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Right, a quick quiz before we get down to business here. What was Hanse's biggest-selling yacht in the UK in 2016? I was going to put the answer at the bottom of the article but rather than keep you in suspense, I'll just tell you straight off that it was the Hanse 588. Yup, that's right, a 58ft yacht. Not its small and eminently affordable 315 I hear you cry? Nope.

In addition, I recently attended the start of the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers and the most popular yacht on the startline was the Hanse 575. Bigger appears to be better these days and I would argue that few manufacturers have grasped this concept better than Hanse Yachts. I mean, even its small yachts are big and they are priced in a manner that has had some of their rivals scratching their heads. In other words, this is a manufacturer that seems to be on top of its game and I was interested to see how they approached putting together an all new 50ft-plus yacht that slots in where its 545 (discontinued in 2013) left off.

On first viewing of the new 548 it seems clear to me that Hanse →

When it comes to sheer value for money, Hanse takes some beating. So what's the secret? **Sam Jefferson** tests its new 548 to find out

In a Hanseatic League of its own?



more than a passing resemblance to Soto Acebal's much sportier Solaris 55 – and that is no bad thing.

The trick that Hanse uses is to give all of its range low coachroofs and very high freeboard and that freeboard is cunningly offset by a knuckle just below the toerail. It sounds like a dog's dinner, but it works and the longer the yacht, the better it can carry off this extra hull height. The only point where this clever tactic comes slightly unstuck is when you come to step aboard. A ladder or fender step up is advisable unless you are feeling very sprightly.

Keep it simple

On deck, Hanse again goes for evolution over revolution. One of the key features of all Hanses these days is that they are designed to be handled easily by a couple. As a result, Hanse has developed a tried and tested formula that has been nicely refined in recent years. This involves a self tacking jib which takes all of the stress out of handling the headsail and this is married to leading all the control lines – most pertinently the mainsheet – underneath channels in the cockpit coamings to the helmsman. It has taken a while to perfect this system – but these days it is simple, easy and a virtually foolproof method of taking all the strain out of short-handed sailing and one that has been adopted by many other manufacturers. It also ensures that the cockpit is clearly delineated between the 'sailing' area aft and the lounging area forward. Throw in electric furlers for the headsail and main winches, plus in-mast furling and you have a yacht that, despite its size, is a doddle to handle. Indeed, we tested the 548

has hit upon a winning formula and is happy to stick with it. She's a tad beamier than the old 545 and features the now familiar aggressive lines that Judel/Vrolijk has been penning for it in the past few years. She's all hard angles with a plumb bow, vertical transom and no sheer. Somehow, all of this is meted by the soft turn of the bilge at the transom and absence of any chines making the yacht purposeful without looking brutal. The sleek, low coachroof also helps give the yacht a very pleasing sporty look on the water. In all honesty, she bears

1 The cockpit is clearly delineated between the lounging area forward and sailing area aft. As you can see, the lounging area is a triumph of space and comfort

2 Aft in the 'sailing' part of the yacht, all controls are right where you need them, and features such as in-mast furling are push-button



• COCKPIT
The twin helms are set well aft to allow for a massive lounging area forward

• SAIL CONTROLS
With a self tacking jib and all running rigging led aft, singlehanding really is simple

• HULL
The freeboard is high, but has a knuckle just below the toe rail

• SAILS
Our test yacht came with a suit of Elvstrom sails

on the same day as the new Hanse 388 and in some ways the 548 was actually easier to handle as it had more electric powered systems.

Other than that, the decks are exceedingly clean and uncluttered. The cockpit feels huge with twin tables on either side very much a necessity. These drop down to create yet larger lounging areas and it must be said that, particularly with all the cushions in place, this is an extremely inviting place for a spot of lounging. I was rather saddened that the Solent in October did not oblige with some suitably friendly weather.

Meanwhile, the 'sailing' end of the yacht aft is nicely laid out although – despite flip down seats – you would feel slightly exposed at the helm in big following seas. The bathing platform folds down to reveal a large storage space beneath and there is a niftily thought out fold down bathing ladder. There's space under here for a modestly dimensioned tender or something larger if partially deflated. There is also the option for a second outdoor kitchen unit situated in a central island making this the ideal yacht for at least one former leader of the Labour Party. Head further

JOE MCCARTHY

3 Up forward the decks are marvellously uncluttered and there is provision for extra cushions to be fitted for yet more sunbathing options

4 The stern feels quite open, but this can be made to feel more enclosed with the addition of a central pod between the helmsman's seats

'The Jefa steering is very direct and the yacht has a good feeling of balance'

forward and there is yet more acreage of lounging space all of which points to precisely how effective this yacht would be for chartering. Up at the bow there is also a suitably cavernous sail locker/storage area which could swallow up a multitude of fenders and the like. Back aft, there is the option of a large solid fixed bimini which looks practical but does seem to defeat the object of creating a nice sleek stylish hull if you're going to whack this on top. Rather like getting all tooled up in an Armani suit and then shoving a bin on your head.

