

Hunter 49

A passagemaker with all the comforts of home

It might simply be called The Big One. The Hunter 49 is the largest of the company's fleet and tailor-made to compete head-to-head with passagemakers like the Beneteau 515. With an overall length of 49 feet, 11 inches, this luxury cruiser offers comfort and roominess without sacrificing maneuverability. It's meant to replace the Hunter 46, a mainstay in the company's production line since 1997, with more than 250 sold.

On the June day that we tested the Hunter 49 in Newport, Rhode Island, only a matter of hours separated our sail from the cacophonous departure of more than 200 boats bound for the Centennial Newport-to-Bermuda run. It was this maritime event that brought our attention to the Hunter 49's navigation tools, the centerpiece of which is a multi-function Raymarine E-series package with touch-screen display.

Accomplished world-class sailor and Hunter Marine consultant Steve Pettingill was on board as skipper, having sailed the brand-new vessel from its

birthplace in Alachua, Florida, to its temporary destination in Newport, where a yacht brokerage was waiting to take possession. Pettingill was clearly interested in what sort of weather the Bermuda-bound sailors might be facing, particularly since many of them are long-time friends and acquaintances. With a few taps of his fingertip on the cockpit-mounted LCD screen, he called up an image of the Gulf Stream. In the path of the Newport fleet awaited a red swirl, a relatively monstrous twister hurling its might counterclockwise.

"That's a good one," he said, pointing to the glob of scarlet on the display monitor, which is affixed to the cockpit binnacle and within view of the dual steering wheels. "You want to keep to the south on that one and take advantage of the wind direction. Go with the flow and then get out of it."

Just in case his strategy was not self-explanatory, Pettingill explained that sailors who stray too far north into such a weather system while trying to cross the Gulf Stream are far more likely to find themselves fighting wind and waves head-on and taking a horrific pounding, one which could span 100 miles or more. As you might imagine, having such technology at your fingertips is a major plus, especially on days when the weather forecast is iffy

and crewmembers are in short supply. A glance at the display can instantly provide important information for pressing decisions.

But on the day of our test sail, the waters of Newport Harbor and Narragansett Bay were bathtub calm, with 6-knot winds tickling the Rose Island Lighthouse and streaming gently beneath the Newport Bridge. To test out just how useful the Raymarine navigation equipment can be, we clicked on the nearest buoys and were quickly treated to real-time information on wave height, water temperature, wind speed and direction. Nice. Had we needed it, the GPS and plotter would have led the way, supplemented by the depthsounder, knotmeter and other standard instrumentation.

As Hunter Marine's director of offshore testing, Pettingill spends weeks and sometimes months aboard specific vessels, which affords a better sense of a boat's livability, durability and what features might need tweaking. Asked for opinions, he is especially keen on the way the Hunter 49 performs under sail—characteristics we would soon witness firsthand—its powerful 100-horsepower Yanmar auxiliary turbo diesel that can literally lift the bow out of the water, and the voluminous storage lockers that keep the cockpit and cabins uncluttered. Opening one of the cavernous gull-wing cockpit lockers, he peered down inside and said, "You can stuff your bike in here and there's still more room for sails, fenders and all sorts of gear."

At the dock, the boat was easily maneuvered out of its tight space behind the International Yacht Restoration School on Thames Street, a task made easier because of the bow thrusters, operated with push buttons installed near the helm. Once amid the busy harbor, "hoisting" the sails was nearly effortless because of the smoothly-operating winches and furling systems.

Hunter has designed this boat with roller-furling foresails and an in-mast, vertical-battened, full-roach furling main. Two sets



Hunter 49

LOA 49'11"; LWL 43'10"; Beam 14'9"
Draft shoal 5'6", deep 7";
Displacement 32,813 lbs.
Ballast shoal 12,544 lbs., deep 11,216 lbs.
Sail Area 1,014 sq. ft.
Base boat price \$319,990

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of self-tailing rigging winches, two sets of line stoppers and organizers, a boom vang, and a mainsheet winch at the helm complete the setup. All sheets and internal halyards lead to where they should, back to the cockpit, a sensible arrangement enhanced by a dual-ended mainsheet adjustable from the cockpit or the companionway.

Hunter offers two headsail options—single self-tacking jib or self-tacking staysail with overlapping jib. With its 63-foot mast, just short enough to clear most highway bridges, and a lengthy boom, the boat has 1,052 square feet of sail area. The rig functions without a backstay, relying instead on an anodized double spreader, which means more usable space off the stern. Together, these features make the Hunter 49 simple to sail, even singlehanded if the situation arose.

"Most of the time, there were only two of us on board coming up from Florida, and we were never short-handed," said Pettingill, who has crossed the Atlantic more than a dozen times, circumnavigated the globe and set several sailing records.



There's plenty of room in the cockpit for socializing, and the helm is tricked out with engine controls and plenty of high-tech nav gear.

light air off Newport, longing to head o
with the Newport-Bermuda racers and
show off its passagemaking stuff.



