

HUNTER 33

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By Duart Snow

If the continued growth of sailing as a pastime depends on user-friendly boats and shallower learning curves, then an entry-level cruiser like Hunter's newest 33 is well positioned to meet the requirements of those new to the sport.

This writer belonged to one of the last generations of sailors who followed the long, steady course from childhood prams through racing dinghies to various cruising keelboats, honing skills and learning to short-hand boats that were really designed to be sailed by larger crews.

So stepping aboard the well-conceived Hunter 33 – easy to handle under sail or power, accommodating and well equipped, yet responsive and rewarding as the sailor learns the ropes – is a breath of fresh breeze, so to speak. For the novice or owner who is new to cruising, the H33 packs a lot of function and value into an affordable entry-level package.

This model replaces a previous 33 that proved very popular for Hunter from 2004 to 2011, and it incorporates both familiar Hunter features and the characteristics of this innovative builder's newest generation of boats. True to contemporary cruising boat design, it maximizes interior volume and accommodations with high freeboard and beam carried well aft. But it also has a few new wrinkles designed to improve performance and comfort.

At the bow, the entry is fine and the hull sides above the waterline are hollowed slightly to reduce buoyancy and the tendency for fuller hulls to hobby-horse uncomfortably in a chop or seaway. Beamier aft sections, a "reflex" or tuck in the underbody near the stern, and a slight "knuckle" or chine in the transom corners all help to increase the effective sailing length and speed potential of the hull, while easing its motion.

The profile of the cabin trunk sweeps in an arc that mirrors the sheer, increasing the headroom and volume below without looking unbalanced. A single long, dramatic window complements these curves while admitting lots of light. Flush-mounted hatches and elliptical-form grab rails sent into the top corners of the house contribute to a deck profile that is largely unbroken and uncluttered. To reduce the glare from all this deck acreage, the top and sides of the cabin trunk are finished in light grey gelcoat.

The cockpit of this new 33 is longer than its predecessor, and its usable space is further extended by a clever folding swim platform that forms the aft end of the cockpit in the raised position but pivots down to provide through-transom access at anchor or dockside. This platform, stern lockers and pushpit seats are surfaced in teak.

The helm console, with a folding Lewmar wheel, a folding table and space for instruments, is placed well aft to maximize seating and lounging space forward. Self-tailing Lewmar #30 jibsheets winches are also placed well aft, beside the helm, while the beefy stainless steel cockpit arch holds mainsheet and traveler controls. This arrangement makes it a breeze for the helmsman to tack and trim sails himself, freeing the rest of the crew to enjoy the ride.

Lewmar #16 winches mounted at the forward corners of the cockpit, above bins for line tails, control halyards and furling lines for the jib and in-mast mainsail furling system. The fractional Selden rig follows Hunter's familiar Bergstrom and Ridder configuration, with wide swept double spreaders, diamond stays, and no backstay.

On our test boat, Raymarine ST60 instruments were set into a console at the forward end of the companionway – a full Raymarine package, including a multi-function display at the helm, is optional – while up forward the Lewmar windlass hides in the anchor locker, under a hatch, to preserve the deck's clean look and working space.

Wide, curved steps lead down from the cockpit to the salon, a vast, bright and rich-looking space. The large windows and double hatches in the overhead admit plenty of light, and cherry woodwork throughout contributes to the bright, open feel.

Immediately to port of the companionway, the U-shaped galley is fitted with Corian counters, a sink and a voluminous under-counter trash bin forward, a two-burner Force 10 propane stove outboard, and an icebox plus Dometic refrigerator aft. A microwave oven is fitted into the aft bulkhead above the counter.

The huge U-shaped dinette that occupies the rest of the salon's port side forward of the galley could seat a medium-sized dinner party. The table can be winched down (the handle hides in a cabinet on the table's inner side) to create an equally vast berth. And if you need still more space for guests, look to starboard, where what appears to be a pair of chairs flanking a table converts quickly into a settee when the pivoting table is flipped over. Electrical panels, stereo and VHF radio are located on the cabin side behind the aft end of this settee.

The forward cabin holds a large vee-berth and matching cabinets: a hanging locker to port and a shelved cupboard to starboard. The master stateroom, entered to starboard opposite the galley, benefits from the larger cockpit above to provide more volume below. Like the salon, it's big and bright, with a capacious rectangular berth. Opening ports in the hull side to starboard and a hatch to the cockpit deliver light and ventilation. A single large locker/cupboard provides storage here.

