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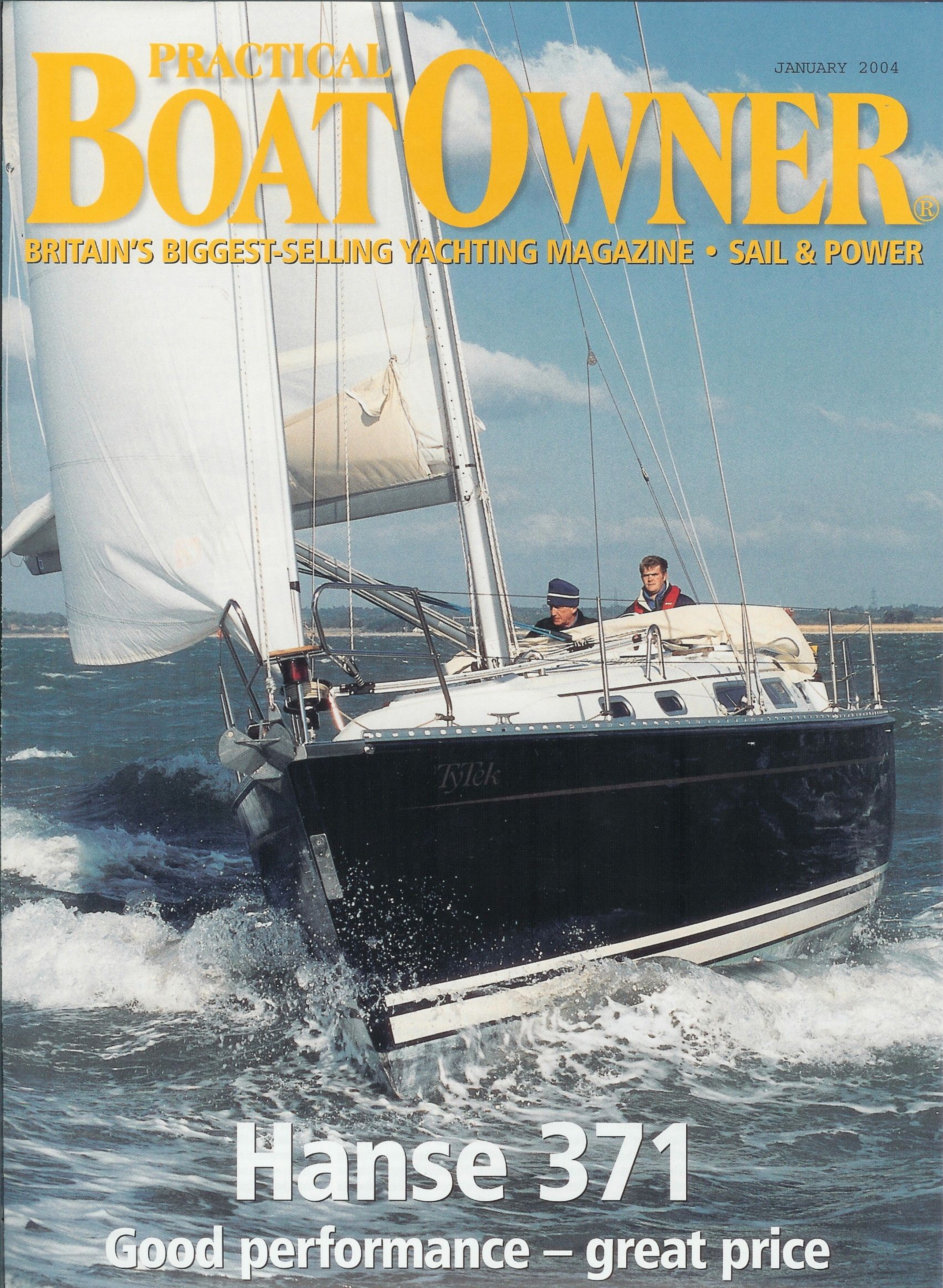

Hanse 371

Good performance – great price

Different by design

Time was when people expected to get what they paid for. Paying good money meant getting a good boat. Handing over a smaller wodge of cash meant accepting a few compromises, but if you had established your priorities, knew what to look for and understood where the builder had made savings, you would have a good idea of what to expect.

