

# Straight down the middle

**Delphia's new 37-footer shows that Poland's largest builder is squaring up to take on the big names from France and Germany, says David Harding**

Until recently, the vast majority of Polish boats imported into this country were trailable sailers designed for the lakes of their native land. Poland does have a well-established industry building larger yachts, but few of them have found their way to the UK under their own names. That's partly because several builders familiar to us in Western Europe have contracted the production, or at least the moulding, to yards in Poland, who have concentrated on contract work rather than on developing their own models.

Now, however, things are changing – and nowhere faster than at Delphia Yachts. Formerly known as Sportlake, builders of the Sportina range of lake-sailers, Delphia have also produced boats for Jeanneau, Kirie and J-Boats among others. But the new name signalled a new departure and the development of the Delphia range of cruisers, which now includes the 29, 37 and 40.

I tested the 29 in PBO 457 and found something different from the typical modern production cruiser. Though not without faults, she was pleasantly woody down below, with few internal mouldings, and built using relatively simple, traditional boatbuilding techniques.

So is the 37 in the same vein? Not exactly. Instead of the smaller Delphia's flow-coated inside to the hull, chunky frames and air of honest simplicity, you find a production-line feel typical of mass-produced boats. The timber is mahogany instead of Polish oak, and the accommodation is based on an internal moulding.

This approach clearly signals Delphia's intention to fight the middle ground, where decisions are based largely on the boat's size-to-price ratio. I had wondered whether the Poles might take advantage of their lower labour costs to offer, as on the 29, a competitively-priced boat with just a hint of the feel and finish of a semi-production alternative built by hand: they have the joinery skills to do it. Instead they've gone the identikit route, choosing



to tool up for volume production and minimal fit-out time, and in so doing have pitched themselves against some mighty powerful rivals.

Rather than adopting a critical tone and looking at this as a lost opportunity to offer something distinctive, perhaps I should be congratulating Delphia for breaking into the mainstream and presenting what looks like a credible alternative to boats from Bénéteau, Jeanneau, Bavaria, Legend et al. If that was their aim, they appear to have succeeded. Labour rates are likely to increase now that Poland is in the EU, and if Delphia plan to crank their production up to the point at which they become a major force in European boatbuilding, maybe that's the only way to go.

## Following the fashion

From the outside, the Delphia 37 could be part of a new range by almost any large European production builder. She has typically short ends, a full stern, ample



freeboard, a modern-style curvy coachroof, a spade rudder and a choice of deep or shallow bulbed fin keels.

If she differs anywhere, it's in having a tad more rake to the stem, a relatively modest, 9/10ths fractional rig that places most of the area in the genoa and, significantly, the option of a centreboard. The first two features give her a more conservative appearance than some of her plumb-bowed, sportier-looking competitors, and suggest a boat that's geared towards cruising. Her sail area/displacement ratio of 17.7 (deep fin) or 16.7 (shallow fin) confirms this impression, as does the traveller forward of the companionway. Evidently she was never intended to rival the Salona 37 or Hanse 370 in terms of performance, even if she has a reasonably slippery-looking hull, a finer entry than many, and moderately light displacement (the displacement/waterline length ratio is 125 and 136 for the deep and shallow-fin versions respectively). Competition is likely



to come from the likes of the Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 35 and Bénéteau's Océanis 373.

On deck, once again there's little to grab the attention. You're faced by the usual expanse of white moulding, hardware from the familiar brand names, the ubiquitous slotted aluminium toerail and a pretty standard deck layout.

Before homing in on the details, let's go for a sail. Once you have a feel for what a boat's intended to do, it's often just as well to make the next stage a spin around the bay if you have an interest in things like handling, motion, sailing ability and the functioning of the rig and deck hardware. If a boat fails that test, there's limited point in picking away at anything else.

