

ON BOARD SAIL

BY SVEN DONALDSON

Marlow Hunter 40

Revitalized Florida builder blends old strengths with new thinking

FOR HUNTER MARINE, 2012 certainly qualified as the proverbial roller coaster ride. After swinging from Chapter 11 to having robust new ownership in the form of Marlow Yachts within the first seven months of the year, August brought a full throttle effort to put a fresh stamp on the company's product line. In part because 2012 was Hunter's 40th anniversary, an all-new 40 footer became the priority project; and remarkably, the first example debuted at the Annapolis fall boat show only eight weeks after the company's existing design team got the green light.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION The most distinctive feature of this new Marlow Hunter sailboat is its aggressive looking, hard-chined hull. When Glen Henderson and the rest of the company's in-house design team decided on chines for their clean-sheet design, they jumped in with both feet. No subtle little creases half way up the topsides for this baby. Instead, when viewed from astern, the

MH 40 resembles an enlarged, proportionally wider reincarnation of the venerable plywood Thunderbird 26. And as any Star class or T-bird sailor can tell you, a well-designed, hard-chined boat can sail like a witch. The immersed chine adds form stability, improves tracking and may well augment the keel to boost upwind performance.

Of course the Hunter 40's hull is also quite unlike the T-bird's in many respects beginning with a much sharper and conspicuously-hollowed entry. Further aft, especially in the area where the outboard chainplates insert, the topsides bulge outward quite noticeably. This added fullness above the LWL keeps the centre of buoyancy from shifting aft too much with increasing heel (which would otherwise result in bow-down trim and excessive weather helm).

Like the chines that were recently added when the e33 was redesigned in 2011, the new MH 40's chines are immersed for much of their length, but rise above the LWL as they near the transom. However, the chines on the e33 disappear as they

approach the transom, allowing the snap-on vinyl rub rail to continue down from the sheer and around the transom lip. By contrast, the new MH 40 has much more prominent chines which dictate a different transom treatment.

Along most of the sheer line it's business as usual: mating external flanges thru-bolted and bonded with 3M 5200, and enclosed by the protective vinyl extrusion. But where the transom meets the sides of the hull the inside corners are heavily reinforced with extra layers of fibreglass, and there's no external flange. On the positive side, Hunter achieves a clean, chiseled look that mirrors the angular chines. On the other hand, those crisp transom edges are mostly comprised of gelcoat, and as a result, somewhat vulnerable to impact damage.

In other respects, the construction of the MH 40 conforms very closely to other models produced in the same facility. Like its siblings, it's a husky boat and by no means a lightweight, but it also benefits from Hunter's trademark B&R rig, which imposes exceptionally low loads

on the hull structure.

Overall, the bold, slab-sided hull and elongated knife-edged windows of the new 40 represent a major departure from the styling of previous Hunters. This is a boat that will likely evoke strong responses—both positive and negative—but, it's unlikely anyone would ever describe it as bland.

DECK AND COCKPIT Lewmar direct drive, twin wheel steering and a superior fold-down transom are some of the high notes for the new MH 40. The squared-off transom offers ample space for an expansive hinged panel that's high enough to overhang most docks, but low enough to work as a swim grid when the telescoping ladder is deployed. There's a rugged drop leaf table in the centre of the cockpit overhung by the trademark Hunter stainless steel mainsheet arch. An arch-mounted fibreglass bimini is optional, but the Vancouver dealer decided against it for his stock boat, anticipating his customers would prefer a removable canvas enclosure.

Wide, unobstructed side walkways and well-positioned grab rails facilitate moving safely on deck aboard the MH 40. Of course, given that the majority of 40s will be sold with two furling sails and a full suite of cockpit or helm-lead controls, foredeck visits will seldom be needed except when anchoring or docking. Lines headed aft from the mast base are neatly tucked away beneath the coach house decking, and with flush-fitted windows and hatches this makes for a clean, almost seamless look.

After a whirl with "teak look" vinyl decking materials, Marlow Hunter has largely returned to real timber for cockpit seating and swim grids. There are comfortable, wood-trimmed seats built into the pushpit corners, and contoured seating on either side of the cockpit ahead of the helm stations.

SYSTEMS The fixed plywood box that encloses the engine on the MH 40 features removable panels on the top, sides and back for outstanding maintenance access. Unlike the usual swing up engine cover, this arrangement allows companionway traffic to proceed (carefully) while the engine is exposed. The access panels themselves are small enough to lift out and stow with minimal fuss. ▶

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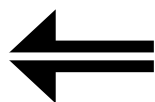
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The test boat was equipped with an optional 54 horsepower Yanmar diesel saildrive (40 hp is standard). I measured 77 dBA in the centre of the saloon when cruising at a brisk 7.9 knots (2,800 rpm), and 79 dBA running wide open at 8.4 knots (3,000 rpm). While these are respectably low sound levels, the substantial air gaps around the edges of some access panels mean there's room for improvement. Airtight gaskets would make a noticeable difference, and shouldn't be a difficult upgrade.

One of the benefits that stems from displacement (nearly 10 tons in the case of the MH 40) is generous hull depth amidships. In practical terms this means ample space beneath the floor boards for stores, spares, extra batteries and so on, while at the same time offering six and a half feet of headroom in the saloon. The test boat was fitted with four 232 ah 6V golf cart batteries as the house bank in addition to the engine battery. With low-draw LEDs for most of the lighting, it should be feasible to spend several days at anchor before needing to charge up.

