Hanse 311

The price of this German import looks hard to beat, but is she good value for money? James Jermain finds out

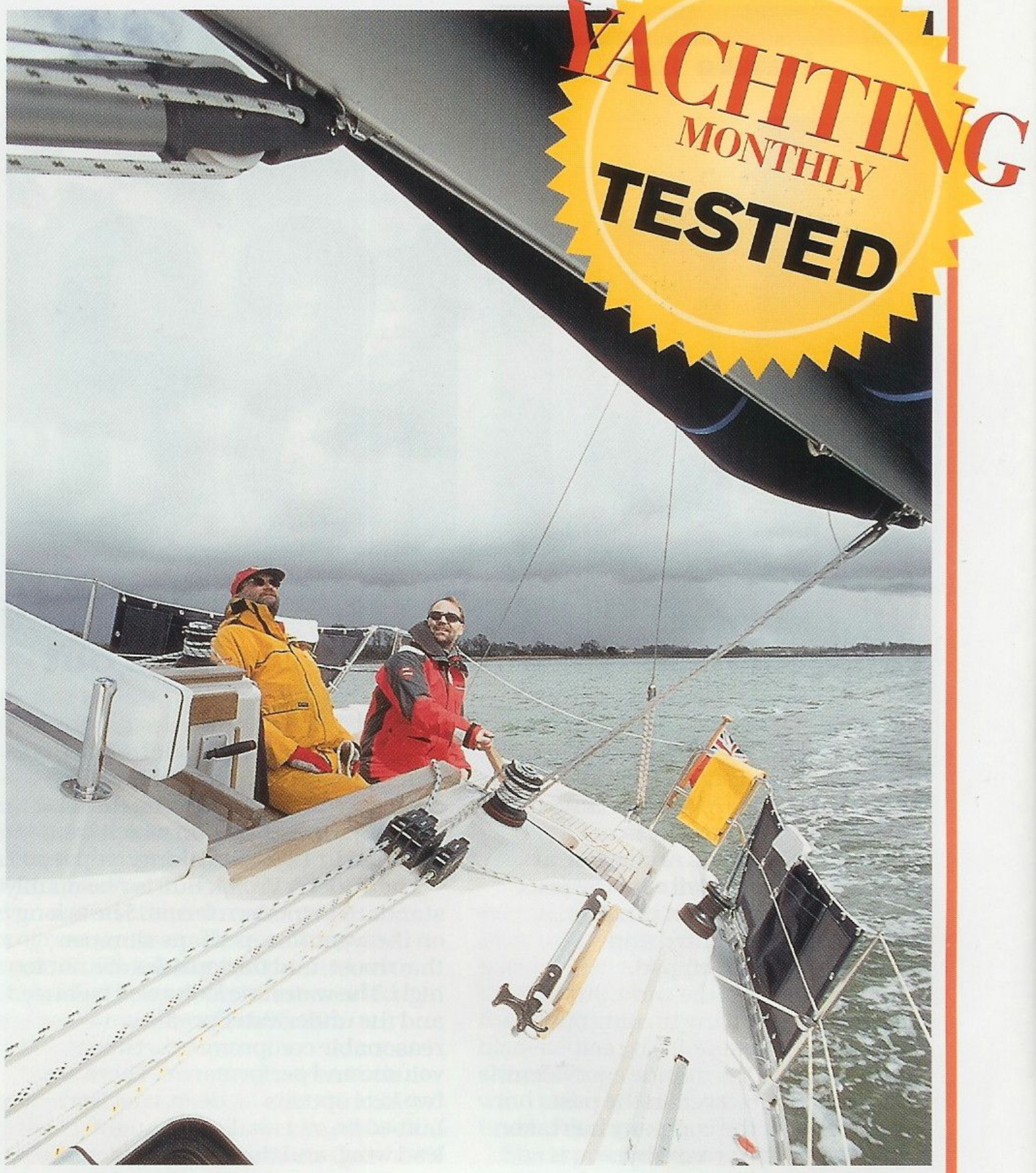
When a 31ft (9.5m) Hanse costs just a pip under £46,000, it is hardly surprising the company is not a friend of the brokers. And, while at one time you could tell why the price was so low, the current range is modern, well presented and moderately well equipped.

