

TESTED: HANSE 548

DOES PUSH-BUTTON TECHNOLOGY MEAN A 50-PLUS
FOOTER REALLY CAN BE SAILED EASILY BY A COUPLE?

Imagine putting a cruising couple from the late 1990s into a time capsule and fast-forwarding them to the present. Then tell them about the Hanse 548 – a stylish, modern cruiser that offers exceptional value for money, sails effortlessly at 10 knots, fits in up to four double cabins and is easily managed by a crew of two.

Would these people believe you? Back in their day, a 40-footer was usually considered the biggest boat a husband-and-wife crew could expect to handle safely and efficiently. And even if they could cope in open water, what about manoeuvring and berthing?

Now let's invite them to join us on our test sail on the Hanse. Just getting aboard will elicit comment because, for some people, the gunwale will be at shoulder height when they're standing on the pontoon. Then, once the warps are dropped, our guests will observe how the boat can be extricated from an angled berth with only a few feet of clearance at either end, spinning in her own length with the help of the bow- and stern-thrusters.

When we're ready to set sail, once again they'll be struck by the way things have moved on in 20 years. It's not that any of the sailhandling systems are new or radical, because electric

FACTS

Test editor **DAVID HARDING**

- **Where we tested:** The Solent.
- **Wind:** 5-25 knots, from flat water to short chop.
- **Model:** Hanse 548 hull No.1, with extras including electric in-mast reefing and high-performance sails.



Sailing photos by Paul Wyeth





discipline, but even after a fair amount of sailhandling over the course of a few hours we managed to avoid creating too much of a snake-pit.

Minor criticisms in the cockpit include the lack of handy lockers for things like sunglasses, sandwiches and binoculars. There's a shallow 'glove box' under an acrylic lid either side of the companionway, but these won't hold much and there's nothing further aft apart from the large locker beneath the starboard seat. Those of us who want to keep a camera – or anything else for that matter – somewhere safe yet easy to reach near the helm feel rather bereft.

I'd also like to see handholds on the outboard sides of the helm consoles to match those inboard. You need something when going forward on the leeward side.

Otherwise, moving around a dry deck is easy on the level; in the modern Hanse style it's pretty flat and ideal for outdoor living in sunny climates.

Substantial bulwarks are reassuring, but handholds are limited and there are plentiful deck hatches as well as smooth outer edges to the low coachroof, so you have to bear that in mind in the wet and think what you're going to hang on to in a seaway.

If your mission really is to get into the water, the electrically operated stern platform is probably the best place to start from.

Press a button (yes, another) on the starboard helm console and the transom hinges down to reveal a garage big enough for a folded 3.6m F-RIB (folding RIB). Then lift up the hatch in the platform and slide out the boarding ladder. It has all been thought out.



Open accommodation

Going down below is supremely easy: it's more like walking downstairs than negotiating a set of companionway steps. Full-height stainless steel pillar handholds each side are thoughtfully provided, but moving forward from there when the boat's heeled is more of a challenge. Handholds overhead, 7ft above the sole, are of limited use and would be out of reach for many. It's a wide-open cabin sole to slide across.



Hanse has long favoured having the master cabin in the bow... though the occupants of the port aft cabin (above) will hardly be slumming it

Hinging up the companionway steps reveals the Yanmar diesel. Side panels can also be removed

Such practicalities aside, the accommodation has much to offer. For a start, the volume is enormous. There's a lot of light thanks to all the hatches, long windows in the coachroof and large ports in the topsides that let you see out when sitting down.

On our test boat the joinery was in European light oak; mahogany is standard. It's neatly finished throughout and barely a bead of sealant is visible.

Plenty of layout variations are possible. Constant features are the two double aft cabins, the galley (to starboard of the companionway) and the saloon. Elsewhere you can mix and match. The bigger of the aft cabins, to port, can have a large en-suite heads and shower opposite the galley, as did ours. Alternatively the space can be used for a smaller heads plus a utility cabin, or for two extra bunks. At the other end of the boat it's a choice of large master cabin or twin smaller doubles, while right in the bow is a large stowage locker or a crew's cabin.

Styling to suit

Hanse went through a phase a few years ago when almost everything down below was a cube or a square, sometimes in garish colours. Thankfully the styling has mellowed since then. In the case of the 548 it's modern but rather more subtle and unlikely to date so quickly.

All the usual mod cons can be fitted: dishwasher, washing machine, air-con and so on, plus a pop-up TV and the 'gourmet island' barbecue unit aft in the cockpit complete with fridge and sink.

