



Marlow Hunter 31

This all-new Marlow Hunter design packs a lot of punch into 31 feet

AFTER A SIX-YEAR HIATUS, Marlow Hunter (formerly Hunter Marine) has a 31-footer back in its line-up, an all-new design that represents a watershed moment for the long-established Florida yard. Unlike the Marlow Hunter 40 and 37 models—both well into development by mid-2012 when Marlow Acquisitions took control of the brand—the 31 has enjoyed a relatively leisurely gestation. Quite possibly as a result, this new boat incorporates some clever new features not seen in earlier Hunter sailboats (or for that matter, anywhere else).

Design Features Although some other 31-foot keelboats are as wide as this new Marlow Hunter, very few create such a strong impression of expansive beam. The 31's cockpit is "oversquared"—substantially wider than

it is long. A combination of nearly vertical topsides and cockpit seating "pushed" outboard as far as possible establishes a cockpit sole that wouldn't seem undersized on a 40-footer. Tip-up foot braces enable passengers and crew to remain securely seated on the "high side" when the yacht heels, but fold away to create a flat walking surface when not required.

The extra-wide cockpit sole does more than simply provide extra living/working area. It creates sufficient space to install a unique canting helm pedestal—built by Edson to Marlow Hunter's specifications. The canting helm is an optional upgrade, but it's tough to imagine why anyone would order the MH-31 with a standard fixed pedestal when this elegant alternative is available. A touch of the toe to the foot pedal on the pedestal base unlocks the entire assembly so it can

be tilted about 30 degrees to either starboard or to port. But when locked amidships, with the two segments of the Edson folding wheel hinged in and the helm tucked away neatly behind a fixed cockpit table, there's direct, unencumbered access to the fold-down stern boarding platform.

As mentioned earlier, the new 31 is a beamy boat—actually slightly wider than its larger sibling, the Marlow Hunter 33. Wide beam has both pros and cons: extra living space and sail-carrying power on the one hand, but extra hydrodynamic resistance on the other. However, naval architect Glenn Henderson—a long-time associate of Hunter Marine—has refined a design approach claimed to neutralize the downside of a wide sailing hull. Every cruiser in the Marlow Hunter line features a noticeable concavity a little above water level in the bow area, ▶



- 1 Superior onboard comfort with large windows and skylights make the MH-31 an attractive, liveable package. 2 Thanks to a short cockpit, the MH-31 has plenty of space in the interior for a nicely-sized galley. 3 Double berth sleeping cabins fore-and-aft each have something to offer: generous headroom in one and a larger bed in the other.

and a down-turned lip or “reflex” in the stern sections just ahead of the transom. The hollowed bows aim to reduce added drag when the boat is punching through head seas, while the S-shaped buttocks lines of the reflexed stern suppress the size of the stern wave.

In the new 31, the Marlow Hunter design team has made both the bow hollow and the stern reflex a little more pronounced in an effort to minimize the “drag penalty” associated with a 2.7 length-to-beam ratio. While the effectiveness of this design strategy may be open to debate, I did get the impression that the stern wave re-

mains relatively small when pressing under power.

In other respects the new 31 bears a close family resemblance to its 40 and 37-foot stablemates. Sharply angled hull chines at the corners of the transom drop beneath the water plane a little further forward before rounding off and blending smoothly into the turn of the bilge. Distinctive stylistic elements—notably the arc-shaped cabin windows which taper to points fore and aft—ensure that the latest Marlow Hunters will never be mistaken for any other sailing brand. However, it should be noted that the exterior detailing of

the new 31 is visibly better than that of the earlier 40 and 37, very likely the result of having more time available for creating the plugs and molds.

Construction As of this year, Marlow Hunter has upgraded their manufacturing methods, adapting many of the materials and procedures used to build the production of high-end Marlow motor yachts in the far east. With the aim of minimizing print-through issues associated with resin shrinkage and simultaneously boosting osmotic resistance, the Florida plant has moved to a premium NPG-Isophthalic gelcoat

backed by a Matline Plus, and wetted out with vinylester resin rather than standard polyester.

For the underlying lay-ups, all Marlow Hunter cruisers, including the 31, are now built with stacked, multidirectional reinforcements rather than conventional woven rovings—a change which improves resin-to-glass ratios and further enhances cosmetics. Above the waterline and in most areas of the deck, Nida-Core—a pre-skinned polypropylene honeycomb product—is now being used instead of end-grain balsa to create stiff lightweight sandwich panels. In the forward underbody, high strength Kevlar is incorporated in the layup to guard against collision damage.

It's worth noting that the lack of appreciable compound curvature in the topsides of recent Marlow Hunter designs makes cosmetics a priority because irregularities tend to show up more when surfaces are bowed in only one plane. Even after all these improvements, hull fairness isn't absolutely perfect, but it's easily good enough to look pleasing. And last, but not least, Marlow Hunter now uses a warm oyster white as their default gelcoat colour. It looks very smart in the flesh—a nice change from the more sterile whites often favoured by production builders.

