



Hanse 540e

The German builder of ultra-modern cruisers offers sweet sailing performance and chic Euro styling in a unique 54-footer

The wind was light and rain clouds drifted slowly along the Connecticut shore as we unmoored the big Hanse 540e and motored out into the channel to raise sails. We were in Norwalk, an old industrial town with brick factories and warehouses along the town waterfront. We turned off the engine and tacked up the channel toward town, dodging moored boats and rocky out crops.

The 540e has a large high-roach mainsail and a blade 90-percent self-tacking jib that is sheeted to large electric winches in the cockpit. We were sailing in tight quarters but the boat handled like a big dinghy as we effortlessly threw it through one tack after another.

What was surprising at first was how nimble and quick the boat was. It has a fin-keel, spade rudder design, but it also displaces over 40,000 pounds. Yet, in the light breeze it gathered speed nicely and sailed at the same speed as the true wind as we sailed up the channel.

We spun the 540e around at the head of the channel and ran toward Long Island Sound. Off the wind the big mainsail bears the load and drives the hull deliberately. We zigged and zagged our way toward open water, jibing as need be with only the mainsheet to manage through the jibes.

Downwind the blade jib, which sheets inboard for tight and efficient upwind sailing, loses effectiveness as it is eased out. The trick with self-

tacking jibs is to run lazy sheets outside the shrouds that can be quickly attached when sailing off the wind. Moving the sheet lead outboard and aft allows you to trim the blade for better efficiency.

Out in Long Island Sound, the wind died away as the clouds glowered ever more darkly and threatened rain. With the 110-horsepower engine cranked up, which was driving a folding prop, we headed back to the marina. At full revs, the 540e will cruise along at a cool 10 knots; at cruising revs it will maintain an easy 8 knots. The boat handles easily and surely around the docks and will back in to a tight mooring without significant prop-walk or rudder stall.

We did not put the 540e through a long or varied sea trial but we did have the chance to see how it sailed in light airs, how it handled around the docks and what its potential will be for coastal and offshore sailing. It is a very sweet sailing sloop, first of all, with the potential for very high



The clean, flush foredeck and wide side decks will be easy to maneuver around and are great for lounging

average speeds on passage. It is easy to handle under power and sail for a couple or even a lone watch keeper. The decks are open and uncluttered; all halyards, reefing lines and main-sail control lines run aft from the mast to the cockpit via conduits built into the cabin top. The boat has been well thought out for cruising and occasional racing and will ultimately be a real joy to sail.

THE DESIGN CONCEPT

Hanse yachts are designed by the noted German design firm of Judel/Vrolijk and the 540e is a good example of the style and substance that has made Hanse such a dominant force in boatbuilding over the last decade.

With 16-feet of beam, the hull has a huge amount of volume into which has been built a spacious and comfortable interior. The hull shape is simple, modern and slippery, as we noted during the sailing trials. The bulb keel provides almost 13,000

pounds of ballast positioned well below the hull's center of gravity; this enhances stiffness and makes the boat a very stable platform. The spade rudder is quite high aspect for a cruising boat but does steer the boat surely and quickly without adding drag from unneeded wetted surface.

The bow section of the hull is quite full by modern racer-cruiser standards, which adds buoyancy forward and will both provide an easy motion in a seaway and keep the decks dry.

In order to have the flush deck forward and the low profile cabin top—while still maintaining generous headroom below—the 540e has quite high topsides, which also help to keep the decks and crew dry in bouncy conditions. The somewhat boxy look of the hull—plumb bow and nearly vertical transom—gives the boat a very purposeful style and the high topsides are broken visually with a well placed cove stripe and

side port lights.

If there is a design element that will seem unique on first viewing the boat it has to be the open after deck and the lack of helmsman's seats behind the wheels. When steering, you either stand behind the wheels or sit on the wide coamings outboard. Visibility is excellent no matter where you are positioned and you can even sit between the wheels on the raised edge of the afterdeck and steer with either wheel.

The afterdeck is a great place for the crew to lounge and it provides a garage in the transom in which you can stow a good-sized dinghy while passagemaking. Moreover, the flush decks forward and aft give the boat a distinctly Euro feel—almost like a Wally Yacht.

LIVING ABOARD

It seems that 54 feet is becoming a size that really appeals to cruising and offshore racers these days—a size made popular by the Hylas 54,