### Taking the rough

Since it had been blowing a Force 10 the day before, we were guaranteed a bouncy

ride off Plymouth despite a significant reduction in the breeze. It was typically in the high-teens, with gusts up to 22 knots. At one point we found ourselves sailing along in a squall under a jet-black sky, being pelted by hail stones and with the wind veering so far that we were hard on the breeze with the waves coming from our leeward bow. It all felt rather surreal.

The boat took the conditions in her stride, flying off the crests and landing with a bit of a thud on occasions but generally giving us a more comfortable ride than some tubbier-hulled cruisers of similar size. If anything, her performance was notable for its lack of drama: she's a mild-mannered boat that neither excites nor punishes.

Upwind our speed hovered in the mid fives most of the time. The Jefa steering was light and reasonably responsive, and the rudder continued to grip until the side

decks were awash. I would choose a larger wheel for a more comfortable perch on the coaming: the standard offering is 900mm (35in) and there's room for another 300mm (12in) using the same pedestal. If you wanted to go bigger still, a higher pedestal could be fitted.

Unlike some high-volume builders, Delphia are prepared to accommodate the occasional non-standard request, be it a different steering pedestal or, as fitted to one 37 in Sweden, the mainsheet track on the cockpit sole. In that case, the pedestal was shifted aft.

My only other observation was the relatively small mainsail and large genoa. Mains have grown bigger and foretriangles smaller in recent years, so windward work on the Delphia calls for more winching than on some boats. You will also need to reef the genoa sooner, and suffer a compromised sail shape as a result.

While she proved to be stiff and generally happy upwind in the moderate

**PRICE:**  
**£77,344**  
incl VAT and delivery  
to South Coast

► conditions we experienced, bearing in mind that we were carrying full sail in the interests of pushing her a bit, going downwind was more of a challenge. That's when the test boat's combination of a shallow fin keel and fixed prop made their presence felt. First, she was reluctant to surf. It felt as though we were sailing with the brakes on, which might have been due to the prop's drag and the modest mainsail. And pushing her beyond a certain point to try to get her going didn't help, because the rudder lost grip and she rounded up in a gentle broach. The only way we could hold her on a reach in those conditions was by sailing deep and dumping the vang at the first sign of a broach. As a result, our speed peaked at a lacklustre nine knots.

**Looking deeper**

I suspect that the deep-fin version with its deeper rudder would be a different boat. Add a folding prop, too, and she would almost certainly come to life. The Island Cruising Club in Salcombe, owners of our test boat, chose the shoal-draught version to give them more scope in shallow harbours – and with little more than 1.54m (5ft) below the waterline they certainly won't find themselves facing too many restrictions. The inevitable trade-offs are performance and response to the helm, and while draught is normally associated with upwind ability, you need a rudder with plenty of bite when going downwind in any sort of wind and sea. And a shallow keel means a shallow rudder. A partial solution, of course, is to reduce sail and slow down to six or seven knots.

We did, however, establish that the boat's hull form wasn't to blame. As the sun promised to pop out from behind a bank of cloud just before sinking below the horizon, we hurried back into the lee of Penlee point so I could jump aboard the Delphia 40 and grab some brighter photos. Motor-sailing with the engine full ahead, we saw 13 knots on the GPS as we surfed down a wave. Given enough of a nudge, this boat can go.

**DOWN BELOW**

**Accommodation and construction**

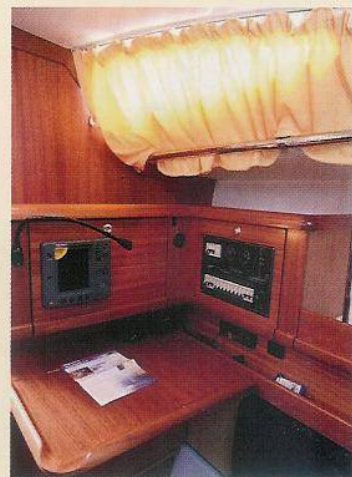
**A** complete tray moulding lines the inside of the hull on the Delphia, so areas of smooth grey plastic are noticeable if not particularly intrusive.