A single head and shower is located immediately forward of the master, to starboard of the companionway steps, where it will function well as a day head.

Overall, this layout is roomy and flexible – ideal for a couple or a small family but ready to accommodate guests in comfort and privacy.

On a rare sunny and warm spring morning in Vancouver, I joined Lawrence Fronczek of west coast Hunter dealer Specialty Yachts for a sail on the H33. From the helm, the first and overwhelming impression is of the generous deck space forward and the unobstructed view to the bow and beyond. Even a companionway dodger, not fitted on our test boat, would not compromise the helmsman's view.

The optional 29-horsepower Yanmar 3YM30 diesel pushes the boat along smartly and quietly at six-plus knots at about 3000 RPM; wide-open throttle of about 3800 delivers closer to seven knots. Like a growing percentage of contemporary cruisers, the 33 is fitted with a standard sail drive to smooth the flow below the water and facilitate tighter close-quarters maneuvering.

At full throttle, it was possible to see the benefits of the hull shape, particularly the stern reflex, in our wake; it was fairly smooth all the way back to a pair of ripples almost a boatlength behind us.

While six knots or so of morning thermal on a smooth English Bay didn't exactly provide a stern test of her sailing qualities, the 33 was pleasantly lively and responsive upwind and off. She accelerated out of tacks quickly and held a groove with little fuss. The Lewmar steering was direct and fast, adding to her responsiveness.

The steering also contributed to her singlehander-friendliness. With sheet winches immediately to hand from the helm, tacking meant tossing the wheel over about a half-turn, releasing the sheet from one winch and stepping across to load and tail the other. The wheel held its position and turned the boat through the tack while I trimmed the jib entirely by hand – no winch handle required, at least not in light winds. Finishing the tack was a matter of centering the wheel and touching up the mainsheet or traveler.

Easy as she was to handle, the 33's performance in light air suggests that she will stretch out smartly in stronger winds and quickly reward new owners as they learn to sail her and build confidence in her capabilities.

Overall, the H33 offers the entry-level sailboat purchaser an impressive package of accommodations, ease of handling and performance, plus great value at under \$160,000.

Specifications

Length Overall 33' 6"/10.21 m
Waterline Length 29' 5"/8.97 m
Beam 11' 6"/3.51 m
Draft – Deep (tested) 5' 6"/1.67 m
Shoal 4' 6"/1.37 m
Displacement 12,400 lb./5,624 kg
Ballast – Deep 3,459 lb./1,569 kg
Sail Area 542 sq. ft./50.4 m²
Fuel Capacity 25 gal./95 l

Water Capacity 50 gal./189 l
Holding Tank 15 gal./57 l
Engine Yanmar 3YM30 29 HP Saildrive

Price as tested \$155,890 US

Test boat provided and price quoted by
Specialty Yachts
www.specialtyyachts.com

Other Models

E36 39 41 45DS 45CC 50 50CC

CANADIAN DEALERS

Specialty Yachts
www.specialtyyachts.com

True North Yachts
www.truenorthyachts.ca

Marina Lennox
www.marinalennox.com

Photo Captions:

Photo 1 - Hunter's new 33-footer offers generous accommodations, ease of handling and impressive value.

Photo 2 - The U-shaped galley is fitted with Corian counters, a sink and a voluminous under-counter trash bin forward, a two-burner Force 10 propane stove outboard, and an icebox plus Dometic refrigerator aft.

Photo 3 - A folding swim platform from the aft end of the cockpit when raised position and pivots down to provide through-transom access at anchor or dockside.

Photo 4 - The huge U-shaped dinette occupies the rest of the salon's port side forward of the galley and could seat a medium-sized dinner party.

Photo 5 - The forward cabin holds a large vee-berth and matching cabinets: a hanging locker to port and a shelved cupboard to starboard.

Photo 6 - The salon is a vast, bright and rich-looking space. The large windows and double hatches in the overhead admit plenty of light, and cherry woodwork throughout contributes to the bright, open feel.

Photo 7 - This pair of chairs flanking a table converts quickly into a settee when the pivoting table is flipped over. Electrical panels, stereo and VHF radio are located

on the cabin side behind the aft end of this settee.