Hanse started in the early '90s in former East Germany turning out other people's casts-offs at rock-bottom prices – the marine equivalent of the Skoda. However, in the past couple of years the company has taken a quantum leap forward by commissioning its own designs from top naval architects, Judel & Vrolijk, and tightening up on quality. The difference in finish between the all-new 311 and the 331 on which we reported in 1999 is striking.

The Judel & Vrolijk hull is reasonably standard in modern terms. She is long on the waterline, perhaps slimmer than most, and the topsides are not too high. The waterline looks well balanced and the underwater profile is a reasonable compromise between volume and performance. There are two keel options – a deep, cast iron bulbed fin or a shallow-draught lead wing, and the spade rudder is semi-balanced. The superstructure is long and carried well forward to give a square, almost old-fashioned profile.

Below decks

Nicely dished and angled steps lead down into a bright saloon where white laminated bulkheads set off the pale mahogany-faced ply joinery. Plastic laminates are used extensively and effectively in the fit-out. The sole has a grippy finish, while the table and galley work surfaces are topped with a wood-effect laminate that should be hard wearing, long lasting and easy to maintain. The high gloss varnish on the woodwork took a bit more getting



used to by eyes accustomed to a matt or semi-matt finish. It certainly gives off an opulent glow, but may prove less tolerant of hard treatment than a flat coating. The white vinyl headlining panels detach to give access to deck fittings.

The saloon is fitted with two straight, 6ft 3in (1.90m) long settees, which will make good seaberths with the addition of lee-cloths. With the back cushion removed they are a generous 2ft 6in (0.75m) wide. They flank a large table mounted on the mast support. Stowage is unusually good and includes a wickerwork fronted locker on each side flanked by well-fiddled shelving, as well as the usual under-bunk stowage. The latter will be used in later boats for fuel and water tanks. There are secure grab rails down the side of the coachroof but none overhead.

The galley is reasonably large with a good icebox and adequate stowage, though this is not very well divided up. The insulation on the icebox lid is thin. There is a small, dedicated work surface by the after bulkhead. Pressurised cold water is standard, a calorifier and hot water extra.

The chart table faces aft and uses the head of the port bunk as a seat. The table is not large at just 22inx18in (45cmx58cm) and the chart drawer is shallow. The switch panel and wiring are workmanlike with room for a normal amount of electronics.

Plenty of light gets below through the main hatch, a second hatch forward and a small ventilation hatch over the galley. There are two opening ports forward but no ventilators as such. Intriguingly, a second small ventilation hatch and the after window on the port-hand side are cut in half by the heads bulkhead. It transpires the position of the bulkhead was altered after the deck mould had been completed.

The coachroof line allows for 6ft (1.83m) headroom in the forecabin – generous in a 31-footer. The vee berth is 7ft 3in (2.20m) long and 5ft 6in (1.68m) wide at the head. An in-fill turns it into a double. There is a useful locker over the foot of the bunks and two wide shelves along the hull sides. The water tank takes up most of the space beneath the bunks (this is to be under the saloon settee in later boats). The forehatch is on the small side and will prove difficult to get out of for larger guests. Subsequent boats will have a slightly larger forecabin by straightening the main bulkhead.

The aftercabin, with just one opening port, is on the dark side, but the bunk is a generous 6ft 6inx5ft 3in (2.0mx1.60m) and headroom is over 6ft 2in (1.89m). There is a small standing area beside a locker with hanging space and shelves. The fuel tank is under the bunk.

The heads is spacious and benefits from the awkward positioning of the bulkhead. However, with no hot water, there is no shower. Also, the half-hatch provides a bare minimum of ventilation. Stowage is adequate and access to the seacocks is good. There is a small hanging area for wet oilies. A holding tank is on the options list.

