

The shape of things to come

Bill Dixon's striking design for the Hanse Group is set to divide opinion among sailors, as few boats have. James Jermain reports

MOODY 45DS

'Can something that looks so much like a motorboat sail? The answer is yes. In fact, she sails very well'

Photos: Graham Sprook YMLZ/2008

Love her or hate her, Bill Dixon's new Moody 45DS is not a design to be ignored. She is one of the most striking and interesting new cruising designs to be launched for some years – described by critics as a 'confused hybrid' – part yacht, part motorboat, part catamaran.

So why did Hanse choose the Moody name to launch such a radical new boat? You may recall that in the 1980s, Bill Dixon virtually invented the modern deck-saloon cruiser with his Moody Eclipse range. At the heart of this new boat is the idea of a deck saloon that merges seamlessly with the cockpit via a pair of sliding 'patio' doors (Hanse prefers to call them 'saloon doors'). Dufour tried a similar concept with the Atoll in 1998, as did Cabo Rico with its NE 400 motorsailer.

The Moody 45DS is sufficiently radical to be

a major gamble for the German Hanse Group, which bought the rights to the Moody name 18 months ago from Premier Yachts (Premier remains the UK distributor for the new Moody range). Bill Dixon launched his new design last year, saying: 'We're trying to attract new people to sailing by rethinking what a cruising yacht should be.' Can something that looks so much like a motorboat sail? The answer is yes. In fact, she sails very well.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The most obvious departure from tradition is the layout, which has much in common with contemporary motorboat design – the saloon merges with the cockpit and the sleeping quarters are on a separate, lower level. The single-level walk-through to the cockpit, via 'patio doors'

echoes catamaran layouts. The cockpit has a fixed 'bimini' with a sliding sunroof and is divided into a lounging area forward and a working area aft, with twin steering positions. The deck saloon has a dinette, galley and chart table with an inside helm station. The lower deck has three double cabins and two heads.

Other distinctive aspects of this boat include the 30cm-high (1ft) bulwarks, topped by rigid stainless steel guardrails and a very clean deck layout, thanks to a self-tacking jib and lines led aft under the deck to banks of clutches either side, with just two electric winches handling all lines. Both can be reached by the helmsman.

Below the waterline, her shape could belong to almost any fast cruiser. The hull is not excessively fat or deep-bodied, but the waterline is extremely long between a plumb bow and square transom.

This contributes to her low displacement/length ratio even though she is no lightweight. She has a large rig to compensate yet it is easily handled thanks to the self-tacking jib and powered winches. The keel is a little squat-looking but the weight is low in the bulb. Add to this the generous beam and the ballast ratio of just 31% becomes more reasonable. The builders experienced some problems with the rudder design in early trials, but by the time of our test revised blades had been fitted, with more area aft of the stock, to increase feel and response. A short shaft log protects the sterngear and gives added directional stability.

UNDER WAY

We took her out in winds ranging from 13 to 16 knots true, giving 18 to 23 knots over the deck to windward. We dropped in a single reef and set the

full jib before sailing out into a typical Solent chop. Reaching towards Calshot we topped 8 knots with ease at 60° to the wind, the top speed being 8.3 knots in 18 knots apparent. Twin helm positions often create heavy, imprecise steering with irritating drag between the two wheels. The Moody's steering was amazingly light and positive. She responded quickly and held her course well, even when one rudder blade was completely out of the water.

As we hardened up round Calshot we half-expected her to become overpressed quite quickly. With 22 or 23 knots over the deck, she heeled to 25° or more, but never felt like breaking away. While the crew found the angle of heel a little too much for comfort, the helmsman was probably the happiest person on the boat. The hull was well balanced and she continued to

blast westwards at around 7 knots, 35° off the wind. Short-tacking along the north shore was simplicity itself – put up the helm, wait for the bows to come through the wind, the jib car to snap across the track, and you're off and running again. She's not the fastest tacker in the fleet but she keeps her way on and is soon back in the groove and up to speed.

Bearing away off the Isle of Wight shore, we ran down past Cowes at around 6 knots, under good control, keeping the wind 30° off dead aft so that the jib could fill. Then we set off on a beam reach and speed built back to 8 knots. With a rush of blood to the head, we decided to set the large asymmetric spinnaker, which gave us another knot as we blasted towards the shoals off Hill Head. For the final beat home, we dropped in a second reef but kept the full jib. Speed still



The helm feels great and the helm position has good visibility and secure foot blocks, even when well heeled

hovered around 7 knots but the angle of heel was greatly decreased and comfort levels rose.