Other signs of production building are the slightly slabby joinery with occasional inconsistencies in the grain, a few rough edges, un-sealed end-grain and plenty of visible sealant, but the finish is on a par with most of the competition.

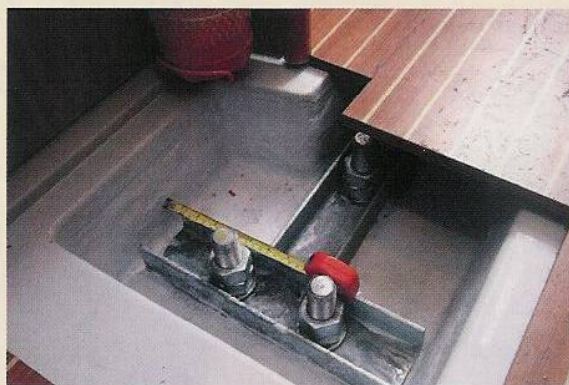
Delphia use a foam core in the hull above the waterline, and it's reassuring to know that the seacocks are installed through the solid laminate of the under-water sections before the inner moulding is fitted. The inner

moulding appears adequately sealed to prevent water ingress where it's cut away around the skin fittings.

Lifting the floorboards also reveals 29mm stainless steel keel bolts, as used on the Delphia 40, with chunky backing plates. Similarly hefty construction is visible behind the backrests, where the chainplates are taken to reinforced sections of moulding that appear to spread the load over a reasonable area. Further features worth noting included piped limber holes through the frames in the bilge, reducing the chance of water seeping into the foam or the laminate, and impermeable, sanitary-grade



▲ Nav space is compact but useable, and the electrics are easy to reach



▲ The cast-iron keel is bolted to the hull by nine, 29mm stainless steel bolts through channel-section backing plates

lining in the heads. Although detailed structural analysis is impossible and my Polish isn't good enough for a full understanding of the design drawings, the Delphia gave the impression of being engineered with a degree of robustness. The Island Cruising Club's busy programme should subject their boat to some accelerated ageing, so it will be interesting to see how she fares.

The ICC chose the three-cabin layout, with twin double cabins in the stern. As on the Sun Odyssey 35 (see PBO 470), this arrangement pushes

**Sail and power**

When it comes to sailing performance, the Delphia should be an easy boat to live with. Her moderate proportions by modern standards make her more comfortable, predictable and obedient than some alternatives except when you're pushing a shallow-fin version downwind in a lumpy sea. She makes you keen neither to hog the helm nor – as on some boats – to relinquish it, though enthusiastic helmsmen would doubtless find the deep-fin alternative more rewarding to sail.

If you choose a folding prop, you should experience not only a significant increase in performance but also the banishing of the slight vibration in the rudder that was present both upwind and down.

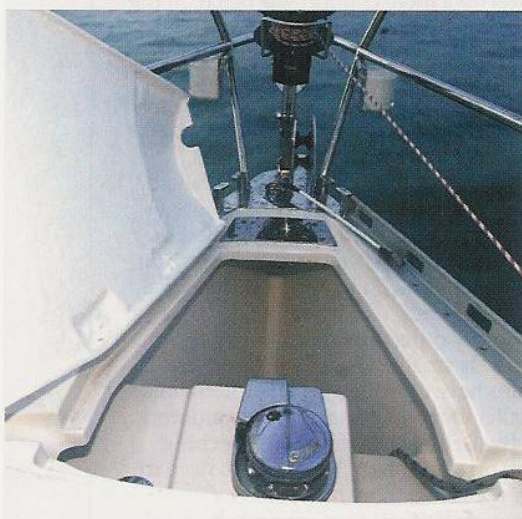
In the deck hardware department, everything seemed to work reasonably well providing you're not too fussy about the finer points of rig and sail trim. The Lewmar

48 self-tailing primary winches are just abaft the wheel and within easy reach of the helmsman – unlike the mainsheet on its track across the coachroof. Whether or not you like it here, you will need more than the 2:1 purchase to make use of it.

