

PHOTOS: ALLAN WHITING;
US YACHTS

the 49ers

The Hunter 49 shorthanded cruiser/passagemaker promises true value-for-money and an unbeatable warranty, writes
ALLAN WHITING

American sailing marque Hunter has always combined ease-of-sail handling with build quality. But now this ideal cruising combination is available at bargain prices thanks to a strong exchange rate. Jumping aboard the boat, we had a short play in the flagship 49-footer to see how much bang you get for your Aussie dollar.

The 49 replaced the 46 in 2007, but somehow we missed out evaluating it back then. But the recent climb of the Aussie dollar has seen some refocussing on American craft and the Hunter 49 was an obvious boat to evaluate as our dollar soars towards parity with the greenback.

WHAT'S WITH 49?

If the Hunter flagship had been designed by a European boat manufacturer you'd imagine it would have been called a 50. But in the USA, the number 49 probably has more appeal than plain old 50.

Historically, those who joined the 1849 California Gold Rush were known as 49ers and since 1946, the name has been carried by San Francisco's gridiron football team. Also, the famous single-spinner Ford cars were introduced in 1949.

With this 49 yacht, Hunter has managed to cram an awful lot of kit into a boat that sells for less than the Australian median house

price — with homelike features as part of the attraction.

Our evaluation boat is the proud possession of Tania and Alan Pascoe, who were in the throes of preparing it for an around-the-world cruise. They took time off their busy schedules to show us around their home-on-the-water and let us crew during the recent 19-boat-strong Hunter Regatta held on Sydney Harbour.

Despite being fitted with pure cruising sails and loaded for passagemaking, plus the weight of six regatta drop-ins, *Screensaver* managed a creditable fourth over the line in the Harbour race. Not bad for an around-the-world home.

HUNTER DIFFERENCE

Thanks to a trademark rubbing rail that covers the flanged deck-hull join, Hunter yachts are easy to pick. Closer inspection shows another difference: a rig that has a slender mast section and no backstay.

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. Hunter adopted the B&R rig in 1993.

The sturdy B&R rig requires a wide

Left: Hunter 49 test boat was set-up by the owners for an impending around-the-world cruise. But even on ho-hum Sydney harbour, our yachting man, Allan Whiting (pictured), was impressed by her space and ease of handling.





Clockwise from opposite: Underway, handrails help you traverse the companionway steps while an island bench aids support at the L-shaped galley; Easily sailed Hunter 49 is perfectly suited to couple's cruising and shorthanded passagemaking; Owner's forepeak cabin; Plenty of opening hatches dot the 49's clean foredeck.

shroud base, so Hunter yachts have traditional, hull-exterior chainplates and long spreaders. The wide sheeting base is a plus at all points of sail other than close-hauled with an overlapping headsail, but that's no real issue in the case of boats that are designed primarily for cruising. The 49 comes with a modest-overlap jib and can be ordered with an optional self-tacking headsail.

Construction is state-of-the-art, with Hunter hulls and decks built in a production-line process, using a combination of solid FRP and Baltek

that is used in surface materials in hospitals and food-processing plants. The outer hull skin is Ashland AME-5000 modified epoxy, for maximum osmosis resistance.

The chainplates are attached to the outside of the hull by massive bolts and a belt of reinforcement runs around the hull, from chainplate to chainplate. Deck walking areas are plywood sandwich laminate, and Coremat reinforced FRP is used for vertical surfaces, with aluminium plates embedded in the laminate at deck hardware attachments.

stainless steel frames, with integral threaded rods.

Our evaluation boat was fitted with the deep-draft keel, in the interests of maximum righting-moment with a ballast weight saving — the shallow keel tips the scales at 5690kg, while the deep one is 600kg lighter.

Hunter's production system is based on modular assembly. While galleys, cupboards, drawer units and settees are being prepared in a cabinet shop, the interior FRP moulding is fitted with hoses, wiring conduits and tanks. The interior moulding is then

"With the 49, Hunter has managed to cram an awful lot of kit into a boat that sells for less than the Australian median house price"

and plywood sandwich materials. The hull below the waterline is monolithic FRP and above the waterline it's end-grain balsa sandwich. The forward section of the hull, from the keel sump to the stem, is reinforced with a Kevlar layer to strengthen the hull against an object strike.

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

Hunter has adopted solid stainless steel bar rudder stocks, in concert with an isolation transformer to address any corrosion issues. Steering is by rod draglink from twin wheel stations.

