ON TEST DRAGONFLY 28

She turned from innocent family saloon into nitrous-fuelled beast, a gnarly rocket ship of exhilarating performance.

Performance with practicality

The 28 is not just another Dragonfly with a lick of go-faster paint. Jens Quorning has lavished her with design tweaks, producing a powerful, flared and roomy hull. Many of the changes have been thanks to CAD design technology – the floats now fold under and flush to the hull, which makes the folded beam narrow enough for the yacht to be trailed across Europe (5.54m).

She’s a dry boat thanks to those exaggerated spray rails on her main hull, which deflect most of the spray downwards, while finding space for a vee-berth forward. The folding ‘wing-wing’ mechanism has also been redesigned to make it easier to operate just by pulling the floats out on a continuous line from the cockpit without demanding grafting. And the outriggers have been extended a foot in front of the main hull to increase diagonal stability and reduce pitching, their distinct asymmetric shape providing greater buoyancy. So with a deeper 13.5m centreboard, she goes to windward better than her predecessors.

The other time I’ve sailed at over 15 knots this year was on a fully crewed 50ft racing keeler with an A-sail up in a Force 6. This time, however, we were off East Head in a Force 4-5 with just three of us. They do compare though: both felt electric and, when cranked up to peak boat speed, produce a unique high-velocity ‘hur’.

After clearing the rocks at Emsworth we raised that flat-head main, with a reef taken in to face the gusty sou’wester, and we were off, windward flat flying. It was like being teleported back to teenage Hobie-cat sailing. Immediately we hit double figures – 12-13 knots at 45°! (she will point higher, but no exchange for a couple of knots).

That’s where my figure-taking notes stopped, as concentration becomes critical at these speeds. The channel wishes and moored boats approached so quickly that I had to be constantly on the alert. We tacked out past Hayling Island and into a 0.75m chop: even at 50° we were making 14 knots for the first rule before turning round and cracking off. Close reaching, she absolutely flew – spray flying, 15-17 knots, smoking. And the trimmest bats at the bottom of the sloop go never materialised. This was a stable, controlable, continuous experience.
It felt reasonably secure, not just sticking your heels down and hoping you stop before the plate ran out.

Those long asymmetric floats and that sharply wedged main hull pierce a path while dislodging most of the spray — indeed, the only spray that finds its way aft is if you catch the windward float on a rogue wave.

The Dragonfly’s sea keeping ability isn’t a surprise after the 35-foot won the European Yacht of the Year award two years ago when it gained the judges’ votes in horrible conditions off the Dutch coast.

Flight control

Launching the mainsail is a dodgle if things get hairy, likewise spinning the genoa or kite sheets off the small winches — instead of using self-takiens, the Andersen 28s have cars-clients on the coachroof, so you can flick them off from the helm like a dinghy. On the odd occasion that she did stab a toe, or bury her leeward float, their buoyancy pointed her back to windward while providing enough time to dump the main.

Popping the large asymmetric saw her change into another gear as we headed back towards the harbour. With the kite up and the helm fully loaded, we maintained 15-17 knots off the wind. In fact, during the entire afternoon we rarely dropped below 13 knots! When we shook out the reef to do a bit of speed-reaching brazza, heelf increased slightly, but speeds didn’t.

It’s the most exhilarating sailing I’ve done since a ride on an Extreme 40 cat last year — and I enjoyed it as much. And like the in-vogue cat, you can feel every gust convert to acceleration. This Sport model has been very well-tuned to help you sail it safely to its potential. The genoa sheets tight to the tracks on the coachroof upwind and is attached to barber-haulers on each float, so you can set a beneficial shape offwind.

Equally, the main keeps shape offwind despite the lack of a traveller by applying boom vangs either side. And the second reef line is an effective cunninghams. Winches are small and manageable and an adjustable tiller and double-purchased mainsheet gives dinghy-like control.

The engine links like an autopilot arm to the tiller, so manoeuvrability is excellent, and the four-stroke 120hp manages 7 knots.
Small family comfort
This model does not have the usual traditional oak interior — rather, the Danes have chosen a modern, lighter look with Formica and maple offered as standard and teak as an option.
Although almost 3ft shorter than the 950, the 28 provides more room below and an extra berth.
The two single saloon berths leave walk-through access to the open heads and twin-berth and the raised cockpit allows for a large single berth below — the companionway slides across for access, with space for two kids.
The long saloon table has a drop-leaf each side and foot rests that raise to stop you sliding off the high berths. There's stowage below each saloon berth where hatchets form a cushioned leaf to provide wide, long sleeping room. Headroom is largely restrictive (averaging 91cm), other than in the companionway area, where standing room is available at the galley and nav station.
The heads is very basic, with just the toilet and sink — rather than add the necessary larger water tanks and sump pump for a shower, Dragonfly say clients prefer the use of a solar shower bag in the cockpit, with the sprayhood and optional cockpit tent making an adequate wet room — well, they are Danish.

Beach bake — a stable platform aground, the 0.4m draught means you can explore secluded bays and take the ground where you please.
Folded wings — the outriggers fold up simply, making it easier, safer and cheaper to berth. She fits into a single marina berth, there is no guard rail to climb over and you can step ashore on the level.
On the road — boat weight is just over 1,000kg, so an aluminum trailer is offered for £8,000 to keep the weight under the legal limit of 1.2 tonnes.
Conclusion

Astonishing performance is something Dragonfly have been offering for some time, but with her striking metallic livery, sporty rig, simple interior and the many tweaks Quorning has added to aid practicality, the 28 has changed with the times and represents an attractive go-faster option in the multihull market laden with bulky charter boats.

But this boat is being sold as a four berth family cruiser, so with these speeds must come the vigilance and caution that seasoned performance multihull sailors develop naturally. Everything happens at two or three times the speed. So if you choose to take on the conditions — we were having a blast, but still reeled in 15-20 knots — then you must know your onions. Otherwise, keep moderate under wraps (difficult!), reel down and keep her on the level.

The 28 may not quite be a super-sailer, but she does offer independence. You can launch and rig the boat without paying for lifts and you can cruise for a week or even a season whenever you like, delivering and collecting her by road.

The thought of sailing in Scotland at speed on one holiday and in the West Country the next is an attractive and realistic proposition. She’s the ultimate versatile performer.

Entry-level

The 28 is being seen as the long-term successor to the popular 930, which is now 13 years old and, despite an Extreme makeover last year, is starting to look a little dated. The 28 now represents the entry-level model at £30,000 cheaper than the 930.

She is offered in two guises. The Sport model we sailed in the carbon-rigged, high-tech sail model, whereas the cheaper Touring model has a 15.5m shorter aluminium mast and reduced sailplan. Space has been bought in the cockpit by doing away with the trampers. The boom sheet directly to the sole.

Specifications

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<tr>
<th>Dragonfly 28</th>
<th>Dragonfly Sport</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Note: GZ x Displacement gives actual Righting Moment (zg ft lbf)