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Over the past decade or so, things seem to have changed. We now hear stories of people comparing boats from opposite ends of the quality spectrum, looking at nothing except how big a boat they can get for their money and remaining oblivious to even the most elementary differences in design and construction. One dealer recently recounted how a potential buyer had walked onto his stand at a boat show and demanded the answers to just two questions: how long was the boat, and how much did it cost? When a quick calculation showed that he could buy something that was cheaper for its size, he lost interest and walked off.

It's a trend with worrying implications, and one that can make life harder for builders whose boats don't come top in the 'how-cheap-can-they-make-them?' league compiled by some of today's boat show visitors. The relatively low-volume, semi-bespoke end of the market has been affected most, but even yards such as Hanse – whose boats are among the least expensive for their length – have sometimes lost sales because the formula has worked against them.

Hanses don't offer as much space for the money as some other boats for one simple reason: they're designed to sail. It's a distinction that sometimes seems to elude people, including our 'just-two-questions' friend at the boat show. I never cease to be amazed by some of the boats that end up on the same list, and I find it hard to understand how the Hanses are sometimes lumped together with boats of a fundamentally different nature simply because they're in the same price bracket.

Of course, prospective purchasers might be wondering whether to please those members of the family for whom in-harbour comfort is a priority, or to satisfy their own desire for sailing qualities. Nonetheless, it's important to differentiate between boats with beamy, high-volume hulls, shallow draught and modest rigs and the finer-lined, deeper-draught and more generously-canvassed offerings like the Hanses.

The Hanse 371 is a lot of boat for the money – but to buy her for the price alone would be to miss the point, says **David Harding**

Contributing to the confusion, I suspect, is the fact that the Hanses are fast without looking racy. While even a novice might guess that a Mumm 30 would sail faster than a Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 29.1, it takes a little more perception to distinguish between a Hanse 371 and a Bavaria 38, for example. Hanses occupy the middle ground: they're performance cruisers, neither floating country cottages nor the sort of boats that are widely raced. They're aimed at people whose principal interest is cruising, but who like to cruise quickly in a boat that's enjoyable and responsive to sail.

Looking for clues

Since the Hanse 371 doesn't have the marine equivalent of the GT badge, go-faster stripes, alloy wheels and rear spoiler to draw attention to her performance potential, what clues are there for those wandering around the boat show and faced by dozens of thirty-something-footers with plastic hulls and fin keels?

The pedigree of the yard and the designer is normally a good starting point. Hanse was formed by Michael Schmidt, a successful racing sailor who led the German Admiral's Cup team to victory in 1985. If you like boats that sail, you've a better chance of finding them if the owner of the yard is similarly inclined.

Schmidt formed the company in Greifswald, in what had been East Germany, and acquired the moulds of discontinued Scandinavian designs. First came the Hanse 291 – formerly the Aphrodite 29, built in Sweden by Rex Marin. Then the Finngulf 33 became the Hanse 331, while the Bianca 42 had her stern chopped down and was introduced as the Hanse 400. All three boats sailed beautifully and, thanks to cheap moulds and government grants following the reunification of Germany, they were sold for almost unbelievably low prices.

Despite this successful recycling of old moulds, Schmidt realised that the boats lacked the internal volume needed for wide appeal in the long term: he needed to develop a range that offered more accommodation while retaining the sailing performance for which the marque had become known. He re-jigged the 291 and kept her going as an economical starter boat, but commissioned a series of new designs from Judel and Vrolijk – Germany's best-known design team, with an enviable record in everything from Admiral's Cuppers to Whitbread 60s and IACC boats. With men like that behind them, there was never any doubt that the new Hanses were going to sail.

Even if you knew nothing about the Hanses' background, you could still ▶

ABOVE: the standard self-tacking headsail provides ample power for cruising in a Force 4 and above

ABOVE: the 371 is well mannered when pressed hard

RIGHT: centre-boom sheeting keeps the cockpit clear, but works at a mechanical disadvantage. A traveller in the cockpit is an option

distinguish them from their podgier competitors. Look at the 371's healthy draught, relatively fine entry and narrow waterline, modest freeboard and generous rig. A little number-crunching reveals a displacement/length ratio of 174 and a sail area/displacement ratio of just under 21. And there's more. Instead of the usual iron fin bolted straight onto the hull, Hanse have used lead on the bottom and iron at the top, thereby ensuring a lower centre of gravity and greater sail-carrying ability. Ideally, you would find lead on the bottom of a moulded stub or spacer, but that's usually the preserve of boats with a substantially higher price tag.

