

FREE INSIDE: 28-PAGE **RYA** SAILING SCHOOL GUIDE

YACHTING

ESTABLISHED 1906
www.yachtingmonthly.com

MONTHLY

FOR THE CRUISING SAILOR
FEBRUARY 2010 £4.30

Contessa vs Bavaria

Which 32-footer scored highest?

YM
100-POINT
BOAT TEST

How Atlantic dreams come true

210 ARC yachts and 1,000-plus crew

UK CRUISING GUIDE

Strangford Lough

Aus \$10.50 (inc GST)/NZ \$17.00/
US \$10.50/C \$12.50/ITC8.90/SP C7.70/
PT C7.70/GR C7.70/NL C8.40/NOK B9



9 770043 998213

LIBBY PURVES

'Free our
chart
data!'



NEWS EXCLUSIVE

e-Borders
scheme:
date shock!



BOAT WORKS

Why fit
a chartplotter
in the cockpit?



100-POINT BOAT TEST

The UK's most comprehensive yacht tests



USED BOATS TRIED & TESTED

Contessa 32

We compared this beloved 32ft British icon to Bavaria's new 32ft wunderkind. Which is better? Chris Beeson's scorecard might surprise you

Do modern boats match up to traditional cruising classics? Readers often say 'They don't make them like they used to!' We decided to find out by putting the classic Contessa 32 up against a modern cruiser, the new Bavaria 32.

The Contessa is the Queen Mum of British cruising – a much-loved icon that set the benchmark for cruisers when she was designed by David Sadler in 1970. It's a benchmark that, I'm often told, modern cruisers have consistently failed to reach. Indeed, so revered is she that some say her second-hand value is artificially high, surfing a wave of appreciation that has been rolling for nearly four decades.

Jeremy Rogers' Lymington yard built the vast majority of the 800-plus Contessa 32s afloat today, but a few were built by JJ Taylor in Canada. Recession in the early 1980s closed the yard, laid off its 200 staff and the moulds were sold. Undeterred, Jeremy started up again in 1988 at Milford-on-Sea, refurbishing Contessa 32s, and the yard returned to Lymington in 2009. In 1995, having bought back the moulds, he started building them again and there have been 19 new Contessa 32s since then. For £143,750, you can have one, too.

The Contessa 32 we tested was *Gigi*, made famous by her passage

from New York to San Francisco, via Cape Horn, chronicled in John Kretschmer's book *Cape Horn to Starboard*. After finding her in Houston, Texas, in a sorry state, Jeremy brought her back to Lymington and refurbished and refined her to the point where she's almost certainly one of the best examples afloat today. She has now been sold to an anglophile Frenchman and ours was the last sail before the handover.

Performance

The 20-knot northeasterly funnelling down into Lymington Yacht Haven faded to just 12-14 knots once out in the Solent. Under full main and jib she tracked upwind at 5.7-6.2 knots, sheeted in to about 35° to the apparent wind, and tacked through 80°, very creditable for a yacht with an overlapping genoa. With Jeremy Rogers, serial winner of the Contessa 32 National Championships, on the mainsheet, she slipped along gloriously with 5-10° of weather helm.

Further over towards the island shore, in 16-18 knots of true wind, she fetched along at 6.9-7.5 knots, dipping her rail at around 35° of heel. Modern, beamy cruisers →

Isn't she lovely? Powerful too. But this iconic British cruiser isn't without her faults and many believe she's over-valued







Cushions and infills create a 5ft 10in double berth below the big forehatch but Gigi's pipecoats lift (INSET) to reveal the sail bin



Tile-backed locker doors (INSET) create more space in the galley



No separation between the midship heads and the forecabin



An excellent chart table, lots of stowage and views outside



Engine access is good if not always convenient



Plenty of saloon stowage and Gigi's lowered sole (INSET) means there's just standing headroom but the sloping sole isn't very ankle-friendly

Contessa 32

Key features



The tiller takes up most of the cockpit space during manoeuvres and the bridgedeck limits space further