Hunter has been fitting winged keel profiles since 1988, to concentrate weight as deeply as possible, without draft that's excessive for cruising boats. The 49 can be ordered with shoal draft, 1.68m keel or a 2.13m deep-draft keel. Both keels are high-antimony lead bulbs, cast around

placed temporarily in a 'dummy hull' that has access holes in its sides. Around 75 per cent of the interior fitout is done inside the dummy hull, with much less difficulty than doing the job inside a sealed hull.

The part-finished interior assembly is then removed from the dummy hull and lowered into the hull moulding, with the bond between the interior moulding and hull formed by Plexus adhesive that 'melts' the resin faces of both components. After curing, the join



“Hunter must be confident of its build quality and the reliability of its inclusions, because the warranty is an unbeatable five years — stem to stern”



is said to be as strong as the original laminates and up to six times stronger than traditional FRP taped joints.

Final assembly of the interior includes engine installation. The deck moulding is kitted out separately and arrives in almost finished condition for bonding and screwing to the hull.

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A HOME AT SEA

Most 49s are fitted out as owner's versions, with the master cabin for'ard and two aft doubles, while a charter variant has twin for'ard cabins. Our test boat was the former model and the master cabin layout was very impressive. The bed head is set against the collision bulkhead and the island mattress broadens halfway along its length and then tapers slightly towards the foot. The head is to starboard and a separate shower cabin is to port.

The saloon would do a small city apartment proud, with ample dinette table seating for six to eight and a separate lounge opposite. We love the movable dinette bench seat that slides out from under the table, exposing storage space below. A drop-in floor panel means the seat can be left in either position.

HIGHS

- Equipment levels
- Value for money
- Ease of handling
- Warranty

LOWS

- Close-hauled performance

The cabin floor is bright-finished in teak-and-holly pattern, which despite its high-gloss offers quite good grip.

The L-shaped galley is fronted by an island bench that offers optional second fridge and freezer space, while providing ideal 'bottom support' for the cook in a seaway. A brilliant galley touch is a crockery cupboard with drying rack. Plates can be stacked wet from the rinse water and left to drip dry, with the evaporation aided by a warming light bulb inside the cupboard. Hunter won't confirm that the inspiration came from a lazy male!

Opposite the galley is a practical carbon fibre-look, lift-up nav table with an adjustable captain's chair. The nav station has ample wall space for optional instrument displays.

Aft of the nav station is a large head and shower cubicle with a day-use door and a second door into the portside aft cabin. The double bed is large enough for fore and aft or



Opposite: Minus a backstay, the flagship Hunter 49 utilises a Bergstrom & Ridder (B&R) rig for shorthanded, round-the-world yachts. Above: Dedicated shower compartment is opposite the starboardside head. Below: Features of the apartment-like saloon include a movable dinette bench seat and a brilliant crockery cupboard with drying rack.



HUNTER REGATTA



Local agents US Yachts held its annual Hunter owners' regatta on Sydney Harbour on a Saturday afternoon with a 15-knot nor'easterly breeze that drew out what seemed to be every seaworthy craft available. With packed ferries and motorboats dialled into the mix, the Hunter crews had to be on their toes. Fortunately, the regatta was held without incident.

Just because people buy Hunter boats for their renowned cruising abilities doesn't mean that these buyers have lost their competitive streak. The Farm Cove start-line saw pre-gun

jockeying that would not have looked out of place in any IRC fleet.

Nineteen Hunters headed off on starboard tack across the harbour and then put in several digs to lay the large mooring buoy off Athol Bight. From there it was a continued work across the race fleets and ferry tracks to round Clark, then Shark Islands, before a run back to the finish line in Farm Cove.

The Hunter fleet made a fair fist of the windward legs, pointing off a few degrees in comparison with the hotshots in other racer fleets, but made good speed in the moderate breeze. The boats with larger, battened mains did noticeably better than mast-furling craft, but water traffic played as large a part as boat performance through the Hunter fleet.

The square run saw most boats goosewing their headsails and the keenest had

foredeck crew holding out jib clews for that extra bit of sail area.

Then followed an impromptu race back to US Yachts' base at the National Maritime Museum moorings in Darling Harbour, followed by drinks, mini hamburgers and fish and chips at the adjacent Yots Cafe & Bar. The tales got taller and the passages faster as the evening wore on. All good fun.

This photo: Globe-trotting Hunter owners don't mind a joust between themselves at the annual Hunter Regatta on Sydney Harbour. Below, left to right: Hunter owners get together post regatta at Darling Harbour's Yots Cafe & Bar; Foredeck crew assist with winging the genoa; Australia's exclusive Hunter yachts distributor, US Yachts owner and CEO Matt Hayes (blue shirt).