A remarkable feature of the compartment is the door opening into the cockpit locker, which turns this space almost into an extra cabin. It allows excellent access to heavy items which are often stowed beyond easy reach in the cockpit locker and heads, and can easily be fitted with shelves and other stowage devices for bulky things like outboards. For serious offshore work, however, there is a safety issue in having the locker's hatch potentially opening into the entire interior of the boat.

Although the finish on the 311 is better than on earlier models it is still no better than average. There is still a lot of uncapped end-grain ply. We also found the doorways undersized at just 1ft 4in (41cm) wide and 5ft 5in (1.66m) high. However, the overall effect of the interior is pleasant.

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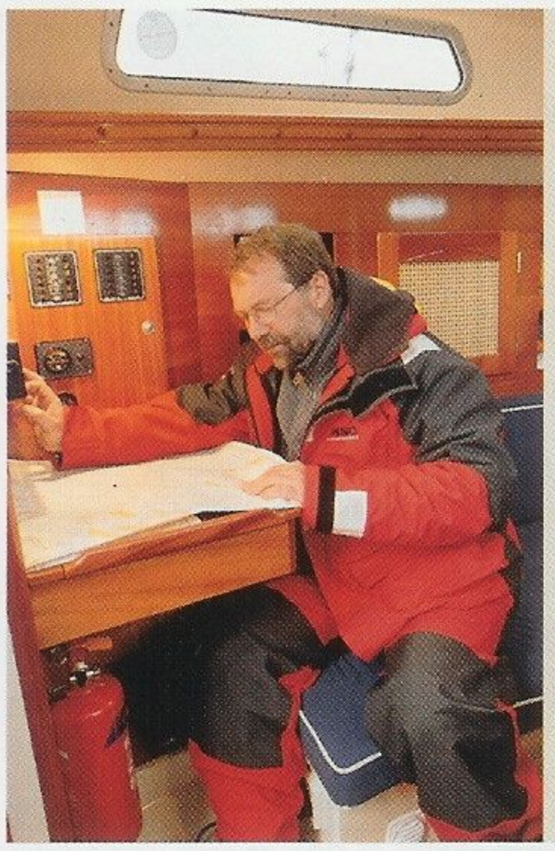
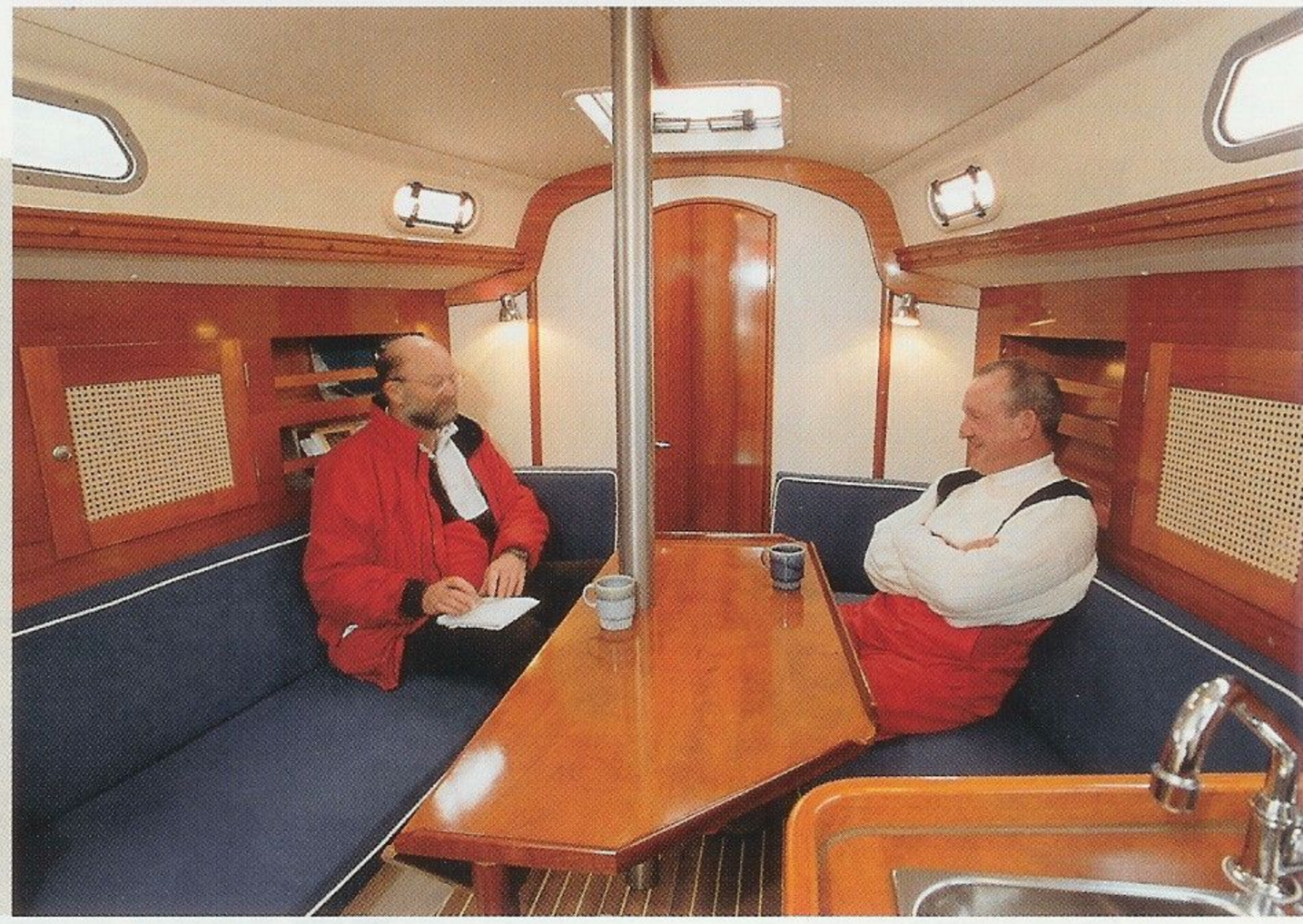
Hanse 311