In recent years, Hunter products have scored well when it comes to systems installations, but due to its accelerated development cycle, I wondered whether this would still be the case for the MH 40. Nevertheless, despite the fact that many installations are performed before the interior grid gets lowered into the hull, all thru-hulls, as well as pumps and major electrical components remain readily accessible—an important consideration for future repairs or upgrades.

INTERIOR The Marlow Hunter 40 is available with either two or three cabins each with its own distinct ▶



[1] In the three-cabin layout, the V-berth becomes the owner's quarters.

[2] In the two-cabin layout, the queen size berth takes up this duty.

[3] Hunter's return to using higher quality finishes gives the interior a fine impression.

[4] The fold-down transom is high enough to sit above most docks but low enough to be a usable swimgrid.

[5] The starboard side galley should offer plenty of room to operate.

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character. The two cabin boasts a rather opulent owners' suite aft with a queen sized island berth under the cockpit footwell. The broad cockpit coamings allow for standing headroom on either side of the bed, and there's ample space left over for lounge chairs plus generous stowage. For prolonged cruising or live-aboard use, this will be the arrangement of choice.

The three-cabin version fits two doubles aft, and the V-berth cabin becomes the owners' quarters. This will obviously be the preferred arrangement for families and chartering.

The central living area offers a very large galley beside the companionway to starboard which is fronted by an equally spacious dinette. Opposite the galley is the aft head, and continuing forward on the port side is a compact nav station and a full-length settee. I did feel that the chart desk surface was unnecessarily high—certainly not ideal for running a laptop computer. But in other respects, the HM 40 offers top-flight accommodations with attention to key details like safe hand-holds and built-in stowage.


As for interior aesthetics, the MH 40 makes a fine impression thanks to numerous windows and skylights, and the extensive use of cherry wood offset by white countertops, upholstery and over-heads. Interestingly, most of the bulkheads and furniture faces are actually a realistic-looking melamine laminate, but in combination with natural wood trim it takes a very close look to tell. On the other hand, Marlow Hunter has recently shifted from laminate cabin soles to solid wood (about one centimetre thick) bonded to plywood subfloors. No worries about sanding through this flooring—it should last pretty much forever!

UNDER SAIL Variable conditions on English Bay saw the wind build briefly to about nine knots before fading to three to four. It was hardly ideal but enough to get a sense of this boat's considerable potential. Working upwind, the MH 40 accelerated nicely in the puffs. While it didn't heel much, it was still enough to fully immerse the leeward chine. Basically it felt like a stiffer boat than most similar-sized Hunters I've tested, and I suspect those chines could be playing a role. The helm felt very light and responsive, thanks no doubt, to the low friction, direct drive linkage. All in all, a rewarding boat to drive.

Close-hauled speeds ranged between four and six knots as wind speeds fluctuated, and of course it didn't help that

the 54 hp upgrade engine comes with a sizable, three-bladed prop. However, the in-mast furling mainsail, made by Doyle, had vertical battens which effectively supported a useful amount of roach area and the 110 percent stock jib is a nice looking sail. Like other boats in the line, this 40 has a mainsail-dominated rig which is easily and quickly de-powered by easing the arch-mounted traveller or when necessary, reefing down. The small jib is very easy to tack, even singlehanded, and I can't see much benefit from either self-tacking gear or powered winches for this particular boat.

CLOSING REMARKS Marlow Hunter isn't the low price market leader these days, but it remains a strong contender for the title of value leader once standard equipment and overall cruising functionality are taken into account. Standard price for the MW 40 in Vancouver was US \$277,788.

Over a 40-year history, Hunter Marine often pioneered new ideas (and hasn't seemed deterred by occasional missteps). Now, with a new, but extremely boat savvy CEO at the helm, it appears the brand will continue to go its own way in terms of styling, design and construction. It should be interesting to see what moves this innovate firm makes next. 

THE STATS

LOA	12.57 m	41' 3"
Hull Length	12.19 m	40' 0"
LWL	10.97 m	36' 0"
Beam	4.01 m	13' 2"
Draft-Deep	2.03 m	6' 8"
Ballast-Deep	2,461 kg	5,425 lbs
Displacement	8,936	19,700 lbs
SA-Standard	93.46 sq-m	829 sq-ft
SA-Furling	84.54 sq-m	910 sq-ft
D/L	182	
Fuel	189 L	50 USG
Water	341 L	90 USG
Holding	151 L	40 USG
Power	40 hp	saildrive

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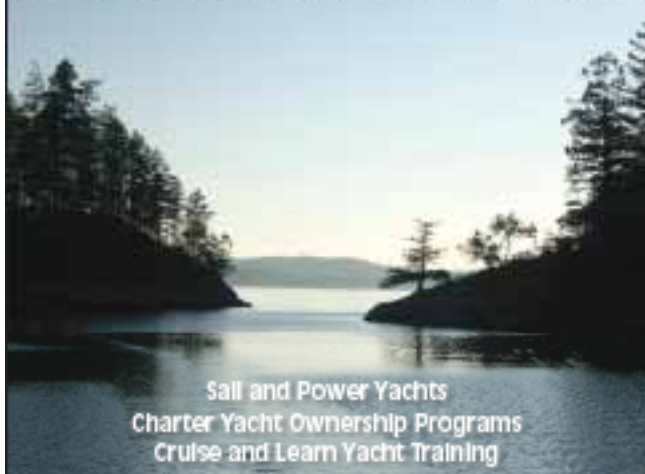
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