Moving around down below was easier than we expected, given the deck saloon's large open spaces. We wouldn't fancy cooking on a beat, but the heads was usable and the seating secure. Grab handles are adequate and well placed, though additional ones are needed on the steps to the lower level. Visibility forward was good from the chart table, where the inside steering position is located, and a hatch gave a useful view of sail luffs. Sound levels below decks are remarkably low.

We thoroughly enjoyed our day out and the new Moody dispelled any misgivings we might have had about handling and performance.

ON DECK

The layout of deck gear has been designed for short-handed sailing, even if with a full crew. Those not involved with working the boat have a spacious area forward protected by the wheelhouse and bimini. A GRP table provides good bracing and the seats are long enough to

lie on. The steering positions have electronic engine controls and eye-level instrument pods moulded into the bimini. The chartplotter pod is in the aft end of the table. Helm seats are large and comfortable with secure foot bars on the sole.

Given the size of the deck saloon, visibility from the helm is good. There are positions (though no single position) from which all parts of the horizon can be seen. A blind spot under the bow might make picking up a mooring tricky.

The sidedecks are uncluttered and reasonably secure but the guardrail is too low forward of the cockpit, despite the high bulwarks. The foredeck is on the small side and dominated by the anchor well, with its self-deploying anchor and integral stemhead fitting. We didn't like this - we nearly lost a foot during one attempt to deploy and stow the anchor. It seems an awful lot of effort to make the bow look clean and stylish. Equally unsuccessful is the complex system for dropping the transom gate and boarding platform. This is Hull No1, though, and Hanse is changing the gas struts on the anchor system and simplifying

the transom system on future boats. Under the raised cockpit sole there is a huge locker, and deck stowage in general is very good.

The cockpit and saloon are divided by the impressively engineered sliding doors, which look capable of resisting at least a moderate case of pooping. Built-in washboards, required under the RCD Category A (Ocean) regulations, rise from the sole to provide some protection against flooding when the doors are open.

BELOW DECKS

The galley is small but works well and has plenty of stowage. The sinks could have been deeper and the shape of the fridge-freezer was awkward, even though it had both top and front doors. There are options for 24 and 240v microwave ovens and pop-up television sets. Stowage is excellent, including large bins under the sole.

The dining area opposite the galley had space for six round a versatile table and the seating is comfortable. The backrests remove to create a straight bunk, which will be a useful pilotberth at sea - the only proper sea-berth on the boat.

The sleeping accommodation is down four steps on the lower deck. On our boat there were three double cabins (one quite compact) and two heads. Alternatives include various orientations of bunks and an option for two cabins and an office. With good headroom throughout, the accommodation is spacious and effective.

Pride of place goes to a stunning forecabin, with a full-length skylight and three additional opening ports, plus a deck hatch. There are also outlets for optional air-conditioning. Stowage is plentiful and varied and the 'semi-island' double bunk is 1.97m (6ft 5in) long and 1.51m (4ft 11in) wide. There is a dressing table, though the seat is low. The heads is spacious and includes a separate shower stall. Stowage is good and access

UNDER POWER

The test boat had a mismatched three-blade folding prop, reducing the effectiveness of the 110hp Yanmar, but she still managed 8.5 knots and cruised quietly and smoothly, in the mid-7s.

A bow thruster, fitted as standard, is essential - she has twin rudders and hence no prop wash to aid close quarters manoeuvring. She has a fairly wide turning circle, both ahead and astern, and a tendency to swing the stern to port until she has a knot or so of way on astern. A stern thruster is an optional extra. The engine room is under the saloon, with easy access to generator, inverters, chargers and air-conditioning units. Only the forward end is a little inaccessible.



to seacocks reasonable. The larger of the two guest cabins extends aft, partly under the saloon. It has an athwartships bunk, longer but slightly narrower than the forward one. The third cabin is somewhat smaller and the bunk is more of a large single than a double and stowage is rather limited. The second heads and shower room is accessible from the passageway or from the larger guest cabin. It is large enough and well equipped. The master heads has an electric toilet; the second heads has a manual one.

The interior is a warm mahogany colour with off-white mouldings and panels. Finish is good and she has been accurately and strongly put together. Hanse believes the Moody 45DS will be a good ocean passage-maker and has entered her in next year's ARC. She's certainly a comfortable and practical coastal cruiser and for overnight passages offshore, with a crew of two to six.

