



FIRST TEST SAARE 38

Blending quality and performance with a lower price tag than you might expect, the Saare 38 challenges the established order

Words & pictures David Harding

Scandinavian boatbuilding has a reputation. Yachts from this part of the world have traditionally been built to a standard by which other yachts are judged: think of Hallberg-Rassy, Najad, Nauticat and Malö. And then we have the sportier Scandis, such as Arcona, X-Yachts, Faurby, Baltic and Sweden Yachts, known for combining performance with the sort of finish that is rarely associated with such slippery hulls.

Not all these boats have been built within Scandinavia, however. Finngulfs came from a yard in Estonia, which has been producing its own range under the Saare name. The designs are by Karl-Johan Stråhlmann, who was responsible for most of the later Finngulfs. Saare's aim is to offer affordable Scandinavian build quality and performance – and the smallest model, the 38, looks the business.



SPECIFICATIONS

MAKE
Saare

MODEL
38

PRICE FROM
£270,500 inc VAT

DESIGNER
Karl-Johan Stråhlmann

BUILDER
Saare Yachts





PERFORMANCE

Having been scanning the horizon for a suitable weather window for several weeks, we finally found one. It was the day before Storm Brian and conditions were already on the brisk side of comfortable. The breeze started at 20-25 knots, gusting to 30 by the time we were heading home.

It's always good to see how a boat copes with a little pressure so we set out under full canvas, ready to drop in a slab if necessary. The Saare took it in her stride: she's a powerful offshore yacht and clearly relished the opportunity to show what she's made of.

Despite having to sail in de-powering mode and feather our way through some of the livelier gusts, we mostly maintained speeds above 6 knots upwind. It was encouraging that she let us flatten the rig and sail in such a way that mainsail flogging was minimal, though it meant steering a fine line. If you try pointing as high as in flat water, the boat quickly stalls but sail too deep and you're struggling. It's to the boat's credit that she coped with it and, what's more, that she remained pleasantly light on the helm.

On freeing the sheets, we saw the log nudging 8 knots and found the helm still perfectly manageable. Once the wind came over the quarter, we started semi-surfing down some of the short steep waves and threw in the odd gybe without drama.

Steve Bruce, the UK distributor, says he has logged 7.2 knots close-hauled in 10 knots of true wind, which is some going for a boat of this nature.

Engine-wise, the 40hp Volvo does everything you would expect and it goes without saying that a folding prop comes as standard.

DECK LAYOUT

Even if you had no clues as to the Saare's origins you would probably guess that her roots are in Scandinavia. She has a small fixed windscreen a Malö or Hallberg-Rassy, as well as other features that set her apart from your run-of-the-mill production cruiser. These include the raised teak-capped toeboards, teak decks as standard, through-deck scuppers, chunky mooring cleats forward, aft and amidships with stainless-steel chafing strips.

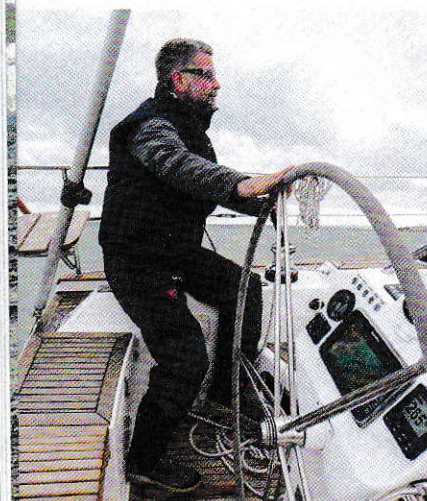
Moving forward along the wide side decks is easy. Outboard are tapered stanchions incorporating a gate amidships. Inboard, you have stainless-steel handholds on the sides of the windscreen and the running almost the entire length of the coachroof.

A German-style mainsheet is fitted. It's led aft on each side to Harken 40 self-tailers within easy reach of the wheel. Halyards and other lines from the mast pass via deck organisers into conduits in the hatch garage, emerging from its aft end to be handled by banks of Spinlock clutches and a second pair of Harken self-tailing 40s. Most of the rest of the hardware is from Seldén. Notable points on the deck include the substantial double bow roller, the anchor locker with a shelf for stowing mooring warps and a good array of dorade vents.

