ON TEST DEHLER 38

When is a Dehler not a Dehler?

When it's built by Hanse perhaps? Toby Hodges finds out if Dehler qualities of innovation and performance are retained in the Dehler 38, the first launch under new ownership

One of the most anticipated production boats of the season, the new 38 is the first Dehler built entirely by Hanse at their factory in Griefswald. Hanse took some criticism for shutting down Dehler's yard in Freienohl at the end of last year – it was on the eve of Dehler's 50th anniversary and resulted in nearly 80 job losses.

But when you look at the scale of the Hanse Group, which now owns five brands – including Moody – the decision to take production in-house inevitably made economic sense.

So is the stylish new 38 a Dehler or a Hanse? Does she retain the performance, innovation and durability upon which Dehler built their name?

I went to Marseille to test the first boat off the line.

For our test sail, we were joined by Karl Dehler, the man who almost single-handedly drove the concept of the 38. He undoubtedly still demonstrates a passion for the company his father created 50 years ago.

"It's been very important for me to keep the Dehler aspects apart from Hanse," he declares. "Details like the hull to deck join fitted under the toerail, integrated cockpit bench drains, full sandwich [balsa and vinylester] hull and deck, keel-stepped mast, etc." He also maintained it was

TEST FACTS

Test Editor: Toby Hodges

- Where we tested : Marseille, France. From the old town marina we sailed south, hunting the breeze near the Frioul Islands
- Wind: Force 2-4, flat water
- Model: Three-cabin version with one heads (standard: two cabin), plus standard rig and keel set-up

important to stick with Judel/Vrolijk even though they also draw the Hanse range. "They know the history, what works and when to save weight."

Dehler wanted to make a couple's boat that was easy to sail and easy on the eye, with no concessions to volume. The 38 has only 30mm less freeboard than a Hanse, but 10cm less headroom.

"This is a sailor's boat," Karl Dehler maintains. He reckons the 38 will have a similar performance to the X-Yachts Xp 38, but with more cruising-oriented volume.

The main benefit of the move to Hanse, however, as even Dehler accepts, is the price tag of €129,000 (£109,900), which might well prove the most significant attraction.

Photos by Lester McCarthy

ON TEST: DEHLER 38

1. Perspex coachroof windows were an expensive development, designed in 3D, so they can be opened from inside the boat.
2. A shallow liferaft locker to port sits above a full-beam locker with hatch to starboard, providing useful stowage – the anchor locker is minuscule.
3. A conventional above-deck furler was chosen to avoid the need to move the forestay and mast aft. Racers will use a Tuff-Luff anyway. The rig is designed for a symmetrical spinnaker and pole.
4. With no provision for sheet tails, the cockpit (and companionway) quickly becomes untidy.
5. Optional fixed table is a practical cruising option. Six can be seated around it and it provides the bracing necessary in a typically beamy cockpit.

Harnessing the breeze

The 38 is a modern, sporty, fun-looking boat, with distinct Judel/Vrolijk design characteristics, especially from astern. Gone are the quirky coachroof ports of earlier Dehlers and, though the coachroof is still narrow, the coamings are flared to create extra volume below, which accentuates the beam and softens the deck lines – expect to see this new styling reappear throughout the range.

We were sailing the standard cruising version, but Dehlers have traditionally attracted a healthy racing following, so an 80cm higher Competition, or carbon, mast is available, as well as a 20cm deeper/350kg lighter keel and a racing rudder. An option allows owners to save up to 100kg using fabric wardrobes, thus saving 500-600kg over this Cruising version with its larger engine, cockpit table and teak decks.

▲ **Above: drop-down swim platform. Note liferaft locker visible to port**

A fickle breeze that eventually filled in to a Force 4 gave us an agreeable day's sailing. Heading out in just 5-7 knots of breeze, we hoisted a big red Elvström gennaker to help the slippery 38 equal the windspeed, and she proved very easy and pleasant to sail.

With her relatively narrow underwater shape she also pointed well and should avoid any tendency to nosedive when heeled. Clocking up to 7.5 knots close reaching, she felt lively in the gusts, certainly enough for the cutlery drawer to fall out during one puff.

On the helm you get plenty of rudder purchase and the Jefa wire steering communicated demands admirably. With six winches there was plenty of capacity for crew trimming the kite. Yet the 38 is designed for a conventional pole and spinnaker. "She's a medium displacement boat, not a planing design," explained Karl Dehler, "so she would get penalised racing with A-sails."

Upwind set-up

Retracing our steps from behind the Frioul Isles, we found the cruising laminate main and 105 per cent jib with vertical battens

were enough to keep the boat moving at 3-4 knots in just 5 knots true. Dehler went with a jib track on deck to allow a clean sheet lead along the coachroof/deck join aft to the winches. Thanks to a conveniently placed clutch, both jib and main can be sheeted to the same winch when short-handed (see panel, right).