Whichever way you look at her, the 371 is a boat with a performance bias. On the other hand, she comes with several features that distinguish her from racier designs such as the X-Yachts, Elans and the new Dufours (apart from being heavier and with shallower draught). One is the siting of the mainsheet traveller on the coachroof – though it can be moved into the cockpit – and the other is the provision of a self-tacking jib as standard (an overlapping genoa is an option). It's hard to provide enough sail area for good light-airs performance with a non-overlapping sail plan unless a boat is either lighter than the Hanse, or stiff enough to carry a tall rig with an enormous mainsail. All the same, the compromise in performance at the lower end of the wind range is something that many Hanse owners seem prepared to accept: relatively few boats have been sold with genoas.

Powering up

Another drawback of self-tackers is that they lose much of their drive as soon as you ease the sheet a few inches: the leech twists open and only the bottom of the sail provides any drive. But you notice the benefits upwind when it's blowing as hard as it was when I took the 371 for a spin recently. In a breeze of 25 knots-plus, a short-footed, high aspect ratio headsail is infinitely more efficient than a genoa that's been reefed around a foil. With a slab in the mainsail to help keep the boat on her feet, we made upwind at a consistent 6.5 knots, tacking through 80 to 85° and hitting 9 knots when we bore away onto a reach.

With good sails and a folding prop instead of the fixed two-blader, there's no doubt that we would have done better still: as on the Hanse 315 (see PBO 438), the standard East sails did the boat no justice. Since our demonstrator left the factory earlier this year, Hanse switched to Doyle Sails for a while before giving their business to the North loft in Denmark. They're also in the process of standardising on Harken deck hardware instead of using a mix from a variety of manufacturers. When a boat has the performance

DOWN BELOW

■ Hanse have developed a distinctive interior style over the past few years: red-stained mahogany trim coated in a high-gloss varnish and set off by white-painted bulkheads. The finish is generally neat, but with few laminated corners. Radiused curves, such as around the door frames and galley, are usually in sections with deliberate gaps between them.

Unusually, Hanse use interior mouldings only in the forecabin, after cabin and heads. Instead, the joinery is bonded to the hull, which is reinforced in the traditional manner with frames and stringers. Overhead, you find removable panels covering the deckhead except in the cabins each end. Here, it's moulded, but with sections along the outboard sides that can be unscrewed to allow access to the hull/deck joint.

Notable features include the chart table, opposite the saloon on the port side, with seating forward and aft. Owners generally seem happy with it. And it's no good looking for the battery switches in the normal places. With a keyless engine, such as the Volvo, it's a good idea to hide them somewhere that's easy to reach but not so easy to find.

Access to the systems, tanks and engine is generally good, and much better than on the Hanse 315 (see PBO 438).

ABOVE: with varnished trim and white bulkheads, the Hanse's interior feels more American than European

LEFT: the chart table doesn't conform with the norm for an offshore cruiser, but the layout has its advantages

RIGHT: a door at the after end of the galley opens into the enormous cockpit locker. Both the galley and locker are smaller if you choose the second double after-cabin

potential of a Hanse, it seems a shame to compromise it with budget sails and to make it look as though the hardware is whatever the builder happened to have in the box at the time. These upgrades will be a big step forward.