Moving aft to the cockpit, it's good to find that it's not overly wide: there's a leg-bracing distance between the seats and the decks run all the way to the stern so you can walk right aft without having to step into the cockpit. There's still space for a removable table if you want to dine alfresco.

Stowage is beneath the helm seats either side of a central section that can be removed for ease of boarding. Forward of the wheel to starboard is a depth locker, the matching lid to port opening up a workshop-cum-utility cabin. The finish throughout is hard to fault: mouldings are neat and robust, ins-

Big enough for steering from the coaming, the wheel still allows easy movement around the cockpit



of lockers flow-coated, lids supported by gas struts and drains covered by sensible gratings. You find no sharp corners or dry strands of glass to draw blood from unwary hands.

At the cockpit's forward end, the washboards stow conveniently against the sill and stainless handholds flank the companionway.

AT THE HELM

It's never easy to make the wheel big enough so you can helm from the coamings yet still move forward easily when you want to. It's a pretty good compromise on the Saare and, if you have a crew, you shouldn't need to hop around too much because the mainsheet winches are within easy reach. You can just about stretch to the Harken 46s for the headsail if you need to.

A good-sized pedestal allows plenty of space for a plotter, autopilot control, engine instruments and all the usual buttons and displays. Foot braces help keep you on the high side and the split backstay rarely gets in the way.

Jefa's steering linkage is smooth and the gearing about right for a well-balanced performance cruiser that doesn't need endless turns from lock to lock.

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

The Saare is more cruiser in nature than the Finngulfs. Of heavier displacement and with fuller hull sections designed to carry greater loads for long-distance sailing, she's also designed for low drag and good performance. Unlike typical modern cruisers, the 38 has a hull with rounded sections, a relatively narrow waterline, a deep canoe body and an even rocker, so the immersed shape changes little when heeled. That's one reason why she's so well balanced. Because of the low centre of gravity from the lead keel at the bottom of the deep moulded stub, she has no need for a hard turn to the bilge to add form stability: the ballast provides the drive and righting moment when you need it, as we found on our test. This is an approach that tends to produce powerful yachts with the ability to perform well throughout the wind range – hence the surprisingly good speed in light airs despite a displacement/waterline ratio of 226.

The Saare logo on the opaque doors of the illuminated drinks cabinet provides a focal point at the forward end of the saloon



The hull shape changes little when heeled; one reason she's so balanced





The fridge-freezer in the table is an option to supplement the one in the galley



Above: joinery has previously only been available in mahogany, but European oak is now an option. Unfolding the saloon table doubles its size

Right: the multifunction utility cabin can be reached from the cockpit or via the galley. It can also be heated for use as a drying locker



Sinks are near the centreline in the L-shaped galley, where you can brace yourself against the companionway steps. It's good to have low-level lighting under the bottom-hinged lockers



