

On test



OYSTER

Oyster 485

A British thoroughbred from Oyster's stable, the 485 is more than a match for her competitors in the 48ft range. Matthew Sheahan assessed the British flagship for the 1994 London Boat Show

Oyster Marine led the way for much of the 1970s with lines from only two designers: Holman & Pye and Stephen Jones. Just the mention of the successful UFO designs will have those sailors who were racing in the early Seventies smiling nostalgically as they remember the enthusiasm of the day.

Yacht names like *Storm Bird*, *Nadia*, *Black Topic*, *Jacobite* and a whole string of *Oystercatchers* were synonymous with the state-of-the-art which influenced yacht design for over a decade.

Oyster's latest design, and the British flagship for the 1994 London Boat Show, is the Oyster 485, continuing the stage by stage development of the company's bluewater range.

We were invited to spend a few days aboard the first of the type, cruising the Orwell in Arthur Ransome country in November.



Left, with sheets cracked, the 485 picks up quickly and remains responsive even to small helm adjustments. Above, clear decks enhance her looks. Top and right, on the wind she shows none of the frequent compromises of furling rigs

All photos: Malcolm White

ON DECK

Oyster's confidence in this new size has no doubt developed from her successful sister-ship, the Sovereign 435, of which over 60 have been built to date. But between this boat and the 485 lies the 461, so similar in appearance and so close in size that it begs the question: why two?

"Right from the start we had always intended to produce the two boats," said Oyster's commercial director, David Blacklaws. "They are built in the same mould even though the 461 came first. Mediterranean mooring charges take a leap above 14m (46ft) and the 461 suits that market. But for owners who are not concerned or constrained by these limits, the 485 offers an after cabin on the centreline as well as more stowage space on deck."

There is very little to clutter the deck layout and precious few lines to get under your feet,

so the absence of ropes and fittings shows off the 10mm standard teak decks, recessed into the deck mouldings. All the halyards are adjusted at the mast and the all-furling rig means that, on this version at least, there is hardly any need to go forward.

With the exception of the forward anchor locker, all the on-deck stowage is at the after end of the boat. A lazarette is positioned centrally, with a gas locker that will take four 907-type gas bottles, set to starboard. The after end of the coachroof incorporates two shallow lockers to house everyday equipment such as shorepower lines, brushes and a few fenders.

All the space is easy to get to, and with little equipment on board there appears to be plenty of room. But as you start to imagine finding a home for spare parts, outboard and fuel, kedge and storm anchors and their cables, drums of warps, tender, liferaft, extra sails (minimum of

storm jib, trysail and spinnaker), awning and bimini, you begin to wonder whether it would be worthwhile considering additional stowage for bluewater cruising.

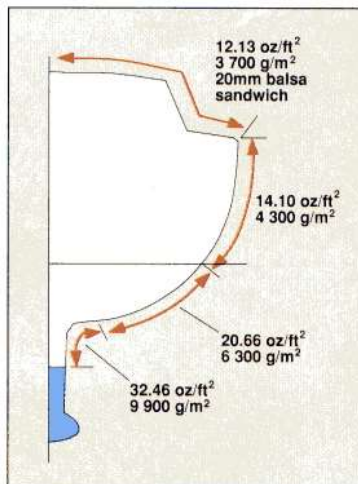
As a sign of the times there are only four winches in the cockpit area, and six in total aboard this 48ft boat – although our test boat was not fitted for spinnaker handling. Nevertheless, of the four winches, two were Lewmar 62CST primaries, one a 30C reefline winch and the fourth a 40ST mainsheet winch.

