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ON TEST MOODY 54DS

# In from the cold

If you had to pick a yacht to go sailing in the Baltic in December, the voluminous, warm and welcoming Moody 54DS would top a lot of lists. But her size can bring its own problems, reports Toby Hodges





- ▶ Where we tested: Laboe, Kiel, Germany
- ▶ Wind: 10-27 knots SW
- ▶ Model: four cabins, with galley on decksaloon level. Optional powered in-mast and twin-headsail furlers



I have never seen anything quite like it. Day after day crowds flocked to the Moody stand at Düsseldorf as if this were some sort of religious icon. At the world's largest boat show last year, one yacht stood out above all others, marked by this constant stream of people, queuing for a turn aboard.

And it could accommodate the masses, too – incredibly, up to 30 could enjoy the tour simultaneously. If there is a yacht you would want to host a party on, it's the Moody 54DS.

Step aboard and you'll see why. The hull is high enough to create capacious accommodation on the lower level, leaving a one-level living area through cockpit and decksaloon unmatched by any monohull of this size. The 54DS takes the concept to a new level – it is comparable, in





## ON TEST: MOODY 54DS



fact, to a motor sailer or cruising catamaran.

Bill Dixon has been very clever with the design, which looks elegant, especially when the yacht is heeled, and she provides unparalleled comfort for her size. The panoramic views and natural light are astonishing, and the incorporation of electrical appliances throughout gives this vessel the feel of a floating apartment. You can understand then, that if I had to choose a boat to sail in Germany in December, this new Moody ticked all the right boxes.

### Two-storey monohull

I couldn't help but wonder, though, how such a bulky, high-sided yacht would fare at sea. In an effort to offer a quality yacht at production boat prices, the Hanse Group,

▲ **Above: the 54DS amalgamates the best parts of the Moody 45DS (110 sold) and 62DS (12 sold), to create the ultimate decksaloon**

owner of Moody since 2007, again chose to borrow an existing hull mould. When the initial 54DS line drawings came back from the Dixon office they were reportedly similar enough to the existing Judel/Vrolijk-designed Hanse 575 to use that hull.

It can be shrewd business to use a hull of a proven yacht – 145 of the 575 have sold in two years. Many production manufacturers do it to save on building a new mould – indeed, Hanse did it with the Moody 62, which shares the mould of the Hanse 630. But at the same time it forces a comparison of dimensions that I find hard to ignore.

To put it crudely, the Moody is a two-storey Hanse. Bear in mind that the Hanse 575 is already a very high-sided boat – so high that you need stepladders to reach the

hatches from below – and you begin to get a picture of the size of vessel that greeted me in the fishing harbour of Laboe, near Kiel.

The superstructure of the Moody is gracefully designed to fit her length subtly. But the second 'storey' introduces a lot of weight high up – she is five tonnes heavier than the Hanse. And this extra weight introduces a whole new scale of loads. The added displacement requires more ballast, more engine power and more sail area to keep her moving in lighter airs.

In turn, the added loads require larger deck gear, halyards, winches, jammers – and lots of power to operate systems. It's a sobering linear increase in dimensions.

So however impressed I might be by the grandiose features of the 54DS, from the





- 1 Although large enough to be used for a crew cabin, the sail locker is ideal for housing the large downwind sails, cushions and fenders
- 2 Stanchions are neatly curved in amidships to allow for the genoa tracks to be mounted on the bulwarks. Extendable boarding ladders built into the rails are a necessity
- 3 The high bulwarks and fixed guardrails provide a superb sense of security when walking around the deck. Ironically, it is least secure between the wheels aft, where the deck is raised
- 4 The decksaloon roof is carried aft each side, which helps disguise the height with style. It also supports a very neat bimini that slides open manually – a design I'm sure we will see copied
- 5 Sheets and running rigging are led to electric winches each side, controlled from switches on the pedestal. Reversible winches would make more sense here
- 6 The shelter and protection of the cockpit is unsurpassed for a monohull. An optional soft bimini can completely enclose the cockpit
- 7 In addition to the vast amount of deck stowage, there is also a tender garage, with stowage for a liferaft