The well-laid-out switch panel has the welcome addition of soft back-lighting



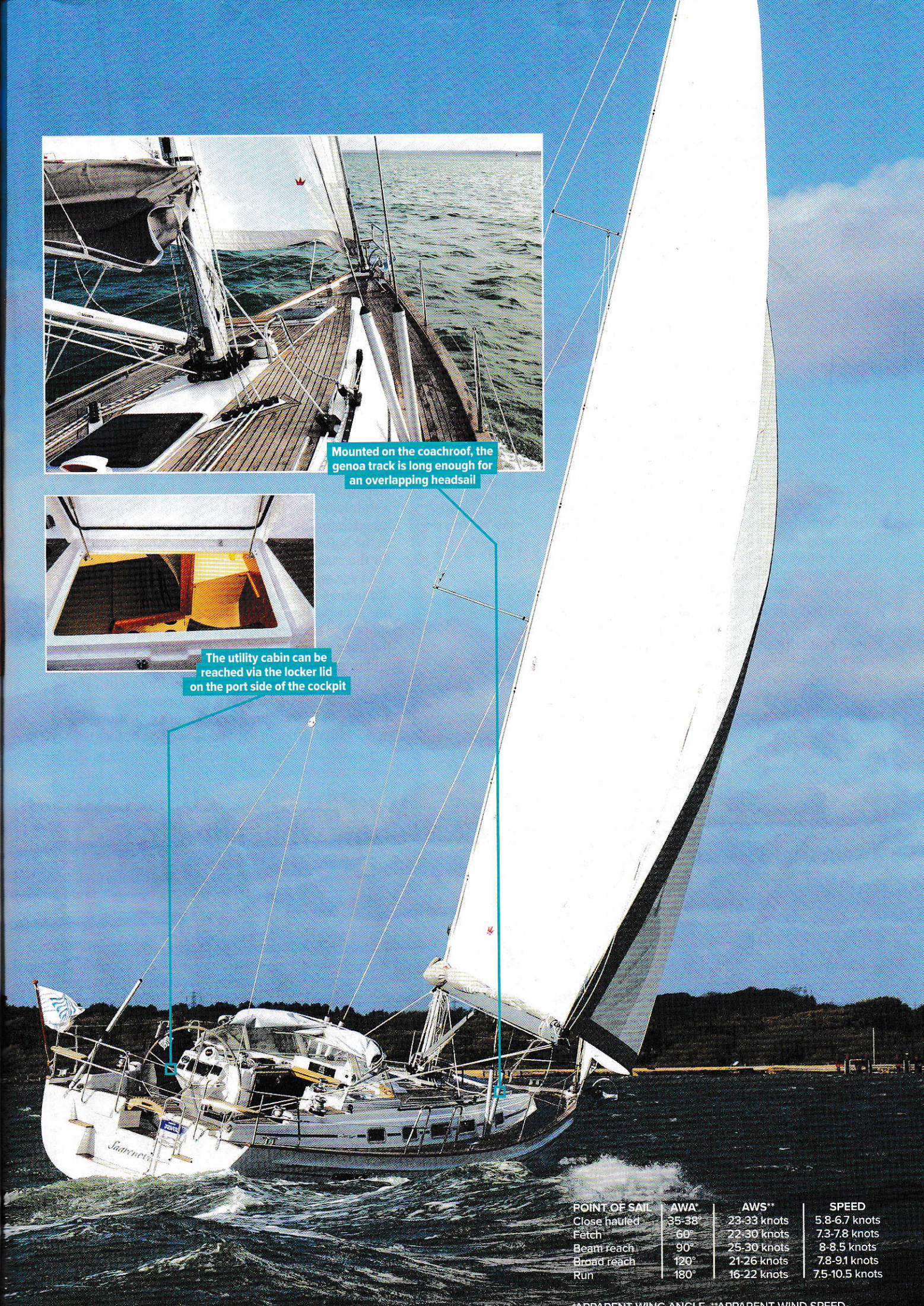
Choosing the layout with the forward heads make the forward cabin the obvious choice for the owner. It's roomy, light and with better headroom than the aft cabin. It even features a dressing mirror



Mounted on the coachroof, the genoa track is long enough for an overlapping headsail



The utility cabin can be reached via the locker lid on the port side of the cockpit



POINT OF SAIL	AWA*	AWS**	SPEED
Close hauled	35-38°	23-33 knots	5.8-6.7 knots
Fetch	60°	22-30 knots	7.3-7.8 knots
Beam reach	90°	25-30 knots	8-8.5 knots
Broad reach	120°	21-26 knots	7.8-9.1 knots
Run	180°	16-22 knots	7.5-10.5 knots

*APPARENT WING ANGLE **APPARENT WIND SPEED

RIG & SAILPLAN

A clue to the Saare's performance pedigree is her keel-stepped mast. It's a double-spreader rig from Seldén, of a high-fractional configuration and set up with a moderate amount of pre bend.

Many owners of the 38 choose a headsail with minimal overlap. Given the sail area/displacement ratio of just under 18 and the easily driven hull, it provides ample drive in most conditions. It sheets inboard of the rigging to tracks on the coachroof, which extend well aft so an overlapping genoa can be used for extra power in light airs.