Practical nav station includes an adjustable captain's chair.

athwartships sleeping and three opening ports ensure good air flow.

The starboard aft cabin is smaller, has a dedicated cupboard for a washer/dryer and can be optioned as an office.

Hunter has sacrificed some saloon floor space by adopting a companionway with a shallow angle that is very easily negotiated in rough weather. The plus for this design is a wet hanging area below the stairway that's ideal for foulies. Engine access is via a lift-up stair and side panels in the aft cabins.

The combination of opening and fixed ports and skylights keeps the 49's interior light and airy, but blackout blinds make it easy to dim proceedings when required. Insect screens are a handy inclusion for use at inshore anchorages.

Ample lift-up floor panels are provided for access to through-hulls, plumbing and wiring. Alan Pascoe has experience of bilge water sloshing around in canoe-bottomed yachts that lack a bilge depression and was pleased to see the large keel sump in the 49.

UNDER SAIL

Our Hunter 49 evaluation coincided with the annual Hunter Regatta held on Sydney Harbour. As touched on, *Screensaver* was in ocean-cruising mode and carried 10 people for the event, so it was hardly setup for race performance. Despite that, the 49 showed a handy turn of speed with the sheets eased a tad.

The Pascoes spec'd their boat with in-mast Selden roller furling and while this arrangement offers easy reefing and dousing, it's not a high-performance option: vertical battens and a straightish leech don't provide maximum efficiency. In contrast, some of the fleet had roach, battened mains that gave much more power, but at the expense of more complicated reefing. Hunter buyers

make their choice, depending on the role they choose for their boat.

Screensaver's mildly overlapping, 110 per cent headsail tacked easily, with final tensioning done by powered sheet winches.

The 49's mainsail traveller mounts atop Hunter's patented TravelerArch that consists of paired, heavy-wall stainless steel tubes that form a targa top over the cockpit and double as locators for the various bimini options. The traveller car operates via lines leading down the arch tubes to camcleats. The endless mainsheet can be worked from the helmsman's position, using the port jib sheet winch, or from the powered halyard winch, behind the spray dodger.

The sweptback spreaders didn't cause as much restriction to square-running as we expected. Another surprise was the ease of goosewinging the headsail. The sail dimensions and the wide sheeting base made the jib self-setting for square running, and only racing enthusiasm sent crew members to the foredeck to hold out the headsail clew.

The Hunter mainsheet design and a pair of rope bins behind the spray dodger eliminate sheets and halyards from the cockpit floor. In conjunction with the optional autopilot, it's possible for one person to operate the engine, make and shorten sail, tack, gybe and steer the boat. And that's what shorthanded cruisers demand.

Moving about the Hunter 49, above and below decks, is a safe operation, thanks to high-grip deck surfaces and ample hand-hold rails.

The Hunter 49 is a superbly-equipped, beautifully finished boat that suits shorthanded cruising and passagemaking to a tee. It is excellent value-for-money and comes with the best warranty in the business. Oh, and you can sail around the world.

Hunter 49

PRICE AS TESTED
\$660,000

OPTIONS FITTED

Additional top-loading fridge and freezer; solid boom vang; antifouling paint and barrier coat; bimini frame and cover; CD stereo system in cockpit; spray dodger; electric halyard winch upgrade; engine upgrade (100hp); Fischer Panda 12kW generator; icemaker; leather cushions; Oceanaire shade and hatch package, quiet-flush heads; Raymarine 7001+ autopilot, E80 display with RS125 and 2kW radar, and ST60 Tridata repeater at port helm; washer/dryer; and watermaker (30lt).

PRICED FROM
\$550,000

GENERAL

Material: FRP monolithic and balsa sandwich hull, and plywood sandwich deck
Type: Monohull
Length overall: 15.21m
Hull length: 14.61m
Waterline length: 13.36m
Beam: 4.47m
Draft: ... 2.13m (1.68m optional)
Weight: 14,884kg

CAPACITIES

Berths: Three doubles (four-cabin layout optional)
Fuel: 568lt (840lt optional)
Water: 757lt
Holding tank: 197lt
Water heater: 42lt

ENGINE

Make: Yanmar diesel
Type: Shaft drive
Rated HP: 75
Prop: Fixed three-blade

SAILS

Sail area: 94.2m² (with mast-furling main with vertical battens); asymmetric spinnaker optional

SUPPLIED BY

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