

On test



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All photos: Malcolm White

Above and right, make no mistake, the Vancouver 38 Pilot House is a heavy displacement boat and yet even in light airs she ghosted along at respectable speeds. Her rod steering provided a direct feel to the helm and she responded well to small sail trim adjustments, making her a pleasure to sail



Vancouver 38

Vancouverers are well known for their rugged, go-anywhere style, a reputation justified by the exploits of many owners. Matthew Sheahan went to find out more about their latest bluewater cruiser at Northshore's Itchenor base

I wish the yard had never given me the Vancouver Yachts Owner's Association newsletter. In it, the long list of exciting cruise destinations is enough to make you want to set off before tea-time.

The Azores, southern Scandinavia, round Britain, Rio de Janeiro and Trinidad are just a few of the locations that Vancouver owners have written about this year. And, although I haven't read them all, I'll bet that none of the boats was shipped to her destinations.

Night follows day, and Vancouverers travel under their own steam – these are basic, irrefutable facts.

We spent two days aboard Northshore's new 38 Pilot House, a boat based on the success of both her smaller sister, the 34 Pilot House, and the Vancouver 36.

We put her through her paces, joining the boat at Northshore's Itchenor base.

ON DECK

It is surprisingly common to come across yacht ranges that have evolved by stretching successful designs to satisfy particular needs, but



rarely do you hear of yards working the other way round. Yet that is exactly how the 38PH was born.

Designed by Tony Taylor in 1988, the Vancouver 36 was built from moulds originally drawn at 38ft LOA, but blocked off at 36ft right from the production of the first boat. Only in 1996 did Northshore build a boat to the full length of the moulds.

The 38 Pilot House owes much to the success of the smaller 34 Pilot House, (coincidentally, a boat that was created by extending the hull of the Vancouver 32).

In many ways the new addition looks similar to the 34, with her rugged, no-nonsense appearance. Her bow and stern profiles, her sheer line and, of course, the pilothouse itself, all claim her pedigree. On

deck, though, there are noticeable differences, not least in the extra space in the cockpit.

The 38's keyhole-shaped cockpit provides plenty of space forward, while keeping the helmsman's seating close to the pedestal-mounted wheel steering.

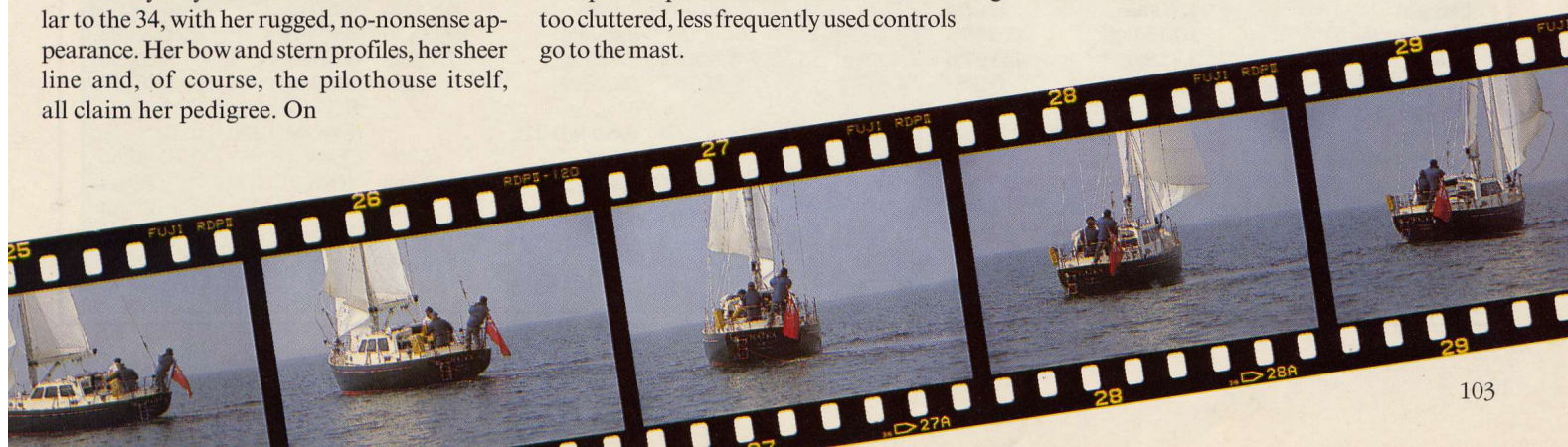
Ample stowage space is provided on deck, the largest lockers being at the after end of the cockpit where their depth has no effect on the space in the after cabin.

