



Hunter 45DS Test
Sailing Magazine (US) October 2007

Hunter 45DS

Clever design engineering makes for a comfortable cruiser and party platform that's not lacking in power

Hunter is a truly prolific sailboat manufacturer. It is celebrating 35 years in business, and over those 35 years it has produced 68 different models, introducing 10 in just the last five years. I recently experienced Hunter's latest offering firsthand, the 45DS, in Saint Augustine, Florida, and also had the opportunity to visit the factory in nearby Alachua, Florida.

The 45DS is an evolution of the 44DS, but also uses lots of new ideas. The goal was to take the best aspects of the successful 44DS, update the exterior cosmetics, and improve the cockpit and interior. The intended customer for the 45DS ranges from the bluewater cruiser to the person looking for a nice dockside cocktail platform. Hunter's goal was to provide a boat with home-like comforts, but not compromise bluewater per-

formance. To Hunter's credit, the boat will also likely be a learning platform for new sailors—the boat needs to be easy to use, nimble and forgiving.

Details

The visit to Florida allowed me to really dig into the construction of the boat. While visiting the factory and the boats under construction I spoke with Hunter's director of engineering and chief designer Glenn Henderson and several members of his staff. I was impressed to see the efficiencies at the factory and quality that goes into the boats. Many top-notch components are aboard from Harken, Lewmar, Spinlock, Selden and many others. Standard system upgrades included isolation transformers on the shore power inlets, an X-Change-R oil change system, as well as smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in every cabin.

The 45DS uses the same hull as the 44DS. While there were economic efficiencies in play, the fact is the 44DS has a great hull. The hull is solid fiberglass below the waterline and balsa-cored above. Hunter adds Kevlar laminates to the collision areas for extra impact resistance. The

hull is attached to the deck via an outward facing flange, the flange is chemically bonded with 3M 5200, and both screwed and through bolted. The outward flange also serves as the base for the trademark Hunter rubrail.

An easily driven hull is a big part of the Hunter equation. The forward sections feature a "bow hollow." While most sailboat profiles are completely convex, this hull has a slightly convex section just aft of the bow. The hollow eases the water around hull, and it provides a transition from the fine bow entry to the generous beam just aft. The hull has a low prismatic coefficient to maximize light air performance, and the aft underbody shape flattens the stern wave to further enhance performance. To keep the boat nimble around the dock and underway, Hunter uses a relatively large rudder and smaller keel.

The keel strut is iron with a lead bulb. This design has a couple benefits. It allows for a lower center of gravity, due to the higher density lead being used in the bulb, and it also minimizes costs. You don't typically associate lead with high cost, but the fact is that lead has tripled in price. Rather than just pass the cost on to the customer, Hunter redesigned the keel to keep the cost down and improve performance. The 45DS, as all of Hunter's boats, has a true keel stub in the boat. This allows for a deep bilge sump and is stronger than just bolting the keel to the flat bottom of the hull.

The deck is plywood cored and has solid glass in high-load areas. A plywood-cored deck, while heavier, is both stiffer and stronger than a deck cored with balsa or foam. To compensate for the heavier deck, Hunter has chosen to use a soft headliner. Aside from the weight benefits, I think the headliner gives a more luxurious look and provides good access to the underside of the deck.



Hunter 45DS

LOA 44'10"; LWL 39'2"; Beam 14'6"
Draft shoal 5', deep 6'6"; Displacement
22,936 lbs.
Ballast shoal 7,389 lbs., deep 7,237 lbs.
Sail Area 962 sq. ft.

Base Boat Price \$262,990

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Hunter uses a modular "liner" technique for its interiors. The interior is housed in a separate hand-laid liner that is later bonded to the hull. During construction Hunter actually places the liner in a hull-matched carrier and installs most of the interior outside the boat. Using this method, the hull and interior work can continue in parallel to maximize efficiency. When it is time to marry the hull and interior, the interior liner is placed in a bed of Plexus adhesive, an adhesive that is stronger than the fiberglass itself. Going even further, the liner is tabbed to the hull around the bilge sump, and the bulkheads are tabbed to the hull and deck. Using this method, Hunter gains the efficiencies of modular construction



Hunter's trademark arch incorporating the traveler and the bimini keep the cockpit free of clutter.

while giving up few of the benefits of traditional techniques.

On deck

One of the major changes in the 45DS is a larger cockpit. The cockpit has a centerline table with storage and accommodations for large electronics, spacious dual helms and the classic Hunter stainless steel traveler arch.

All sail controls are led aft, and our test boat had a full complement of electric winches. The double-ended mainsheet system is interesting. One end of the sheet is brought to a clutch on the starboard cabin top, while the other is belayed to a clutch at the port helm station. This setup allows the boat to be easily singlehanded but still allows a crew to work in the cockpit without crowding each other.

The dual helms feature Whitlock direct-drive steering. This system provides very precise steering, and is far better than any other dual-helm system I have tested.

The double-spreader spar crafted by Selden uses Hunter's well-proven B&R design. The large main provides most of the horsepower but is still easily handled with the optional Selden in-mast furling system, vertical battens provide some roach and a good overall shape to the furling main. The jib is fractional, and at 110-percent, just barely overlaps the main. It is easily handled with Selden's excellent Furlex furling gear. The boat is not over-canvased; Hunter's design theory states that a boat should not require tons of canvas to attain hull speed.