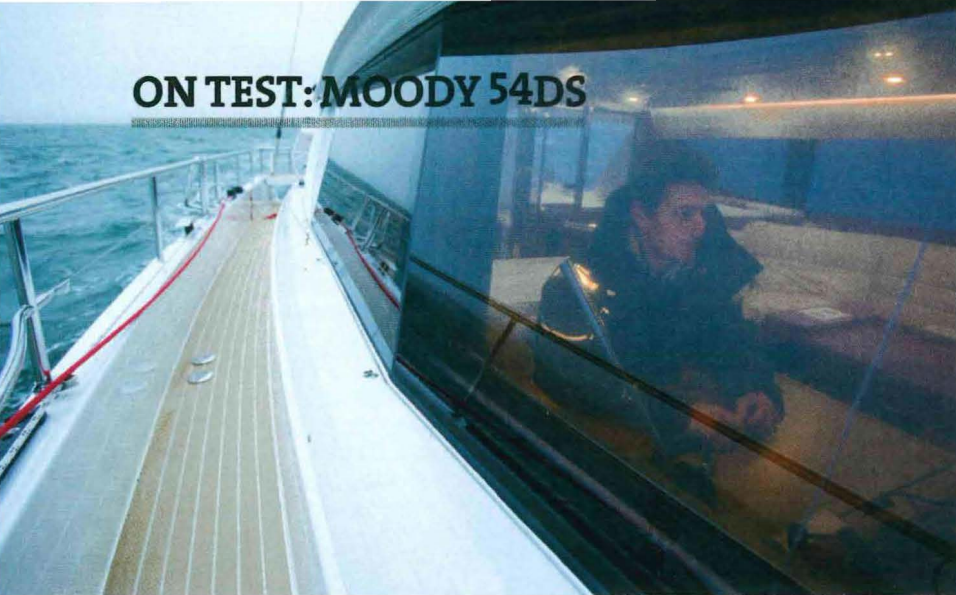
► Right: the twin-headsail set-up suits the 54DS perfectly. It allows you to change gear easily from the helm, while keeping full foresails to suit all conditions



Test photos: R Langdon/Ocean Images



## ON TEST: MOODY 54DS



▲ **Side decks** Bulwarks are high to give a feeling of security when walking round the deck. Stanchions are carefully curved to allow genoa tracks to be mounted here



▲ **Engine room** Thawing out – the soleboards of the decksaloon lift to reveal a prize asset of the 54DS, a spacious and impressively installed engine and machinery room. There is space enough to provide all-round access to the engine and genset, plus chargers, fuses, aircon units, etc. A washing machine can also be installed here, accessed through the day heads

► **Cockpit** The cockpit is the social heart of the boat, linked by sliding doors to the decksaloon and galley. This is where owners of the 54DS will spend the majority of their time, at sea or anchor. Options include a drawer-fridge and barbecue. The starboard lazarette locker provides fantastic stowage and is arranged tidily. Electronics, including bus modules and back-up 12V distribution panel, are mounted on the forward bulkhead and there is good access to the steering gear and stern thruster



▲ **Bus system** Moody chose to install a C-zone digital switching bus system as standard, which reduces cable runs and provides intuitive systems monitoring on touchscreen displays. But, perhaps aware that some owners will not want to rely on such a modern system offshore, Moody has commendably also installed a back-up 12V system so that the main powered sailing and navigation systems can still be operated independently of the bus system

moment I first tried to board using the necessary ladder integrated into the guardrail, I couldn't help feeling apprehension about the forces needed to get this big dame moving.

Of course, Moody and Dixon are a step ahead there. They know it's impossible to market a boat to a couple if she requires an army to handle her, so deckgear and sailing systems are cleverly arranged. Indeed, I was able to sail her up and down Kiel harbour largely on my own, thanks to manageable sail systems and sheets led to the helm.

### Sub-zero sailing

The wind chill factor sent temperatures plummeting well below 0°C as we prepared to go sailing. It felt more like gearing up for skiing, but at least we could layer up in the warmth of the heated saloon.

“ If I had to choose a boat to sail in Germany in December, this new Moody ticked all the right boxes ”

Once kitted out, we set sail quickly and easily with electric in-mast furling and two main electric winches to operate sheets and running rigging (all standard), plus optional powered furlers. Within minutes, we were sailing towards Kiel under full main and self-tacking jib into 17-20 knots of apparent wind.

The self-tacker is another winning hand taken from the Hanse deck, which allows one person to short-tack a large vessel with ease. And sailing in and out of restricted waters was a prime way of showing the benefits of a twin-headsail set-up. Sailing upwind with one sail, before furling it and

unwinding the larger headsail to return, proved easy and effective.

I instantly felt a goodly load on taking the helm of the 54DS. The Moody reps were quick to point out that this was because of the second independent steering system installed, which provides redundancy should one system break – both are wire-linked to the quadrant, but if one breaks it can be disconnected. That could certainly introduce friction, but to my mind the load was more an indication of the size of vessel and the amount of water she has to displace.

The Moody pointed well and averaged 7 knots as we tacked up past the entrance to the world's busiest artificial waterway. She is obedient and tacks quickly, assets to be grateful for when sailing in busy shipping channels. She responds to gusts and heels gracefully, clearly communicating a sense of





power. But the sailing was not as rewarding as you might expect of a modern monohull, considering it was full sail in flat water. During our European Yacht of the Year trials, the 54 went out in a Force 7 and steep waves, but needed the engine to keep her tracking, and testers reported slamming.