For racing, however, I felt there was not enough room for the main trimmer to sit between the wheel and the winch, so they would have to trim from forward of the winch, which is out of reach of the traveller. The latter is well-designed, set into the deck with cleats on the coaming and in a perfect position to be adjusted from the helm.

The helmsman, meanwhile, has a comfortable position to both windward and leeward, with full control of the mainsail. Moreover, the 1:24 backstay tensioner can be led to the helm.

As the elusive breeze finally started to fill in, tickling up white caps from the azure waters, I was able to appreciate what Karl Dehler meant about the pure pleasure of sailing. "We want to extract the best performance the whole time," he said. "If you have a boat that only sails in over 12 knots, but 20 knots is too much, it only has very limited appeal."

With around 10 knots of breeze, we were making speeds into the low 7s close-hauled, tacking through 75°, and high 7s close-reaching with the boat nicely heeled and light pressure on the wheel from a delicate weather helm.

A 28hp Volvo with a fixed two-bladed prop is the standard engine, although the test boat had the optional 40hp version, which we felt was a tad unnecessary, with a folding three-bladed prop. This produced 7 knots at 2,100rpm, or 8 knots full tilt.

▲ Above: the new 38 has a more contemporary look, but retains Dehler's good performance

▲ Above: Karl Dehler, the driving force behind the 38

IN DETAIL

The sheet and car adjusters are led tidily along the deck at the coachroof/deck join. With the German sheeting blocks following the same lead, this makes for a very neat set-up. For those sailing short-handed, a clutch mounted on the side of the coaming in reach of the helmsman means you can cleat off the main and use the aft winches for the jib sheets. So you can easily change over sheets and control both sails.

1 Saloon Curved lockers can be raised to provide useful stowage. Flip-down cushions provide headrests – rather reminiscent of aircraft seating. The table is a practical size with a slide-out section for bottle stowage. Drawers under saloon berths are handy. Nice touches include the varnished teak surrounds on hull ports, fabric lining the hull and headlining, plus full-length alloy grabrails.

2 Navstation A lift-top compact table that can be slid aft to extend the saloon seating. Raised lockers open to expose optional plotter, VHF, stereo and switch-panel – but wiring access to the latter is poor.

3 Aft cabin(s) Narrow doorways, a small double wardrobe and long raised shelves. If choosing the second aft cabin to port, you would find it very snug for two, with little stowage. However, with the swing door to the heads closed, it makes the cabin feel larger.

A Hansefied interior

Down below the Dehler feel is maintained although some of the more modern techniques and benefits of Hanse are evident. The test boat was finished in teak and looked smart, with good stowage and an innovative layout. The extra space provided by the beam and the light through the hull windows made an immediate impact.

The other stand-out feature is the curved joiner work, including the table, chart table, heads enclosure and raised lockers, which is both practical and stylish. I had wondered how Hanse might try to replicate Dehler's joinery skills and the answer was to use Alpi, a multi-laminate veneer normally finished with melamine. Our teak option looked acceptable – mahogany is standard.

The standard layout comprises two cabins, but there is the option for a third, as aboard the test boat, thanks to an innovative swing door through the heads. Proportions are good, though she seemed to lack a Hanse's standing room. And there's a sensible trade-off with the chart table – you still get one, but it slides aft to allow seven to sit around the saloon table.

All windows open for ventilation and there's a fancy lighting system with indirect and overhead LEDs. However, there were some sloppy areas behind the scenes. The furniture is not structurally bonded and there seemed to be a significant amount of hull liner used for headlining. All-round engine access is excellent, but the insulation is poor and access panels have little seal. Door latches often stuck shut, sealant finish was sloppy, floorboards creaked – although these will be screwed down on later boats – doorways are very narrow and end grain was not sealed on soleboards. Hopefully, these teething problems will be ironed-out.