The big genoa means plenty of winching to do after tacks and the diagonal lower shrouds don't make life easier

Coamings enclose the cockpit, creating a deep, safe space, but low freeboard means it can get wet

The kink in the stanchion allows crew to use bigger winches without rapping their knuckles on it

Long grabrails and gunwales that get deeper towards the bow make the passage forward safe

would be pirouetting into wind at half this angle but she slipped along without so much as a twitch of rounding up. Bearing away onto a beam reach, she clocked up 5.9–6.5 knots. As a sun-blessed finale we hoisted the spinnaker and barrelled along on a broad reach at 7.2–7.6 knots.

Upwind there was a slight but constant murmur through the tiller, which I put down to wash across the rudder from the locked prop, but otherwise she was a joy. Though you can see forward while sitting in the cockpit, I chose Jeremy's favoured position, up on the coamings and leaning against the lifelines. Both positions were bone dry.

Off the wind she reacted regally and accurately, if not immediately, but barreling along at over 7 knots with the scuppers scooping the Solent was unforgettable. Her reputation as an invincible sea-boat seemed entirely justified to me.

Living below

A pair of hand-holds and three steep, flat steps take you below into *Gigi's* saloon. It's a bright space with two port lights and an opening hatch, but ventilation is a bit limited, with just the hatch and two solar vents. Aft of the 6in step supporting the keel-stepped mast there's 5ft 9in headroom forward, 5ft 11in aft, but the angled sole – *Gigi's* sole has been lowered 6in to improve headroom – starts just 10in from the centreline, which makes walking a bit tricky.

It's a squeeze getting between the table and the U-shaped seating



'Barrelling along with scuppers scooping the Solent was joyous'

to port but once you're seated, six can dine comfortably. A wooden-backed cushion infill converts the U-shaped seating to port into a 6ft 5in by 3ft 4in double berth. The starboard settee berth is the same length but 2ft 4in wide. Both have lee cloths fitted. There's stowage in lockers outboard, behind and below the seating and a stainless steel water tank is fitted below the sole with an access panel.

Hand-holds run the length of the saloon and there's a sturdy fiddle at the chart table and a pillar in the galley, so no shortage of security. The chart table is excellent, half-Admiralty size with plenty of stowage and instrument space, a view out through the side port and a solar vent above. The companionway is close by, too, improving ventilation and

communication with the on-watch crew. There's another foot of space for charts in the tiny gap beneath the bookshelf outboard, but pencils, dividers and the like can get in there too and you have to tack to get them out again.

The chart table's seat is the head of the 6ft 1in quarterberth. A panel under the berth lifts out in two pieces and there's more stowage below. A port opens into the cockpit but it's still a gloomy berth.

To port is the galley, which has 5ft 7in headroom. Its design hasn't changed since 1977 and it includes plenty of stowage in deep, well organised lockers outboard. There's a footpump to empty the two 6in deep sinks, a coolbox under the drainer and an Isotherm fridge aft of the two-burner Force 10 stove. A fluorescent light helps illuminate the

galley. A solar vent provides the only direct galley ventilation but it's right next to the companionway.

Unusually, *Gigi's* forward cabin, through a sliding louvred door, has twin pipecoats that can be hauled up for excellent access to the stowage beneath, or lowered to create a 5ft 10in double berth with infills in place. Two sideports and a big opening forehatch flood the forecabin with light but headroom is a pint-sized 4ft 8in. There's a locker at the foot of the berth and a sole panel for transducer access.

The heads has two lockers outboard, a clever space-saving sliding sink and there's a holding tank under the forward berth. There's no bracket for the shower head and nothing to separate the ablutions from the forward cabin. Opposite the heads is a zipped locker that looks like a wet locker – good bracing means it's the perfect place to put on your oilies – but there's no wet locker drain and headroom is just 5ft.

