

Bright ideas

The fresh thinking represented by this year's new boats confirms that designers have not been resting on their laurels

STORY AND PHOTOS BY **BILL SPRINGER**

We had advance warning that over 40 new boats would debut at this year's shows. We heard the hype and read the brochures, and then it was time to see how this year's new-boat fleet measured up. The mission of SAIL's Best Boats program is to recognize innovation, clever design, good build practices, things we'd like to see on our own boats, and why-didn't-I-think-of-that solutions. Here's what we found.

Cruisers under 40 feet

Three new sub-40-footers from Hunter designer Glenn Henderson use clever/commonsense features to enhance interior comfort. The beamy **Hunter 27** is equipped with an athwartships double bunk aft and a surprisingly large saloon. Locating the mast compression post in the forward cabin has really opened up the accommodations of the **Hunter 33**. Both the 33 and the **Hunter 38** have centrally mounted through-hulls in the sump so you don't have to rip up the entire boat to get at them.

For sheer diversity, you can't beat the 30-to-40-foot size category. The **Najad 332**'s tempered-glass windshield,



beefy raised toerail, and deep cockpit make clear that it's a 33-footer that will be at home offshore. We liked the well-executed commonsense features of the **Hanse 342**, including a self-tacking jib on a curved track and copious stowage. Students of cockpit design would like the **Beneteau 343**, whose hinged helm seat easily folds up to provide access to the walk-through transom. And there's no need to climb around the steering wheel when not sailing since the wheel pivots 90 degrees.

Need shoal draft as well as offshore stability? The 37-foot **Southerly 115** has a 2,635-pound swing keel (along with additional fixed ballast) and a cleverly designed interior to accommodate the keel's trunk. The sporty-looking **Dufour 385** has a wide-open cockpit, dual helm stations that allow for excellent visibility, and a walk-through transom. With its dovetailed drawers, superior

The Etap 24i is a little trailerboat that's filled with good ideas. Its dual rudders facilitate mounting the outboard in the center of the transom and ensure that a rudder will continue to bite even at extreme angles of heel (below). It also makes excellent use of under-cockpit stowage space that is accessible both from the cabin and through a large hatch in the cockpit sole.



The Finnish-built **Nauticat 321** packs a lot into its modest length. It's a true pilothouse cruiser complete with wheel, throttle controls, a comfortable helmsman's seat, and a panoramic view outside (above). The raised dinette seats four comfortably. The boat's high topsides translate to enough interior volume to accommodate a spacious aft cabin and a good-size cabin forward.



The **Jeanneau Sun Fast 35** has a powerful rig, a well-laid-out cockpit, and a why-didn't-I-think-of-that nav station down below. To make maximum use of saloon seating space and also incorporate a forward-facing nav station with its own seat, Jeanneau designers came up with a clever solution—a nav table that moves. Slide it out of the way against the bulkhead when you don't need it; slide it forward to reveal a proper nav station with a comfortable seat and plenty of brace points (above). As they say in the Guinness commercials—brilliant.



Other notable design features of the **Etap 24i** include a traveler that can be removed to free up cockpit space at the dock or even on a light-air day (above), jib tracks that run along the top of the coachroof handrails, and superior European anti-skid that's not readily available in the States.



The **Viva 32** is an unusual trailerable cruiser from Poland. It has teak decks, a full mahogany interior, and an anchor roller on a bowsprit. Designer Kris Kozlowski wanted his boat to be quickly and easily rigged, so he created an integrated mast-raising system that works on the A-frame principle. The wide ends of the frame pivot at the chainplates, and the pointy end attaches to the roller-furling headstay (above). A small electric winch provides the power to pull a line running from the forestay through the bow. The shrouds are pre-attached, the mast butt slides into the maststep, and the mast goes up with a push of a button. The only effort required (except for button pushing) is to pin the headstay to the bow. If you've ever wrestled with the rigging on your trailerable boat, you'll appreciate a system that can be used even while afloat.

systems installation, and traditional good looks, the **Sabre 386** is an excellent example of Maine craftsmanship. The saloon of the **Wauquiez Pilot Saloon 40** stands out because its sight lines are so good. From what this French builder calls the pilot saloon, visibility outside is excellent.