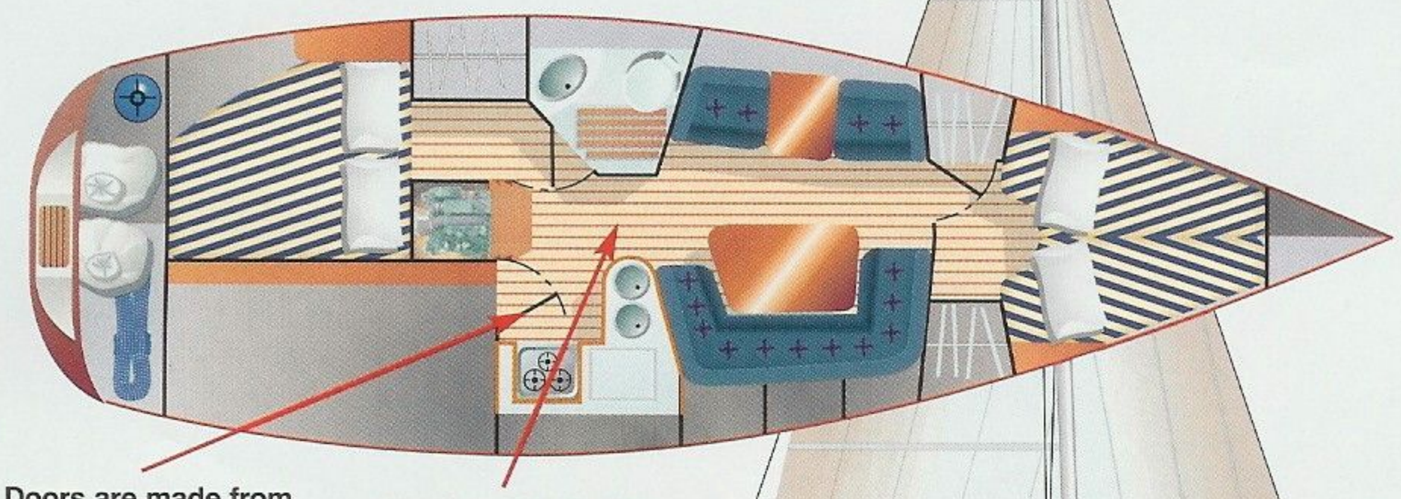
Even though we had to make do with the poorly cut sails on our test boat, the 371 proved a delight to handle. She was finger-light to steer via the Whitlock rod linkage, with the wheel only loading up slightly when the toerail started getting wet. By the time the rudder eventually lost grip, the leeward deck would be well under-water but no drama ensured: the boat just rounded up a few degrees in a token protest and then, when the gust passed, the main sheet was eased or the helmsman stopped trying to provoke her, she carried on as before.

For a boat that's light by cruising standards, the Hanse felt surprisingly smooth and long-legged. She was also remarkably tolerant when thrown into tight manoeuvres, spinning through 360° in either direction with the sails pinned in, and describing a circle little more than a boat-length in diameter. Still moving at about 3 knots when she crossed her own wake to complete the loop, she accelerated smoothly back to cruising speed without a hint of stalling. She'd be great for match-racing, and, of more relevance to cruising sailors, could be wriggled into and out of tight spaces under perfect control. Especially when you're short-handed, it's important to have a boat that answers the helm and goes where you point her without argument.

Having failed to induce any protests with the pirouette routine, I put her head-to-wind until she was virtually dead in the water (something that's easier with a self-tacker, because it won't back) before bearing away onto a close-hauled course. That's when I expected her to heel over and slip sideways, but yet again she pulled away without so much as a murmur of discontent. And that was in a Force 6, with too much sail up. While we chose to keep the boat over-canvassed, to show up any handling quirks, I'd have taken in a second slab before setting off on a long windward leg.

Blocks and string

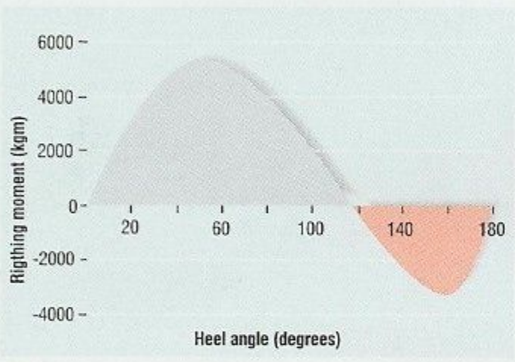
For all her good manners, handling would have been made easier by a more powerful backstay tensioner to control the mainsail and the headstay sag (we took the tail around the genoa winch), halyards that didn't stretch so much and a mainsheet that the helmsman could reach. All those issues are simple to address, and indeed two alternative mainsheet systems are offered. What matters most is that the 371 seems to do everything that's asked of her. She also joins that select group of cruising yachts that makes you want to hog the ▷