Jeremy Rogers MBE, talented racing yachtsman and builder of hundreds of Contessa yachts, grinds up the spinnaker halyard

Design & construction

David Sadler drew a hull that is achingly beautiful above the waterline. Her sheer sweeps elegantly down from her overhanging bow to a freeboard of just 2ft 3in at full beam before flowing aft and pinching at the elegant sawn-off counter. It's as good as the best of Sparkman & Stephens – so attractive that the coachroof and coamings, though by no means disproportionate, look a little lumpen.

The long overhangs give her a deceptively high displacement-length ratio, at over 300, nearly 50% higher than the Bavaria, but when heeled, her waterline length increases significantly. That, and her much more powerful sail area-to-displacement ratio than the Bavaria's, means she's more

seakindly and, theoretically at least, quicker.

Below the waterline she has plenty of rocker, with V-shaped sections fore and aft, a long, encapsulated lead fin keel and an unbalanced rudder hung on a full-depth skeg, which also houses the shaft-driven prop, so directionally she's very stable. A ballast ratio of 48 per cent gives her an astonishing 155° AVS (angle of vanishing stability), despite a STIX (stability index) of just 33.

Hull and deck are solid laminate infused with polyester resins. There's also a layer of isophthalic resin behind the hull gelcoat to prevent osmosis. The rudder is laminated on a stainless steel stock with two bronze bearings and a stainless steel lower attachment plate.

Sailplan

The masthead rig has a chunky section with single in-line spreaders and her 'engine room' is definitely the 140 per cent genoa, which is twice the size of her mainsail. Tacking it round the double lowers and shrouds inevitably involves a fair bit of winching. The high aspect ratio mainsail is sheeted from the end of the boom on a cockpit-wide traveller just aft of the bridgedeck using a 4:1 mainsheet purchase. The genoa cars are mounted across the sidedecks, angled towards the bow. It's certainly an 'old school' arrangement but surprisingly, she points as high as the Bavaria.

Deck layout

Coamings surround the deep cockpit so it's a safe, if not exactly spacious, place for crew and helm, though the

low freeboard means it does get wet in a blow and if the two sink-sized cockpit drains are blocked, that could be a problem. Views forward without the sprayhood up are excellent from the cockpit but I preferred sitting on the coamings where the helmsman has Lewmar 44 primary and 14 secondary winches to hand, along with the backstay hydraulic pump. There are two bins in the coamings for stowing winch handles, sail ties, a hand-held VHF radio and so on, and a deep cockpit locker to port, which also houses the plastic fuel tank.

'The cockpit is safe, if not exactly spacious, and she's wet in a blow'

Unlike most Contessas, *Gigi's* lazarette is hinged on top of the coaming rather than at the back of the seat, which means larger items can be stowed there. Port aft is a two-bottle gas locker. The throttle and engine controls are to starboard and a manual bilge pump is fitted to the cockpit's aft bulkhead. The Lewmar 28 halyard winches handle all sail control lines except the third reef, which hooks on at the mast.

Jeremy found himself knocking his knuckles on a stanchion when winching *Gigi's* upgraded primaries so he installed a curved stanchion to create more space. This also created a space between the coamings and the lifelines that he likes to wedge himself into when helming in rough stuff.

There's a grabrail on the sprayhood and a handrail running to the forward hatch. You've also got the toerail with its gorgeous teak

capping to brace against. Despite the double lowers either side of the shrouds, moving forward along the sidedecks is quite easy.

Clear deck and solid bulwarks make the foredeck a safe place to work. The anchor locker is quite shallow but still large enough for an 11 kg (25 lb) CQR and 50m of 6mm chain, which runs from the double bow roller round the remote control Lewmar windlass and through a hawse pipe into the locker.

Gigi is fitted with an inner forestay that stows at the mast when not in

use and deploys using a Highfield lever. Remove the lever fitting and you have a babystay. The inner forestay and twin lowers are excellent heavy-weather safety features but they make tacking significantly more of a chore.

