



# Impressive Space and Solid Quality

By Simon Hill

Over the past two decades the number of small cruising sailboats available on the market dwindled significantly as buyers and manufacturers turned to bigger, more expensive vessels. Where 28 feet was once considered the minimum for a cruising boat, these days it's typically 36-feet and up. Hunter boats (now Marlow-Hunter), however, never gave up on the smaller end of the market and with the new Marlow-Hunter 31 it's clear the company doesn't expect buyers of smaller boats to give up their desires for space, performance and quality construction.

## DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Design-wise, the Marlow-Hunter 31 hull expands on themes expressed by naval architect Glenn Henderson in previous Hunters and Marlow-Hunters while the deck and interior design display the thinking of David Marlow and his design team in Alachua, Florida.

At nearly 12 feet wide it's beamy for a 31-footer, although that's partly because in terms of hull length it's really more of a 32-footer. Maximum beam is carried well aft, and combined with a chined hull form this allows for tremendous interior volume while contributing to good form stability and sail-carrying power. Below the waterline the boat has slightly hollow bows to help pierce waves and reduce pitching, and pronounced stern reflex to minimize drag and reduce the size

The Marlow-Hunter 31 has clean lines, with a hull form that minimizes drag and allows it to display a good turn of speed even in light conditions.

Photo: Marlow-Hunter Yachts

of the stern wave. Distinctive details like the arc-shaped side widows and mainsail traveller arch give the vessel an unmistakable – and overall quite pleasing – Marlow-Hunter family resemblance.

Since David Marlow took ownership of Hunter Marine in 2012 he has upgraded the build quality to match that used in the renowned lineup of Marlow luxury power yachts, creating a stout and well-finished product. Instead of balsa wood coring, the hull and decks use Nida-Core, a polypropylene honeycomb that's lighter than balsa, much stronger, and immune to moisture and rot.

Woven fibreglass cloth has been replaced with multi-directional knitted cloth, allowing more consistent glass-to-resin ratios and reducing weave print-through. Kevlar augments the fibreglass in the bow sections and well into the hull bottom towards the back of the keel for collision resistance. The Kevlar also wraps the hull completely at the chain plates building in a bullet-proof roll bar into the hull and deck. Plus, vinylester resins are now used throughout the boat (not just the hull bottom) for superior strength, osmosis resistance and better cosmetics throughout. The high-end IP gelcoat – an easy-on-the-eyes Oyster White rather than bright white – is 100 percent NPG-Isophthalic resin, which pro-

The gelcoat is an easy-on-the-eyes Oyster White colour, with contrasting beige non-skid on the deck. All control lines are led conveniently aft.



vides improved resistance against fading and cracking plus, additional protection against osmosis in the hull because of its high water resistance. A quick look in the bilges and settee lockers reveals careful attention to build quality and finish even in these hidden areas.

### ON DECK

On deck, the most striking aspect of the MH 31 is how big the cockpit is for a 31-footer. This was accomplished by dispensing with side decks aft of the companionway and pushing the seating right out to the hull sides. Flip-up footrests in the cockpit floor allow you to brace yourself when heeled over which is necessary because the cockpit is so wide that it does not allow your feet to reach centerline when seated. There's also an ingenious canting Lewmar wheel pedestal that tilts 30 degrees to either side, providing the easy-to-reach advantages of dual wheels without their space requirements and complexity.

In the aft cockpit corners are Hunter's much-loved pushpit seats, with a fold-down transom between them. This makes it easy to board when tied up stern-to, although its height above the waterline makes it more of a dive platform than swim grid at anchor (a starboard-side boarding ladder provides access from the water). At the bow there's an ample anchor locker with electric windlass. Flush-mounted stainless handrails provide security when moving forward or aft, and there are six folding cleats to secure the boat at dock.

Standard sails consist of a Furler furling headsail and a Selden in-mast furling main with vertical battens (a non-furling track-mounted main is optional). Principal sailing gear with the Mariner package includes a pair of Lewmar 30 self-tailing primary winches and matching Lewmar 30 self-tailing cabintop winches, with a 4:1 double-ended mainsheet running on an arch-mounted traveller. The mainsheet is dual ended so the tail is led to the port side of the arch and the starboard bank of clutches, and all other sail controls are likewise led to the cockpit, so there shouldn't normally be any need to leave the cockpit under sail. There are even line stor-

### SPECIFICATIONS

Length Overall:	32' 4"/9.86 m
Length Waterline:	29'8"/9.04 m
Beam:	11'10"/3.61 m
Draft (Deep/Shoal):	5'5"/1.65 m/4'5"/1.35 m
Displ. (Deep/Shoal):	11,854lbs/5,377 kg/12,000lbs/5,443 kg
Sail Area:	581 sq ft/54.4 sq-m
Engines:	21 hp (29 hp optional)
Fuel:	21gal/80 L
Water:	50gal/189 L
Holding tank:	20gal/76 L
Designer:	Glenn Henderson and David Marlow



The main cabin is bright and spacious, with plenty of room to move around. It's fitted to a high standard, with cherry woodwork and Dura Leather upholstery.

