches are supplied to operate halyards, reefing lines and the single jib sheet. They proved to be large enough for the job, although the halyards needed quite a bit of effort to achieve the luff tension required in strong winds.

The cockpit is a good size - its around 7ft 5in long - but is not too wide to be able to brace yourself firmly when the boat's heeled. Both cockpit seats and coamings are comfortable on all points of sail. Stowage is good - there's a huge



locker across the stern of the boat that is sensibly divided into three sections. This should prove ample for fenders, dinghy and all other paraphernalia that collects on a cruising boat. A smaller locker under the seat on the port side is useful for items that need to be kept within easy reach. This locker is ventilated for use as a gas locker.

There are wide side decks, clear uncluttered foredeck and substantial handrails on the coachroof, which make working on deck easy. The foredeck has a self-draining anchor locker, and a bow roller is fitted on UK-specification boats. The mooring cleats are reassuringly substantial and there's a useful fold-down boarding ladder incorporated in the scoop stern.

Under Sail

This is where the 301 really shines - its close-winded, light on the helm and well balanced, with a very responsive feel - all the things a good boat should be. Sailing upwind was a pleasure, with a positive feel to the helm, just the right amount of weather helm and good visibility past the headsail.

The self-tacking headsail proved to be a considerable bonus, taking all the effort out of tacking. Even short tacking up a narrow river with a small crew would not be a strenuous undertaking. The Hanse is also quick to accelerate out of tacks which gives added reassurance in confined waters. Downwind, the headsail arrangement is not so good as the sail is blanketed by the large mainsail and the sheeting angle is poor.

Although roller reefing is not provided as standard, the headsail still proved easy to handle - the Hanse's fractional rig means that one relatively small sail will suit most conditions. It's easy to hoist and drops neatly on the foredeck - rather than over the side - when it's lowered.

Sailing close-hauled the Hanse made an indicated 6-6.5 knots, both with two reefs in the mainsail in a Force 3. In the lighter breezes she tacked through an impressive angle of 70 degrees, although this increased to nearer 80 degrees in the stronger winds. Our maximum speed during the test was 7.2 knots on a beam reach in a Force 5/6 under full sail.

The boat hove-to well, with the wind just forward of the beam. To achieve this we needed to hold the traveller for the self-tacking headsail to windward using a sail tie. This was easily done, but it does mean that having-to is a less simple operation than with a conventional headsail. The Hanse's deep draught (or low centre of gravity wing keel), high ballast ratio and relatively narrow beam all point to her being a good sea boat, and one that should inspire confidence on extended passages.

Under power

The 301 is fitted with a 10hp Volvo Penta inboard diesel which drives through a saildrive unit and a fixed two-bladed propeller. Although the engine is on the small side for a 30-footer, it proved to be capable of driving the Hanse's easily-propelled lines at hull speed. The installation appeared to be generally good, but was let down by a lack of sound insulation.

Handling under power is predictable - the boat spins around easily and maintains steerage way at very slow speeds. In reverse there's a moderate prop-walk effect which initially kicks the stern to starboard, but the Hanse's big rudder soon overcomes this.

Verdict

Two things are outstanding about the Hanse 301 - a very low price and excellent sailing qualities. It's great fun to sail and gives all the benefits of a new boat at a price that compares favourably with many second-hand vessels of the same length.

FOR - Value for money • Excellent sailing qualities • Ease of handling

AGAINST - Small heads compartment • Poor chart table

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