ACCOMMODATION

Below decks is one of those interiors in which it's a pleasure to spend time. The woodwork has previously only been mahogany, but you can now choose European light oak as an alternative. Either way, the finish more than matches that of most Scandinavian yards. If you're looking for a reason why the Saare costs appreciably less than some of her better-known competitors, you won't find it either in the quality of the joinery or after spending an hour or two poking into corners and exploring the darker recesses.

In terms of layout, the Saare follows the tried and tested approach. Normally the heads is forward and the aft cabin to starboard; that was the arrangement on the boat we sailed and it's pictured and described here. An option is to have a larger forecabin, the heads aft and the stern cabin moved over to port.

One notable feature is the utility cabin, reached from abaft the galley or via the lid in the port cockpit seat. It's a multifunction space, not trimmed and lined like the rest of the accommodation, although it has a single berth in case you need it. The cockpit table can live in here and there's the option of a heater outlet next to a space to hang your waterproofs if you hinge up the forward end of the berth.



The fixed windscreen, along with high, wide coamings, helps to protect the crew from the worst of the elements

The unvarnished mahogany on the companionway steps gives a good grip underfoot and you have a stainless-steel handhold either side. There's also a switch for low-level night-lighting that's hardwired to the battery, so you're not left groping in the dark for the main switches.

As you would expect on a boat like this, interior mouldings are kept to a minimum. In fact, the only one is in the heads. Because of the rounded hull shape, the sole boards don't extend to the base of the bunk fronts in places and here, the inside of the hull is carpeted. It's often an indication that you're on a boat designed with sailing ability as a priority.

Down below under sail, it was reassuringly quiet and free of the creaking or groaning you often find when a boat is being worked hard. The timber rails

A powerful yacht, she relished the chance to show what she's made of



securing the bottom of the curtains below the four opening ports each side make useful handholds, supplementing the stainless-steel rail overhead to starboard. Popular options include a fridge-freezer in the saloon table to supplement the one in the galley: no need to disturb the cook when you want a cold beer. Another is the drinks cabinet, its front prominently emblazoned with Saare's Viking ship logo at the forward end of the saloon. With the opening ports each side and the multitude of through-deck vents, Saare owners should have no need to put up with musty interiors. Nor should they be disturbed by rattling under power, as the sole boards are a precise cut and fitted with rubber feet.

Given the adjoining heads on our test boat, the forward cabin would make a natural choice as the owner's cabin. It's roomy, light and airy, with a seat, plenty of stowage and a nearly-full-length mirror.

CHART TABLE

Many a well-proportioned chart table has been spoiled by the lid's prominent hinge or deep gutter. Not here: the full surface of 79cm x 58cm (2ft 7in x 1ft 11in) can be used because the hinge is flush.

Substantial well-rounded fiddles in solid mahogany border the forward and inboard edges. Stowage beneath and outboard of the table is good and a hinge-down panel gives access to the electrical breakers. The switch panel is well laid out, incorporating gauges for the watertank (under the saloon berth to starboard) and fuel (to port). It's also softly but clearly back-lit.

GALLEY

In the tradition of seagoing galleys, the Saare's has the sinks (large and small in this case) close to the centreline. You can work securely, kept in place either by a bum strap attached to the cooker's crashbar or by wedging yourself against the companionway steps.