Photo: Simon Hill

age bins for excess running rigging tails to stow so the cockpit does not become cluttered.

While the winches may perhaps seem small for a 31-footer, the fractional B&R diamond-stay rig features a large mainsail with an easy-to-manage 110 percent jib that eliminates the need for larger winches. And because the primary and cabintop winches are matched, dodger-equipped boats can run the jib sheets to the cabintop winches and thus avoid removing the dodger side panels when using the jib. Specialty Yachts in Vancouver has all its boats built with additional inboard jib car tracks for this purpose.

### ACCOMMODATIONS

Three secure steps lead down to the MH 31's bright and spacious main cabin. By keeping the furniture to the perimeter of the boat, Marlow-Hunter has created lots of open space to move around: About the only time you'll remember you're not aboard a 40-footer is when sliding into the dinette past the microwave cabinet. A linear galley is located aft, with most of the amenities (12V refrigerator and freezer, two-burner propane stove and oven, sink with hot and cold running water, and plenty of storage) set to starboard, and a



The aft cabin has standing headroom at the entrance and sitting headroom in the berth. A translucent overhead hatch lets in diffuse natural light.

Photo: Simon Hill

microwave and additional storage to port.

Forward of the galley there's an L-shaped dinette to port and a short settee to starboard. Proper ceiling grab rails provide security underway and there's 6'1" minimum headroom pretty much throughout. A remarkably spacious head compartment (with separate shower, no less) is housed in the aft port quarter of the boat, and a roomy double cabin to starboard. In the forward cabin the V-berth narrows substantially at the front, but both cabins offer well over 6'5" of room to stretch out in bed, and both include hanging lockers and storage space.

### POWER AND EQUIPMENT

Standard power for the MH 31 is a 21-hp Yanmar 3YM20 saildrive diesel with 120 amp alternator, and an optional 29-hp Yanmar 3YM30 was fitted to the test boat as part of its Mariner Package. Comprehensive 12V house and 120V shore power systems are standard, with a Smart Plug shore-power cord set. Also included is an integral battery charger, galvanic isolator, automatic bilge pump, isolated shower sump pump, water heater, LED lighting, Raymarine knot meter and depth sounder, and much more.

We found it interesting that nothing drained to the bilges. All water drained to a common drain with a sump box to be pumped overboard in an effort to keep the bilges dry. This design is just one of many features that David Marlow has carried over to Marlow-Hunter from his Marlow Yachts.

The Mariner and Specialty Yachts Package adds all the features needed to make the vessel cruise-ready including a Delta anchor package, VHF radio, Dura Leather upholstery, Sony audio system with waterproof cockpit speakers and Bose cabin speakers, 32-inch folding wheel, galley dishware, radar reflector, Coast Guard approved safety package and the list goes on.

### UNDERWAY

We took the Marlow-Hunter 31 out on an overcast spring day, with light winds prevailing over Vancouver's English Bay.



The cockpit is a great space to socialize. A drop-down transom makes boarding easy, and the folding wheel keeps things open when not underway.

Photo: Simon Hill

Slipping out of the crowded Granville Island docks the MH 31 demonstrated excellent manoeuvrability, and motoring out of False Creek at 5.1 knots (at 2,200 rpm) created virtually no discernible stern wave. An easy cruising speed of 6.8 knots was recorded at 3,100 rpm, and top speed was 7.1 knots at 3,500 rpm with noise levels in the cabin showing between 75-80 dB.

When some breeze appeared it was easy to deploy the furling sails, and we were quickly able to get the boat moving at nearly three knots in wind that was topping out at about four knots, tacking upwind without difficulty despite the light conditions. The true test of a slippery hull form is how well it accelerates, and the MH 31 proved quick to build speed in even the slightest puff, and equally quick to respond to the helm. With a sail area-to-displacement ratio of 17.9 and good form stability the MH 31 should prove to be a lively performer in good breeze, and Specialty Yachts owner Lawrence Fronczek confirmed that aboard a sistership in Annapolis, MD he was able to achieve 7.8 knots upwind in 15 knots of breeze.

### A SMALL WONDER

Small boats make sense for many reasons, from moorage availability, to ease-of-handling, to operating costs. For those seeking small boat benefits without sacrificing cruising comfort the MH 31 offers genuinely impressive interior space for a boat that fits into a 32-foot slip. •

For more information on the Marlow-Hunter 31 contact Specialty Yachts on the West Coast at 604-689-7491 (toll free at 1-800-665-2336), or Sunnybrook Yacht Sales in Eastern Canada at 902-275-2424 (toll free at 1-866-590-9210), or Port Sanilac Marina supporting central Canada at 810-622-9651.