

NEW BOAT TEST

24 hours aboard a Dufour 36 Performance

In her element. With the hi-tech sails set up for a soft breeze, she romped away



The Rochelais builder is revamping its Performance range and this is the first of the new breed. But is she cruiser or bruiser?

Chris Beeson went to Marseilles to find out

Looks a bit sporty,' I said to Graham Snook, our photographer, as we trundled down the dock in Marseille's Vieux Port and the Dufour 36 hove into view. 'Are you feeling fit?' She has a lean, hungry air that will make some giggle and reach for their sailing gloves, and others break out in a muck-sweat, clutching their pink gins ever tighter. Dufour has had a great decade, twice winning European Yacht of the Year for its cruising yachts (Dufour 34 in 2003, Dufour 405 in 2010) but its Performance range has yet to win any significant recognition. Will she change that, or is she too hot to handle

even for the raciest cruisers? We had 24 hours to find out.

Performance

According to my GPS we were making 6.2-6.9 knots upwind, within 30° of the 14-15 knots of apparent wind, and tacking through 90° – pretty remarkable. Dropping down onto a fetch, she notched up 6.3-6.8 knots in 10-12 knots apparent and, having launched the big black asymmetric, she beam reached at 6.4-7.2 knots in 8-10 apparent. With the sun settling into the west, we broad reached sedately at



The anchor locker, big enough to take our Delta, has a windlass

3.8-4.2 knots in 5-6 knots of apparent wind before dropping the kite and firing up the 29hp Volvo. The two-blade folding prop (two-blade fixed is standard) scooted her along at 7.1 knots at 2,500rpm and 8 knots flat-out. There was no wind on day two so we motored to the Calanque de Sormiou, which is a stunning anchorage, one of several gorgeous calanques on that stretch of coast. It's a great place to charter but it gets busy in high season.

At the helm

The Lewmar steering system feels great – sharp, tight and precise. The only seating option is outboard, which offers all-round visibility and is comfy enough, but on a longer passage you might need to stand now and then to avoid



The waters of the Calanque de Sormiou looked very inviting, but it was still too chilly to swim

has a split backstay with a cascade of blocks but there are none of the tweaky barberhaulers one might expect on a performance boat.

Deck layout

There's a removable bow roller, which fits securely enough but you need somewhere to keep it when not in use. There's a windlass with remote control in the anchor locker, leaving enough room to stow the Delta anchor we had on board. The sidedecks are wide and largely clear with teak toerails for secure footing and all the sail control lines are ducted aft to twin Lewmar 40s at the companionway. I prefer coachroof grabrails to be within reach of the cockpit but, more significantly, there's no provision for a sprayhood – the position of the hatches means it would be either vast or tiny – which is a big drawback for cruising.

In the cockpit itself there are twin Lewmar 45 primaries and two more Lewmar 40s handle the German mainsheet system. There are clutches on the mainsheet port and starboard, so the mainsheet winches can be used as secondaries. The coachroof bulkhead is sloped and comfortable enough while you're relaxing on the 1.4m (4ft 7in) cockpit seats – including the removable cockpit lockers – but outboard the 20cm (8in coamings) aren't deep enough for back support. I'm told there's provision for a cockpit table. The cockpit sole's mainsheet traveller is great for trimming but you'll need to control your gybes to avoid the mainsheet hooking something on its way across.

Aft of the wheels, the engine controls are to starboard, to port is a single-cylinder gas locker and a cockpit shower and in the starboard aft deck is a large lazarette with a rubber sealed locker lid. Aft of that is a drop-down transom, which provides a narrow bathing platform complete with telescopic boarding ladder, and reveals the liferaft locker.

Living below

Our report is qualified here, as we couldn't cook or wash on board. The boat was off to a show after our test so there's wasn't even a kettle, nor a drop of water. This left us roaming the revolutionary environs of the Vieux Port in search of a decent *bouillabaisse* and *un petit verre de blanc*, before turning in for the night, not entirely unsatisfactory. ➔

neck strain. The coamings end between the primary and mainsheet winches, so water on the sidedecks will drain into the cockpit but the helmsman should be out of the direct deluge.

