



Best Pocket Cruiser - Dehler 29

The image of a small boat snuggled close to the beach against a lush tropical background makes us remember that the cruising dream is possible for all, from the neophyte just getting started on what the budget allows to the experienced cruiser content to eschew the comforts that larger boats afford. It was disappointing, therefore, to have only three boats that fit this description in this year's contest, and they were each very different in character. The vote went unanimously to the Dehler 29 because, of the three, this was the boat the judges would feel most comfortable seeing in an excursion like the Caribbean 1500. There was much sucking of teeth when they contemplated making this passage in the Maine Cat 30 (not without reason when we saw the pasting this season's fleet received at the hands of Tropical Storm Mitch), and the Beneteau 311, with its high bubble of a coachroof, didn't meet the description of "compact."

Much of the Dehler's appeal was that it was content to be a small boat and harbored no illusions of grandeur. Pocket cruisers, the judges decided, do not require standing headroom. Once below, it's enough to be seated either at the nav desk or on one of the very comfortable settees. Standing is really only beneficial in the galley, and even there it's often more comfortable to lean braced against the counter or the companionway ladder.

The BOTY panel agreed that this boat would ideally suit a couple or small family who were eager to sink their teeth into some serious cruising yet didn't mind that they'd be more or less camping. Such sailors will be attracted by the confident appearance of the Dehler 29. The idea that sailing might be fun is mirrored in the 29's decor, where dark mahogany is mocked by a cheeky, bright-blue, windowpane-check upholstery.

The accommodation plan couldn't be simpler. Once aft of the chain locker bulkhead, the cushioned v-berth takes up the entire forward section and is separated from the saloon by just a curtain. There are no built-in lockers here. Storage for clothes, etc., is provided instead by cloth bags hung along the hull sides. Same deal for the aft cabin, but with a real locker in addition. There is lots of cushion under the cockpit, but enough of it is against the hull along the port side to

make a quarterberth with good maneuvering room. The cushion is split fore and aft to allow a lee cloth to create a snug cocoon for the partner off watch.



As a fine entry-level family boat or as a coastal cruiser for a seasoned skipper interested in a sprightly sailer, this tidy German import contains lots of good things in a small package.

The saloon is big enough for entertaining, with seating in a U that wraps around the forward end of the table and along both sides. You could get comfortable at sea in almost any conditions.

As you come down the companionway, the small galley is to port. The two-burner alcohol cooktop stuck on the counter is a bit restricted—a built-in gimballed stove would be a lot more useful—but the stainless-steel-lined icebox is a classic touch, and the sink is deep and close to centerline. Elaborate cuisine is not among your expectations on a boat this size, especially at sea. At rest, the more ambitious cook can commandeer the enormous saloon table and the nav desk for slicing and dicing. The small nav desk to starboard is adequate for holding the tools and writing letters, but the saloon table is handy if you need to spread out a chart. Aft of this little nerve center is the head compartment. Again, it's compact but adequate.

The companionway drop board, a three-partner that telescopes into itself to stow in the sill so there's no loose boards to stow, is a novel touch. It can be locked in any of three positions. The ladder serves its purpose well; curved treads offer support when the boat is heeled.

We sailed the boat in gusty northerlies. Under way, the judges' first impression was that the boat didn't sail up to her dockside promise. However, she was obviously

hard pressed with full main and a 120-percent genoa; being boat-show time, the rig wasn't properly tuned, the reefing lines weren't led, and there was only the one jib on board. Under normal circumstances, she'd have a reef tucked in to ease the helm, which was particularly heavy in the gusts. In the quieter spells she handled easily, pointed nicely, and reached hull speed very quickly.

The tiller steering defines the cockpit layout, with the traveler and mainsheet in front of the helm. The jib sheets lead to cabin-top winches, which makes reefing the main a bit of a muddle. Because I'm a little uneasy stopping off the jib sheet to free the winch, I'd spring for optional sheet winches mounted atop the cockpit coaming, where they'd also be more accessible from the helm. I'd also like to see the boom raised about a foot. You have to make a conscious effort to stay really low when tacking or jibing. A cruising family would rather hang on to their scalps than to the small amount of sail that would be given up.

Getting around the deck was a cinch, in no small measure because of the confidence-inspiring TBS nonskid. It's probably more expensive to apply than simply molding a gelcoat pattern, but it is vastly better. A molded pattern, to be effective, needs teeth to bite your shoes or your bare feet. The more comfortable it is to walk on, the less effective it is likely to be, and water doesn't help. TBS resembles fine, rubbery granules, and on this boat it was even applied to the inboard sides of the molded toerail. A nice detail.

A little 10-horsepower Volvo Saildrive makes for a compact and accessible power plant and pushes the boat along quite adequately. An optional 19-horsepower version might tempt a rangier skipper into using it too much and depleting the small, 16-gallon fuel capacity too quickly. This small tankage, including 27 gallons of water, raised concerns about the boat's cruising range. There are ways around those problems, and we are, after all, talking about a pocket cruiser. And, as the judges agreed, a right fine one at that.