Moody
Performance Cruisers

Moody S38

A development of the 'un-Moody' Moody S31, this 38ft Dixon design could mark a second turning point for the Swanwick-based yard. Matthew Sheahan tests the first example in the Solent

All photos: Malcolm White

Moody have been building sailing yachts now for 61 years, a fact endorsed by the high proportion of sepia photographs along the walls of Moody's recently redecorated Swanwick offices. Harrison Butler's *Vindilis* and Adlard Coles's modified Tumlare Class *Cohoe* were legendary, needing little introduction, and both were built by Moody's yard in Swanwick.

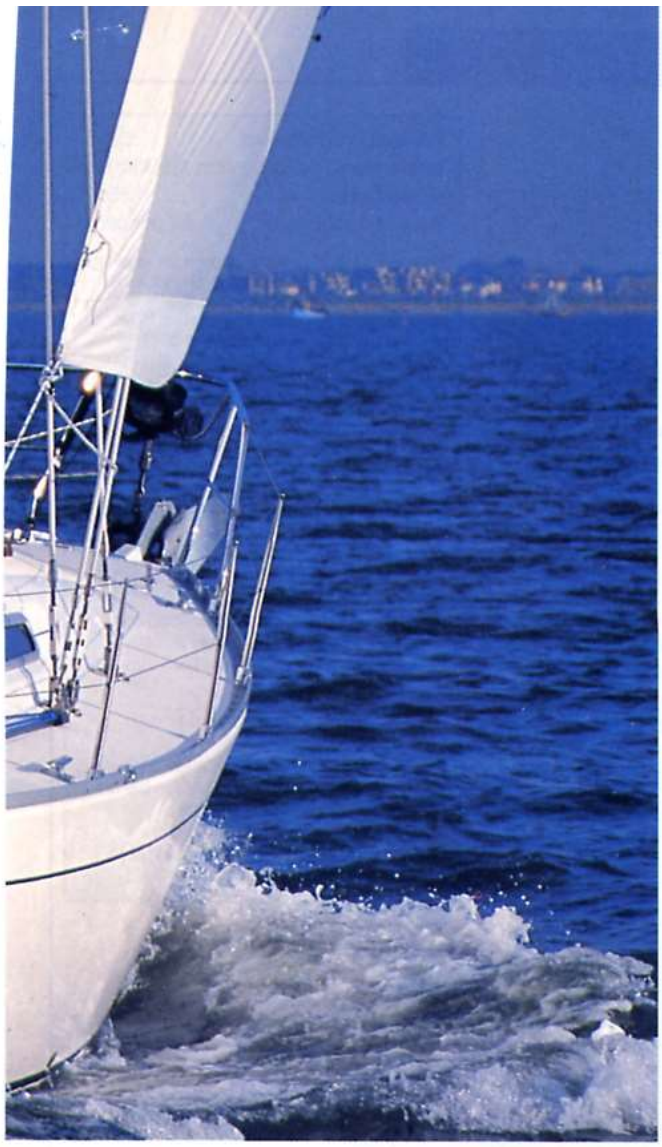
But what of today's boats? Will we look back in 20, 30 or 50 years' time and be able to identify landmark designs in the same way?

Perhaps it will be easier for Moody than for many other manufacturers. The summer of '94 will surely rate as a major turning point in recent years with the introduction of the S31, a boat and concept that has now spawned another in its style, the S38. We set out to test the very first example in the Solent.

ON DECK

Designed as a performance cruiser, the S31 Bill Dixon design was described by some as the most 'un-Moody Moody to appear for many years'. Others commented on how her styling seemed to be a direct and perhaps long-awaited response to the typically French style, (especially below decks) that has dominated many areas of sailing in the UK.

But above all, the boat was a success, with



Far left, slipping along in under ten knots of wind. Above, the S38 achieves a good SA:disp ratio with her standard sail plan; the fractional rig should perform even better. Left, all controls lead aft

80 afloat in just 18 months, and confirmed to the company that their strategy was working and the risk had paid off. Success with this model must have been doubly satisfying as a second addition to the S-series was planned.