Steering from the twin helms works well. The forward visibility is commendable over and through the decksaloon. And with push button controls for the two winches on both pedestals it is easy to tweak sheets. Having a reversible option for these winches might make more sense, however, to keep sheets held safely in the self-tailers. And although there are tail boxes in the coamings aft, these are not large enough to prevent the cockpit becoming cluttered.

Downwind we averaged 6-6.5 knots in 10 apparent, gybing the genoa past the austere

Laboe naval memorial, until we met a horizon that remains empty until the Baltic meets Denmark. The Moody makes for a very comfortable platform on passage, whether taking it in from the warmth of the chart table or walking around the secure deck. With sea room to play in, we were able to clock 9-9.9 knots reaching in 20 knots.

As an impending front closed in with the last of the light, and the surroundings took on an even more gloomy turn, the breeze steadily increased. I was impressed with the Moody's ability to stand up to full sail (main and jib), feathering the main into 25 knots over the deck. The helm didn't overload and maintained engagement with the conditions. She certainly provides the sailing satisfaction a cruising cat cannot. But the most pleasure was still reserved for going forward into the cockpit or heated

saloon to thaw out. The ability to stand a watch here in complete protection and all-round visibility is the Moody's winning hand.

The effort required to convince the 54DS to berth alongside a spacious marina berth was a telling example of how her bulk can present problems. The local dealer from Diamond Yachting thinks 54DS owners will need a crew to help manage the boat for maintenance and docking. At least the potential to house crew is catered for, which itself is impressive for a 54ft yacht.

### Sea-view apartment

Step through the patio doors and the overriding impression of the 54DS is just how voluminous she is – comparable, in fact, to a cruising catamaran, with the living area all on one upper level and cabin accommodation down below.





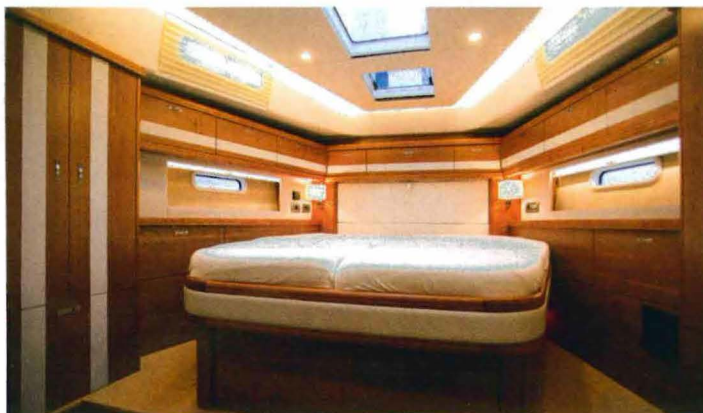
## ON TEST: MOODY 54DS



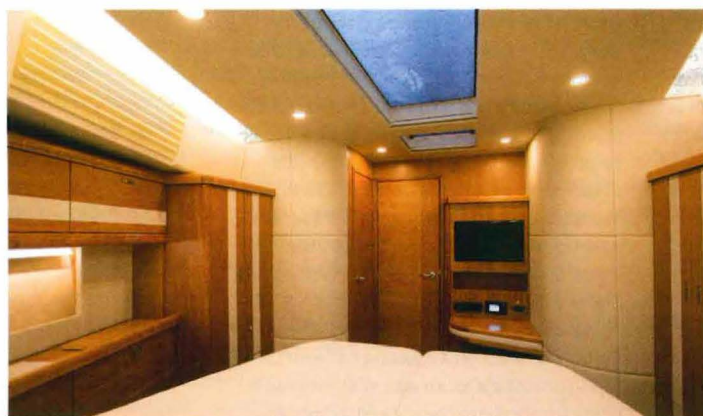
There is only one small cabin aft – an indication of how much stowage space there is in the lazarette and tender garage. This port aft twin cabin, with private companionway and separate heads, is an example of the yacht's intelligent layout. It can either be a family cabin with day heads, or a generous crew cabin with ample space and privacy (if the sail locker is chosen forward). There is also the possibility to have the galley below instead of a fourth cabin. The galley works too well on the upper level, adjoining saloon and cockpit, for this to be a popular choice, however.

The deckhouse is a remarkable place to sit and view the surroundings in comfort. But there are drawbacks to the abundant glass, notably weight and privacy – blinds are not offered for the forward windows because it is a problem to mount them discreetly, the builder says. The windows soon fogged up with three of us taking coffee in the saloon, despite demister fans. And the condensation that remained during our cold trials showed the task the forced heater/aircon units are faced with.

