



Sailing the Dehler 34 makes *Sam Jefferson* wonder why there aren't more small cruiser-racers on the market

PHOTOS: JOE MCCARTHY

When I was younger I always said to myself that the older me would own a Sigma 33. I know, I know I should have been aiming for a Swan 65 or something, but I'm a modest man with an awful lot to be modest about. The Sigma 33 therefore made a lot of sense. It was modestly quick, modestly good looking, modest but comfortable down below and could take you across an ocean or across the Solent – whichever was your wont. The problem is that now – like me, in fact – it's getting a bit old and tired. The other problem is that if you cast around for a modern equivalent, there isn't much there. Did I say isn't?

I meant wasn't, because I couldn't help but feel that the new Dehler 34 ticked an awful lot of the same boxes.

Here we have a spanking new 34ft cruiser/racer fresh off Judel/Vrolijk's drawing board and let's get to the first and for me most important thing – she's good looking. That's important to me because when I go to see my pride and joy, I want her to cheer me up just by looking pretty. And the 34 does.

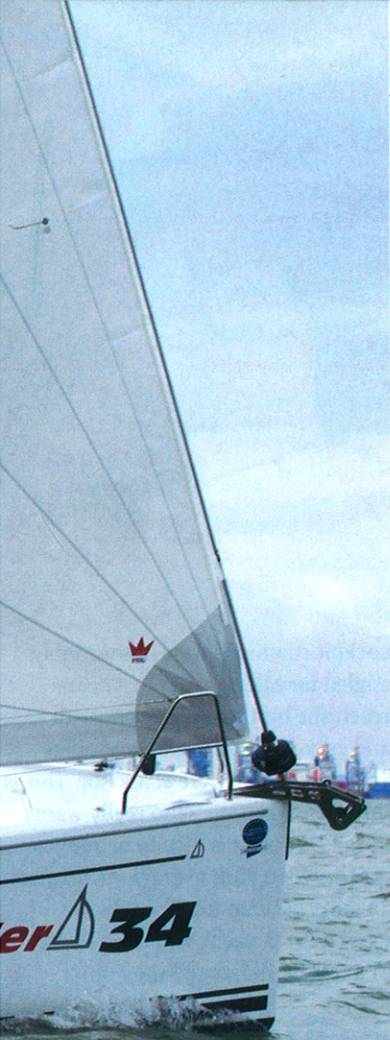
Curved derriere

She has appreciably lower freeboard than the equivalent-sized Hanse or Bavaria and I have always respected Judel/Vrolijk's reluctance to whack a chine or two aft just for the hell of it. I mean, which do you prefer: an angled or a curved backside? For me, a soft turn to the bilge is

ABOVE
The 34 is a seductive mix of sporty lines and pleasing performance

far more alluring. Combine that with an aggressive plumb bow, transom with almost no rake and a sleek, low coachroof and you have a thoroughly stylish little yacht. She's also strongly built with a solid hull/deck joint and carbon reinforcement.

She is without question a cruiser/racer, so she's a little lighter than a pure cruiser at 5.4t to 5.8t (depending on which options you choose), features a keel-stepped rig of decent proportions and comes with the choice of either a deep, T-shaped keel with a bulb or a choice of two L-shaped keels of different depths. The 34 is the baby of a range of Dehlers that includes the 42 and the 46. Having already tested the 46, there was a great sense of familiarity when I stepped aboard. This was



LEFT
The bathing platform can be removed if you take the racing version of the 34

RIGHT
The cockpit is sensibly laid out with Dehler's clever drop-down washboards



a good thing as the 46 featured a sensibly laid-out cockpit; very clear and uncluttered, with very well-placed integral instrument pods in front of each wheel and exactly where they need to be. Twin wheels are standard, but there is a competition pack that has the option of tiller steering along with longer carbon-fibre spars and other weight-saving measures such as synthetic teak and doing away with the bathing platform – it is worth keeping this, though, as it's a nice size and comes with a very nifty swim ladder.

Given her racing pretensions, it was natural that the mainsheet

traveller should run across the cockpit floor right in front of the helmsman, while the mainsheet winches were within easy reach from the helm. Storage was also excellent with a decent-sized lazarette and a cavernous cockpit locker to port which you could fit several sails in, plus a dinghy (provided you remembered to deflate it).

Sharp styling

Up forward you have the option of a short sprit with an integrated bow roller.

Down below it's distinctive, uncluttered and manly. The smart,

curved lockers lining the main saloon are a stylish addition. Dehler is fortunate in that it doesn't feel the need to pander to the charter market, which means that it doesn't have to shoehorn two double cabins aft. This means you get that huge cockpit locker, while the double berth is situated to starboard and is over half the width of the hull, giving you a bit of extra room. Aside from that, the layout is pretty standard stuff with a double forward which – inevitably on a yacht of this size – is tapered quite a bit toward the bow. The main saloon features a modest chart table and separate heads/shower to port with an L-shaped galley to starboard. Nothing wildly innovative here, but the quality of the finish is excellent.