Although she was never intended to replace the popular centre cockpit Moody 38, one cannot help but draw comparisons between the two – particularly as during our test the two models were moored next to each other.

Strangely, the outline of her deck plan implies voluminous, almost tubby forward sections, yet Dixon has managed to develop a seamless transition from this plan view into fair lines as they approach the waterline.

In all other views, though, there is simply no doubt that the S38 is a sleeker boat than the centre cockpit model. Sleek not just in her hull and deck design, but in the styling of mouldings that clearly follow the modern trend where curves are king. The most obvious difference, however, is that the S38 is an aft cockpit design.

Broadly speaking this boat has been designed to accommodate four people and as far as her cockpit is concerned, she is comfortable and practically laid out. Well positioned, solid grabrails are fitted round her deck, as well as a footrest along the centreline of the cockpit sole, a detail that emphasises the width of her cockpit and her beam aft.

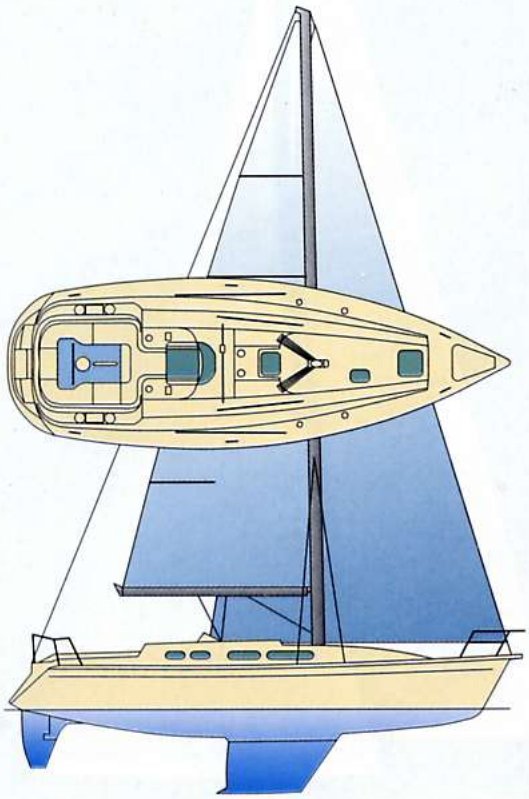
All the control lines are led aft through the deck to a pair of Lewmar 30 winches and two banks of rope clutches either side of the companionway. The mainsheet is led to one of these winches from its track and car position just forward of the main hatch. Unfortunately, this makes it difficult for the helmsman to reach.

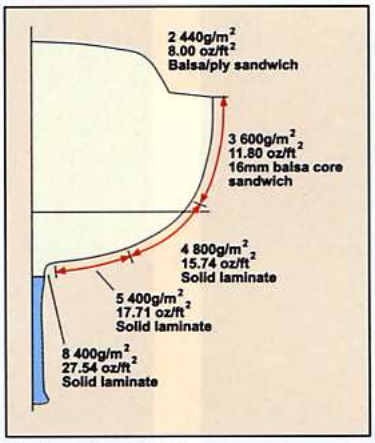
Nevertheless, a good thing about the mainsheet controls was that the traveller arrangement uses a 6:1 purchase arrangement and cam jammer cleats on swivel bases, which allows sail trimming from a range of positions.

Of the few potential problems that we did spot with her layout, the most obvious (and easily rectified) was getting aboard. The ▷

Technical data

MOODY S38





Designed by: Bill Dixon

Built by: Marine Projects (Plymouth) Ltd, Newport Street, Plymouth, Devon, PL1 3QG Tel: (01752) 227771. Fax: (01752) 266760.

Marketed by: Moody Marketing & Development Ltd, Swanwick, Southampton, SO31 1ZL. Tel: (01489) 885000. Fax: (01489) 885509.