Left: the chart table is adequate but is set quite high and its tray is shallow Right: the saloon decor is unconventional but pleasing

On deck

The cockpit has been designed to accommodate wheel steering, so with just a tiller, there was plenty of room for the crew. However, for the same reason, the after half was rather wide, as we discovered when she was well heeled, and the helmsman could do with a foot bar. The seating is comfortable enough in the forward half, though. There are two deep after lockers, one of which has a ply box for the gas bottles.

Our boat was fitted with a non-standard mainsheet traveller which, though efficient in sailing terms, was a serious obstruction in the centre of the cockpit. Although the standard rig includes a self-tacking jib, Harken 32 genoa sheet winches are included in the package together with tracks and cars. The winches seemed to be a little far forward to be easily worked by a solo helmsman. The single sheet for the self-tacking jib is trimmed using the single-speed Harken 16 halyard winch on the coachroof.

The side decks are wide and protected by the high cabintop. The excellent non-slip is missing from key parts of the cockpit coamings and the curved sides of the coachroof. The bow roller was a post-production addition and a better one is being developed for the British market. The anchor locker is on the small side.

Under way

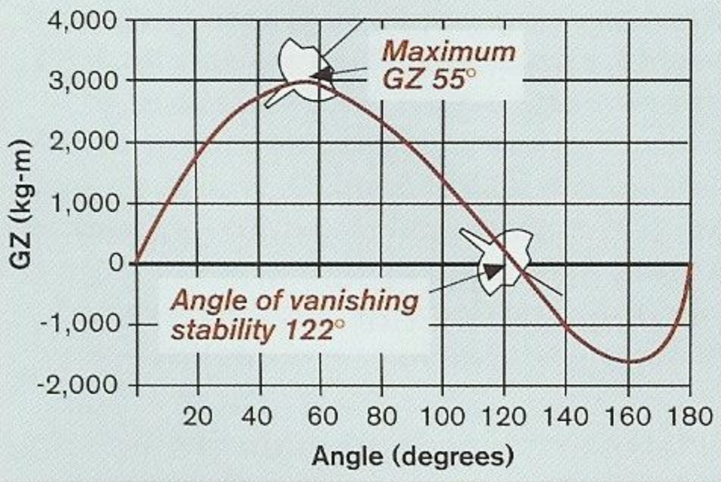
We had testing conditions for our trials, with a gusty Force 6-7 blowing down the Orwell. Gybing round the myriad bends was educational and the beat back showed perfectly the advantages of self-tacking rigs. We also had cause to bless Hanse's single line reefing system and the self-stowing mainsail cover, although the latter is on the options list, along with full battens for the main.

The standard rig is a $^{7}/_{8}$ths fractional with a 100%, self-tacking jib and large main. There is a rigid kicker and a rather under-powered backstay tensioner. The jib is on a roller reefing gear. A 125% genoa is optional, though many owners might prefer a large reaching sail to give power off the wind in light airs.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS & OPTIONS

Hanse 311
Category A (Ocean)

STABILITY CURVE FOR HANSE 311

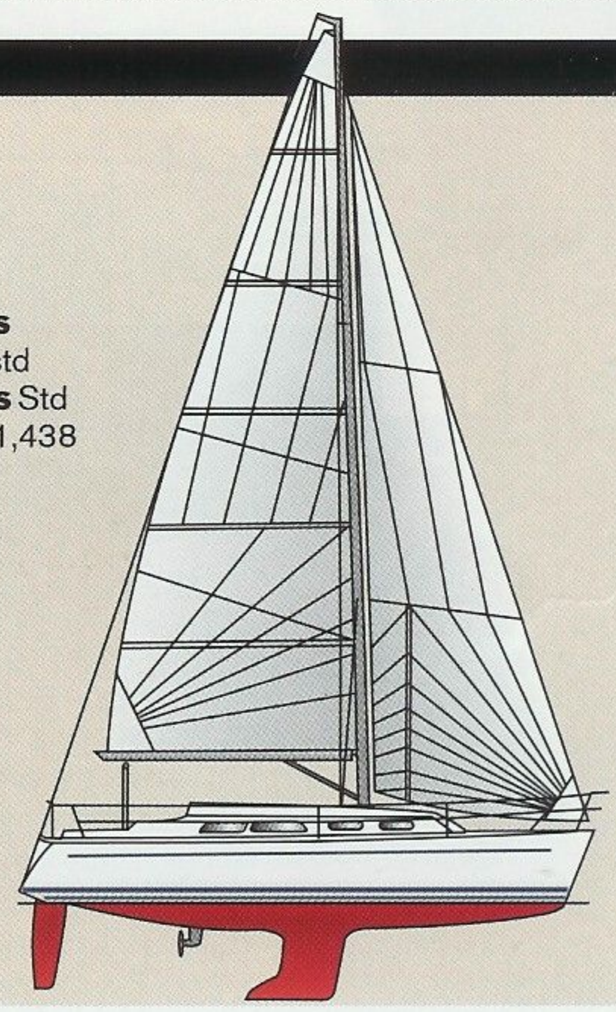


Specifications

Price £45,990
LOA 9.45m (31ft)
LWL 8.07m (26ft 6in)
Beam 3.29m (10ft 6in)
Draught (deep) 1.75m (5ft 9in)
Displacement 3,860kg (8,492lb)
Ballast (deep) 1,250kg (2,750lb)
Sail area 50m² (538sq ft)
Sail area/disp ratio 20.7
Disp/length ratio 203.7
Ballast ratio 32.3%
Berths 6
Engine Volvo 2020 19hp
Batteries 1x70ah
Fuel 50lits (11 gals)
Water 100lits (21 gals)
Builder Hanse, Greifswald, Germany
Regional agents North: Robsons, Tel: 01539 447700. SW: South Western Yacht Brokers Group, Tel: 01752 551991 Solent and South Coast: Focus Yachting Ltd, Tel: 01202 668860