Under power

A 20hp Beta diesel engine drives a shaft-mounted, three-blade Featherstream prop through an Aquadrive. She cruises at 2,500rpm making a shade over 6 knots. She turns forward in just over her own length. Astern, she turned to port in two boatlengths, but we couldn't get her to turn to starboard.

Companionway steps remove to provide access to the front of the engine. Panels in the cockpit locker and under the quarterberth provide access to the back of the engine and the oil filter. It's thorough, if not exactly convenient. ▲



The shallow anchor locker is big enough for an 11kg (25 lb) CQR and 50m of 6mm chain



Gigi's lazarette, hinged at the coaming rather than the seat, can handle larger bits of kit



Rogers has fitted *Gigi* with a plastic fuel tank, easily accessible from the big cockpit locker to port

YM's 100-POINT RESULTS

Take a **360°** tour of the Contessa 32 at www.yachtingmonthly.com

UNDER SAIL

PERFORMANCE

She's a powerful yacht but intuitive to sail. She feels surefooted, responds well and tolerates poor trim. She's a little too heavy to deliver genuinely exhilarating performance but her reputation as a great sailing yacht is well deserved. You'll spend a fair amount of time well heeled, though.

9/10

AT THE HELM

The tiller rumble was distracting but she feels well connected and responds precisely. The tiller rather dominates the cockpit during manoeuvres but views forward are clear and perching on the coaming is a delight. Her low freeboard means she can be quite a wet yacht to sail.

8/10

ON DECK

DECK LAYOUT

The cockpit is a squeeze for any more than two but it is deep and secure. Primary and secondary winches and the backstay pump are within reach of the helm. There are good handrails and toerails going forward and the lowers don't obstruct the sidedecks too much. She has a good, uncluttered foredeck.

8/10

SAILPLAN

There's plenty of power available and the mainsail can be easily managed by a singlehander. Not so the big genoa, which always requires a fair bit of winching in after tacking. The removable inner forestay is an excellent sea safety feature and the in-line spreaders work well, but do require double lowers.

7/10

BUILD

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

If you're not bothered about headroom, she's a sight you'll never tire of – beautifully proportioned with the sweetest lines and delightful details, like the fairleads built into the bulwarks at the bow. *Gigi* has two extra stringers but all Contessas are built like rocks, ready for anything.

10/10

MAINTENANCE

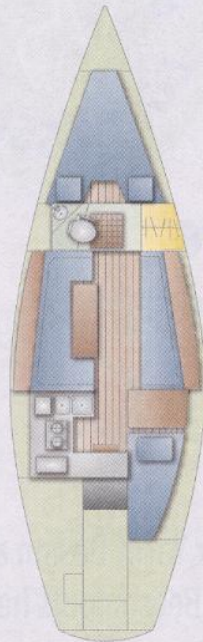
Access to most seacocks and systems is good and the deep bilge makes sure the sole stays dry. The engine casing in the cabin, with neat built-in toolbox, dismantles and there are side panels below the pilotberth and through the cockpit locker for all-round access.

8/10

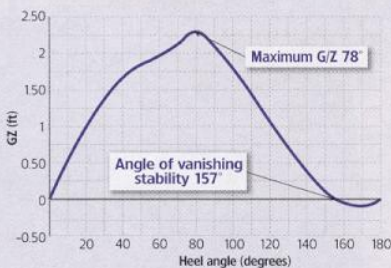
100-POINT BOAT TEST

TECHNICAL

Contessa 32



- **Price guide** £90,000 as seen, second-hand from £24,000
- **LOA** 9.75m (32ft)
- **LWL** 7.32m (24ft)
- **Beam** 2.9m (9ft 6in)
- **Draught** 1.68m (5ft 6in)
- **Displacement** 4,218kg (9,300 lb)
- **Ballast** 2,026kg (4,468 lb)
- **Sail area** 52.2m² (562sq ft)
- **Engine** 20hp
- **Diesel** 55 lit (12 gal)
- **Water** 82 lit (18 gal)
- **Displ/length** 307 (moderate displacement)
- **Sail area/displ** 20.05 (racer)
- **Ballast ratio (%)** 48
- **RCD category** A
- **STIX** 33
- **Designer** David Sadler
- **Builder** Jeremy Rogers
- **Tel** 01590 645454
- **Website** www.jeremyrogers.co.uk



