

A race-winner goes cruising

PBO
NEW BOAT TEST



Slicing her way to windward in 20 knots of breeze with a crew of two, a reef in the mainsail and Dacron sails, the Salona shows her cruising credentials



Lines are led aft under removable garages on the coachroof in a layout that's simple and efficient. The kicker and pole downhaul are split to both sides

Can a boat that's capable of beating the best on the race course really make a practical cruiser? David Harding sails the Salona 35 to find out



Watch a video of PBO's Salona 35 boat test. Scan this QR code with your smartphone or visit www.pbo.co.uk/salona35

In PBO we don't normally test boats that have just won their class in a highly competitive racing series. This time, however, we made an exception, because the boat in question is a family cruiser. It just happens to be a family cruiser that's fast, fun to sail and, yes, capable of winning races.

In the 2012 Hamble Winter Series, the first Salona 35 to arrive in the UK topped her class comfortably, showing a clean pair of heels to competitors that gave her 20 points under IRC (boats that should, in other words, be appreciably faster).

I joined the crew for one of the races – more out of personal interest, to experience the boat in competition mode – before returning a few months later wearing a PBO hat. Off came the North 3DL laminate sails and on went the cruising Dacrons, together with the seat across the stern. Race boat became cruiser.

Three of us (none from the regular race crew) then hopped aboard

and set off into 17-21 knots of chilly spring wind against the tide in the Solent. Three became two when I jumped into the RIB to take the photos, leaving the boat in the capable hands of two people who had never even seen her before.

Was it lively? Yes, as a sail on most sporty 35-footers would have been in those conditions. Was it fun? You bet. Hairy? Not in the least. The Salona 35 is more spirited than a lot of dumpier alternatives designed solely for cruising; far more responsive and obedient yet, in many ways, also easier to handle. I've said it before and I will say it again: with a non-extreme, well-designed sailing yacht, fast doesn't have to mean flighty.

A pedigree performer

The Salona 35 is a development of the Salona 34, designed by J&J and built in Croatia, down the Adriatic coast from J&J's offices in Slovenia. Salona build a range of sporty cruisers that have established a name for themselves

racing under the IMS rating system in the Mediterranean. They're broadly in competition with Dehler, Beneteau's Firsts and some of the J boats; designed not only for people who like throwing them around the racecourse, but also for those who want to be able to cruise quickly and efficiently.

Plenty of people enjoy both racing and cruising, swapping the laminates and the gang of heavies on the rail for the Dacrons and the family crew for a week or two during the summer. What separates them from some (but by no means all) dedicated cruising folk is that they're not prepared to cruise slowly. They like boats that are fast, responsive and fun to sail; that will get them where they want to go with a smile on their face. They might not enjoy quite as much headroom in the aft cabin or such a luxurious shower when they've arrived, but they'll have spent less time bouncing around getting cold and wet on the way and might well be sitting in the cockpit enjoying

drinks and nibbles while the slower cruising boats that left at the same time are facing the prospect of missing the tidal gate and spending another night at sea. If that's your sort of sailing, the Salona might well be your sort of boat.

For serious pot-hunting under IRC, you'll want the iron/lead composite keel designed by Jason Ker, optimised with the help of CFD (computational fluid dynamics) and fitted to our test boat. The aim was to achieve the lowest possible centre of gravity without using a bulb, minimising drag and, significantly, the rating (currently 1.001). The racing alternative is the 2.15m (7ft 1in) T-bulb lead fin. For the depth-conscious there are a couple of shallower options, giving draughts of 1.75m (5ft 9in) or a positively-cruisey 1.50m (5ft nothing).