RIG AND SAILS

As standard the Oyster 485 sports a fully battened mainsail and furling headsail by Gowen sails, all supported by a silver-anodised Kemp mast. However, our test boat was fitted with the white-painted Hood Stowaway in-mast furling option for the mainsail and a Kemp Furlex headsail furling unit. ▷

Technical data

OYSTER 485



Designed by: Holman & Pye
Built by: Oyster Marine Ltd, Fox's Marina, Wherstead, Ipswich, Suffolk IP2 8SA.
 Tel: (0473) 688888. Fax: (0473) 686861.
Marketed by: Oyster Marine Ltd

FACTORS

Prismatic coefficient	0.51
Immersion	N/A
Ballast ratio	31.88
Personal stowage	5.72 per cent

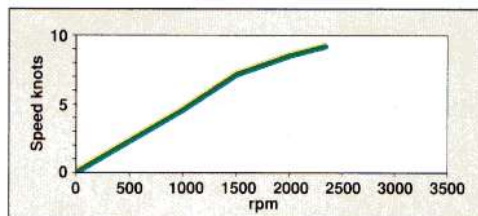
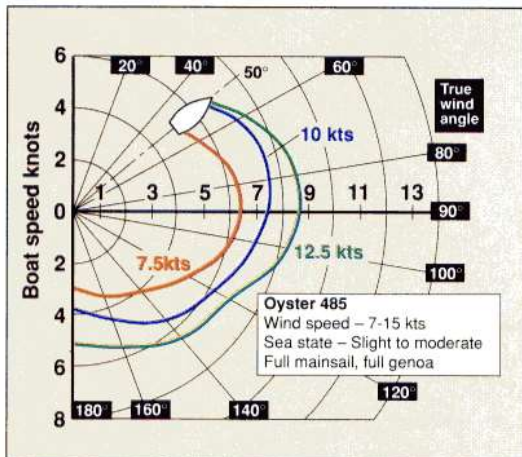
Stowage volumes

Forecabin	84.22ft ³	2.38m ³
Saloon	77.53ft ³	2.19m ³
Galley	30.64ft ³	0.87m ³
Head	32.20ft ³	0.91m ³
After cabin	80.35ft ³	2.28m ³
Nav area	9.62ft ³	0.27m ³
Total	314.55ft ³	8.91m ³

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.

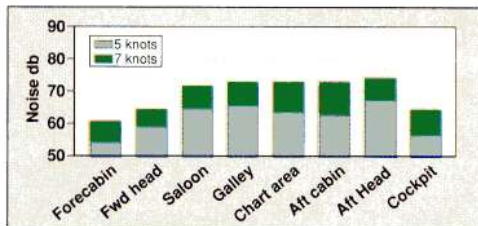
Prismatic coefficient: The ratio of volume to displacement to a volume of LWL and the maximum cross sectional area below the load waterplane. An indication of fineness or fullness of the hull.



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.

$$\frac{SA(ft^2)}{(\text{Displacement (lb)} \div 64)^{0.66}}$$



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

LOA
LWL
Beam
Draught
Displacement
Ballast
Sail area
Berths
Engine
Water
Fuel
Sail area:disp
Disp:LWL
Price (ex VAT)

OYSTER 485

48ft 6in 14.78m
 39ft 1in 11.91m
 14ft 10in 4.52m
 7ft 2in 2.18m
 41,000lb 18,594kg
 13,070lb 5,927kg
 1,098ft² 102.11m²
 6
 Perkins M90 Diesel
 82hp 61kW
 165gal 750lt
 120gal 546lt
 14.78
 306.55
 £342,089

HALLBERG RASSY 39

49ft 1in 14.96m
 41ft 0in 12.50m
 14ft 6in 4.42m
 7ft 3in 2.21m
 39,689lb 18,000kg
 17,860lb 8,100kg
 1,112ft² 103.42m²
 7
 Volvo Penta TMD41A
 143hp 107kW
 308gal 1,400lt
 154gal 700lt
 15.29
 257.04
 £269,336

SOWESTER 52

51ft 5in 15.67m
 37ft 6in 11.43m
 14ft 0in 4.27m
 15ft 10in 4.83m
 39,000lb 17,687kg
 14,600lb 6,621kg
 1,221ft² 113.55m²
 6-8
 Yanmar 4JHZ-DTE
 88hp 66kW
 200gal 909lt
 120gal 546lt
 16.99
 330.11
 £570,000