THREE ALTERNATIVE CHOICES

1 Sadler 32 £18,000-£32,000
She was also designed by David Sadler, in a bid to improve on the Contessa's perceived shortcomings. Another solid sailing yacht



2 Rival 32 £19,000-£26,000
Peter Brett's design has lines and a sailplan similar to the Contessa's but displaces too much to perform on a par



3 Nicholson 32 £17,000-£32,000
A long-keeled GRP legend by Peter Nicholson and Halmatic that set the benchmark before the Contessa arrived



BELOW DECK

CHART TABLE
It's well positioned, close to the companionway, very secure, with lots of stowage and the seat is the head of the pilotberth, so the navigator can get some sleep. It's got views outside and is bigger than it looks because charts can run under the joinery outboard, but pencils and dividers can, too.

9_{/10}

GALLEY
There's plenty of storage, good lighting, and we really like the fiddled, tile-backed locker doors – more working space and great for hot pans. The only issues are headroom and ventilation, which is limited to a dorade vent and the companionway. Otherwise, it's a very safe, seamanlike setup.

8_{/10}

HEADS
Stowage and seacock access are good and we like the slide-out sink, but we'd fancy our chances more on a toilet that's fore-and-aft, and further aft than this one. The heads is well short of standing headroom and lacks ventilation. There's no shower bracket, nor any barrier between the heads and the forecabin.

4_{/10}

LIVING BELOW
Stowage, handrails and light in the secure saloon are top notch, but ventilation is limited, sections of the sole are angled because *Gigi's* cabin floor was lowered by 6in, but despite this there's little standing headroom. The forward cabin is a bit tight and open to the heads. The saloon double is the best berth.

6_{/10}

TOTAL SCORE

A beautiful, solid, seakindly cruiser, a little slow by modern standards and the sailplan is not as easily handled. Down below she feels cramped and a bit gloomy by today's standards but the chart table and galley are excellent.



77

100-POINT BOAT TEST

Just two points!

Much has changed in yacht design in 40 years. How did the classic Contessa 32 rate against the new *wunckerkind* Bavaria 32? Chris Beeson compares his score cards



CONTESSA 32	77
BAVARIA 32	75

WHERE THE CONTESSA SCORED

AT THE HELM

Contessa 32 – 8/10 Bavaria 32 – 7/10

The deep cockpit and reassuring heft of the tiller in the hand win this round for the Contessa, although with more than two in the cockpit, it gets a bit crowded. The Bavaria has a much bigger cockpit but some careless design, short coamings and backstay positioning, let her down.



8/10

The Contessa's cockpit was deep and she was a joy to helm

FINAL VERDICT

The Contessa 32 wrests top spot by just two points! This was a surprise to me. I expected the Bavaria 32's superior accommodation and spacious cockpit to seal the deal for modern yachts, but unexpected shortcomings in the sailing department let her down.

In fairness, *Gigi* has thousands of ocean miles under her keel and she's recently been refurbished and kitted out to a high specification by her original builder, Jeremy Rogers. Despite her 1982 vintage, *Gigi* is absolutely gleaming and, at £90,000, still more expensive than the Bavaria at a shade over £75,000. Generally, secondhand prices range from £16,000–£35,000, but a new Contessa will cost you nearly £145,000.

The Bavaria 32 was fresh out of the box, unladen with cruising gear and equipped with a basic sail wardrobe and running rigging. With 5 knots' less wind for the Bavaria, or a £6,400 suit of Elvstrøm's taffeta-covered EPEX sails, instead of the basic Dacron, results might have been very different.