Looking at the other measurements reveals no surprises. Being developed from the 34, the 35 has a hull slightly tweaked from the 34's that's 10.4m (34ft 1in) long and a modest 3.36m

(11ft) in the beam. Displacement is 5,300kg (11,684lb) which, combined with her sail area of 56sq m (603sq ft), gives her a sail area/displacement ratio of 18.7. That means she has less sail for her weight than a lot of sporty boats. Similarly, the displacement/length ratio of 192 is conservative. Whichever way you look at her,

like when sailed short-handed – and that's exactly what our brisk sail showed us. The first thing to say is that it's no good trying to carry full sail in 20 knots of wind. We suspected as much, only trying it to start with because no reefing lines were roven through the boom. Like many fractionally-rigged sporty cruisers,

The Salona 35 is more spirited than a lot of dumpier alternatives designed solely for cruising, yet easy to handle

there's nothing extreme. She just happens to be blisteringly fast and highly competitive when sailed by a full crew who know what they're doing. A keel-stepped mast is often favoured on sporty boats because it can be a slimmer section than a deck-stepped equivalent, while rod rigging is used to minimise stretch, weight and windage.

From the cruising perspective, what we need to know is what she's

the Salona would rarely, if ever, carry a reefed main during an inshore race with a full crew: if it's windy enough to reef, it's probably too windy to go out.

As we expected, with no weight on the rail it was impossible to harness any meaningful drive from the full main, so we used a few sail ties to put in the first reef and achieved a reasonable shape in a much reduced sail. Then the boat

made her way upwind with high-5s on the log rising to 6 knots-plus as soon as we cracked off a degree or two. She's so easily driven that we wouldn't have been under-cannvassed even with two reefs.

There's no avoiding the fact that you need to shorten sail earlier than on some dedicated cruisers, though I didn't get the impression that she would run out of power or become exhaustingly frisky if asked to beat into 35 knots and a confused sea for a few hours.

In the groove

What's most striking about the Salona is her instant response to the finger-light helm. She offers a precision and sensitivity that few boats can match. Carbon wheels help, of course. Contrary to what some people believe, carbon isn't used just to save weight in the stern. More importantly, it transmits the feel from the rudder to the helmsman's hand, whereas the inertia of a heavy stainless wheel has a deadening effect.

Tech spec

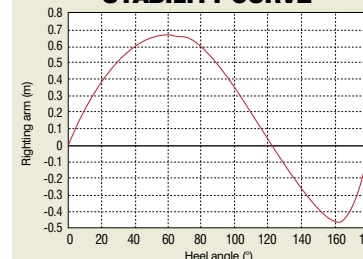


SALONA 35

PRICE FROM £99,500

LOA	10.40m (34ft 1in)
LWL	9.16m (30ft 0in)
Beam	3.36m (11ft 0in)
Draught – shallow fin	1.50m (5ft 0in)
– standard fin	1.75m (5ft 9in)
– deep fin	2.15m (7ft 1in)
– deep fin composite	2.15m (7ft 1in)
Displacement	5,300kg (11,684lb)
Ballast – shallow fin	1,500kg (3,307lb)
– deep fin	1,200kg (2,645lb)
Sail area (main & foretriangle)	56sq m (603sq ft)
Displacement/length ratio	192
Sail area/displacement ratio	18.70
RCD category	A
Engine	Yanmar 21hp saildrive
Headroom	1.85m (6ft 1in)
Designer	J&J
Contact	Vital Yachting. Tel: 02380 458084 www.vitalyachting.com

STABILITY CURVE



The GZ curve shows the maximum righting moment at 55° and an angle of vanishing stability (AVS) of 122°

The Salona uses twin carbon wheels, each mounted on an angled pod on the inside of the cockpit. Even though the stern is far from wide by modern standards, this arrangement offers the dual advantages of placing the helmsman (or helmswoman) well outboard for good visibility and of allowing an easy walk-through between the wheels. All that was missing on our test boat were the

DOWN BELOW

optional folding foot-braces – without them there’s nothing to keep the helmsman on the high side – and some handholds, which could easily be fitted to the forward side of the wheel pods. A removable brace between the seats can slot into sockets that can alternatively accommodate a table.

Unless you have to fight gravity on occasions behind the wheel, it’s impossible not to enjoy guiding the Salona upwind. She’s easy and surprisingly forgiving to sail, demonstrating remarkable tolerance if pinched or sailed too deep while making it clear that she’s not appreciating your efforts.