Her controls are well laid out, too, with essential items such as sheets, reefing lines and the mainsail halyard being led back to the cockpit. To prevent this area from becoming too cluttered, less frequently used controls go to the mast.

The result is a boat that is easy to work, an aspect that is also as much to do with the quality of equipment provided as standard, as it is with the overall deck layout.

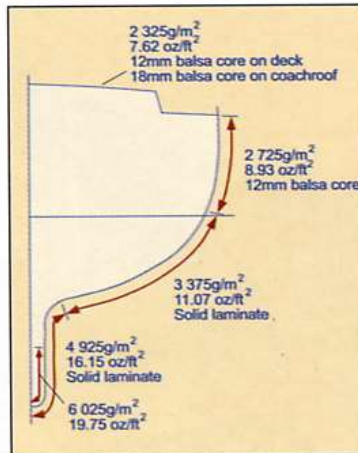
Deep bulwarks, sensible-width side decks and tall stanchions allow you to move about on deck with a sense of security. Solid grabhandles along the coachroof add to this, as do the stainless steel grabhandles that run up and over each side of the companionway entrance—ideal for hooking onto.

However, if there was an area we were unsure about, it was the hint of a limbo dance ▽



Technical data

VANCOUVER 38PH



Designed by: Tony Taylor
 Built and marketed by: Northshore
 Yachts Ltd, Itchenor, Chichester,
 West Sussex PO20 7AY. Tel:
 (01243) 512611. Fax: (01243)
 511473.

| | |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| Prismatic coefficient | 0.514 |
| Immersion | N/A |
| Ballast ratio | 36.6 |
| Personal stowage | 11.2 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.

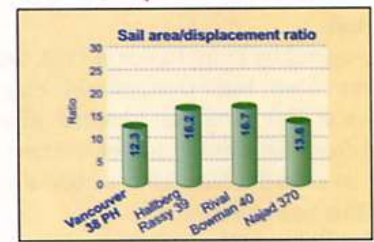
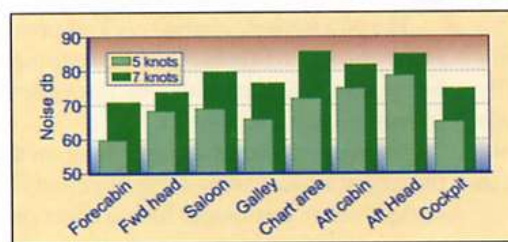
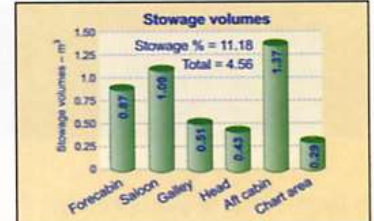
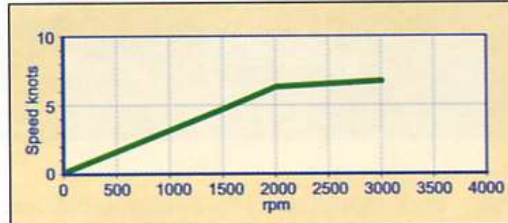
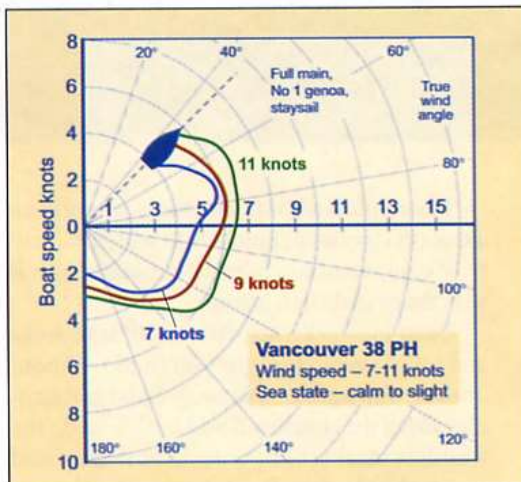
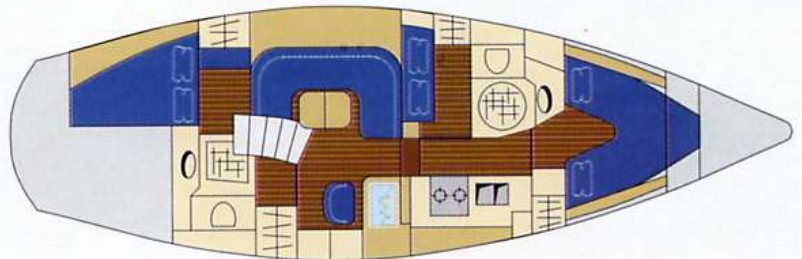
Polar diagram: Shows the optimum close-hauled angle to the true wind. Also shows speed attained on all courses. Important – consider in conjunction with the true wind speed during the test.

