



# More than just a

Hanse's new 31-footer maintains a sporty tradition, says **David Harding**

**I**n 1994, a slim-hulled 29-footer of Scandinavian origin was shown at the Southampton Boat Show. She was the Hanse 291, and the most notable feature was her price: she cost less than £30,000. She was fast, simple – perhaps a tad rough in places – and cheap.

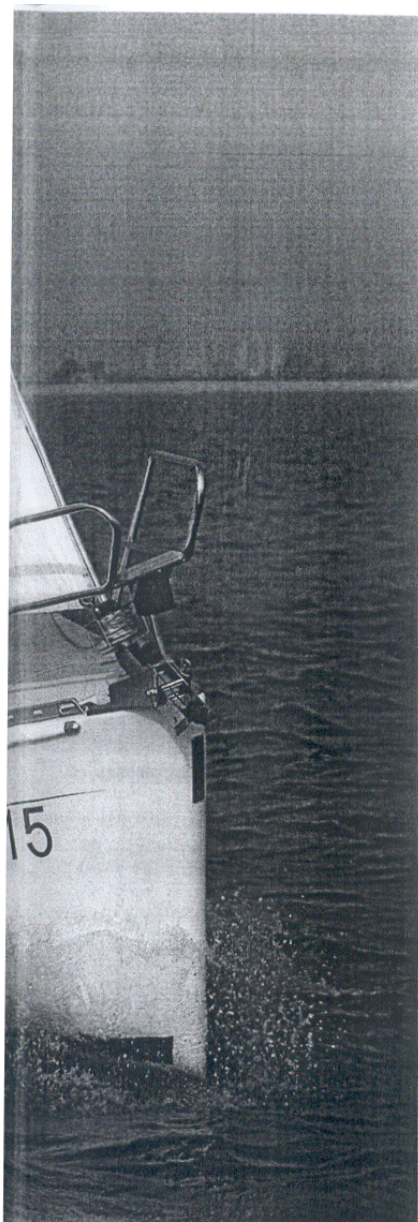
Her builder, Michael Schmidt, had bought a small boatyard in Greifswald on the Baltic Coast of what had, until recently, been East Germany. He got his new business up and

running by acquiring the moulds of discontinued boats and putting them back into production. The Hanse 291, for example, had started life as the Aphrodite 29, built by Rex Marin in Sweden. She was followed by the 331 – formerly the Finngulf 33, from Finland – and the 400, which had been built in Denmark as the Bianca 42.

Despite coming from three builders in three different countries, the boats had much in common. They were all unmistakably Scandinavian, with narrow, easily

driven hulls and tall, fractional rigs. They were all highly regarded for their sailing qualities. And, with the help of government grants following the reunification of Germany, they were all re-launched under the Hanse banner at remarkably low prices.

The origins of the yard might, perhaps, seem irrelevant to anyone looking at a new Hanse today, but they explain why the current range is as it is. Schmidt wanted to build boats that sailed well – that's why he



Downwind, the self-tacking headsail needs to be over-sheeted to retain drive

# pretty price?

PRICE: £48,490 (inc. VAT & delivery, exc. launch and commissioning)

chose the Aphrodite, Finnulf and Bianca.

He also wanted to build them inexpensively, which is why he bought the Greifswald yard. While many of his compatriots were looking to set up in Poland in order to take advantage of cheap labour, Schmidt knew that government funding would be available to help business development in eastern Germany after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Another advantage of Greifswald was that the town had a long association with boats and the sea.

## Moving forward

A decade later, the boats leaving the Hanse factory are markedly different from their predecessors – except for the 300, which is a modified version of the 291. But the new models are still fast and inexpensive. When Schmidt believed that the 331 and 400 had run their time, he commissioned a new range from Judel and Vrolijk, the German team responsible for a number of Whitbread 60s and Admiral's Cuppers among other speedsters. As a top racing

sailor who led his country's Admiral's Cup team to victory in 1985, he had no interest in boats that didn't perform.

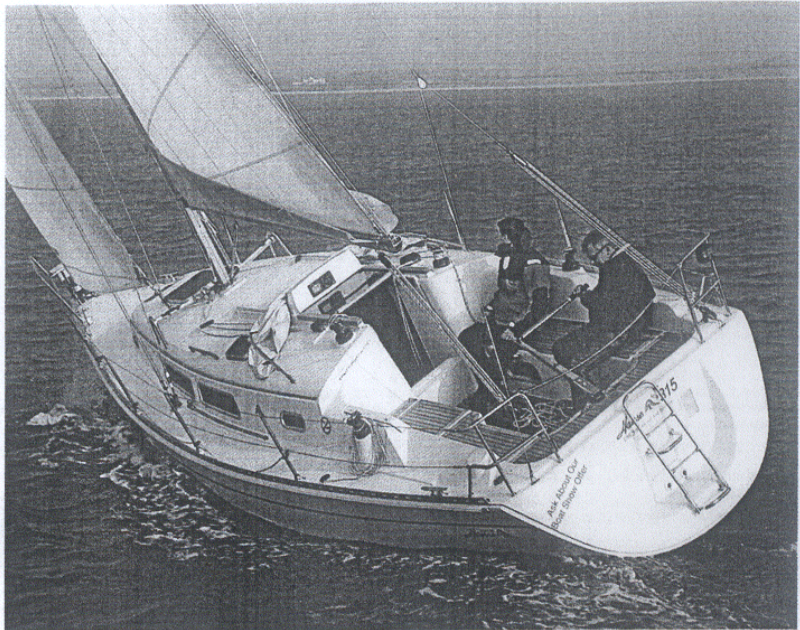
At the same time, he wanted to avoid frightening the cruising sailor: he was aiming to produce robust, frill-free cruisers, but to give them a sportier edge than the Bavarias, Jeanneau Sun Odysseys and Bénéteau Oceanises.

