

PHOTOS ALLAN WHITING

HEAD HUNTER

Hunter's previous aft-cockpit flagship, the 49, has been replaced by the new 50AC. Flashing a modernised deck and cockpit design plus a revamped interior, the fully-loaded evaluation yacht ticked all the cruising-life boxes for **ALLAN WHITING**



THE HUNTER 50AC IS A FITTING FLAGSHIP FOR THIS CRUISING-ORIENTED MARQUE. THERE'S AMPLE SPACE ABOVE AND BELOW DECKS AND ALL BOAT FUNCTIONS OPERATE WELL



There's no shortage of shade with Hunter's cockpit targa arch (above) supporting a massive bimini, plus the traveller. Instead of separate binnacles, steering stations (left) are incorporated in the superstructure moulding.

hull shape is a carry-over from the outgoing 49 and the current 50CC centre cockpit models and, while losing out in terms

staysail used a mini-boom. Taller aluminium masts, with stainless steel wire rigs and reliable furlers, allowed foresail area to be concentrated in one large, variable-area sail: a cheaper and simpler solution, at least for boats up to around 40 to 45 feet.

Where once you could spot a Hunter yacht miles away — by its ugly, conflicting-shape ports and prominent, curved rubbing strake — you can now pick a new Hunter by its family-shape, and elegant, elliptical cabin ports. From the new 33 to the 50, the Hunter range sports this new distinguishing feature, to much greater effect. The practical rubbing strake is still there, but somehow is less obvious.

of wetted surface in comparison with a flat-bottomed cruiser-racer hull, is ideal for the stately cruising vocation. However, as our day's sail showed, the 50AC's wetted surface area didn't detract from its light-air performance.

What made the hefty 50AC slip along at a respectable pace was the optional double-headed rig — the first time we've checked out this sailplan on a Hunter.

CUTTER RIG

Many cruising boats employ the cutter rig that had its origin back in the days when there were low-aspect-ratio rigs with wooden masts and no furlers. There was an obvious advantage in having total sail area broken into small, easily-handled parcels.

Downsides included the need to set-up and trim two foresails, and the inevitable restriction on foredeck space; especially if the self-tacking

Another factor that alienated the cutter layout from modern rigs was the use of bendy masts, via adjustable backstays. When you crank on the backstay to bend the centre section of the mast forward, to flatten the main and increase forestay tension, you automatically slacken the staysail luff tension and the staysail becomes a soggy bag.

However, many cruising yachts in the 45 feet-plus range still offer double-headed rig options. Why?

Big-yacht foresails are huge and even with modern furlers and winches to control them, can be a handful for a small crew. Two smaller sails are easier to handle if something goes wrong. Another factor is that on a big yacht foredeck space isn't at such a premium, but neither an issue, because there's usually room on the coach house top for a dinghy, between vang and dodger.



Staysail (top) is a self-tacker and the test boat had an infill to fit between the dodger (above) and bimini, enclosing the entire cockpit. Two vertical transom gates (above right) access the integrated swimplatform.

Also, many cruising yachts have rigid masts and fixed backstays, so the two-forestay tension issue isn't a problem. That's particularly the case with Hunter's B&R Rig that was adopted back in 1993.

The B&R rig was developed in the 1960s by Lars Bergstrom and Sven Ridder, for use on shorthanded, around-the-world yachts. This rig design has swept-back spreaders, with the shrouds and forestay disposed at 120-degree intervals, triangulating the mast support. There is no backstay.

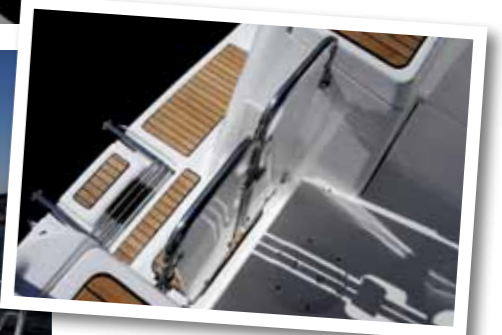
To keep shroud and diagonal stay loads tolerable the B&R rig requires a wide shroud base, so Hunter yachts have long, swept-back spreaders and hull-exterior chainplates.