The helmsman has the mainsheet, main traveller and backstay controls to hand, so you can handle gusts, but you need a crew to tack the foresail and play with all the other sail controls. Two of us handled her easily, cruising chute included, but after singlehanding the Hanse 415 last month, it felt odd having to rely on someone else. Still, this was not a boat designed for singlehanding – indeed, the removable cockpit lockers, making more space for racing crew, indicate the opposite.

Design and construction

Looking at the stats to analyse her performance credentials, she has the same power and speed potential as a Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 36, one of the most popular cruising boats ever made. The Dufour has more sail area and a longer waterline length but she displaces 680kg

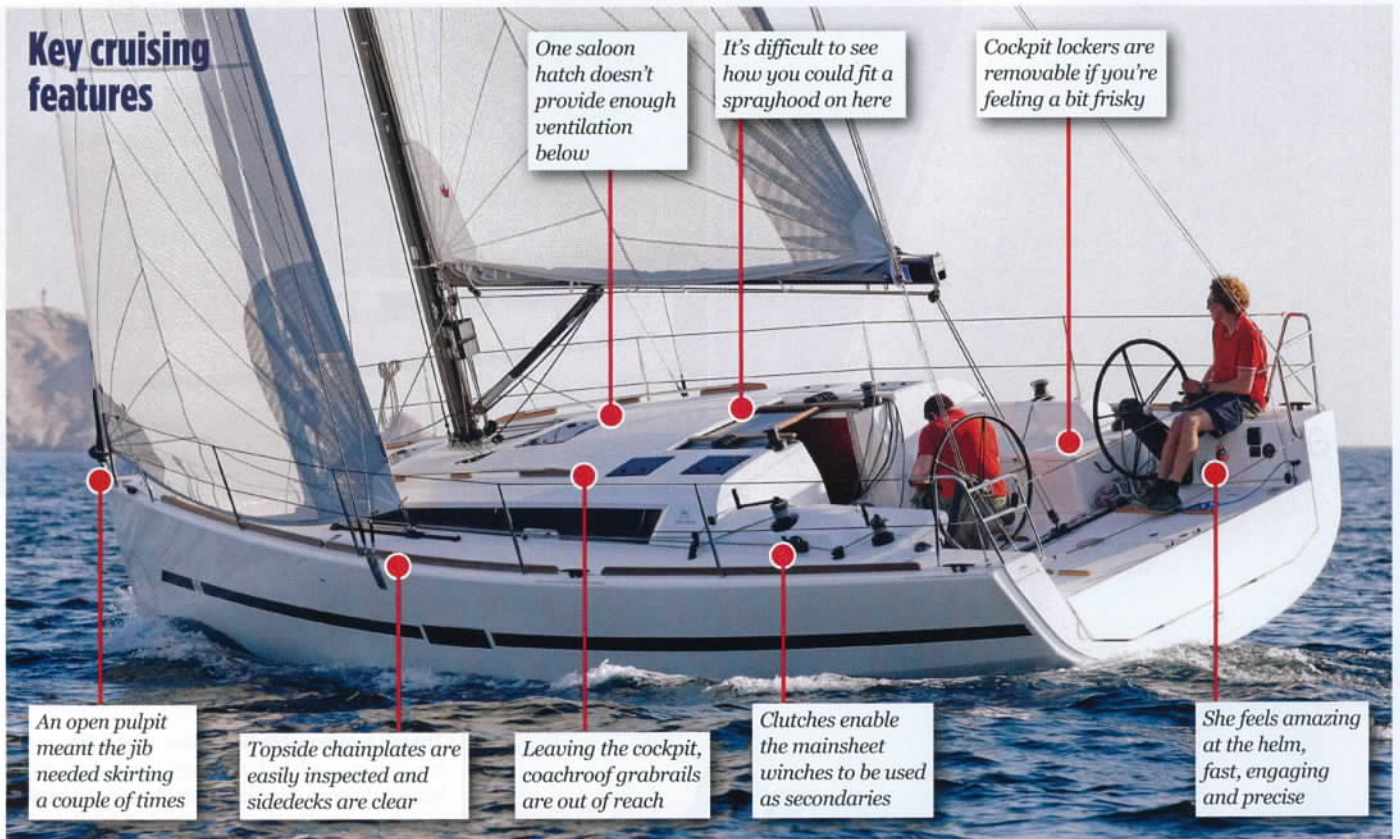
(1,500 lb) more than the Jeanneau. Quite where that weight has been put is unclear. It's not in the keel because she has a low ballast ratio, which is mitigated by her form stability and the deep, cast iron T-keel, neither is it in the interior, which is fairly Spartan, consciously lightweight. It must be in the foam-cored hull and deck. This doesn't scream 'performance' but does reassure potential owners about her structural integrity.