Cruisers over 40 feet

An interesting trend shown by the over-40 cruisers at this year's shows is the increasing popularity of rounded coachroofs and teardrop portlights. Last year the **Jeanneau 54DS** was one of the first deck-saloon boats to sport the new aesthetic, and this year we saw the similarly styled **Jeanneau 49 DS**, which is just as eye catching. There's a similar look to the Castro-designed **Saga 409**, which is



The **Catalina Morgan 440** is the company's first deck-saloon design and offers both innovative and plain-old-commonsense features. The most welcome (and clever) feature we came across after hours of walking the docks was the recliners in the saloon of this boat. Yep, recliners; think La-Z-Boy (two of them) in the port settee (above). The 440's raised dinette provides an excellent view for its occupants, and we really liked the full workroom that is accessible from the aft cabin as well as from the cockpit. Designer Gerry Douglas wowed us with the recliners, but it's the cockpit that shows the level of thought he poured into this boat. He stopped the cockpit table short of the binnacle to make it easy to cross the cockpit to work the primary winches during a tack. Sounds simple, but it makes all the difference in the world.



Designed by Rob Humphreys, the Elan Impression 43 is another deck-saloon cruiser with a rounded coachroof. The saloon is spacious (above), the nav station is well designed, and the L-shaped galley is well suited to meet a cook's needs both offshore and at the dock, but Humphreys really struck a blow for common sense in the saloon settee. Bucking the trend toward curved seats that are pretty to look at, comfortable to sit on, but impossible to stretch out on, these saloon seats are long enough to double as two proper seaberths. The settee table unfolds the full width of the saloon, providing seating for up to 10.



A center cockpit usually increases interior volume, and the second such design to come from Island Packet, the 445, takes full advantage. The sense of space everywhere is obvious as soon as you step below, but most obvious in the galley. It's simply enormous—and well executed too, with excellent brace points, tall fiddles, and copious and easily accessible stowage lockers. The most noticeable feature is countertop space that reaches well under the companionway stairs (above).

intended as a stylish passagemaker with dual roller-furling headstays. The inner working jib is self-tacking, and the outer (larger) jib can be poled out for worry-free running.

Although the euro is strong against the dollar, European imports like the Bavaria 42 offer comfortable accommodations and speedy lines at a very attractive price. The Grand Soleil 50 has the low cabintop and wide decks you'd expect to see from an Italian builder, plus a clever anchor system that contributes to the boat's clean lines. The anchor and bow roller retract into the anchor locker; it's simple to operate manually because the pivoting roller is counterbalanced. At the other end of the spectrum, the Bruckman 50 is a well-designed motorsailer that successfully combines the requirements of comfortable and efficient sailing and motoring. And its walk-in engine room is a thing of beauty. The Hylas Pilothouse 66, the biggest boat we saw at the shows, offers many ways to customize to a prospective owner's tastes.

Performance boats

Racer-cruiser or cruiser-racer? The difference is not as clear as it once was. Whether aimed more at racing or cruising, each performance boat had a plumb bow, a low-slung coachroof, and lots of sail controls to tweak.

The Beneteau 44.7 is the natural evolution of Beneteaus 36.7 and 40.7 designed by Bruce Farr. Like its predecessors, the 44.7 is a performance boat with a well-thought-out, good-looking interior that's wrapped in beautiful light-stained mahogany veneers. The Jeanneau 40.3 has the requisite walk-through transom, dual wheels, large comfortable cockpit, and powerful sailplan you find on most performance boats these days, as well as cruising features like a permanently mounted central cockpit table. And now Bavaria Yachts is getting into the performance-cruiser game with the Bavaria 38 Match. Its plumb bow, open transom, and double-ended multi-purchase backstay tensioner give it the look of a racer, but the three-cabin accommodations plan is cruiser-friendly. The Seaquest 36 is the raciest of the lot. It's designed to be fast and responsive on the racecourse, without totally sacrificing accommodations; this Reichel/Pugh-designed minisled is quite comfortable and functional.