4 Galley **A routine, compact L-shaped galley with practically designed stowage space, including compartmentalised, soft-closing drawers and customisable hullside stowage. The fridge has top and front-opening doors, and deep Corian fiddles line the work surfaces. There is provision for a bin inboard below the sinks, but no attempt to utilise the generous space fully.**

5 Forward cabin **A reasonable-sized owner's cabin with adequate changing room. A small wardrobe on each side with double doors provides enough stowage for a week's cruise, and there are practical alcoves and tables beside the berth as well as raised shelves. Somewhat austere, with no below-berth stowage.**

6 Heads **Unusually, the heads is a talking point, thanks to the clever use of a shared swing door to the heads and aft cabin. There's useful stowage above and below the moulded sink, plus a towel hanging alcove opposite. The sole of the sink area will inevitably get some spillage from the wet room, but it's a practical, if compact, shower with flip-down seat over the heads and convenient shelves for shampoos.**

Conclusion

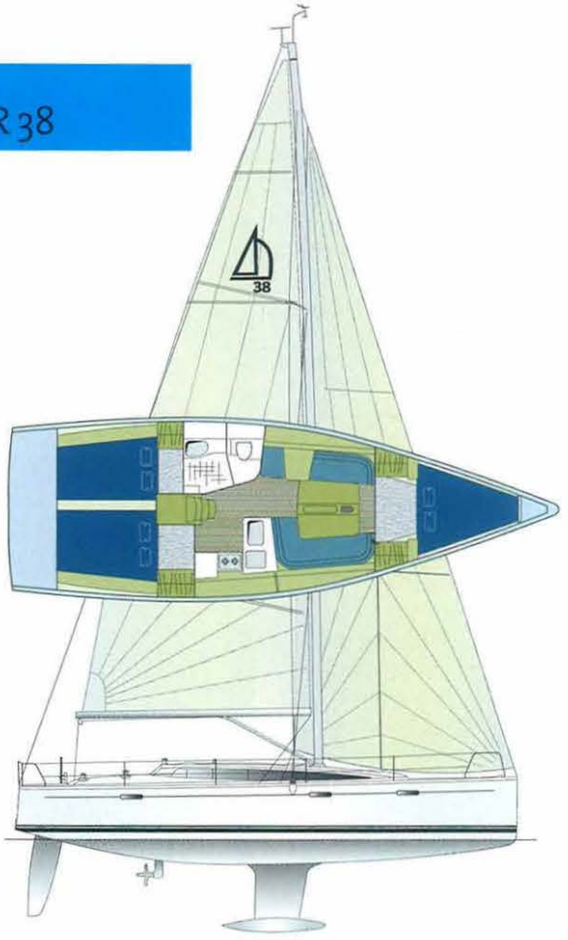
The new Dehler certainly hasn't lost the legs, looks or feel of Dehlers past. She may not be finished quite as tidily as her predecessors, but this is reflected in a price that's in a temptingly different league. For that price you're still getting Dehler performance, which will make you happy, keep you hogging the wheel and perhaps steal a march on some more expensive rivals.

The slight own goal of this pricing restructure is that it renders Dehler's own 41 all but redundant, as the 38 feels more spacious throughout and costs €100,000 (£85,000) less.

I was surprised to see the tanks positioned under the berths fore and aft. Karl Dehler admits it's not ideal for weight management, but to Dehler's credit it's because he didn't want to compromise on tank size.

All in all this is a versatile, practical, sporty cruiser that's fun to sail fully crewed or short-handed, and with the performance upgrades offered, it promises to make an enjoyable club racer.

DATA DEHLER 38

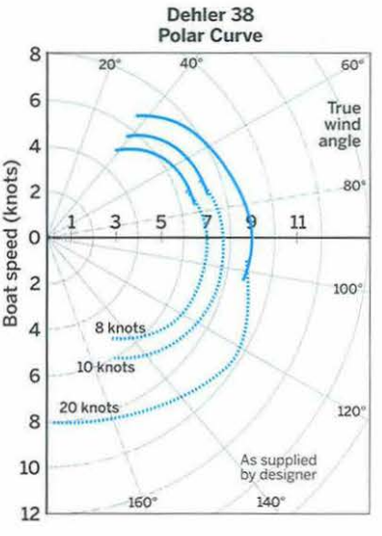


SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	11.30m	37ft 1in
LWL	10.40m	34ft 1in
Beam (max)	3.75m	12ft 4in
Draught	2.00m	6ft 7in
Disp (lightship)	7,100kg	15,653lb
Ballast	2,250kg	4,960lb
Sail area	78.2m²	842ft²
Berths	6	
Engine	28hp Volvo D1-30 SD	
Water	300lt	66gal
Fuel	160lt	35gal
Sail area: disp	21.5	
Disp: LWL	176	
Price (ex VAT)	€129,000 (£109,091)	

Design: Judel/Vrolijk

www.dehler.com



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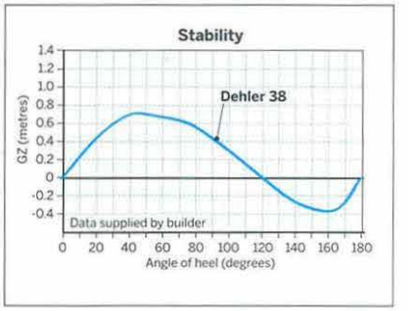
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