So far, so good: not earth-shatteringly innovative, but a nice, →



into a groove nicely. The steering was light and well balanced with just a touch of weather helm to feel the boat was alive and kicking. When we tacked, she turned on her heel with all the sharpness and smartness of a particularly showy tango dancer. My only real complaint was that she didn't have any foot chocks for the helmsman, as they would have been nice when heeled over. That said, the

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
The interior is smart and unfussy; the galley is modest but sensibly laid out; the forward cabin would be used as the master cabin; the heads are functional and practical

cockpit coamings were comfortably angled for hiking out. On a beam reach she hit the high sevens with ease and carved past a number of other yachts as if they were at anchor. This is important. I mean, who really wants to sail slowly? It is nice to be moving quicker than your average yachtsman. Tacking back up the Hamble, we overhauled a yacht motoring home. That rather illustrated the point. ✦

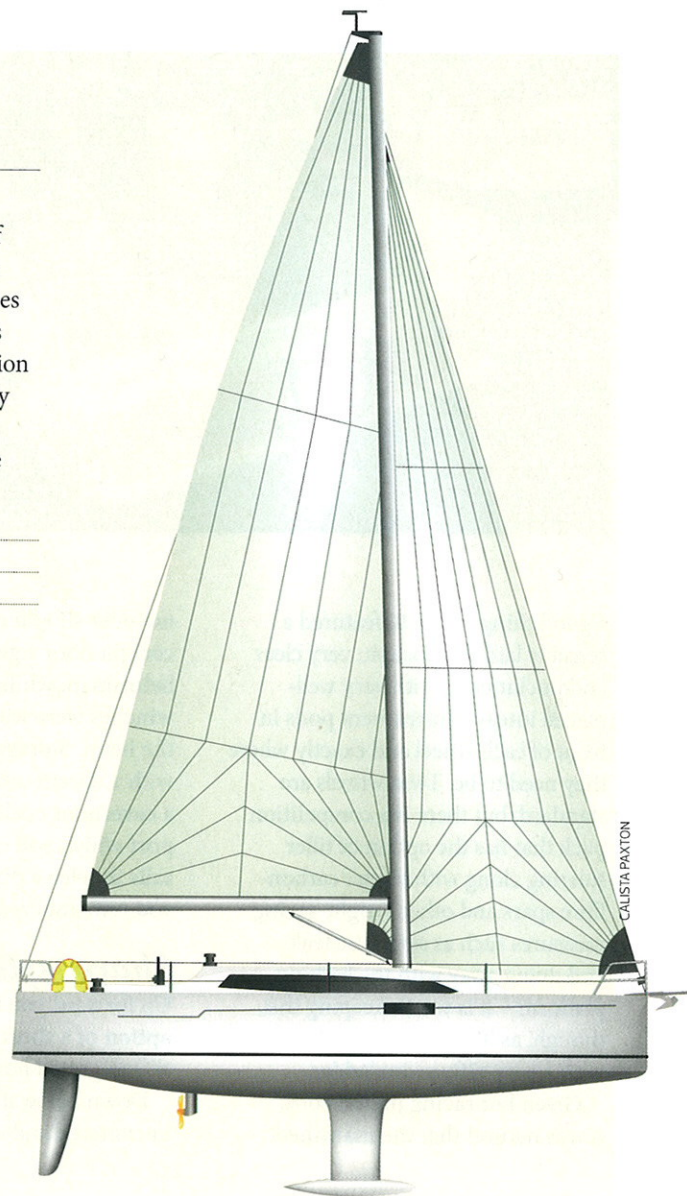
SAM'S VERDICT

This is a good yacht in a size bracket where there are precious few options if you are looking for a cruiser/racer. I'm not saying she's spectacular, but she does everything she's meant to do well. She's fun to sail, well made and, in competition form, I'm sure she could be successfully campaigned. In standard form, she's a great fast cruiser. Then there's the price tag - that's fairly modest too.

- PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★
ACCOMMODATION: ★★★★★
LOOKS: ★★★★★

THE SPEC

- LOA:** 35ft 1in (10.7m)
Beam: 11ft 8in (3.6m)
Draft: 6ft 4in (1.95m) (standard)
6ft 9in (2.1m) (competition) 5ft 1in (1.55m) (shallow)
Displacement: 5,450kg (13,100lb)
Sail area: 65m²
Price: (base) £109,000 (exc VAT)
(sailed) £133,000



smart little boat. It was time to go sailing and I realised as we puttered out of the Hamble River and saw a modest 10-12kt breeze ruffling the water, that I was actually excited to put the sails up. That's a good feeling and not one you always get - certainly not when it's blowing Force 3 and you haven't even packed a gennaker. As predicted, she sailed beautifully - not spectacularly, but really well, pointing high and settling