Sail area: displacement ratio: This ratio gives some indication of power available. Higher numbers = greater performance.

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

Ballast ratio: A comparison between displacement and the weight of the ballast.

Displacement:waterline length: Performance indicator. Low numbers = higher performance. $(\text{Displacement (lb)} \div 2240) \div (0.01 \times \text{LWL (ft)})^3$



COMPARABLE BOATS

| | VANCOUVER 38PH | HALLBERG RASSY 39 | RIVAL BOWMAN 40 | NAJAD 370 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| LOA | 11.58m | 12.22m | 12.17m | 11.25m |
| LWL | 9.27m | 9.30m | 9.75m | 9.25m |
| Beam (max) | 3.66m | 3.76m | 3.84m | 3.63m |
| Draught | 1.70m | 1.85m | 1.50m | 1.80m |
| Disp (lightship) | 10,151kg | 10,160kg | 8,618kg | 9,698kg |
| Ballast | 3,718kg | 3,992kg | 3,225kg | 4,000kg |
| Sail area (100% foretriangle) | 56.66m ² | 74.97m ² | 69.03m ² | 60.94m ² |
| Berths | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Engine | Yanmar 4JH2 BE | Volvo Penta MD22 | Volvo MD 22L | Volvo MD 22L |
| Power | 37kW | 43kW | 37kW | 36kW |
| Water | 590lt | 455lt | 409lt | 400lt |
| Fuel | 363lt | 396lt | 318lt | 300lt |
| Sail area:disp | 12.3 | 16.2 | 16.7 | 13.6 |
| Disp:LWL | 355 | 352 | 259 | 342 |
| Price (ex VAT) | £162,250 | £165,658 | £176,787 | £157,704 |

On test



Left, her high aspect ratio sail plan not only looks good, but allows plenty of manageable sail area

The result was a sail plan that was easy to manage. Although we did not sail her in a blow, we felt it would be difficult to improve on this specification.

ACCOMMODATION

Getting used to hanging onto the grabrails and bending backwards as you descend the companionway steps is a nuisance at the very least. If you're not as supple as you used to be, it could well be more than just an inconvenience.

On the other hand, there is a practical reason for the appealing way that the line of the steps curves to starboard like a sweeping staircase. The arrangement allows maximum space for the saloon table and unobstructed access to the companionway steps.

Keeping the saloon table as large and accessible as possible is particularly important aboard a pilothouse boat as the surrounding view of the outside world is so good that you may well spend more time sitting here than you would in a conventional saloon.