Options

Teak decks £3,868
FB main £324
Genoa £924
Sprayhood £614
Sailing instruments Echosounder and log std
Self-tailing winches Std
Electric windlass £1,438
Ground tackle Std
Storm jib £266
Leecloths £150 pair
Refrigeration £700
Shore power £316
Hot water £847
VHF Shipmate RS300 £912
Holding tank £353
Folding prop £291
Antifouling £441
Delivery and commissioning approx £1,000



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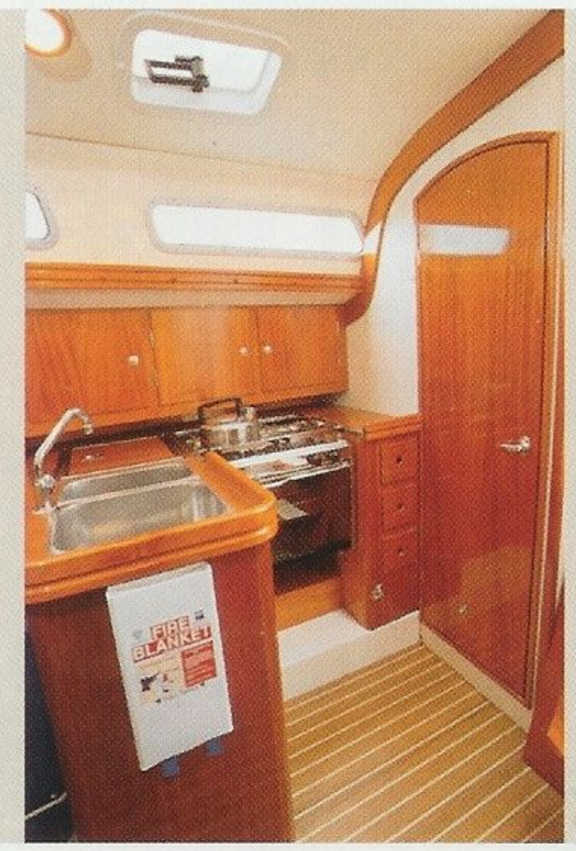
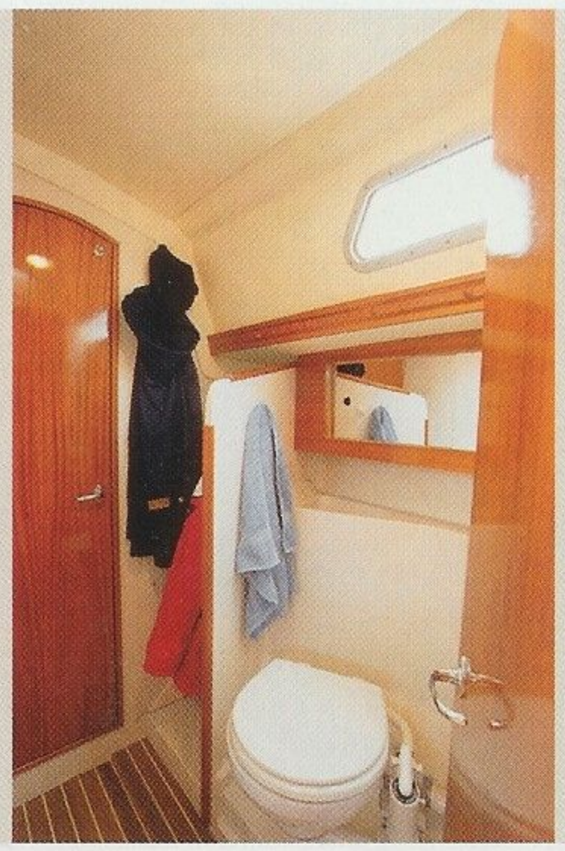
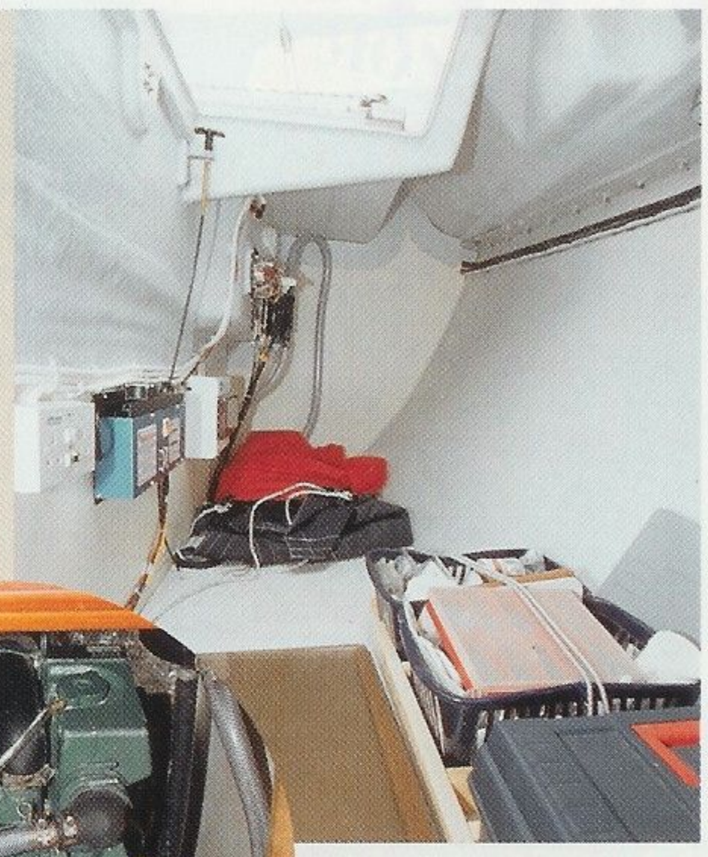