Find the sweet spot, however, and she’s off: this is a boat with a definite groove. A driver who concentrates will be rewarded. One whose attention wanders won’t be punished by finding himself alternately stalling and broaching. Punishment will be in the form of progress that’s simply not what it should be.

Capping an impressive all-round performance, the Salona points like a demon, tacking through around 75° even in the short Solent chop that forced us to sail deeper than we would have otherwise.

Thankfully she didn’t throw any of that chop over the crew. Her fine, relatively high bow sliced through it with minimal fuss. Barely a drop found its way abaft the mast.

A fine bow is a feature she shares with most inshore performance yachts. Where she differs is in carrying her maximum beam further forward than many, as is common among designs influenced by the IMS. This, combined with a

For such a sporty cruiser, the Salona has a welcoming interior. It’s fully fitted, generously proportioned in most departments, reasonably woody and equipped with the usual mod cons.

A moulded headliner has landings to accept the bulkheads. Behind it, alloy plates are bonded into the deck to accept the fastenings for the deck fittings.

It’s not easy to do a lot of structural investigation because all the sole boards are screwed down. I would prefer to see a few sections that can be lifted without the help of a screwdriver, especially over the strum boxes: blockages might need to be cleared quickly. If you do lift the boards, you’ll see Salona’s trademark stainless steel frame that takes the loads from the rig and keel. It’s a reassuring feature that should enable the boat to take a good pounding and the odd bump without drama.

Further reinforcement is in the form of carbon fibre incorporated within the inner moulding, which

relatively slim hull, can result in a boat that’s less hard-nosed and more inclined to continue in a straight line when pressed. The Salona certainly scored in those departments, remaining exceptionally well balanced even if we deliberately provoked her by sailing too deep; the helm stayed light and the rudder lost grip only



The chart table is workable, as is the heads, where the wet-locker is a useful feature that would be more useful with the addition of a hanging bar

lines the hull up to the level of the bunks’ backrests. The hull itself is either a standard hand-laid laminate, or a more expensive epoxy/vinylester infusion to reduce weight. While few boatbuilders have an unblemished record when it comes to structural integrity, Salona appear to pay more than just lip-service to this rather important issue.

One niggle below decks is the absence of useful little stowage

bins or fiddled shelves where you can put things like phones and car keys. Fiddles are inconsistent, too – running around the fixed part of the chart table, for example, but not along the aft end of the opening lid. Similar inconsistencies are evident around the galley and saloon table. The joinery is neat enough on the whole, if lacking practicality in some departments and anything that gives it character or identity.

Headroom is comfortable for

boat designed by the team that Bavaria left behind; a team often associated with the earlier and distinctly less-sporty Bavarias, yet whose Salona 35 – with a little help from Jason Ker – was in a different performance league to the Farr-designed Bavaria. It goes to show that talented designers such as J&J and Farr can create cruise-y boats or sporty boats. It depends what they’re asked for.

Rapid rotations

Back in the Salona’s cockpit, there’s a lot to be said for a full-width track on the sole immediately forward of the twin wheels. Normally the mainsheet trimmer will play the 6:1 sheet and the 24:1 fine tune, plus the traveller and backstay, but if you’re short-handed the helmsman can easily reach the sheet.

We experienced the importance of this during an unplanned HOB (hat overboard) in Southampton Water. Recovering a dark-grey beanie from a 35-footer under sail in 20 knots of wind is never going to be easy, and it did take us a few attempts – some of them unsuccessful only because of the lack of a boathook. Nonetheless, from behind the wheels I was able to control the mainsheet, grabbing several bights to yank the boom



Windows in the topsides let light into the saloon and improve the view out. The finish is acceptable but lacking detail

most at 1.85m (6ft 1in) and the saloon berths are 1.88m (6ft 2in). Roll-over height beneath the cockpit in the aft cabin is an adequate 0.56m (1ft 10in) but it’s a more worrying story when you lift the bunk-top to find that the fixed part of the bunk is wedged firmly on top of the gearbox. Apart from

restricting the vibration-absorbing movement of the engine, it would mean major structural surgery to lift the gearbox before you could change the gaiter around the Yanmar engine’s saildrive leg. Next to it, the exhaust pipe was bent sharply around the joinery, which had kinked it and started to wear it

away. Salona need to address both these issues sooner rather than later.