The chart table and navigation station are set to starboard and forwardmost in this area. Again, visibility is very good, as is the provision for instrumentation and stowage space for books, charts and all the other items that end up with the navigator.

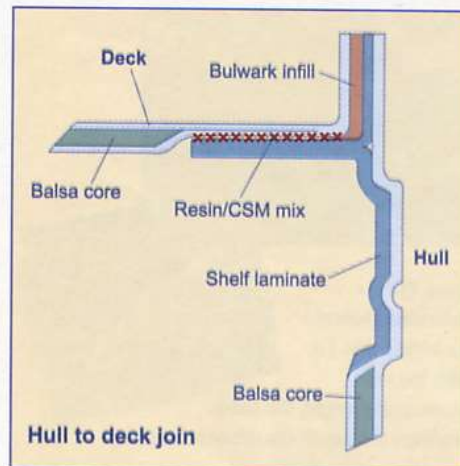
Under the chart table, and in a well finished column panel, lies the switch gear for the boat, which we have to say was a little awkward to get at, compared with a conventional switchboard which would be alongside the navigator. However, there are some concessions that have to be made and considering the advantages of this layout, this is one we could live with.

The space available throughout the rest of the accommodation would suit us well, too.

She packs in an amazing amount for a 38-footer, without feeling cramped. Three double cabins, two of which have en-suite facilities, a spacious, longitudinal galley, and a separate machinery room, all slot into this spacious layout. As far as we could see, the only real drawback or compromise was that none of the three cabins could be considered an owner's cabin – at least, not in the way that other builders provide a sumptuous cabin for one couple and basic accommodation for the guests.

The forward cabin, with its vee-berth arrangement, was perhaps the most conventionally laid out. A second double cabin is amidships and to port, opposite the galley, with the third double cabin sited abaft the saloon and to port.

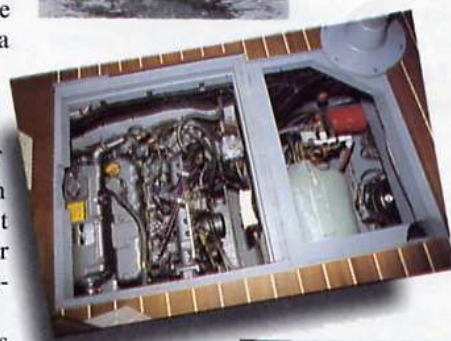
The deckhead to the midships and after cabins was unusually shaped, but despite this, both cabins were practical ▷



Hull to deck join



Above and left, high guardwires, plenty of handholds, bulwarks and sensibly proportioned side decks make her a secure boat to move about on



Above, easy access to the engine is gained by lifting the saloon floor. Several other services are fitted here, too. Right, the machinery room was a surprise aboard a boat of this size and yet the layout worked well



that one had to perform to get below decks. Unfortunately, the companionway hatch does not extend far enough forward to allow you to descend the steps comfortably without bending backwards. The folded sprayhood restricts access further.

RIG AND SAILS

Considering the assumptions about performance that many would make for a pilothouse design, it is interesting to note that this boat carries more sail area off a mast that is 0.9m (3ft) taller than the standard Vancouver 36.

Even by scanning her sail plan drawings, one can quickly see that this is not a boat whose performance is likely to be handicapped by lack of sail area. Her high aspect ratio rig has been designed to drive her in the lightest of breezes, while the cutter configuration ensures her sail plan is manageable in a blow.

Kemp provide the standard two-spreader, masthead rig which is fitted with forward-facing jumper struts at the upper set of spreaders to avoid the need for running backstays to support the cutter stay. The system works well and, although the struts aboard the test boat were due to be shortened, their presence did not seem to hinder sail handling.

Rugged simplicity is the key to any long-distance cruising rig and this arrangement is well suited to her purpose.

Sailmakers Banks had supplied a well cut and constructed sail wardrobe for our test boat, the genoa fitted to a furling system, the self-tacking staysail hoisted on hanks and the fully battened mainsail using slug/ball type car sliders.