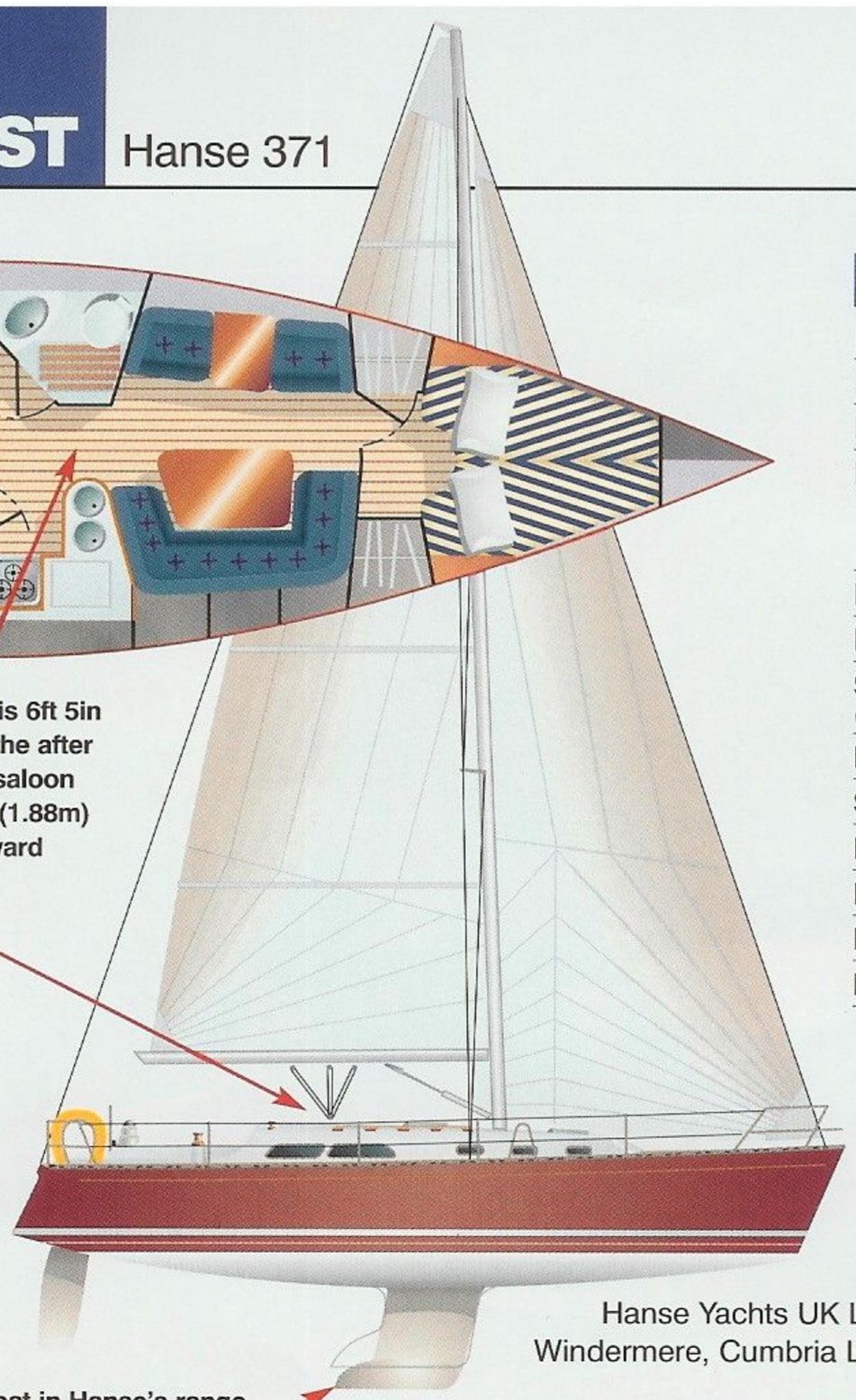


Doors are made from foam sandwich to save weight

Headroom is 6ft 5in (1.96m) at the after end of the saloon and 6ft 2in (1.88m) further forward

Taken to a track across the coachroof as standard, the mainsheet can be moved aft to the cockpit