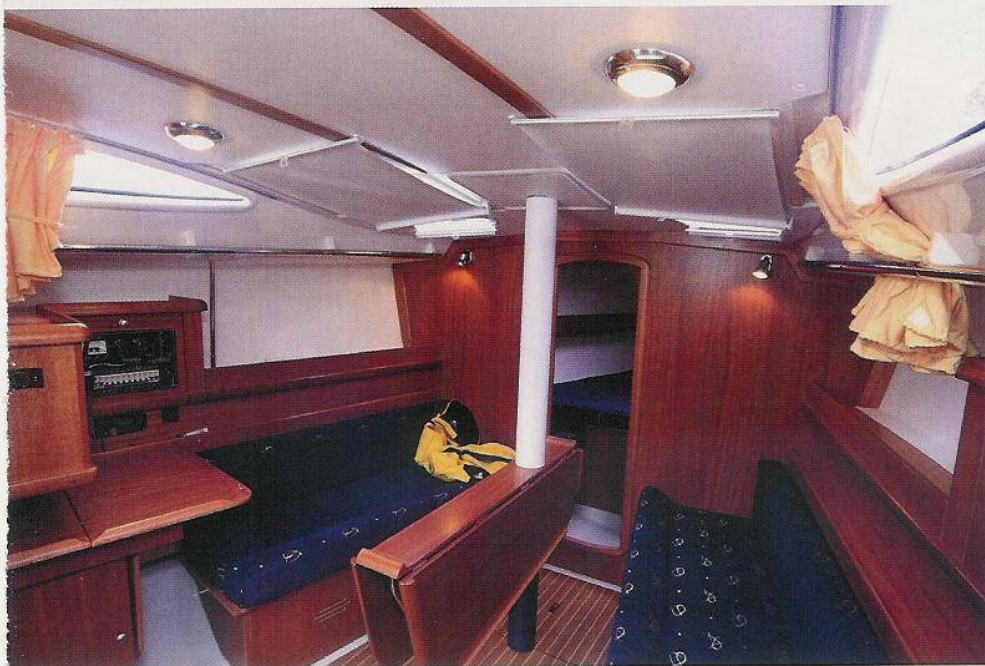
The genoa cars use plungers as standard and can be rigged with a towing purchase on demand. For some reason, the tracks were in two sections and had been cut differently on each side. As a result, setting the cars with four holes showing at the aft end of the tracks placed them in different positions and made it impossible to achieve consistent headsail twist on both tacks.

Set on a double-spreader, deck-stepped Sparcraft rig, the sails came from Ocean in Poland and were cut from a highly-resinated cloth. The leech of the mainsail was already beginning to fall away.

Under power, the new 30hp Volvo D 1-30 diesel driving a right-handed prop via a



▲ Anchoring facilities include a single bow-roller and space for the optional windlass



▲ Twin double cabins in the stern push the heads and chart table forward on the port side; the saloon is bigger with the single aft-cabin version, which also has more locker space. There are plenty of hatches but no vents

the heads forward, opposite the galley, and means that the port saloon berth doubles as a seat for the aft-facing chart table. An infill extends it to 1.97m (6ft 6in) so it could be used to sleep an eighth person or as a useful sea-berth. With the two-cabin layout, you get a bigger heads and a forward-facing chart table with its own seat, as well as a full-depth cockpit locker to port. The starboard side remains the same except for a wider aft cabin.

Dimensions and ergonomics won't present any worries to most people: headroom is

1.95m (6ft 5in) and the starboard saloon berth (which can be fitted with a lee cloth) is 2.05m (6ft 9in).

Stowage throughout is average for a shallow-hulled boat, and generally easy to reach thanks to the hinge-up berth tops. Engine access is better than on many and the electrics behind the switch panel neatly laid out. I'd like to see some vents rather than relying on opening ports, though at least the moulded headliner in the saloon is supplemented by some removable panels for access to the deckhead.