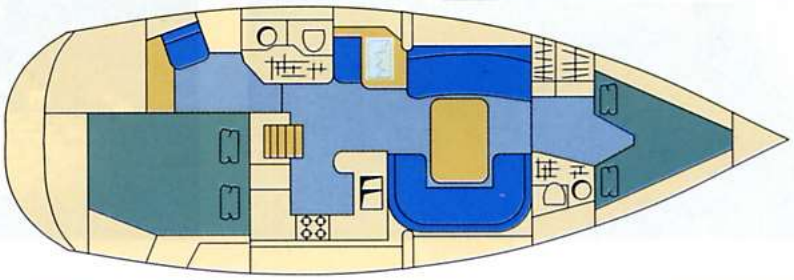
Prismatic coefficient	0.55
Immersion	232kg/cm 1,300lb/in
Ballast ratio	35.8
Personal stowage	9.42 per cent

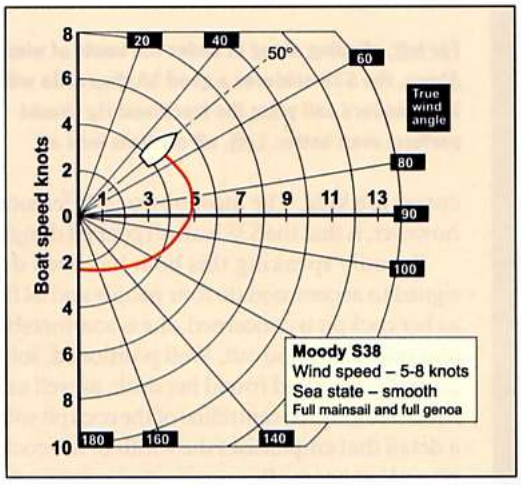
Stowage factor: 3ft³ per person for stowage of personal effects. Factor is shown as a percentage of total volume.
Pounds/inch (kg/cm) immersion: How much weight it takes to sink the boat parallel to DWL.
Prismatic coefficient: The ratio of volume to displacement to a volume of LWL and the maximum cross sectional area below the load waterplane. An indication of fineness or fullness of the hull.

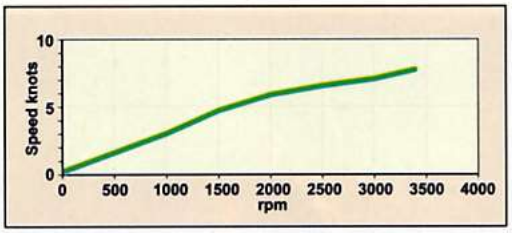
Polar diagram: Shows the optimum close-hauled angle to the true wind. Also shows speed attained on all courses. Important – consider in conjunction with the true wind speed during the test.
Sail area: displacement ratio: This ratio gives some indication of power available. Higher numbers = greater performance.

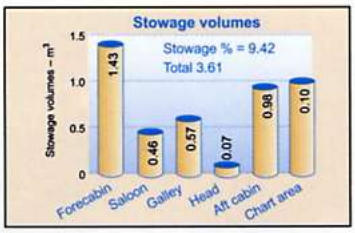
$$\frac{SA(ft^2)}{(Displacement\ (lb) \div 64)^{.666}}$$

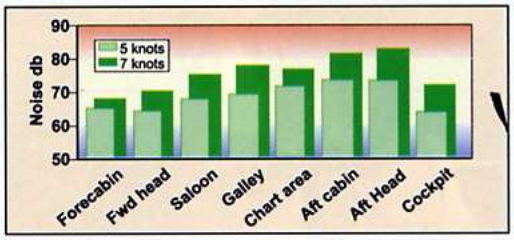
Ballast ratio: A comparison between displacement and the weight of the ballast.
Displacement:waterline length: Performance indicator. Low numbers = higher performance. (Displacement (lb) ÷ 2240) ÷ (0.01 x LWL (ft))³