Far left: the galley is about as big as you could expect on a 31-footer
Left: good hanging space for oilskins in the large heads compartment. The door to the left of the picture leads into a vast locker (right) which also has deck access



We set off from Ipswich in a true wind of around 15 knots dead aft. With a boom that would clear the heads of most crew but not our helmsman, a careful eye was kept on the Windex. A fault in the steering immediately became apparent since the helm was unduly heavy. This was almost certainly due to over-tight bearings, but it made the boat unfairly difficult to handle in the conditions.

Despite the weight and lack of feed-back, the Hanse was remarkably sensitive to the helm and responded quickly to the slightest movement of the tiller. She was soon slipping along at a lively 6 knots and achieved the first gybe without difficulty. The second coincided with a gusty windshift and the stiff helm could not be put over fast enough to stop her rounding up in a startling broach. The rest of our passage was less eventful. On a broad to beam reach she had over 7 knots showing on the log in 12 knots apparent wind.

For the beat back up-river we dropped in one reef, which quickly turned into two, but held on to the full jib. She tacked lightning-fast and the helmsman had to be on his toes to catch her as the headsail filled the instant she was round. As a consequence we lost very little speed between tacks and even against the tide made good progress up-river. The swirling wind made it difficult to get accurate tack angles but she seemed close winded and made an average of 85-90° between tacks.