Looking to take advantage of every breath of light-air, we flew a red, white and blue chute, which pulled the boat along nicely, its sharp bow cutting through the barely-rippled surface. The boat moved much faster than we imagined yet tracked cleanly and solidly across the bay.

Scrambling about the deck was worry-free, mostly due to a nonskid coating, beefy stanchions and double lifelines, stainless handrails, an array of hardware supplemented with four dock and four spring cleats, and a dual offset bow roller complemented by an electric anchor windlass for the Delta anchor. Two dorade vents kept the air fresh and the temperature cool below deck, while a gated, walk-through transom provided easy access to the swim platform, great for taking a dip or clambering into the dinghy.

Spending time in the cockpit was relaxing due to its commodious size and layout. And since the day's temperature was in the low 90s, we were glad for the stainless arch that supports a bimini as well as the mainsheet traveler. The bimini sheltered the cockpit table, which has dual leaves for the perfect al fresco dinner party or after-sail brewfest.

Dual leather-wrapped steering wheels allow the helmsman to shift between port and starboard when necessary, increasing visibility when heeled or backing into a dock. The cockpit sole is made from Flexiteek, which offers luster and low maintenance. The twin cockpit settees can accommodate at least six people, and two more seats are integrated into the stern rail, ensuring that the helmsman won't have to keep saying, "Excuse me," or perhaps something less pleasant.

Down below

Down below, the roomy saloon with its 6 feet, 9 inches of headroom could double as a dance hall, which is no surprise given the boat's 14-foot, 5-inch beam. Despite the generous living space, the interior design isn't barren. Portals flood the space with light, and unlike some previous Hunter models, the portal selection on the 49 follows a theme in size and shape rather than resembling a museum of windows.



The galley immediately starboard of the companionway is functional with a three-burner stove, oven, range hood, microwave with coffee maker, top-loading 6-cubic-foot refrigerator, 2.8-cubic-foot freezer, double stainless sink and Corian countertops with a view of those at the dinette, also on the starboard side. It's a very social arrangement, unlike some boats with oddly placed bulkheads that give the feeling of being a rat inside a Skinner box. The galley also features generous pantry and drawer space, with an icemaker or wine cooler as options.

Adjacent to the solid teak dining table is a navigation station with cushy navigator's chair, a carbon-fiber laminate chart table with built-in storage for charts, cruising guides and course-plot-



ting implements, a phone jack, 12-volt and 110-volt electrical outlets, and an adjustable chart light. The electronic display can be outputted to the saloon's 23-inch television monitor to keep the crew and passengers involved in tracking the voyage.

Beside the nav station is another saloon settee, with plenty of passage room between and grab rails should seas get rocky. A Bose stereo system with DVD/CD with cabin speakers delivers electronic entertainment options. A laminated teak grain sole warms the cabin and accordion shades offer privacy.

The Hunter 49 features two heads, two stern cabins with double berths, and a master cabin in the V-berth with double bed, vanity table, mirror and bulkhead-mounted 15-inch flat screen

television. The overall layout affords the option of creating a fourth double berth from the dinette.

The details

The boat's charms are most visible on deck and in the saloon, but under water this vessel is equally impressive, from its three-blade propeller and bronze through-hull fittings, to its finely balanced, foiled spade rudder and HKT Kevlar-reinforced hull with balsa-cored sides and solid laminate bottom.

At 16 tons, or slightly more than 32,000 pounds, the shoal-draft model draws 5 feet, 6 inches, while the deep-draft hull dips seven feet below the surface. Just beneath the boat's 43-foot waterline, a 12,000-pound ballast keel on the shoal model (11,000

pounds on the deep-draft keel) keeps the center of gravity low, which according to Hunter delivers a stiff and stable ride.

The engine room is equipped with an automatic fire-suppression system and smoke detector. The main water tank holds 200 gallons, the fuel tank 150 gallons, but the latter capacity can be increased by converting the starboard water tank to hold another 67 gallons of diesel. A watermaker is optional. The boat also features a 52-gallon waste holding tank with macerator.

When the time comes to switch over to auxiliary power, the shaft-driven Lewmar Mamba gearbox and shaft-steering linkage system eliminate the possibility of a cable malfunction. As most sailors might agree, the shaft-linkage translates to reliability and peace of mind—no small matters when at sea.

The Hunter 49 surely belongs in the class of big cruising boats and fittingly assumes her role as queen of the company fleet. By all accounts, she's roomy enough for a small tribe, but nonetheless graceful.

With an overall length a mere inch short of 50 feet, and matched by a beam of less than 15 feet, it easily adheres to the aesthetic 3-to-1 ratio and then some, giving her a sleek appearance despite her size.

The 49's 6-foot, 9-inch headroom opens up the saloon, above. A queen berth tucks into the forward cabin, far left, and Hunter's Steve Pettingill shows off the nifty nav gear, left. The large galley features a coffee maker and three-burner stove and oven with a range hood, just like home, lower left. The overall design is sleek in spite of its volume, right, and the transom has every cruising amenity available, below.