BOWMAN 48

48ft 2in 14.68m
 39ft 5in 12.01m
 14ft 2in 4.32m
 5ft 10in 1.78m
 31,700lb 14,376kg
 11,800lb 5,351kg
 1,066ft² 99.14m²
 6
 Perkins 4236
 80hp 60kW
 200gal 909lt
 120gal 546lt
 17.03
 231.05
 £298,800

On test



Top left, this saloon exemplifies Oyster style and demonstrates why they have continued it throughout their range. **Top right**, forward-facing windows open to allow excellent ventilation. **Far left**, high cockpit coamings make for dry, comfortable seating. **Left**, all-round access to the engine is possible. **Above right**, an electric windlass is fitted as standard and works well

All too often, though, the performance trade-off (sometimes necessary when considering this option) is a deterrent to the keen sailor. But here the Oyster 485 scores highly. Utilising the best aspects of modern materials, such as Dyform 1x19 wire for the lower shrouds, forestay and backstay, and conventional 1x19 wire for the remaining stays, the two-spreader masthead rig is simple in its staying arrangement without compromising performance. The use of Dyneema halyards as standard also helps in this area.

ACCOMMODATION

Since taking the decision to build high quality, go-anywhere yachts, Oyster have stuck to their objectives to ensure that their entire range develops to achieve the optimum cruising machine. Twenty years down the line, the step-by-step development shows in a standard layout that is as uncluttered down below as it is on deck. Oyster will entertain specific layout requirements for individual owners, but in general only small details are finally changed.

As soon as you enter the saloon you can see why most of the range takes advantage of the deck saloon arrangement. A full 6ft 5in (1.9m) of headroom is available throughout this area, with easy handholds making it safe to negotiate while under sail.

To port, the extendable saloon table has

comfortable seating for five. Additional director-type chairs can be used for at least two more. Opposite, a two-seater settee provides casual seating that could, if required, be built slightly longer fore and aft to accommodate a saloon pilot berth.

Ventilation is excellent as two of the three forward-facing windows hinge open to allow a free flow of air into the saloon – a boon in warmer climates.

The navigation station is a step down on the port side abaft the saloon and, because this is a centre cockpit boat, communication between the navigator and helmsman is good. The galley, too, benefits from this arrangement as it is set in the walkway passage to the after cabin. Not only does this allow security wherever you are working, but over 12ft² (1.1m²) of Avonite-finished worktop space is available without hindering the rest of the accommodation, and that does not include sink-top space.

Cold food storage is very impressive, with an upright fridge of around 9ft³ (0.25m³) capacity – almost household proportions. There is also a 3.6ft³ (0.1m³) cold box which could be fitted as a freezer unit. An unusual aspect of the galley is that, in order to minimise the skin fittings, the twin sinks share the same wastepipe. If you do not block one off before pumping out, the empty sink (which in our case was acting as a draining board) fills with water.

Washbasin and shower units in the head also share the same outlet, which means that the sink drains into the shower tray before emptying overboard. Although this arrangement should cause no problem in temperate climates, frequent cleaning may be necessary in the tropics to keep them odour-free.

Opposite the galley, abaft the engine room, a large, almost walk-in wet locker provides so much space for storing bulky and/or wet items that many would no doubt begrudge the optional generator its designed home.

The finish of the teak woodwork is of a very high standard throughout the accommodation and overall it is difficult to find fault below. Perhaps it is because of this that minor details stand out – like the conventional cabin lighting: on the dim side when compared with modern low voltage lamps.

CONSTRUCTION

In keeping with the standard of joinery, the construction of the hull and deck has no rough edges and the yacht is built to Lloyd's rules as well as complying with the current ICOMIA standards. Consequently, skin fittings and their attachments are installed with double clips on all pipework, along with clear labels, bonded to the hull, for all seacocks and valves.

The hull is a solid laminate constructed from a combination of mat and woven >

On test



Above left, the walkway galley has plenty of worktop as well as good handholds and foot braces. Above right, headroom is good throughout the after cabin, which is fitted out to a high standard. Left, the fridge is of household proportions



rovings; the deck utilises a 20mm-thick foam sandwich construction.