Overall the interior looks smart and modern and I was impressed with the standard of finish. The 54DS is intelligently designed, with abundant space, tanks and stowage for liveaboard cruising.

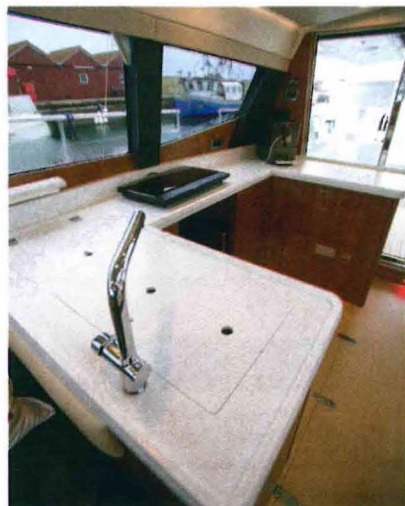


◀ **Forward cabin** The single series of hatches and skylight above the berth in the forward cabin creates a fantastic view, especially lying on the berth looking up at the rig. This ensuite cabin looks plush, has good stowage, is flooded with natural light and decked out with the requisite entertainment mod-cons



◀ **Guest cabins** The 'VIP' cabin reaches below the saloon and is big enough for an owner to think twice about which suite to choose – it only loses to the forward cabin in headroom. The double berth can be mounted either longitudinally or transverse. Stowage space is a little limited as there is a 680lt fuel tank below the berth, but the tall wardrobe is practical. Opposite to starboard is an airy, versatile cabin that can be a small double, Pullman, office or galley – one Italian client even has a gym here



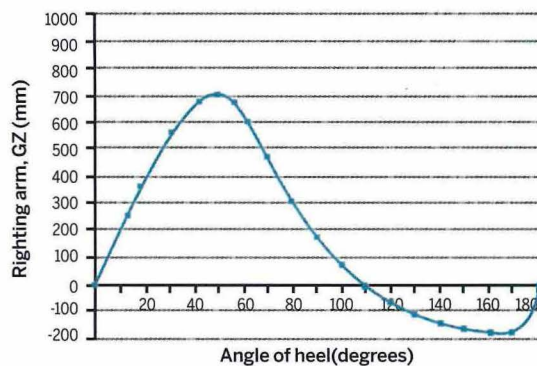


**Galley** This is a fantastic arrangement for use in port, an inviting place to prepare food and drink with excellent views. It has plenty of work surface and stowage space, including a cavernous domestic-style corner cupboard for pots and pans, plus numerous appliance options, including dishwasher and extra fridge/freezers. When the boat is heeled, however, it is a different scenario, especially on starboard, when it is hard to find any bracing. And a rolling sea quickly makes you realise how high up you are

## DATA MOODY 54DS

### SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	17.10m	56ft 1in
LWL	15.55m	51ft 0in
Beam (max)	5.20m	17ft 1in
Draught	2.65m	8ft 8in
Disp (lightship)	24,500kg	54,013lb
Ballast	7,000kg	15,432lb
Sail area (100% foretriangle)	156.7m <sup>2</sup>	1,687ft <sup>2</sup>
Berths	7-8	
Engine Volvo shaft-drive	150hp	
Water	810lt	178gal
Fuel	520lt	114gal
Sail area: disp	18.9	
Disp: LWL	182	
Price ex VAT: €549,000 (£407,160)		
Test boat: €820,000 (£608,145)		
Designed by: Dixon Yacht Design		



### Conclusion

The Moody 54DS offers the ultimate in hospitality for a production yacht. She's comparable in volume to a 65-footer and may even outmatch that in terms of views and comfort (but with half the price-tag). However, this means she should be treated as such, including the manoeuvring, loads and the systems to manage.

So, while there is no doubt this was the boat of choice for the Baltic in December, especially in harbour, once out at sea I was not so convinced. The size of the hull and superstructure makes for a lot of boat to manage when sailing or docking.

Owners of a 54DS will need to plan passages carefully to ensure a comfortable ride, but the pay-off is tremendous shelter from the elements. Arguably, the same applies to others in this market. The Moody 54DS sits in a bracket that will appeal to those also looking at motor yachts and cruising cats. A Lagoon 52, for example, is similar in price and weight for similar space, but the Moody provides greater sailing pleasure and has more of a semi-custom feel.

The electronics, engineering and machinery demonstrate commendable build quality. For those who put a high value on comfort and space – sensible if the majority of your time spent aboard is at a respectable angle – look no further.

SEE THE VIDEO

yachtingworld.com/  
moody54dsvideo



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