CONSTRUCTION

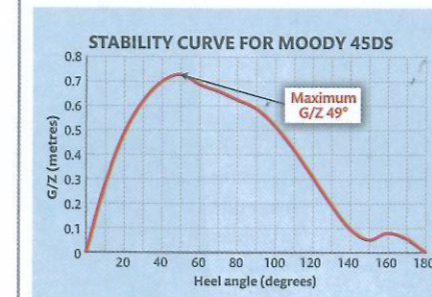
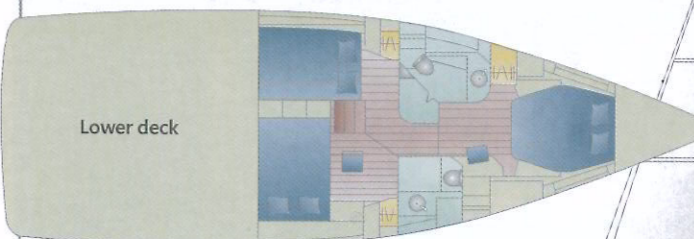
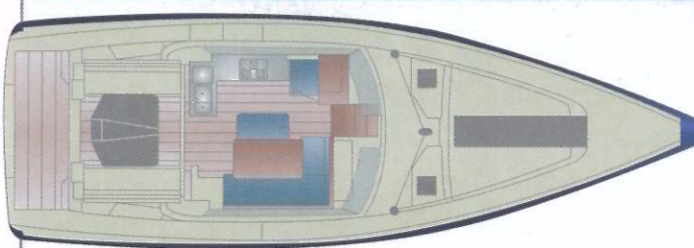
Hanse has built a highly automated production line for the Moody. The hull is a vacuum-bagged epoxy pre-preg moulding with a foam core above the waterline. A moulded backbone and ribs provide stiffening. The deck is similarly built and fitted with special thermal and sound insulation. The hull and deck join in the bulwarks and are massively built-up and bonded together.

VERDICT

The Moody 45DS, the first of a new range, is a radical departure from the norms of yacht design. But don't be put off by her looks. She sails well, handles positively and the interior is well laid out and put together. Purists may not like the 'patio doors', despite the built-in lifting washboard, or the large expanse of glass, however strong it may be. But many will love the protected cockpit, all-round saloon views and separate day/night quarters. There's a sense that this is your 'pied-a-terre' rather than a bulletproof, go-anywhere blue-water cruiser. In the pipeline are plans for a larger version of this boat and also a smaller design with a conventional layout.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

More pictures on **YM PLUS** Online supplement www.yachtingmonthly.com



FOR

- Delightful deck saloon
- Comfortable sleeping cabins
- Good handling and performance

AGAINST

- Limited offshore capability
- Debatable anchoring arrangements
- Looks will not suit purists

Price	£328,885	Displ/length ratio	175
LOA	13.72m (45ft)	Sail area/Displ ratio	18
LWL	12.93m (42ft 5in)	Ballast ratio	31%
Beam	4.57m (15ft)	RCD Category	A
Draught	1.99m (6ft 6in)	STIX	43
Displacement	13,600kg (29,982lb)	Design	Bill Dixon and Design Unlimited
Ballast	4,300kg (9,479lb)	Builder	Hanse Yachts, Germany
Sail area	100m ² (1,076sq ft)	UK Agent	Premier Yacht Sales
Engine	Yanmar 4JH4-TE 75hp diesel with conventional shaft and fixed, three-blade prop	Tel	01489 884075
Fuel	600 lit (132 gal)	Website	www.premieryachtsales.co.uk
Water	800 lit (175 gal)		

* All prices quoted in YM boat tests are inclusive of VAT and commissioning, unless otherwise stated

BELOW DECKS



ABOVE: The owner's cabin forward is flooded with light from skylights, a deck hatch and side and hull ports. ABOVE RIGHT: The spacious heads has a separate shower cubicle

ON DECK



ABOVE: Bracing in the cockpit is good. BELOW LEFT: The anchor arrangement needs attention. BELOW RIGHT: The side port step is standard

ABOVE: The saloon, chart table and galley have outstanding all-round views. RIGHT: The galley is small but well laid out, though bracing is tricky on port tack. FAR RIGHT: The chart table has throttles and autopilot controls but the seat is a little low



THE RIVALS



Nordship 43
Substantial and traditional pilothouse cruiser
Price £344,213



Wauquiez Pilot Saloon 47
High-performance cruiser with raised saloon
Price £305,222



Used Dufour Atooll 43
Walk-through cockpit/saloon, designed mainly for charter
Price guide £55,000 to £100,000