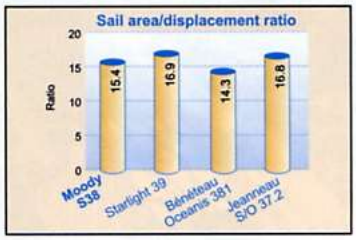












COMPARABLE BOATS	MOODY S38		STARLIGHT 39		BENETEAU OCEANIS 381		JEANNEAU S/O 37.2	
LOA	11.58m	38ft 0in	12.32m	40ft 5in	11.71m	38ft 5in	11.40m	37ft 5in
LWL	9.91m	32ft 6in	9.55m	31ft 4in	10.01m	32ft 10in	9.70m	31ft 10in
Beam	3.96m	13ft 0in	3.81m	12ft 6in	3.94m	12ft 11in	3.89m	12ft 9in
Draught	1.91m	6ft 3in	2.06m	6ft 9in	1.60m	5ft 3in	1.88m	6ft 2in
Disp (lightship)	8,650kg	19,070lb	7,938kg	17,500lb	7,900kg	17,416lb	6,001kg	13,230lb
Ballast	3,096kg	6,825lb	3,311kg	7,300lb	2,200kg	4,850lb	1,950kg	4,300lb
Sail area (100% foretriangle)	63.68m²	685ft²	66.24m²	713ft²	55.74m²	600ft²	54.53m²	587ft²
Berths	4		4		6		6	
Engine	Volvo MD2040		Ford Mermaid		Volvo MD22L		Volvo MD22L	
	29kW	39hp	42kW	56hp	37kW	50hp	37kW	50hp
Water	364lt	80gal	264lt	58gal	450lt	99gal	359lt	79gal
Fuel	182lt	40gal	200lt	44gal	150lt	33gal	141lt	31gal
Sail area:disp	15.4		16.9		14.3		16.8	
Disp:LWL	248		254		220		183	
Price (ex VAT)	£93,800		£114,000		£88,005		£85,848	

Comfortable and secure, the S38's cockpit is a big improvement on the centre cockpit 38

S38 has ample freeboard and the lack of a guardrail gate made climbing aboard a bit of a struggle, even from a high, floating pontoon. Moody offer the gate as an extra and it would certainly be an improvement for a family crew.

We were very disappointed to find that, like so many other new boats, there were no safety harness attachments fitted as standard. Moody state that most customers specify a range of preferences for locating attachments and they prefer to site fittings to order.

RIG AND SAILS

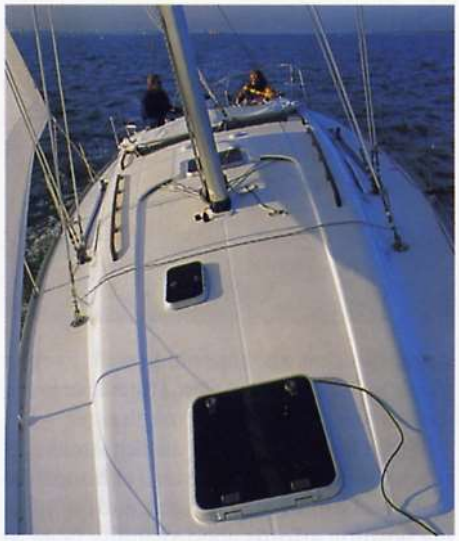
At this stage there may be some who are still sceptical as to whether this boat really is a better performer than her predecessors. For anyone in this camp, checking her design data should reveal the first confirmation that Dixon has indeed sought to produce a more capable boat.

In her basic masthead rig form, the S38 has around 11 per cent more sail area than the standard Moody 38 (63.64m² inc 100 per cent fore triangle) and although her quoted displacement figures put her at around 450kg (1,000lb) heavier, she still manages to convert this extra sail area into a better sail area:displacement ratio of 15.4 against 14.3 for the 38.

Take a look at her fractional rig option and the difference is even greater. By maintaining the size of the foretriangle and increasing the topmast height, the genoa remains the same area, but the mainsail increases by around 12 per cent (to give a total sail area of 71.48m²). This results in a sail area:displacement ratio of 17.2 – a similar figure to the popular Starlight 39 (see *YW* rally Sept 1995).

Her standard spars are by Kemp and in both cases she is fitted with a slab-reefing mainsail with two full-length and two conventional battens, and furling genoa. Frederiksen combination ball/sliders are used on the full battens with conventional sliders used elsewhere, making the mainsail easy to handle without being over-complicated or expensive.