Because of the enormous freeboard, vertical space is plentiful below decks and there's room beneath the raised sole in the saloon for the two diesel tanks, one of the water tanks and the bank of four domestic batteries. That doesn't mean under-bunk space is available for stowage, however: much of it is occupied by systems of one sort or another. You can't stow anything behind the backrests in the saloon because it would drop straight down under the bunks: it's all one space.

Big plus-points in my book include the absence of interior mouldings except in the heads and some partial headliners. Among other benefits are better access to the inside of the hull (which is balsa-cored above the waterline), the systems and the seacocks. You can also reach the structural elements more easily and see that bulkheads are bonded directly to the hull and deck. Given the scope and complexity of the electrical and mechanical systems on a boat like this, the more readily you can get at them the better.

The plumb stem, high freeboard and large angular ports in the topsides all play important roles in the Hanse's design



Our verdict

The Hanse 548 is a cleverly designed boat that evidently presses the right buttons for many people. She's built by a yard that has always done its own thing, setting its own trends and refusing to follow fashion simply for fashion's sake.

The boat's appeal for gentle cruising with lots of outdoor living is obvious. For what sailors of a more traditional bent might call serious cruising, things are less clear-cut. For a start, those wide open spaces that are so welcome at anchor might be rather

less welcome in heavy weather. That's an inevitable compromise.

From an offshore perspective, the righting moment is substantial, as you would expect with a boat of this size and weight, even if the AVS (angle of vanishing stability) is relatively modest at around 110°.

All told, the new Hanse is an engaging blend of the tried-and-tested and avant-garde that makes owning a boat of this size a possibility for more people than ever before. What would our guests from the 1990s make of her? After their initial bewilderment I think they'd be suitably impressed.

DATA HANSE 548



SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	16.22m	53ft 3in
LWL	14.9m	48ft 11in
Beam (max)	5.05m	16ft 7in
Draught	2.55m	8ft 4in
Displacement (lightship)	19,600kg	43,211lb
Ballast	6,400kg	14,100lb
Sail area (100% foretriangle)	144m ²	1,550ft ²
Sail Area/displacement ratio		20.1
Displacement/LWL ratio		16
Berths		6-7
Engine		Yanmar 107hp
Fuel	520lt	114gal
Water	770lt	170gal
Price ex VAT		£345,720
		Test boat £520,000
Design		Judel/Vrolijkx

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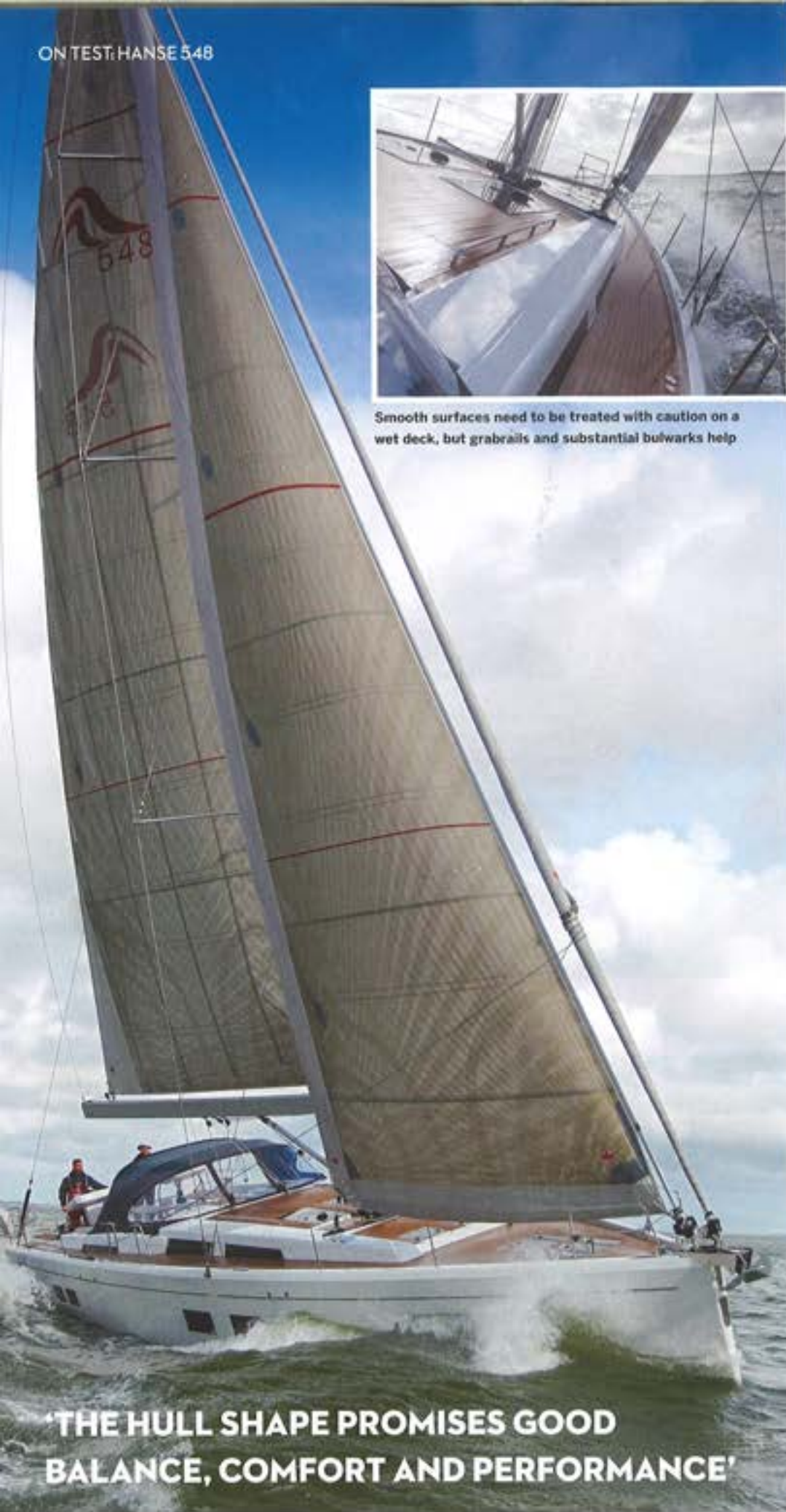