The rig follows Hanse's usual pattern of having a large main that does the lion's share of the work, combined with a comparatively modest self tacker. This works very well upwind, but on a yacht of this bulk can feel a tad underpowered off the wind and the natural solution is provided in the form of a big genoa – almost a Code 0 – set on an outer stay. This solves

all your downwind issues as it is a massively powerful sail that gives you real potential for speed off the wind in modest breezes. The model I tested had the performance package, which included a beautiful set of Elvstrom sails.

Space exploration

Head down below and that high freeboard really comes into its own, as this is a simply cavernous space. Except cavernous is the wrong word as it is wonderfully light down here thanks to a plethora of portlights and skylights. Every time I see a new Hanse, the portlights seem to have got bigger and I'm waiting for the day when the entire hull is a portlight. The main saloon follows their open plan 'loft style' look with a very large lounging area. The galley is to starboard and is nicely laid out with the sink situated on its own island that makes for a nice bracing point if you were cooking →





'The 548 is exceptionally beamy aft and this has opened up yet more vistas of space'

in anything of a swell. The fit out is all light woods and fabrics with clean lines and plentiful amounts of Corian. In common with all of its rivals it treads a fine line between smartness and soullessness but, on the whole, I was a fan.

The 548 that I tested featured twin aft cabins each with ensuite heads. The 548 is exceptionally beamy aft and this has opened up yet more vistas of space. Indeed port aft cabin was slightly larger and was sizeable enough to feature a separate sofa. The ensuite heads on the port side is also huge and can be replaced with a bunk room which might be more suitable if chartering was the priority.

Head forward and you step into a massive owner's stateroom with a walk around double bed, ensuite and drop down flat screen TV.

There are all sorts of nifty smart modern touches throughout the yacht. As a small example, each lamp is fitted with a USB charger, removing the eternal problem of the battle for the 12V socket at the chart table. The forward cabin is so large that there is an option to split it entirely into two.

On the water

All of that padding around down below had given me an urge to get out on the water and conditions were favourable with a 15kt breeze ruffling Southampton Water on a crisp, clear October day. I have tested four different Hanses from this more recent crop of designs and I must say that I find them to be polished performers. The Jefa steering is always very direct and the yachts always have a good feeling of balance. There is a feeling that you can really throw these yachts around and they will cover up your shortcomings as a helm. Given that I tested two yachts on the day, I was also able to have a look at how the 548 looked on the water and the impression was favourable with those angular lines giving her a really racy look and a genuinely purposeful feel. As already noted, handling was a dream and spinning her through the tacks took absolutely no thought whatsoever.

The 548 is no lightweight flier but in the modest breeze she was soon hissing along quite nicely at 9kt. The beautiful sails unquestionably are an asset, as was the relatively

flat water but, then again, this was a stop-start sort of a sail given the restricted, busy waters we were operating in – not ideal for a big yacht - yet she handled it with ease.

Off the wind in light airs is often the point of sail where these Hanses can come a little unstuck due to their relatively modest self tacking headsails. As if on cue, the breeze moderated as we eased the sheets and headed back for home.

Now was the moment that the 548's mighty headsail came to the fore: as soon as we unrolled it, the boat came alive once more and we scooted back to the Hamble at 7kt-plus, reflecting on an extremely relaxing day's sail. →

ABOVE
The linear galley (left) features a stand-alone sink unit that also serves as an excellent bracing point when at sea. Right: the acres of skylights and portlights provide masses of natural light

BELOW
The port aft cabin is voluminous enough to feature a settee



SAM'S VERDICT

There's nothing ground-breaking about the 548. She offers easy handling combined with high levels of volume and cruising comfort. On top of that, she looks good and sails well. In a cruising yacht, you can't ask for much more. In fairness, many other manufacturers offer similarly well rounded packages, so it may just come down to personal preference. Ultimately this is a well thought out cruiser from a yard with a very clear idea of what it wants to provide for its customers. My only gripe was that getting on and off was tricky due to the freeboard, but the payback comes with a nice sleek coachroof

and masses of volume. In terms of the sailplan, the addition of a large genoa or Code 0 is a game changer in these yachts when it comes to offwind sailing in moderate conditions. Under power she was well behaved and the option of bow and stern thrusters helps to ease mooring stress.

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

COMFORT: ★★★★★

BLUEWATER: ★★★★★

THE SPEC

- LOA 53ft 3in (16.22m)
- LWL 48ft 11in (14.9m)
- Beam 16ft 7in (5.05m)
- Draught shallow keel 7ft 3in (2.20m)
- L-keel, medium 8ft 4in (2.55m)
- T-keel, deep 9ft 2in (2.80m)
- Displacement
- Shallow keel 19,800kg (43.6lb)
- L-keel, medium 19.6t (43.2lb)
- T-keel, deep 19.0t (41.8lb)
- Engine Volvo Penta 110hp
- Water capacity 770lt
- Fuel capacity 520lt
- Total sail area 138m² (1,485sq ft)
- Designer Judel/Vrolijk
- Base price £309,000



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NEXT MONTH

Beneteau Oceanis 51.1
On sale January 26



For a fuller explanation of stability and performance figures see sailingtoday.co.uk

CALISTA PAXTON