Her deck-stepped mast is conventionally stayed with two sets of aft-swept spreaders and continuous wire rigging.



The deck is easy to move about on, with no difficult areas, but plenty of well placed handholds

The standard sail package is produced for Moody by Lucas in Dacron, although a Hood wardrobe will be standard as from March 1996. We were particularly impressed with the mainsail which was well cut and easy to control.

ACCOMMODATION

If you thought you knew Moody's style and you haven't yet seen the S31, be prepared for a surprise. The S38 continues where the S31 left off with a well rounded, high gloss, rich feel to the main saloon. The joiner work is Makore and its dark appearance is offset by highly polished stainless steel items. Details such as chainplate supports and brackets have not been disguised or built around.

Storage on deck is good, with a large foredeck anchor locker, and in the cockpit a cavernous locker to port

In general, all the surfaces are well finished, often with stylish and well radiused fiddles and trim. Low voltage lights (with covers) are recessed into the moulded headliner, as are a pair of handrails that run almost the length of the saloon and are bolted through to the grabrails along the coachroof top.

Lighting is good – which did surprise us as the portlights in the coachroof sides are small. Even including the additional hatches in the coachroof top, there are only seven windows in the saloon, of which three open.

Nevertheless, the design of this cabin is clever; there is a feeling of tremendous space the minute you step below decks. But nothing is for free and this initial impact will have its drawbacks for some.

The first and most obvious is that once she is underway and heeled, wide open spaces are sometimes tricky to negotiate, despite the provision of grabrails.

The navigation station, set on the port side and looking forward, was particularly disappointing. Not only does the chart table seem small for a boat of this size, (measuring only 580x770mm, just big enough for a folded chart), but there was no means of bracing yourself while on port tack.

Still on the subject of niggles, there were no leecloths fitted as standard, despite the provision of two sea berths in the main saloon. Again, these items can be fitted at a modest cost and are worth bearing in mind when ordering.

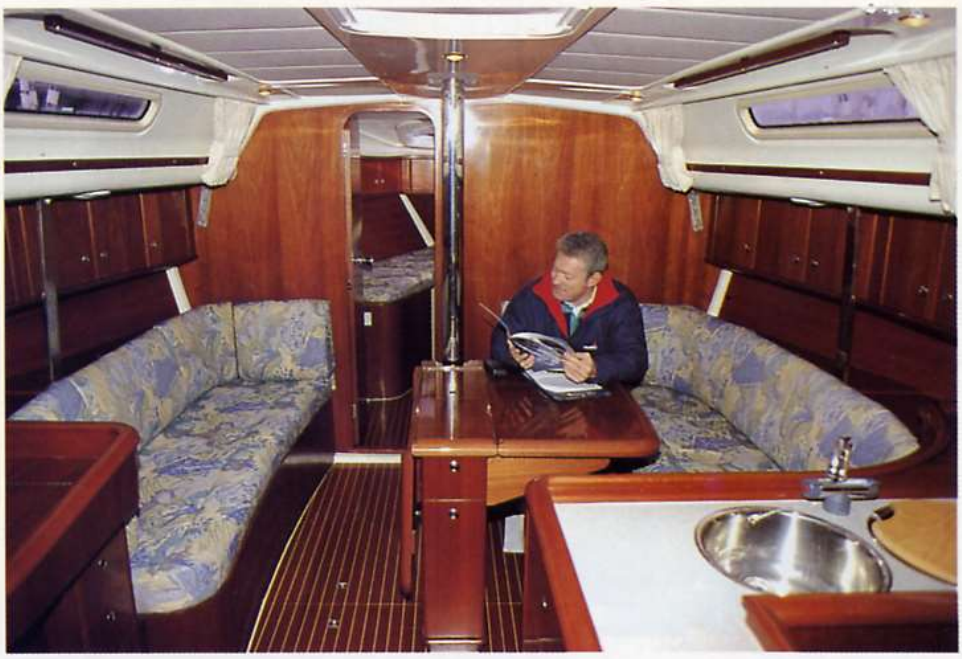
Even if you do not plan to set off over the horizon straight away, you will find that leecloths are efficient at keeping things like kit bags off the floor when sailing. In our opinion, they are not only essential, but spare the well finished joiner work the risk of being attacked with a battery of screws and pad eyes by someone who knows little about the most secure mounting areas of the boat.