Sailplan

She has a modern sloop rig with a big, powerful main and a smaller, easily handled jib. The mast is a two-spreader, 9/10ths fractional aluminium Sparcraft mast, painted black. The discontinuous stainless steel wire rigging is stayed well outboard on topside chainplates, which allows for a smaller section spar. Our test boat featured the optional Facnor FlatDeck furler, which uses a webbing tape instead of a cordage furling line, which allows for a lower profile furler and a lower jib foot, and also eliminates the possibility of riding turns. She

PHOTOS: GRAHAM SNOOK

Key cruising features



One saloon hatch doesn't provide enough ventilation below

It's difficult to see how you could fit a sprayhood on here

Cockpit lockers are removable if you're feeling a bit frisky

An open pulpit meant the jib needed skirting a couple of times

Topside chainplates are easily inspected and sidedecks are clear

Leaving the cockpit, coachroof grabrails are out of reach

Clutches enable the mainsheet winches to be used as secondaries

She feels amazing at the helm, fast, engaging and precise

Down below, there's 1.89m (6ft 2in) headroom throughout. The saloon seats are 1.93m x 0.66m (6ft 4in x 2ft 1in), each with a 100-litre water tank beneath, which keeps weight out of the ends. There's 12cm (5in) of stowage between the tanks and the seating, enclosed by a mesh bag with zip access. We like the switch at the chart table that pumps water from the leeward tank to the windward, turning your drinking water into ballast. The saloon table's port leaf unbolts, lifts off and bolts in level with the port settee to create a 1.93m x 1.03m (6ft 4in x 4ft 6in) double berth.

Shelves outboard of the settees have optional fabric covers with zip access – another lightweight touch but not one that lends itself to useful stowage. Two 17cm (6in) deep lockers below the companionway sole are sealed off from the bilge but domestic stowage in general is limited. The hull ports, though a little low for seated sight lines, let in some light but there's just the one opening hatch in the saloon, so she could be a bit muggy below in warmer climes.

The forecabin has 1.83m (6ft) headroom and stowage is quite good and the forward hatch with Oceanair blind delivers good ventilation. Below the 2m (6ft 6in) double berth, there's a



The forward bulkhead's double doors create a great impression of space

large stowage space and the two-part hinged berth base folds up for access. Port aft there's 1.92m (6ft 3in) headroom and a 2m x 1.48m (6ft 6in x 4ft 10in) double berth but the engine bay narrows it to 1.1m (3ft 6in) at its narrowest. In cooler weather, the calorifier below the berth acts like an electric blanket when the engine's been running. In summer, that might not be welcome. There's a split hanging and shelved locker outboard but you'd struggle to unpack a couple's kit for a week's cruise. At least there are two opening hatches, into coachroof and cockpit, to get some air around the cabin.

Chart table

There's an almanac locker outboard aft and room for a flush-mounted plotter forward. The Corian chart table top lifts and drops, like a stove cover, for laptop navigation. Two panels forward of that invert to reveal grooves and panels to secure pens, mobiles and such. There's stowage below the seat.