In all other respects the 31 is built very much like other recent boats from this Florida plant. Plumbing and electrical installations are pre-rigged before the complete liner/bulkhead assembly gets lowered into the hull while it's still supported by the mold. A sophisticated methacrylate adhesive is used for all secondary bonding including the critical hull/deck joint. Recent Marlow Hunters are not particularly light, but they are certainly strong enough to ensure long, reliable service.

Systems The new 31 comes standard with nearly all the amenities that buyers have come to expect in any serious cruising yacht, pretty much regardless of size. In most cases, the standard 21 horsepower Yanmar diesel sail-drive will be upgraded to a 29 horsepower auxiliary (as seen in the test boat). This is about the largest engine that fits ▶



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in the engine compartment beneath the stairs, but maintenance access is still quite easy thanks to quite a few removable panels.

Under power, the 31 made 6.3 knots with the engine turning 2,300 rpm at an "economy cruise" setting. A more typical cruising speed of 7.2 knots was sustained at 3,100 rpm, while full throttle yielded 7.7 knots at 3,500 rpm. Sound levels measured in the main saloon ranged from 74 dbA up to 81 dbA across this rpm range. These are decent readings for a sailboat of this size; and as with other recent Marlow Hunters, it would not be difficult to save a few decibels by adding airtight gaskets to the engine access panels.

The 31 test boat had not yet received the upgraded house batteries normally installed by Specialty Yachts, but with two separate compressors serving side-by-side refrigerator and freezer compartments, they will definitely be needed. I noted there was no venting to provide cool air to the fridge units, but this too, I was assured, would be added during final commissioning.

With its comprehensive 12-volt and AC shore power electrics, hot and cold running water, and so on, this big 31 is considerably more complex than the entry-level boats of yesteryear. On the plus side, however, it also means superior onboard comfort, which is, by and large, what the market now demands.

Interior The expansiveness of the MH-31's cockpit is mirrored below decks with what looks like an acre of cabin sole. Galley and furnishings are, to a large extent, arranged around the perimeter of the central living area, leaving lots of open space for moving around freely.

The many large window and skylight hatches make for plenty of light and fresh air in settled weather, although I'd like to see some additional all-weather vents. The spacious head features a separate shower that's arranged to double as a wet gear locker. Double berth sleeping cabins fore-and-aft each have something special to offer: generous headroom and more locker space in the V-berth, versus a larger bed and hull side backrest in the aft cabin. One valuable (and often neglected) feature is the full-sized overhead hatch in the aft cabin—a potential life-saver in event of a serious galley or engine fire.

Extra-tall people may find the MH-31 interior is a little short on headroom when compared to larger boats, and as one might expect in a boat designed primarily for short coastal trips, there isn't a great deal of built-in storage. One potential drawback of the extra wide cabin is a greater risk of falling in rough weather, so I was pleased to see that Marlow Hunter now fits overhead grab bars running the length of the saloon. Even so, some buyers may wish to fit a vertical floor-to-ceiling bar to provide a convenient handhold in the open area just ahead of the companionway.

Under Sail Initially my test sail aboard the Marlow Hunter 31 was another English Bay drifter; chasing zephyrs that peaked at around five knots true wind speed. Under these less-than-ideal conditions, the boat did reasonably well, sustaining speeds in the low three-knot range and tacking without difficulty. The optional canting wheel is a treat to use, and with far less by way

of mechanicals than the dual wheel alternative, it makes for a sensitive helm.

As luck would have it, toward the end of the test sail we were hit by a 10-15 knot squall accompanied by torrential rain. Short-tacking back toward the marina, the boat proved a lively, responsive sailor with enough form stability (thanks to that wide hull) to drive strongly through gusts. It's no raceboat, but the designers deserve credit for ensuring this commodious cruiser can still deliver a creditable sailing performance.

Concluding Remarks For a sailboat that fits in a 32-foot slip, it's hard to envision a more spacious, liveable package than the new MH-31. It's not for everyone, of course. There will be some who prefer a stronger bias toward the sailing side of the equation. On the other hand, it's certainly no slouch under sail. Current price for the test boat (as commissioned in Vancouver with a healthy complement of dealer-specified equipment) rings in at \$177,000. This is not the least expensive 31-footer on the market, but for the combination of attributes provided it's pretty tough to beat. Ⓜ

THE SPECS

LOA	9.86 m	32' 4"
Hull Length	9.73 m	31'11"
LWL	9.04 m	29' 8"
Beam	3.61 m	11' 10"
Draft (deep)	1.65 m	5' 5"
Draft (shoal)	1.35 m	4' 5"
Ballast (deep)	1,533 kg	3,379 lbs
Ballast (shoal)	1,599 kg	3,525 lbs
Displ. (deep)	5,377 kg	11,854 lbs
Fuel	95 L	25 USG
Water	189 L	50 USG
Holding	75 L	20 USG
SA (standard)	54.4 sq-m	581 sq-ft
SA/D *	17.9 (std.)	
D/L	203	
Power	Yanmar sail-drive (21 hp std; 29 hp optional)	

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