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Smooth surfaces need to be treated with caution on a wet deck, but grabrails and substantial bulwarks help

'THE HULL SHAPE PROMISES GOOD BALANCE, COMFORT AND PERFORMANCE'



managed to carry it at 50° to the wind and maintain 8 knots in 12 knots of breeze. Just bear in mind that you have to furl it before tacking or gybing. With Seldén's 300 E electric Furler and the optional Lewmar electric 55 self-tailers in addition to the 65 primaries, all within easy reach of the twin helm stations, it's a push-button operation that takes about 35 seconds.

It's a breeze

Given the predominantly light conditions on our first sail, we headed out again a few days later. This time we were greeted by a south-south-westerly topping nigh on 30 knots across the deck, so we left a few rolls in the mainsail as we punched our way upwind at 8.1–8.2 knots. A conventional, fully battened mainsail in Dacron comes as standard, whereas we had the luxury of electrically-powered in-mast reefing as well as Elvstrom's high-performance membrane sails and a vertically battened main.

Not surprisingly, the Hanse's weight and waterline made light work of the short Solent chop, though the helm loaded up a little when the gusts occasionally pushed us beyond 20° of heel. Otherwise weather helm was noticeable but modest

Light and open is the theme below decks. Here the finish is in European light oak

and the feel through the Jefa steering reassuringly direct – a function of both the linkage, in which there's remarkably little friction, and the single rudder. Hanses have always had single rudders and the 548 maintains the tradition. Despite the broad stern, the blade kept the boat on track until the gunwale was approaching the water. You wouldn't normally push things this far but it's good to know where the limits lie.

Another notable point in the face of modern trends is that the Hanse eschews the now almost obligatory chines. By many standards it's a conservative hull shape: one that promises good balance, comfort and performance in a wide range of wind and sea conditions.

Our test boat was kept sunny side up by the standard L-keel in cast iron. If you really want to save draught at the expense of performance you can have the shallow 7ft 2in (2.20m) option, or go the other way with a deep (9ft 2in/2.80m) T-bulb. Prop-wise, a three-bladed folder thankfully comes as standard.

As has become the norm on boats of this size designed for short-handed



cruising, the Hanse devotes a lot of space to non-active crewmembers. The mainsheet is anchored forward of the companionway (to strong points, not a traveller) and the tails are led aft, German-style, to the primary winches by the wheels. With the sheets and furling systems for the headsail(s), plus halyards and other lines also being led aft, the main cockpit area is completely rope-free.

Two times tables

Here you have not one table but two, leaving a direct route from stern to companionway and plenty to brace against. Those who really enjoy pressing buttons, or sunbathing (or both) can have



Left: a modest but serviceable chart table
Right: directors' chairs were chosen instead of a bench seat on this boat

tables that lower to form sun-loungers. The controls are on the consoles, along with everything else including, on this boat, B&G's Zeus³ multi-function plotter, display and controller integrated with the CZone system. Our guests from the 1990s would be awe-struck by the ability to turn on or off all the appropriate nav lights for sailing or motoring, control the fridge or engage 'off boat' mode before stepping ashore simply by touching a screen at the helm.