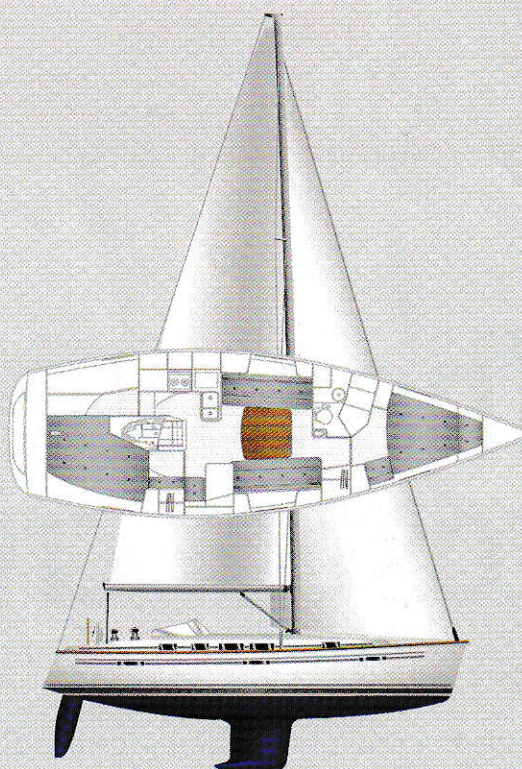
Welcome features include low-level lighting so you're not working in your own shadow, a manual tap so you're not reliant on power to get fresh water, and two rubbish bins.

Beneath the deckhead outboard are vented lockers with bottom-hinged doors that can safely be opened while at sea.

MAINTENANCE

Reaching the vital systems – mechanical, plumbing and electrical – is usually easier on a boat that, like the Saare, is built without extensive interior mouldings. The headlining panels can be removed if necessary and deck fittings are through-bolted rather than tapped into alloy plates. Electrical wiring is tinned.

To reach the engine, you hinge up the companionway steps in the usual manner. A light lets you see what you're doing and most of the routine checks can be carried out from the front. Panels can be removed aft and from the sides when the occasion demands.



SAARE 38

THE TEST VERDICT

If you're looking for a fast, comfortable and sea-kindly 38-footer that boasts the sort of finish and attention to detail for which Scandinavian yards are known, this one should be on your shortlist.

Although the Saare name is still relatively new, the Finnigulf connections count for a great deal: the yard built Finnigulfs for years, the designer drew some outstanding Finnigulfs and Saare's co-founder is the selfsame man who started Finnigulf, Stig Nordblad.

Having sailed the Saare 41 in 2012, I found the 38 to be everything a little sister should be. In fact, she seemed better balanced than the 41, though that might have been down to how the two boats were set up. The Saare 38 proves that a modern cruiser doesn't have to have chines, an ultra-wide transom and twin rudders. Moderate, tasteful and well-designed can do just as well, or perhaps even better.

WOULD SHE SUIT YOU AND YOUR CREW?

Interest in the Saare 38 has notably come from owners of other Scandinavian yachts as well as British designs such as Westerlys and Moodys. I met a couple on board at the Southampton Boat Show who had a Starlight 35. In many ways, the Saare is a modern Starlight, adhering to the same fundamental principles that simply don't date. People moving up from smaller, older yachts such as Contessa 32s are often attracted to Scandinavian designs because they embody many of the features they're looking for and have difficulty finding elsewhere.

The Saare will look after the shorthanded sailor and family crew alike, getting you where you want to go comfortably and efficiently. If this is the sort of boat you want, you're unlikely to find much to take issue with. A boat on test can only be assessed in the conditions on the day, but it's not often you come away struggling to find anything to criticise. This was one of those very rare occasions.

PROS

Powerful and well balanced

Excellent finish

Good attention to detail

CONS

Headsail winches a stretch from the helm

Winch handle pockets not provided

No pillar handholds down below

FACTS AND FIGURES

PRICE AS TESTED
£336,000 inc VAT

LOA 11.57m (37ft 11in)

HULL LENGTH
11.40m (37ft 5in)

LWL 10.16m (33ft 4in)

BEAM
3.66m (12ft 0in)

DRAUGHT
1.95m (6ft 5in)

DISPLACEMENT
8,500kg (18,739lb)

BALLAST
2,950kg (6,350lb)

BALLAST RATIO 34.7%

DISPLACEMENT / LENGTH 226

SAIL AREA 73.30m²
(789sq ft)

SA/D RATIO 17.9

DIESEL
270 litres (59 gal)

WATER
250 litres (55 gal)

ENGINE 40hp

TRANSMISSION
Saildrive

RCD CATEGORY A

DESIGNER
Karl-Johan Stråhlmann

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