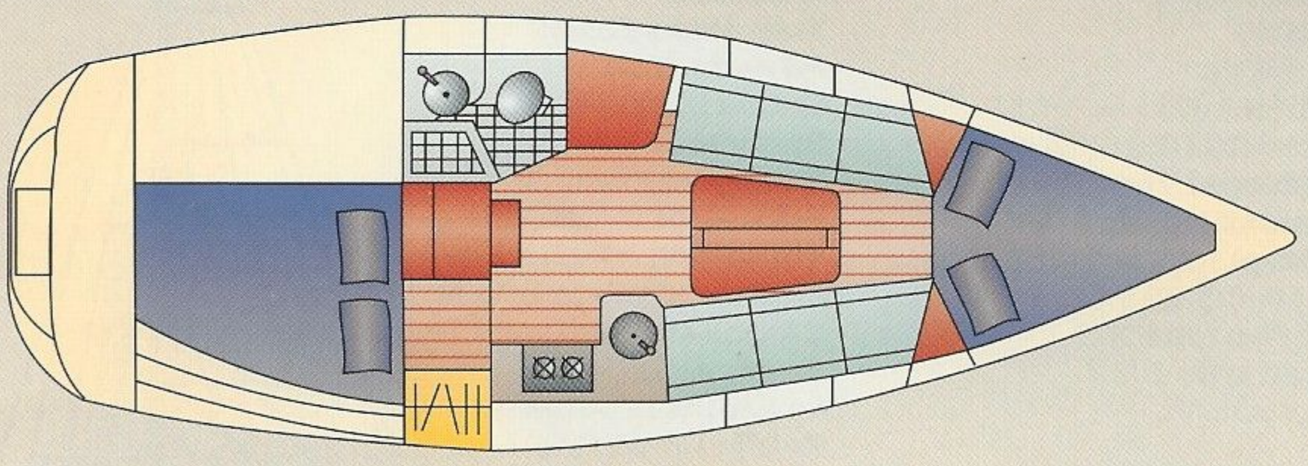
Our boat had the deep keel, which helped her to stand up to the wind but in the stronger gusts it was important to play the mainsheet. She made a steady 5.5 knots hard on the wind, rising occasionally to 6 knots.

Beating up a narrow river near Low Water against half a gale is probably the sort of thing you only do on a boat test and the fact that the Hanse coped with it, with only a few minor alarms, is to her credit. All the indications are that, in lighter conditions, and with the stiffness eased out of the rudder bearings, she will prove a sensitive, responsive and reasonably quick family cruiser.

Under power

The Volvo 2020 19hp diesel is a tight fit under the companionway and it has been necessary to cut an extra hatch in the after cabin to get to all the service points. We would have been happier if there had been double hose clips on the raw water cooling intake. The two-bladed fixed prop bit well and we found she could maintain 6 knots into the wind in flat water. Top speed was just under 7 knots.

She is possibly the sharpest-turning yacht we have tested. She nearly fulfils the cliché of 'literally spinning on her keel' and there is no difference whether turning to port or starboard. Indeed, she turns as tightly astern as many yachts do ahead. Our final exercise involved going astern between two rows of moored boats across the wind before turning downwind into a narrow berth. The Hanse 311 got it spot on first time.



Construction

The hull is a balsa sandwich construction to the waterline and then a solid laminate of CSM and woven rovings to the keel area which is heavily reinforced. All resins are isophthalic and the inner surfaces are gelcoated. A tray moulding is laminated to the hull to reinforce the bilge area and one stringer a side runs the full length of the boat. Bulkheads are laminated to the hull and deck. The deck has a balsa core in horizontal surfaces with solid laminate and ply backing plates in way of fittings. The fin keel is cast iron, the wing keel is lead.

VERDICT

The owner of our test boat is an experienced yachtsman taking his first step into new-boat ownership. He admitted there were a few rough edges to sort out but he was generally impressed with what he had bought for his money. The inventory is a little light in some respects but the price leaves a bit of slack for fitting the gear you really want. The basic structure of the boat looks sound. The furniture and trim is now up to an acceptable level. She is a package that could prove hard to ignore by people coming into boat ownership for the first time, and who want to avoid the pitfalls of the second-hand market.

For: Value for money
Saloon design
Easy handling under sail

Against: Short inventory
Narrow doors
Lack of ventilators