On the Hunter 50AC the cap shrouds terminate above the

asymmetric spinnaker halyard sheave and lead over the spreader tips to the chainplates. Conventional diagonals run between the spreaders, but the lowers anchor at inboard chainplates, separate from the shroud chainplates. In addition, four reverse diagonals run upwards from the mast to the spreader tips, crossing over the lower diagonals. The mast and rig is extremely stiff and reminiscent of catamaran rigs.

The Hunter 50AC hull is balsa sandwich topsides, with solid FRP below the waterline and two layers of Kevlar in the forward sections for impact resistance.

The deck gelcoat is Maxguard that is said to be more flexible than most finishes and also highly UV-resistant. The interior gelcoat is MicroBan, incorporating an anti-bacterial agent



and the outer hull skin is Ashland AME-5000 modified epoxy, for maximum osmosis resistance.

Hunter uses winged-bulb keel shapes to concentrate weight as low as possible, without the compromise of draft that's excessive for a cruising boat. The 50AC can be ordered with shoal- or deep-draft keel. Both keels are high-antimony lead bulbs, cast around stainless steel frames, with integral threaded rods.

BELOW DECKS

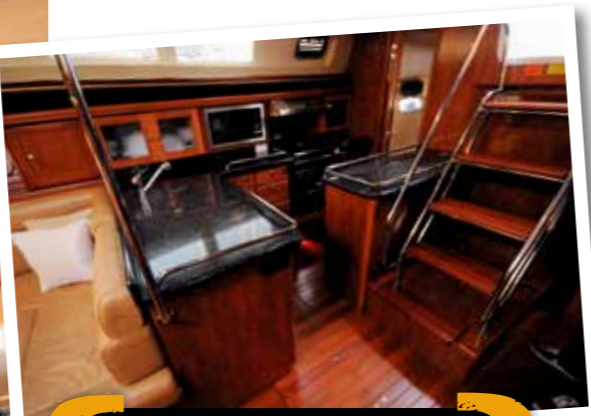
Although keen to evaluate the cutter-rig performance, we firstly spent considerable time below checking out the living areas.

Like other new Hunters the 50AC has a gently sloping companionway, with full-length handrails either side that allow forward-facing descent. Immediately beneath the stairs are coat hooks and a lift-up panel above the engine. A hatch in the cabin sole, forward of the companionway, reveals the genset.

The cabin sole is timber-plywood laminated Everwear and the many under-sole access panels have a solid feel that's missing from most modern boats.

Handrails abound below decks and there are two stainless steel posts at the entrance to the saloon, but the mast compression post is neatly disguised by the forward cabin bulkhead structure.

The saloon, galley and chart table

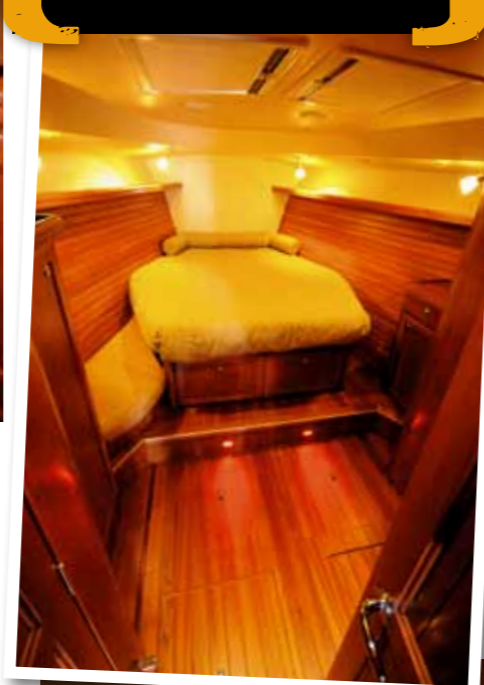


[HIGHS]

- › Liveaboard comfort
- › Cockpit layout
- › Value for money
- › Ease of sail handling
- › Warranty

[LOWS]

- › Ugly dodger design



A gently sloping companionway (top right) exits next to the starboardside galley, opening out into the huge saloon (top left). The Hunter 50AC features double aft cabins (above photos), the starboardside one (above right) offering an optional office module. Owner's cabin (above, far right) is compromised for space by a generous chain locker. The shower room (below right) is separate and opposite the head.

layout is similar to the 50CC, except that the L-shaped galley opens into the starboard aft double cabin, rather than having a bulkhead between the galley and the vast, single aft cabin in the 50CC. An office module is optional in the 50AC's starboard aft cabin and the test boat had a clothes washer/dryer in one of the aft-cabin cupboards.