The 371 is the smallest boat in Hanse's range to fit a lead keel, though the upper section is iron. A shallow fin and centreplate are options

HANSE 371 SPECIFICATION

LOA	36ft 11in (11.25m)
LWL	32ft 4in (9.85m)
Beam	11ft 9in (3.59m)
Draught – standard fin	6ft 6in (1.98m)
– shallow fin	5ft 6in (1.69m)
– centreplate	3ft 5in (1.05m)
Displacement	13,117lb (5,950kg)
Ballast	4,950lb (2,245kg)
Sail area (main and 100% foretriangle)	717sq ft (66.61sq m)
Displacement/length ratio	174
Sail area/displacement ratio	20.96
RCD category	A
Engine	Yanmar 3GM, 29hp
Headroom	6ft 5in (1.96m)
Designer	Judel/Vrolijk

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11,500 miles and counting...

■ Philip Watson, Hanse's dealer in Ireland, bought a Hanse 371 a couple of years ago for his own use. It was only later that the thought of competing in the ARC occurred to him, so he took the boat up to the Scottish Series for some racing, 'to see what broke and for some accelerated ageing'. Finishing third, behind two seriously-campaigned racing boats, and having bent nothing other than the spinnaker pole, he then started preparing for a double crossing of the Atlantic.

Philip and his crew won their class in the ARC, averaging 7.6 knots and completing the trip to St Lucia in 15½ days. Their highest recorded speed was 17 knots, with 12 knots appearing on log for 15 minutes during a 30-knot squall. Most of the time, they sailed under twin, poled-out yankees and no mainsail, only occasionally flying the spinnaker. Much of the return trip was completed in light airs, but more boisterous conditions saw them reach Kinsale within a week of leaving the Azores, again averaging over 7 knots.

helm. I had to tear myself away to take a tour of deck and interior at 25° of heel. The latter expedition revealed a shortage of handholds between the compression post and the galley.

In terms of crew comfort, the 8ft-long cockpit (2.4m) might be a friendlier place for short people if it had a foot-brace down the middle. And owners with small children will want to specify the washboard-style acrylic sheet that fills the gap in the transom. Otherwise, there was little to complain about. The coamings were nicely angled and high enough to deflect all but the most determined wave sweeping back along the deck. My biggest concern at this end of the boat was how useable the emergency tiller would be. Only 21in (53cm) long and facing aft, it would call for a system of lines and blocks if it were to exert any influence over the rudder. At least the short rod linkage is easily reached via the stern locker.

Unless you choose the option of twin double after-cabins, there's an enormous, full-depth locker to starboard with a door that opens into the accommodation. Climbing inside, you can see that the bolts securing the hull-to-deck joint are threaded into rectangular backing plates instead of washers, because the plates won't spin around (they hit the inside of the hull moulding) and don't need to be held by a spanner.

Poking around inside the lockers and into dark corners throughout the boat reveals plenty of rough edges, a few areas of dry mat, and other signs that she has been put together fairly quickly. Similarly, the hull's external finish is ripply in places. Yet Hanses have a better reputation than some in terms of structural integrity. As journalists, all too often we hear alarming stories from owners, charter and delivery skippers, surveyors and repair yards about how well boats have been built. Some names crop up more often than others. So far, the worst I've heard about Hanse has been relatively mild.

Under power, the 371 is as agile as they come. Astern in a stiff breeze, she could be made to pull her bow through the wind against the prop-walk and then to slalom slowly with no tendency to weather-cock. With the throttle fully open, the Volvo 2030 Saildrive (which is giving way to the Yanmar 3GM on new boats) drove her along at just short of 7 knots. It sounded busy and slightly bumpy, but not unduly noisy at its maximum of 3,400 rpm.

With a boat like the Hanse, you'll be tempted to sail rather than motor whenever you can: her speed, responsiveness and obedience put her in a different league to much of the competition. She's a boat you will choose to sail for the pleasure of sailing, and not just because bobbing around on the water is more agreeable than sitting in an office.

If you're used to racing yachts – which are lighter, more expensive and deeper in the draught – the 371 might feel like a cruising boat, because that's what she is. But in terms of performance for the money, she probably tops the table. PBO