Galley

The opening hatch above provides ventilation and light during the day, but at night, the only light is above the sink, which is not much use for peering into a pot. There are lockers outboard, bottom-hinged with gas struts, and removable fids for easier cleaning. Bin lockers outboard have tubs that lift out for cleaning, and the same system works well in the top-loading fridge. There's a bottle locker just forward of the two-burner stove, some stowage below it, along with the gas shut-off valve, and a cutlery drawer below the twin sinks that also unbolts for cleaning. Outboard is a big sliding bin with a recycling section, which is handy.

Heads

Headroom is a decent 1.9m (6ft 3in) and there's an opening hatch for ventilation. The white moulding and the mirrors outboard ensure the heads is bright and easy to clean, and the hand shower will ensure you are too. On the downside, the forward of the two mirrored panels is top-hinged, so getting at its contents is not easy and a chap is likely to bang his head on the cockpit moulding while having a pee.

On the aft bulkhead is a panel that – yes – unbolts to reveal a vast stowage space in the starboard quarter, which could double as another cabin in extremis, or a systems room. However it's used, it will need organisation.

Maintenance

Seacocks are well labelled and easily accessible. Panels in the heads and aft cabin that reveal much of the engine, but not all. You can't inspect all the keelbolts. ▲

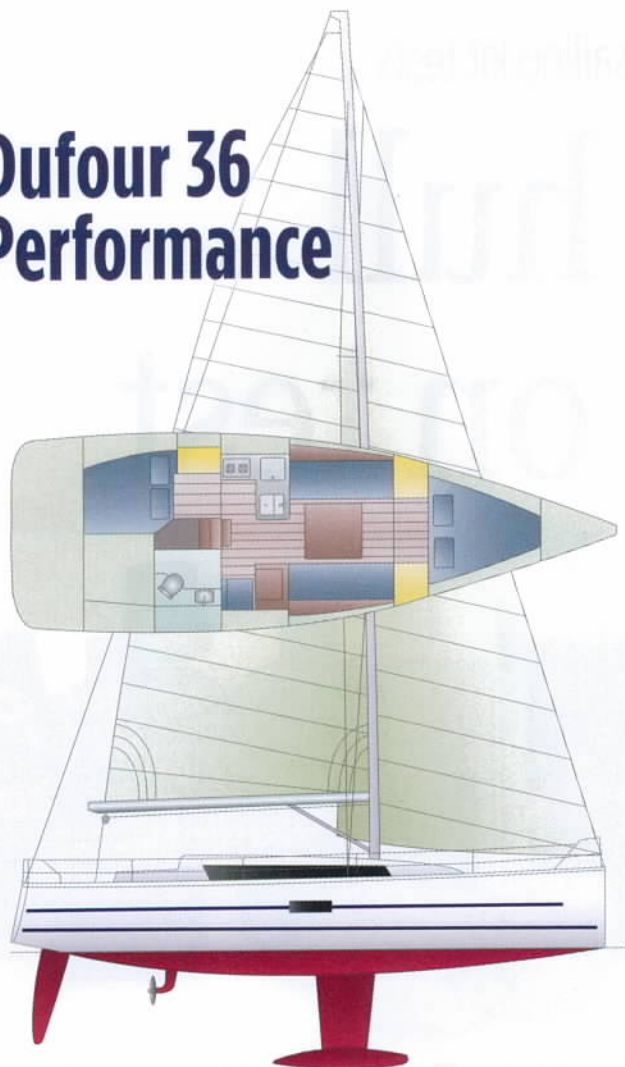
WATCH THE VIDEO

Scan this QR code with your smartphone or follow the link below on your computer to view a video of highlights from our day on the boat PLUS a gallery of extra pictures www.yachtingmonthly.com/dufour36 See p8 for QR code instructions