Saloon area is huge, with lounging space for up to 12 people. Dining at the table is comfy for six; made possible by a movable, padded stool that can be stowed under the table or slid out from under it. There's no tricky mechanism for this function, just a floor panel that slips either to port or starboard of the stool.

The 50AC's galley features heavy Corian tops, sink covers and island freezer lids, but we're not sure about the grey colour selection, given the glowing cherrywood cabin sole, cupboard doors and furniture. Two front-opening fridges are fitted, in

addition to the top-loading freezers that can be operated as fridges, if desired. A microwave, crockery drying cupboard and gimballed oven are standard kit.

Chart table space is large, with a lift-up lid and electrical system control panels at eye level. The padded chair is curved to cope with boat heel and has storage space underneath.

To port of the companionway is another aft double cabin and the day/guest head, with separate shower area and two opening ports. The aft cabins have two ports each, for flow-through ventilation.

The owner's cabin is forward, but set back behind a generous chain locker and sail bin, so although technically a vee-berth, isn't compromised for size or storage. The four-cabin charter model has this area split into two double berths, so there's more than ample room.

A large head is fitted to starboard



WE WERE VERY IMPRESSED WITH THE DOUBLE-HEAD RIG THAT GAVE THE 50AC MORE GET UP AND GO IN LIGHT AIR THAN WE EXPECTED. THE STAYSAIL FITS INTO THE SAILPLAN WITHOUT CREATING MUCH ADDITIONAL CREW WORK



[tradeboat SAYS...]

The Hunter 50AC is a well-priced, go-anywhere, liveaboard yacht with good cruising performance and potential for club social racing. An extensive options list allows custom tailoring to suit owners' tastes. Hunter's five-year, transferable warranty is an industry leader.

and opposite to port is a shower room — the perfect liveaboard arrangement. (The distinguished actress Googie Withers was once asked the secret of her long and happy marriage to equally distinguished actor John McCallum and she replied, with a laugh: "Separate bathrooms!").

PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

The Hunter 50AC's cockpit and deck layout allows a dozen people to find a comfy perch and even with a deck-mounted dinghy and liferaft there would still be ample space for a crowd for daysailing. The downside of enhanced deck space is a dodger that's abruptly upright and would look better, we feel, with more rake.

The test boat had real teak cockpit trim — not horrible 'plastic teak' — and the drop-side cockpit table

was teak-faced too. The boat was also supplied with an infill between dodger and bimini and a full set of clears, to enclose the entire cockpit. High coamings make the cockpit feel secure and a plethora of stainless steel handrails around the deck make movement as safe as possible. An easy transit between the twin wheels allows access to the swimladder, via a set of batwing doors that are more user-friendly than wire rail 'gates'. Hunter hasn't adopted a drop-down swimplatform on the 50AC, opting instead for two vertical hatches in the transom, opening onto large storage spaces.

The conditions for our test sail were light — a 6- to 8-knot sou'wester on Sydney Harbour — and ideal for gauging the performance of the double-headed rig.

Optional fore and aft bowthrusters, with joystick controls, made light

work of getting the big boat out of a tight berth. The forward thruster spins in an inbuilt tunnel, but the aft one lowers to operate and retreats behind a snug-fitting hull plate when not required.

We motored out of Darling Harbour and noted the firm, stable feel of the twin wheels: no prop walk or rudder shake and the boat held its heading without constant wheel movement. Engine noise was well muffled and there was very little vibration.

With powered halyard and sheet winches, plus twin headsail furlers and in-mast mainsail stowage, we made sail in a few seconds, without raising a mild sweat. This was the new Hunter 50AC's maiden sail, so we forgave the main's pleated pre-tuning appearance. The headsails set perfectly, with powered winches taking the hard work out of genoa trim and the staysail happy to self-tack on its curved foredeck track.

We played around with the double-headed rig for a couple of hours and were impressed with its on- and off-wind performance. In this light

breeze the big boat tacked happily and quickly through 90° and went to windward at an average 5 to 5.5kts. With the gear eased to a reach, the speed went to 5.6 to 5.8kts.