Right, all-round visibility from the navigation station is good and, best of all, it's dry and warm



On test



Above, the understated forward vee-berth cabin. Far right, the main saloon. Bottom right, the galley. The fridge is beneath the raised saloon floor



and had enough space to get dressed and move about in.

For all but the tallest of people, headroom is rarely an issue throughout the boat with a typical height of 1890mm (6ft 2in). Stowage space is good, too – with six crew's worth of gear aboard, you will still have used only just under 12 per cent of the total stowage space below decks (see Stowage factor = 11.9 per cent).

CONSTRUCTION

Having opened all the lockers, lifted all the hatches and poked around in every nook and cranny, I found it a challenge simply to spot an average piece of joiner work or poor surface finish. This is not to say that she is absolutely perfect, but considering her size and price band, she is difficult to fault on this score.

The hull is a sandwich construction above the waterline, with balsa for the core, as is the deck, except in load-bearing areas where marine ply or alloy plate take over. Otherwise, she has a solid laminate throughout the hull, which includes an encapsulated keel.

Her standard engine is a 50hp Yanmar 4JH2 BE fitted under the saloon floor and easily accessed. A 3.6kW HFL generator was fitted in a separate machinery room along with the battery inverters. Again, considering her size, we were impressed with the practicality of this arrangement.

UNDER POWER AND SAIL

Never underestimate the advantages of a well designed pilothouse boat. I had, until we sailed over the bar and into Chichester harbour, during which time my mind toyed with the fun a family could have, even in rough conditions, safe in the saloon.

Virtually all-round visibility in a cabin that has plenty of handholds and is easy to move about in even when heeled, goes a long way to ensuring that everyone could feel comfortable and secure under sail. Add to this the fact that she's easy to handle on your own, and you have an ideal family cruiser.



The appeal of this boat, though, is more than her layout and ease of handling.

For a boat displacing just under ten tonnes, she slips along in light airs. With less than ten knots of true wind for most of the early part of our sailing trials, conditions were surprisingly similar to those in which we tested the 34 Pilot House. She sailed well, too.

Ghosting along in flat water, the 38 felt good on the wheel with positive and direct steering provided by the solid rod, Whitlock system. Her performance was enhanced by her Banks sails and uncompromised system of control lines.



During our two days aboard the Vancouver 38PH, Andrew Preece filmed the boat under test. On our free CD you will find a mini-documentary on how we went about testing this and other boats, as well as some sailing footage shot during our trials – take a look



She points well on the wind, builds speed when cracked off, and ghosts downwind when goosewinged and, all in all, she is a good example of how heavy displacement need not mean compromised performance. As the breeze built, her boat speed climbed correspondingly and she remained easily manageable.

What impressed us most under engine was the forward visibility when manoeuvring at close quarters, despite the pilothouse.

CONCLUSIONS

There will doubtless be those who would never consider a pilothouse cruiser because of its perceived association with motor-sailers. Yet from the market trend, there would appear to be an increasing number of open-minded people considering just this, especially those cruising the cold waters of Northern Europe.

For our money though, the pilothouse configuration offers an additional degree of space and comfort below decks that simply doesn't exist aboard her conventional sistership. For those looking to sail with families, the advantages of visibility from the saloon are hard to ignore, especially when you compare this to the traditional layout aboard the 36.

Quality like this, though, doesn't come cheap and the 38PH costs £162,250 ex VAT in her basic specification, a leap of over £60,000 on her smaller sister for four more feet.

For this price, her basic specification is good, although it doesn't seem to prevent owners from spending yet more money on a long list of go-anywhere extras. Our test boat included a list of everything you could possibly want (excluding a spinnaker) at a cost of £41,000 ex VAT.

Put simply, I liked the 34PH and I like the 38PH even more. She's well built throughout, practical above and below decks, and she has a good sailing performance.

But perhaps best of all, she's the type of boat that would instil confidence in rough weather and is quite capable of handling herself. To me that counts for a lot. □