Two keel options are available and our test boat was fitted with the standard fin/bulb configuration drawing 7ft (2.1m) as opposed to the shoal draught option which draws 6ft (1.8m). In both cases the lead keel is bolted to a moulded stub which provides a deep bilge sump. The glassfibre rudder is foam-filled and bonded to a stainless steel stock, with the complete unit fitted to a full-length skeg.

On-board tankage is situated under the saloon, with fuel and water tanks built into the boat either side of the centreline. Fuel capacity is 120 gal (550lt) and water capacity is 165 gal (750lt). The immersion heater and battery box are over the sump, under the saloon sole.

The engine is a Perkins Range 4 M90 delivering an ample 82hp via a two-bladed fixed propeller. However, a three-bladed Maxprop was fitted aboard our test boat and proved its worth when manoeuvring in confined spaces.

UNDER POWER AND SAIL

On a still winter's day, the picturesque Orwell provided ample opportunity to experiment with the 485's handling under power. In the same way as the rig is deceptively simple, so is the propulsion system aboard this boat. The engine is normally aspirated and has no bow

thruster. Instead, the Maxprop had been coarse set to provide plenty of direct control at slow speeds.

Her turning circle is between 1½ and two boat lengths and, although she does not spin about her keel, holding the helm hard over and surging the throttle ahead and astern means that she can be confidently spun inside her own length in stages. Stopping from a cruising speed of around six knots is also impressive, and these two features should allow easy handling in confined waters.

The following day the wind gradually picked up from the south to allow us to sample her handling under sail over a wind range of 7-15 knots. As we ghosted downriver, her furling sail plan showed no signs of being under-powered. With each gentle gust off the banks of Pin Mill to Shotley Point, the 485 accelerated in a fashion that concealed her 18-ton displacement. As the wind speed increased and we headed out through the Felixstowe Channel, the boat speed built to a steady 8.6 knots at 90° true in 13 knots of wind.

But it was her upwind performance that really surprised us. At 50° to the true wind, 34° to the apparent, she sailed far closer than we had expected. Here her designer and builders' pedigree shone through.

All too often the compromises of shallow draught, large interior volume and easily managed sail plan conspire to weaken the performance of an otherwise capable boat. Not so with the 485. Her helm is direct and has good feel, allowing you to slip her quickly in the groove and keep her there. Hard on the wind she will hold a steady 6.4 knots in an average of 13 knots of true wind. Sail trim adjustments can be felt in the helm, confirming her well balanced sail plan and fair underwater profile, yet she is always controllable.

In our opinion the 485's only weakness depends on where you like to sail the boat from

and the number of crew. The primary winches, while close enough for the helmsman to reach, could be that bit closer for comfort, particularly if frequent short-handed sailing is envisaged. The mainsheet, too, could benefit from being closer to the helmsman. At present it is led from the outboard end of the boom forwards, then to a winch on the coachroof top.

However, the traveller control is within easy reach of the helmsman, allowing the build up of weather helm to be trimmed out by lowering the car down the track.

Despite these points she is a pleasure to sail; her easy motion will give her the long legs of her stablemates.

CONCLUSIONS

Many of Oyster's bluewater cruisers head off to faraway places, from the heat of the tropics to the hostility of the Arctic. Such diversity means that the standard specification, or Classic Version as Oyster describe it, includes the essentials common to both demands. Fine tuning the specification to account for air conditioning or heating, for example, is accepted by this yard as a necessary part of the process and consequently virtually any request is possible.

Her basic price is £329,950 ex VAT. Of the extras aboard our boat, the most significant were: an in-mast furling spar at just under £7,000, a three-bladed Maxprop at around £2,300 and a Victron 50amp battery charger at just under £1,900, all ex VAT. These extras, plus a few others, meant that as tested she cost £342,089 ex VAT including launching and commissioning at Ipswich.

The 48ft arena has plenty of contenders, especially at the luxury end of the market, but, unlike many of her competitors, her design concept, specification and performance all complement each other to achieve a well matched cruiser that is unlikely to be eclipsed by the market's latest developments. □