The Columbia name is back, but the Columbia 30 is nothing like its predecessors. It's got raceboat horsepower, simple but effective

We were impressed with the X-40's overall construction quality and attention to detail. Its electronics installation (right) is a good example, with high-quality tinned wire, an easily accessed breaker panel, and clearly labeled wiring—plus, the entire breaker panel can be disconnected with just one master plug. And the rest of the boat is as well finished as the electronics installation.



The Dehler 47 has a laundry list of well-designed and -executed features, but the design and engineering on its retractable anchor and bow roller deserve a special mention. A small hydraulic pump makes it possible to deploy the anchor out of the well with the push of a button—not revolutionary, but clever and useful. The same holds true for



the stern platform, which opens to provide a large swim platform and generous stowage space (below). We'd want something similar to both these features on our new boat.



cruising accommodations, and a retractable bulb keel so it'll be easy to handle with a trailer.

Multihulls

Multihull designers are constantly looking to make the most of the inherent advantages of ultra-wide beam, and this year's fleet is full of fresh ideas. Muted helm

A helm station built into the cockpit roof is not a new idea (the Moorings 6200 was the first to unveil the concept) but it has been translated well to the Lagoon 440. We liked the concept because it provides the helmsman excellent visibility (right) and frees up the cockpit for pure lounging. We liked the execution because of the way Lagoon designers integrated the helm station into the roof, splitting the difference between the roof and the bridgedeck. The built-in couch in front of the mast was another nice touch.



It's not easy to design a 32-foot catamaran with enough interior space to make it practical. By fully integrating a hard dodger/cockpit roof with an innovative, open accommodations plan, the designers of the Tom Cat 9.7 have provided standing headroom and a remarkably spacious interior. The living space flows into the cockpit without a bulkhead in between, and the helm station is mounted on a small pod adjacent to the saloon (above).

Most cat rigs feature diamond spreaders, but the Dolphin 460's rig has none (right). The benefits are obvious—less weight aloft and less windage—but is it practical? The rig was tested by dodging hurricanes on a delivery from Brazil, and it held up well. The secret of this oval-shaped mast is in the thickness of the carbon fiber; the mast walls are over an inch thick in places. And the Dolphin's flat boom makes it easy to drop, flake, and secure the big main right on top of it (below).



feel is often an issue on cruising cats, but Aeroyacht's high-performance H42 addresses steering in a very simple way. Instead of a steering wheel with long, feedback-sapping cable or hydraulic runs to the rudders, interconnected tillers attached directly to the rudders provide precise helm feel. If you're looking for pure speed, the Reynolds 33 is a racehorse that even has a bit of living space in the hulls. Its long, bowed bowsprit supports three roller-furling headsails (including a gennaker), and the hull and beams can be taken apart and loaded on a trailer. The South African-built Moorings 4000 has a hard cockpit roof that retracts to provide excellent visibility from the helm. Unlike many other cats, it's truly singlehander-friendly, with all controls, including the main and jib sheets, leading to the helm station.

Big daysailers

The new crop of big daysailers created a buzz at this year's shows. There were five on show at Annapolis, all over 30 feet and designed to provide superior sailing rather than



All of the big daysailers have comfortable cockpits and sail controls that make singlehanded a breeze, but we were impressed with the Morris 36 cockpit because it is an elegantly simple design (above). The double-ended mainsheet is situated right next to the helmsman. The sheet for the self-tacking jib is also close at hand, and the cockpit seats are long, deep, and comfortable. It's obvious this S&S design was tweaked until it looked just right.

cruising amenities. The 33-foot J/100 has more-modern lines than the other daysailers but is designed to do the same thing—be easy and fun to sail. The cockpit is big enough for 10, but sailing systems are easy enough to singlehand. Hinckley's first new sailboat design in 15 years had gawkers three-deep at the shows. The Hinckley DS42 has 13 feet of overhangs and meticulous craftsmanship, but it's by no means old-fashioned. Rigged with a carbon mast and Leisure furl boom (painted to look like wood), and equipped with an optional ultra-quiet electric motor, its systems are resolutely up to date. Ted Fontaine's Friendship 40 oozes opulence, from its lusciously varnished teak toerail to its hydraulically powered push-button mainsheet control. It's obvious that no expense was spared, and the result is gorgeous. Built in Taiwan, the 8-Meter-inspired Doubleloon 36 also attracted gawkers and dreamers like moths to a flame.



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