Normally on Hunters that have the flat mainsail shape necessary for successful in-mast furling, there's a larger speed difference between working and reaching. We noticed that the twin headsails generated much more windward power than a single genoa and the combination of foresails seemed to make the main power-up better. Helm balance could be set to neutral, by fiddling main and sheet winches, and the boat was happy to self-steer in constant wind.

Like all Hunters, the 50AC can sail wing-a-wing without the need for a pole, but when running square the staysail is a nuisance and can simply be rolled-up out of the way.

The 50AC retains Hunter's cockpit arch that consists of paired, heavy-wall stainless steel tubes that form a targa-top over the cockpit, doubling as mainsheet traveller mounts and

Facts & figures

HUNTER 50AC

PRICE AS TESTED
\$604,900

OPTIONS FITTED

Tall mast, in-mast furling with vertical battens, engine upgrade to 110hp w/ 160amp alternator, inverter with battery monitoring system, Quick Dock system (bow and stern thrusters), additional fridge and freezer, LED lighting, memory foam mattresses, reverse-cycle air-conditioning, Oceanaire shade and hatch package, quiet-flush heads, epoxy barrier coat with bottom paint, three-burner stove with oven, dodger, bimini, enclosed cockpit clears/canvas, cockpit cushions, genset (12kVa Fischer Panda), Raymarine ST70 package (four control heads, autopilot and remote), Raymarine E120W and E90W and radar interface to TV screen, TV in forward cabin, VHF remote mic at helm, 50m of 10mm chain and 150m of warp, Gori folding propeller, powered 54 sheet winches, starboard cabin-top winch power upgrade (two speed), cockpit stereo CD player, Bose lifestyle with 26in TV, three 200amp/h house batteries and one 120amp/h cranking, NSW Maritime Registration 50AC, additional fuel tank, self-tacking staysail, overlapping headsail, watermaker, washer-dryer, solar panels, davit arch, stern-mounted barbecue, Supa Digi TV antenna with splitter, AIS transceiver, and Dynaplate

PRICED FROM
\$484,000

GENERAL

MATERIAL: FRP monolithic and balsa sandwich hull, and plywood sandwich deck
TYPE: Keelboat
LENGTH OVERALL: 15.21m
HULL LENGTH: 14.61m
WATERLINE LENGTH: 13.36m
BEAM: 4.47m
DRAFT: 1.68m (2.13m optional)
WEIGHT: 14,884kg
BALLAST: 5690kg (shoal); 5087kg (deep)

CAPACITIES

BERTHS: Two aft doubles and queen forward
FUEL: 568lt (additional 270lt option)
WATER: 757lt
HOLDING TANK: 197lt
WATER HEATER: 42lt

SAILS

AREA: 94.19 m² (non-furling); 122.26m² (furling main with cutter rig); Asymmetric spinnaker optional

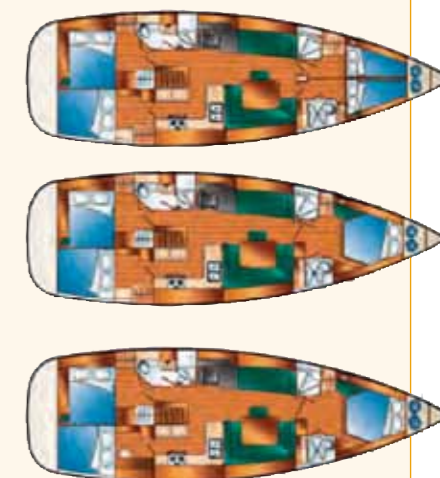
ENGINE

MAKE/MODEL: Yanmar diesel
TYPE: Shaftdrive
RATED HP: 75 (100 optional)
PROP: Fixed three-blade (folding optional)

SUPPLIED BY

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LAYOUT



bimini frames. The traveller car operates via lines led down each side of the arch tubes to cam-cleats. The endless mainsheet has end-boom sheeting and can be worked from the helmsman's position, using

the port jib sheet winch and a fat clutch mounted on the arch, or from the powered halyard winch behind the spray dodger. The helmsman can sail the 50AC singlehandedly, if necessary. ⚓