Dufour 36 Performance

ARTWORK: MAXINE HEATH



FACTS AND FIGURES

- Price around £140,000
- LOA 11m (36ft)
- LWL 10.2m (33ft 5in)
- Beam 3.6m (11ft 10in)
- Draught 2.2m (7ft 3in)
- Displacement 6,400kg (14,109 lb)
- Ballast 1,900kg (4,198 lb)
- Sail area 69.4m² (747sq ft)
- Engine 30hp
- Diesel 90 lit (19.8 gal)
- Water 200 lit (44 gal)
- D/L ratio 168
- SA/D ratio 20.47
- Ballast ratio (%) 30
- RCD Category A
- STIX 38.6
- Designer Umberto Felci
- Builder Dufour Yachts
- UK dealer See website
- Web www.dufour-yachts.com



The chart table is a good size and features an inclining seat



A forecabin divider separates sails for racers, or warring children



No light above the stove but she's cleverly set up for easy cleaning

OUR VERDICT ON THE BOAT

What's she like to sail?

On the day we took her out she felt fabulous, conditions couldn't have been better for her. With 6-10 knots wheezing asthmatically out of the south, her sportiness, a potential con in a bigger breeze, became a considerable pro. In a heavier boat, we would be nailed to the surface or burning diesel, but the 14,110 lb Dufour positively scampered off upwind, skimming across the smooth sea with her hi-tech sails judiciously tweaked. OK, she had loft-fresh sails, was unloaded, had empty water tanks and the conditions played to her strengths, but she was easy to trim and we were soon nudging the theoretical limits of the hull's performance. The helm felt alive and she obeyed the slightest tweak of the wheel. Indeed, I was having so much fun that I felt positively encouraged to tweak the traveller and backstay, sensing the difference slight adjustments made.

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to trim outhaul and halyard tension from the helm but my crew was similarly switched on and tweaked for me. In these conditions she's a really engaging boat to sail – if you like to get engaged with sailing. If not, just set her up right and you'll get where you're going quickly. As the wind picks up, you'll need more than the two reefs that the boom is designed to handle and she'll be wet on deck upwind, but off the wind she'll be an absolute hoot.

What's she like in port and at anchor?

It doesn't look like any thought was given to the installation of a sprayhood. There's probably room for a scuttle above the main hatch but even that's not going to offer the crew much shelter. The removable bow roller worked well when we used it, but it might take a few anxious hours in a breezy anchorage for me to relax completely about its strength.

Down below, she's comfortable enough and I slept very well in the forward cabin, but the finish is just a touch basic. Most of the joinery edges are unfinished, reminiscent of a large jigsaw, and the veneer looks a little like plastic, so she doesn't create any sense of prestige below.

All this weight saving may be in line with her performance motif but it doesn't do much for her cruising credentials. One opening hatch in the saloon isn't enough for a 36-footer, not having a light above the stove seems an obvious oversight, and what's with all the bolts? Clearly she's not intended to deliver luxury, that's not her *raison d'être*, but the Bénéteau First 35, another club racer with a proven track record, makes a better impression below deck.

Would she suit you and your crew?

She's an immensely rewarding boat to sail if you enjoy tweaking various sail controls and 'feeling' at the wheel. If you're a dinghy sailor looking to trade up to yachting, she'll make you feel at home. Fast passage times are guaranteed. Her credentials as a club racer remain to be seen – I'm told she has a similar rating to the First 35 – and in that environment, the ability to set a symmetric spinnaker might be useful, but I'm sure the hardware can be retrofitted.

You can't be too house-proud if you race her, because with all those shackles and D-rings swinging about below after sail changes, the joinery will take a beating and I don't think she would wear it well. If you're looking for fun, the Elan 350, which is also fairly thrifty below decks, should be on your list, too. If you're looking for results, wait and see how she fares against the First 35.

Would she suit your style of sailing?

CREEK CRAWLING



COASTAL PORT-HOPPING



OFFSHORE PASSAGE-MAKING



TRADE WIND VOYAGING



HIGH-LATITUDE ADVENTURE