Two basic arrangements are available, presenting the after section of the boat's accommodation as either one double cabin with a vast bed, or as a pair of smaller double cabins. Our test boat had the former which, although well put together, does take some getting used to.

The layout is a development of the S31's after cabin, with a large double berth offset to starboard. Because the boat is an aft cockpit arrangement, headroom is restricted towards the centre of the cabin and one has to crawl across the bunk to get to the far side.

On the small side, we felt, are the two ▷

On test



Right, the saloon creates an immediate impression of space, but at what cost? Below right, the navigation station and secure galley

head units which, even for a person of 5ft 10in, seemed cramped, especially aboard a 38ft boat. The vee-berth forward cabin has reasonable space, light and ventilation.

Throughout, this boat's accommodation has been well put together with tasteful decor and modern style. We did wonder whether it was really necessary to maximise on saloon space to achieve the initial impact of the saloon and galley at the expense of space elsewhere – especially aboard a boat that will typically sail with just four people.

CONSTRUCTION

Getting at the inside face of the hull and poking around behind the scenes is more difficult than you might at first imagine aboard this boat. Not because Moody want to prevent you from seeing these areas, but simply because she's well built.

Floors are screwed down unless they need to be lifted, in which case there are fold-away lifting eyes. Locker backs are properly finished, too, and there are few gaps to be found between joiner work and hull.

The S38's hull is a solid laminate below the waterline and her topsides are balsa-cored from 150mm above the waterline. The laminate uses a combination of woven rovings and chopped strand mat, all of which is hand-laid using an isophthalic resin. The deck is balsa sandwich.

Conventional floors are built into the keel area of the hull, over which a single tray moulding is laid, extending from the forward to the after cabin. In the fore and aft cabin the moulding forms a matrix, bonded into the hull, which provides the structural integrity. The mid-section of this moulding simply covers transverse members in way of the keel.

Two keel configurations are available with this boat; the deeper of the two fins draws 1.91m (6ft 3in) whereas the shoal draught version draws 1.50m (4ft 11in).

UNDER POWER AND SAIL

On the helm, our test boat, with her fixed prop and rod linked steering, was a doddle to handle. She demonstrated a good turning circle, a top speed of just under eight knots under engine (Volvo MD2040) and good brakes!

Under sail, the weather only allowed us to put her though her paces in under ten knots of wind. Some might say these conditions are more testing for a cruising boat and if this is the case, then she proved herself on most points of sailing.

Once you have allowed time for her to pick up momentum, she slips along well. From a purely personal point of view, I found her much nicer to sail than her centre cockpit sister.

From behind the wheel the helmsman can reach the primaries with ease, (although the mainsheet is more of a problem), and the helming position affords good visibility from to weather or to leeward.

Our main concern, though, was her pointing ability in light airs which gave us a best windward performance of only 50° to the true wind on either tack. We could see no obvious reason for this, other than the mast set-up and a deep luffed genoa (which we did not have time to experiment with during the test).

Had we been able to tweak her a little we would have expected her to achieve around 45° true as a typical optimum upwind angle.

CONCLUSIONS

Basic price of the S38 for the fin keel version is £93,800 ex VAT, so she is not only keenly priced compared with her competitors, but cheaper than the older centre cockpit model by around £20,000. Options like teak decks, spinnaker gear and electronics could add another ten per cent.

But even so, the S38 is excellent value, as long as you are not looking for the ultimate in ease of access throughout the accommodation.

The summary is simple:

If you spend more time below decks than above, and performance is not the key issue, the traditional and evergreen centre cockpit 38 is for you. Otherwise, the S38 is, in our opinion, worthy of a place alongside the sepia prints at Swanwick. ❑

Two arrangements are available aft. Here the double cabin is to port and a drying locker to starboard