



Billy Black

Despite its sizeable length and girth, the Hanse 540e is well-suited for doublehanded cruising.

HANSE 540E: BIG, BRASH, AND COMFORTABLE

Beamy topsides and bold below, this new sailboat from Germany is intended to be handled by a couple. "Boat Review" supplement to our June 2007 issue

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By Mark Pillsbury [More articles by this author](#)

When I first laid eyes on the Hanse 540e on the dock at Strictly Sail Miami, I thought, "Man, that's a big boat." With 16 feet of beam amidships, wide, uncluttered teak decks, a sleek, wedge-shaped cabin top, a transom garage that can hold a RIB and lots of extra gear, an enormous cockpit, and room enough behind twin wheels for a full America's Cup afterguard, this new offering from Germany seemed, well, big for its size.

I was thinking the same a couple days later as we motored seaward through the chop at Government Cut. Trawlers, flybridge sedans, tugs, freighters, cigarette boats: Bring it on, because this baby, with a little better than 41,000 pounds of displacement and nearly 13,000 pounds of ballast in her keel, cut right through the chop kicked up along this busy piece off water. Pushed along by a 110-horsepower Volvo and conventional shaft, the 540e cruised steadily along, making 7.5 knots at 2,600 rpm and jumping to about 9 knots

with the throttle open (3,800 rpm). The boat turned nimbly for her size and backed obediently after a little initial prop walk, thanks to a balanced spade rudder that could get a little ahead of you, if you weren't paying attention.

Once out in open waters, running the main up the 540e's 86-foot-tall mast was a cinch, thanks to an electric Lewmar 54 winch mounted just forward of the starboard wheel. All sail control lines were led aft from the mast and through the banks of six-line clutches mounted on either cockpit coaming. Once braked, the main halyard was removed from the drum, which does double duty as the trimming station for the self-tacking 95-percent jib. At the portside wheel, there's a manual Lewmar 54 for sheeting the main, and there's a pair of Lewmar 46s port and starboard for secondaries. Hanse is a builder with certain opinions about how a boat should perform, and for that reason doesn't offer a furling main, says Don Walsh, head of Hanse Yachts US.

With the jib rolled out and sailing in about 10 knots of breeze, we did about 5.5 knots over the ground closehauled (according to my Garmin Geko GPS). The toughest thing about tacking was the inevitable joke about the effort—or lack thereof—needed to tame the self-tending rig. The boat was a dream to steer and tracked well in the modest breeze.

Among those on board for this test sail were Don and his two favorite customers, Rhode Islanders Bill and Lucille Varr. They had come to Miami for the show seemingly all but ready to put a deposit down on a much more traditional boat before they came across the 540e. They toured it on Thursday, signed a contract on Friday, and delivered a deposit on Saturday—all without the boat ever having left the dock. I won't say they didn't look a little nervous as the bow thruster kicked in, we eased out of the slip, and left the marina, but then again, I won't say they didn't look pretty darned pleased a little later as they took over the helm while a photo boat circled around us off South Beach. With the wind on the beam, the boat gained another knot, but farther off the wind it became apparent that some sort of downwind sail would be appreciated.

When they discovered the 540e, Bill and Lucille said they were taken by the boat's simple but powerful rig, uncluttered deck layout, and modern interior below. After many seasons campaigning a performance cruiser on Narragansett Bay, they were looking forward to some relaxed sailing and were sold on how the 540e was set up to be handled by a couple. In fact, one of the upgrades being much discussed by Lucille on the trip back to the dock was a second electric winch to replace the manual one controlling the mainsheet.

Below, the Hanse 540e offers a distinct interior with a strong Euro flair. Bold fabrics, white bulkheads, dark Corian counters and sink, and mahogany woodwork play off each other to create a modern, perhaps stark, look. In the saloon, there is a decided lack of fiddles throughout, a reflection of the builder's belief that most meals will be cooked in harbor, noted Jim Williams, a St. Petersburg Hanse dealer. There are several interior layouts available; the boat we sailed offered a spacious owner's stateroom forward and two cabins with double berths aft.

One thing I found surprising given the size of the interior was that upon entering the main companionway I had to turn sideways and then backwards to descend the steps (and later hit my head on the hatch when coming back up). Belowdecks, I also found the lack of available handholds disconcerting, and the same was the case on deck.

The 540e has a sleek and racy appearance: Genoa tracks are recessed into the deck and all six mooring cleats are collapsible. Both anchor and bow roller fold back and are tucked away in the covered chain locker. Just aft is a roomy storage area that's enclosed by a watertight bulkhead between it and the owner's cabin.

Climbing in and out of the cockpit was a bit awkward because of the width of the coamings and the placement of line clutches on them, but I'd expect you'd get used to this. You'd likely warm more easily to the comfortable seats and drop-leaf acrylic top table that doubles as a handy brace when heeled under way.

The "e" in 540e denotes an epoxy-impregnated hull that Hanse employs on all its larger boats. Prepreg fiberglass is laid up over Corecell foam. Base price for the boat is \$464,000, delivered to the U.S. East Coast, but the model we sailed, with options, was priced at \$631,000. All and all, it's a lot of boat for a couple intent on making relatively fast passages with ease, and relaxing in

comfort once the next port's been reached.

Hanse 540e Specs

LOA: 52' 10" (16.10 m.)

LWL: 47' 11" (14.61 m.)

Beam: 16' 1" (4.90 m.)

Draft (standard): 9' 2" (2.79 m.)

Sail Area (100%): 1,445 sq. ft. (134 sq. m.)

Ballast: 12,804 lb. (5.808 kg.)

Displacement: 41,226 lb. (18,700 kg.)

Ballast/D: .31

D/L: 167

SA/D: 19.4

Water: 182 gal. (690 l.)

Fuel: 99 gal. (375 l.)

Mast Height: 86' 1" (26.25 m.)

Engine: 110-horsepower Volvo

Designer Judel / Vrolijk & Co.

Price: \$500,000

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