On a more mundane level, one consequence of having so many lines led aft is a lot of tails. Hanse's solution is a tail-locker under the helm seat each side. You need to maintain some



- 1 It's a broad-sterned hull, but more rounded in section than many and with no chines.
- 2 Sail-handling is carried out from the helm stations, leaving the rest of the cockpit clear.
- 3 The height of the boom allows a hard-top to be fitted. A fixed windscreen is another option.
- 4 In-mast reefing is on the extras list; a conventional mainsail is supplied as standard.
- 5 Hanse's self-tacking jib is one of many features that makes the 548 well suited to short-handed sailing.
- 6 A hatch in the bow leads to a large stowage locker or a crew's cabin.
- 7 An outer forestay with an electric Furler is a popular option for flying a reaching headsail.
- 8 Bulwarks increase security on deck, where options include a choice of real or synthetic teak surfaces.



Push-button comfort: choosing extras means no need to wind a winch handle



The bathing platform lowers to reveal the garage and optional telescopic davits



Lockers for the rope tails are under the helm seats each side

furlers, self-tacking headsails, electric winches and in-mast mainsail reefing have all been around for some time, as have the thrusters. Some of these are extras on the Hanse 548, but what stands out about her is the way the rig, deck and cockpit layout work with whatever push-button systems you choose to make a boat of this size so easy to manage short-handed. For our 1990s couple it will be extraordinary to witness. Even by today's standards it's pretty remarkable.

About 15 years ago I was testing a 45-footer in Croatia. On one outing I hopped aboard with a local sailor who spoke little English, but sailing was our common language and we threw the boat around like a dinghy for a most enjoyable afternoon. You can do that with a 45.

A lot changes when you add an extra few feet. Everything gets bigger, heavier and harder to move, which is why you

usually need either more crew or the sort of push-button help that most owners of the Hanse 548 are choosing.

Saying 'most' owners implies that there are more than one or two of them, and that is indeed the case: they're queuing up for this new model, which took over last autumn from the 545.

Hanse has long been selling more boats over 50ft than in its 30ft and 40ft ranges. The yard has established an enviable reputation in the 50ft-plus bracket for spacious and comfortable cruisers that sail well, offer good value and don't need an army to handle them.

Back in 2012, for example, the 575 was launched as a boat that could be managed by just two people. It really could be, though relatively few couples would contemplate a boat of this size if they had much coastal cruising in mind in parts of Europe. With nearly 60ft of length and a draught of over 9ft with the



Twin cockpit tables allow easy movement between stern and companionway

standard keel, there are many harbours, anchorages and marinas that you couldn't visit without advance planning, if at all. It says a good deal about the 575 that Hanse has sold nearly 200 of them.

With the 548, the logistics are less of a challenge. At the same time it's still a big enough boat to take you a long way in considerable comfort. As soon as the owner of the next one to arrive in the UK takes delivery he'll be getting ready for the World ARC – and this is someone who's relatively new to sailing, as are a good number of Hanse owners.

Just as 70 is the new 50 in terms of age, so 50 seems to be widely considered the new 30 when it comes to a boat's length. If you have the budget, can find a berth and don't mind the restrictions imposed by the draught (8ft 4in/2.55m with the 548's standard keel), then why not have a boat of this size? That's the conclusion a lot of people seem to be reaching.

On a blustery day the 548 proved to be a powerful performer but still made life easy for a crew of two

On the subject of budget, there's no doubt that the Hanse offers a lot of boat for the money at a starting price of just under £350,000 before VAT, though it would be easy to spend closer to £500,000 by the time you have been through the extras list.

Size matters

At this stage I should point out that the Hanse's designation over-states her actual length: the hull is just under 52ft long (15.75m). Because of the plumb stem and near-vertical transom, the waterline is the same length as the hull once you're moving at more than a couple of knots, and that's helpful for covering the ground. As we found on our two test sails from Hamble, you can take 8 knots for granted most of the time and at 10 knots the boat still isn't breaking sweat. To be fair, you would achieve these speeds and more on many a smaller

racing yacht, but it's not bad going for a roomy, 20-tonne cruiser with a self-tacking jib and a crew of two who rarely need to exert themselves. The speed-to-effort ratio matters in sailing.

On our first outing the wind started at around 16 knots, letting us make upwind in flat water under full main and self-tacking headsail at 7.8 knots. When you need to tack, it seems almost unnecessary to call 'ready about' because nobody except the helmsman needs to do anything unless you choose to re-balance your glass. Hanse claims to have invented the self-tacking jib and, whether or not anyone challenges this assertion, the system works very smoothly.

A dying breeze later on gave us the opportunity to try the extra sail on our test boat: the 140 per cent headsail set on a forestay immediately forward of the self-tacker. It's more for reaching than for windward work, though we