By contrast, hinging up the companionway steps to look at the front of the engine reveals an installation that’s neat and that allows easy access to the principal service and inspection points.



Tie-bars are linked to the stainless steel frame bonded into the bottom of the hull that distributes the loads from the rig and keel

into the middle and throw the boat into a tack even when she was barely moving. With a lot of boats we’d have had to give up and use the engine.

One thing I had found earlier was that, when we hove to, the keel and rudder stalled to the point where we couldn’t gybe round to carry on sailing. We had to bring the jib across. It’s worth knowing these things in case you have occasion to perform pirouettes under sail.

Back in the marina, more ‘in case’ checks included lifting the cockpit sole to see where the emergency tiller would fit. It all looked perfectly serviceable, though improvements could be made to the mouldings under the lifting sections that

provide access to the rudder head and the stowage in the stern. Water had clearly been flowing over the lips designed to keep it out, and was pooling inside the hull. A drainage tube to a skin fitting wasn’t doing its job and its run meant that water would always sit in its lowest point. Some simple mods to the tooling to channel the water straight through the open transom would solve the problem.

Even easier to change would be the hinges on the cockpit locker lid to starboard. The lid opens to the point where it stands upright, but won’t swing back further to rest against the guardwires. This presents two problems: it won’t stay open on its own, and the hinges could easily be ripped out of the moulding if someone leaned against the open lid.

Fit and functional

Elsewhere on deck, as you’d expect from a boat with an already-impressive race pedigree, everything seems to work. Hardware appeared to be up to spec and in the right place, not that we had occasion to use much of it – principally the Harken 46 self-tailing primary winches and the 40s on the coachroof.

A solid wooden toerail edges the deck, unlike on some race boats

where it’s discontinued amidships to make life more comfortable for the weather-rail crew (for whom the yard will lower it on request).

There’s even a full-depth anchor locker with provision for a windlass. One particularly nice feature is the under-deck drum for the headsail roller-reefing. Where it can be made to work – and there are design considerations that preclude it on some boats – it makes such a difference to the appearance.

The non-slip finish is passable, if not as extensive as I would like, and the hatches are proud rather than flush, providing useful foot-bracing points on an angled deck.

PBO’s verdict

As a performance boat, the Salona is quite something: she’s spirited, amazingly responsive and potentially fiendishly fast yet, at the same time, remarkably forgiving and easy to handle. Below decks she’s generally functional and more fully-fitted than a good many sports-cruisers, if perhaps a bit bland and in need of some technical tweaks.

If you’re looking for a sensibly-priced cruiser that’s fun to sail and capable of blitzing the opposition on the race course, here’s one that has to be taken seriously. PBO

OTHER BOATS TO LOOK AT



Beneteau First 35

PRICE: £121,429

Beneteau’s successor to the First 34 comes from Bruce Farr’s office. Bigger than the Salona, with a higher IRC rating and a choice of deep T-bulb keel or a shallower, more conventional fin.

www.beneteau.com



Elan 350

PRICE: £118,000

With her chined hull, broad stern and twin rudders, Elan’s 350 continues the Open-Class style of recent models designed for this Slovenian builder by Rob Humphreys. Keels can be deep or even deeper.

www.elan-yachts.com



Dehler 35

PRICE: £125,000

Designed by Simonis Voogt, Dehler’s contender in this size range is in broadly similar vein to the Salona and Beneteau and is also available with a choice of keels for cruising or racing.

www.dehler.com

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Twin wheels immediately abaft the mainsheet work well for short-handed sailing. Foot-braces are offered and are most definitely needed