▲ Nothing unusual in the galley – but workshop area is modest

Saildrive pushed the boat along at just over seven knots. Not surprisingly, the prop-walk encouraged her to veer off to port in ahead if the wheel was let go and it was also noticeable that the rudder became over-balanced at higher engine speeds.

As you would expect with a right-handed prop, the turning circle was appreciably tighter to port than to starboard but the boat was generally easy to handle and suffered minimal kick in astern.

Noise down below was subdued, the only irritation being a rattle from the companionway steps on the front of the engine box.

**Conclusion**

The Delphia 37 is a conservative design by modern standards, avoiding the excesses sometimes seen when designers and builders push things to the limits in the interests of maximising internal volume.

As a result, she's generally undemanding and well-mannered, and should be able to hold her own against most of the obvious alternatives in terms of handling and performance as well as construction, finish and specification.

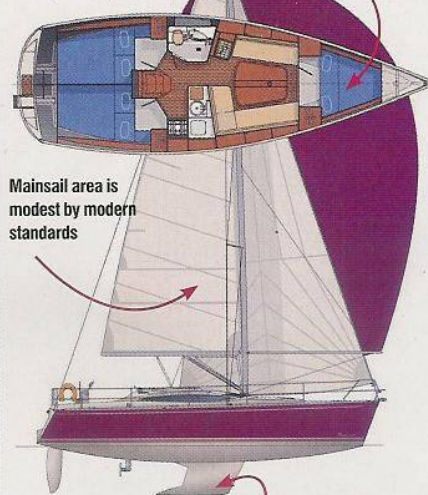
Down below, as in many other aspects of her design, there's little out of the ordinary for a boat from a large-scale production yard, but the Island Cruising Club reckon it will meet their purposes. Clubs like this don't buy boats on a whim.

Delphia Yachts are developing fast and, with the 37, have undoubtedly joined the mainstream – even adopting the well-practiced ruse of over-stating the boat's length: she's just over 10.6m (35ft) on deck, not a 37-footer.

Her competitive price can only broaden her appeal. I suspect this new addition will help Delphia to become a well-known name in the near future.

**SPECIFICATION**

This is the three-cabin layout; the two cabin version has a full-depth cockpit locker. The fore-cabin and after cabin(s) have moulded headliners.



Mainsail area is modest by modern standards

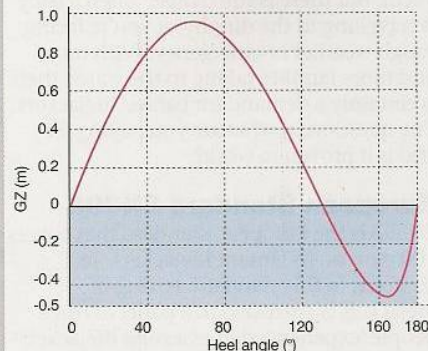
A deep fin and a centreboard (with twin rudders and shaft-driving engine) are also available

LOA	10.74m (35ft 2in)
LWL	10.08m (33ft 1in)
Beam	3.67m (12ft 0in)
Draught – deep fin	1.92m (6ft 4in)
– shallow fin	1.54m (5ft 1in)
– centreboard	0.75m (2ft 6in)–1.95m (6ft 5in)
Displacement – deep fin	5,850kg (12,897lb)
– shallow fin	6,250kg (13,778lb)
– centreboard	6,050kg (13,338lb)
Ballast – deep fin	1,850kg (4,078lb)
– shallow fin	2,250kg (4,960lb)
– centreboard	2,050kg (4,519lb)
Sail area (main and 100% foretriangle)	56.48m <sup>2</sup> (608sq ft)*
Displacement/length ratio (deep fin)	125
Sail area/displacement ratio (deep fin)	17.7
RCD category	A
Engine	Volvo D1-30, 30hp saildrive**
Headroom	1.95m (6ft 5in)
Designer	Andrez Skrzat

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\* Centreplate version has a smaller rig  
\*\* Centreplate version has shaft drive



The GZ curve for the deep-fin version shows the maximum righting arm at 60° and an AVS of 123°