What these two tests highlighted clearly is the change sail cruising has undergone in nearly 40 years. In the early 1970s it



Bavaria 32: quick and lively offwind

was a Spartan pastime, an adventure sport synonymous with hardship and endurance – more like mountaineering – and if you found yourself aground or in a gale, you got on with it.

Sail cruising today is a hugely popular success story. Yachts are easier to sail, more affordable, more comfortable to stay onboard and deliver better performance in the average range of conditions than ever before. Improved weather forecasting means we can avoid challenging conditions rather than blundering blindly into them. Cruising is more accessible than ever, which is why more people are developing a passion for sailing. The remarkable success of Bavaria, Bénéteau-Jeanneau and Hanse over the last 30 years emphatically proves the point.

Ultimately, boat choice depends on the kind of sailing you want to do. If it involves weekending, a fortnight's summer cruising and the odd fair-weather, foreign jaunt with friends and family, or a winter base in the Med, a modern cruiser like the Bavaria 32 will be well suited to your needs. If you're planning long, offshore passages, a traditional cruiser like the Contessa 32 will cope with any conditions you might encounter in exchange for a degree of comfort below. Forty years ago, we didn't have a choice.



7/10

The Bavaria's cockpit was big, but had short coamings



Contessa 32: invincible seaboat

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

Contessa 32 – 10/10 Bavaria 32 – 7/10

The Contessa's peerless looks, painstaking attention to detail and bulletproof build win her this round, though the downside is her moderate displacement/length ratio and a lack of headroom. For many cruisers, standing headroom is non-negotiable these days.



The Contessa scored top marks for design and construction and 9 out of 10 for performance

PERFORMANCE

Contessa 32 – 9/10 Bavaria 32 – 6/10

The Contessa proves her class, while the Bavaria struggles, though the Bavaria faced tougher test conditions. Not many cruising yachtsmen would contemplate heading upwind in a Force 6. Offwind, the Bavaria was quicker and her form stability made her less prone to heeling.

GALLEY

Contessa 32 – 8/10 Bavaria 32 – 7/10

The Contessa's stowage is better organised. The twin sinks are more useful and there's better bracing. The Bavaria's galley, more like a kitchen, presents a more pleasant working environment while moored.

CHART TABLE

Contessa 32 – 9/10 Bavaria 32 – 4/10

A runaway winner for the classy Contessa. Even among good chart tables, hers would score highly, but there is no contest against the Bavaria's sorry-looking ledge. Many builders are increasing living space at the cost of the chart table, believing that chartplotters are replacing paper charts.

DECK LAYOUT

Contessa 32 – 8/10 Bavaria 32 – 7/10

A narrow win for the Contessa, mainly due to the fact that the helmsman can adjust all critical sail controls from the helm, essential for shorthanded sailing. Not so on the Bavaria, which also has very small winches.

WHERE THE BAVARIA SCORED



The Bavaria's sailplan scored with power shared more evenly between mainsail and jib

SAILPLAN

Bavaria 32 – 8/10 Contessa 32 – 7/10

The Bavaria wins her first round. The jib is so much easier to tack shorthanded than the big genoa. Having the sail area's power shared more evenly between main and foresail makes it easier to balance the sails.

LIVING BELOW

Bavaria 32 – 9/10 Contessa 32 – 6/10

Bavaria storms this round with a bigger, lighter, brighter, better ventilated saloon and two spacious cabins. Despite a lowered sole, the Contessa just can't match her with a cramped forecabin that's open to the heads.

HEADS

Bavaria 32 – 10/10 Contessa 32 – 4/10

The Bavaria wins hands-down. Among modern 32-footers this heads would be a remarkable achievement, albeit at the expense of a decent chart table. The Contessa's heads is poorly ventilated, cramped and exposed to the forecabin.

MAINTENANCE

Bavaria 32 – 10/10 Contessa 32 – 8/10

Maintenance access is good on both boats, but there's more space under the Bavaria's cockpit for rummaging around at the back of the engine, and you can work from the aft cabin rather than climbing inside the cockpit locker as you must on the Contessa.