The in-cockpit storage is more than ample. There are large aft lockers for larger gear, and a few smaller areas in the cockpit seats. Large sheet bins control the spaghetti at the cabin-top winches. The transom and swim step is an all new design. Previously, all Hunters had a very rounded, scoop-like transom and step, while the 45DS now has squarer corners and a more vertical design. This small change provides a new cleaner look, and more interior volume.

The boat has a well-designed foredeck, with a large sunning pad directly forward of the mast. The windlass and ground tackle are robust and all housed in



a large anchor locker to keep things tidy.

Down below

The interior of the boat is truly a highlight, as all new Hunters now feature cherry-finished interiors. This new finish, coupled with the light allowed in by the deck saloon design, is truly stunning. The cabin sole is a laminate material called EverWear, promising long life and zero maintenance. The sole looks good and, thanks to Hunter's full subfloor, is very solid and quiet underfoot. The bulkheads and flat cabinet surfaces are covered in wood-grained laminate, again delivering great looks and low maintenance.

From the foot of the companionway the galley is to port and a large head to starboard. The galley features acres of Corian countertops, separate refrigeration and freezer compartments, a built-in microwave and coffee-maker, dual sinks, and a three-burner gimballed stove. There is an innovative dish storage compartment that doubles as a drying rack, complete with a drain and exhaust fan. Storage abounds with many cabinets, drawers, and even storage beneath the sole.

The aft head is spacious, with Corian countertops and a separate shower stall with a frosted glass door. There is private access from the aft cabin, and access from the saloon.

The saloon is beautifully lit



The deck saloon lets in loads of light, top. The galley is designed with features like the dish storage drying rack, middle top. Berths are a highlight, bottom. The good looks of the 45DS stand out, above.

with lots of overhead fixed and opening glass. There is a large U-shaped dining area on port and comfy settee opposite. The boat was setup with an optional entertainment system consisting of a large flat panel monitor mounted on the port main bulkhead and a DVD player and audio system on starboard.

The large nav station is to starboard just forward of the head. There is room to spread out paper charts and lots of panel space for a full complement of electronics. An optional Fischer Panda generator is housed in the nav station seat. The well-insulated noise enclosure keeps things quiet—far quieter than most water pumps.

The aft cabin features an island queen-sized berth, with night-stand-style cabinets. There is a good amount of storage in the hanging lockers and drop-in bin storage along the hull. Our test boat had a washer/dryer in place of the portside hanging locker.

Hunter placed the forward head in the forepeak allowing a large Pullman cabin forward

with a large hanging locker and a full vanity with sink. The bunk is huge and there is storage on shelves and in drawers under the bunk.

Under sail

The conditions were light and sweltering as we made our way out to the Atlantic for a test sail. As we motored out, I took the opportunity to assess the boat under power. The boat was nimble, able to almost turn in its own length. It was easily driven by the standard 54-horsepower Yanmar engine, and a 75-horsepower is an available option.

Interestingly, we motored right past the beach where Steve Pettengill, Hunter's director

of offshore testing, renowned round-the-world sailor and self-proclaimed crash-test dummy, repeatedly grounds each new Hunter model. We opted out of that test, but were comforted to know that every new model is required to pass it.

Once clear of the ICW traffic we unfurled and were underway. Of course this was all done with ease, thanks to the Selden furling gear and electric winches.

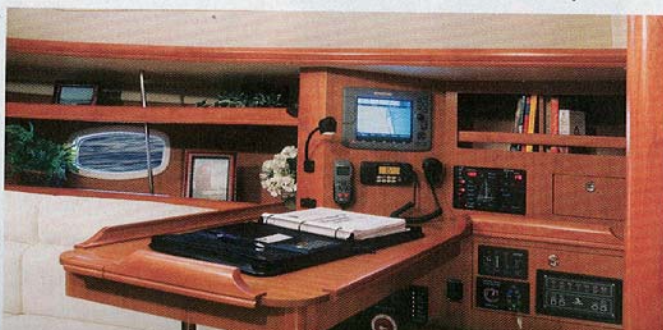
The hot west wind provided us with about 10 knots of breeze. Not much relief from the 100-degree heat, but enough to get the boat moving. We set off on a close reach and touched 6 knots. The boat was very well balanced with a silky smooth

motion. The Whitlock direct drive steering gave fingertip control. Tacking was effortless with the small headsail, a brief shot of the electric winch was all that was required.

We set the asymmetrical spinnaker a cracked off on a broad reach. One of the "costs" of the swept spreaders on the B&R rig is the inability to run deep downwind, but the truth is that you are typically better off to heat up a bit and jibe downwind. We saw a solid 6 knots and the boat handled well. We easily jibed several times, comforted by the fact that the traveler and boom were both safely above the robust cockpit arch.

Coming back into the marina we were able to truly assess the boat under power, as we needed to back the boat into a berth between two gleaming sportfishing boats. The boat backed true and a few blasts of the bow thruster brought us smartly alongside.

Keep an eye out for the 45DS at the fall and winter boat shows, but be prepared for a long wait in line, as this is a truly compelling, high-value package.



The nav station, right, has plenty of room for navigation gizmos. The cockpit is large but comfortable underway, below.