The biggest problem with the old Scandinavian designs was lack of space down below: they had long overhangs, fine

## PBO new boat test Hanse 315

ends and moderate beam. By contrast, Judel and Vrolijk's new Hanse hulls reflect the modern trend towards shorter ends, higher freeboard and greater beam carried further aft. With the help of a bulbed keel to lower the centre of gravity, this combination should produce even better all-round performance, together with greater internal volume. Critics might point out that factors such as the Hanses' relatively fine entries and narrow waterlines make them less roomy than some of their more amply proportioned competitors, but that's where designers choose their compromise between space and pace. Although the 315 may not be as roomy as the similarly priced Bavaria 32, I'd be surprised if she didn't run rings around her.

Whether the new, chunkier Hanses are as enjoyable to sail as their older stablemates is another question. I never tested the 331, which the 315 effectively replaces, but the 291 is one of my favourite boats of all time and I suspect her bigger sister would have cast a similar spell. The newcomer I was about to sail, with as much space in her overall length of 31ft (9.45m) as her predecessor fitted into a hull



The cockpit is deep and well protected. Note the angle of the coamings abaft the winches

### DOWN BELOW

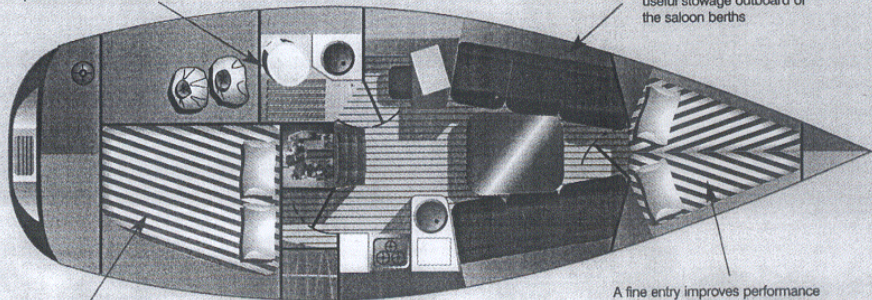
## Bright, white and shiny

**T**he finish of Hanses below decks has advanced in leaps and bounds since the early days. Then, it was roughly cut plywood, unsealed endgrain and door furniture that threatened to come away in your hand. Now, you're faced with a pleasing combination of white bulkheads, pale, vinyl-covered headlining panels and red-stained mahogany finished with 16 coats of shiny acrylic varnish.

In keeping with her role as a fast passage-maker, the 315 has a conventional layout with settee berths each side in the saloon (both over 6ft 2in/1.88m long), the chart table to port and the galley to starboard. Her predecessor, the 311, had an enormously long cockpit locker which pushed the heads compartment forward to opposite the galley. The only way to fit in a chart table was to attach it to the heads bulkhead, so the navigator had to perch on the end of the port settee if he wanted to sit down.

On the 315, the heads has moved aft but still opens into an impressively big locker. The

The heads has moved aft from its position on the Hanse 311



Shelves and lockers provide useful stowage outboard of the saloon berths

The after cabin berth is 6ft 5in (1.95m) long and 5ft 4in (1.63m) wide

A fine entry improves performance but limits space in the forecabin

space further forward has been used for a larger and more substantial forward-facing chart table with its own seat. Although this rearrangement down below is the only difference between the 315 and the 311, it had a dramatic effect in opening up the interior and was considered enough to justify a change of name. I can understand why.

Unlike many of her competitors, the Hanse uses the space above and outboard of the backrests in the saloon for shelves and lockers rather than wasting it to make the boat

look bigger. But under-bunk space is limited by the water tank to starboard and the single battery to port. Tanks for both water and fuel – the latter living under the double berth in the after cabin – are made from stainless steel and have bolt-on inspection hatches in the top but, being fitted before the interior moulding, would be difficult to remove without structural surgery.

Similarly, the moulding looks as though it would present problems when the time comes to change the saildrive gaiter.

The gearbox needs to be lifted and moved back several inches for the leg to be withdrawn and the gaiter removed, and I don't reckon there's enough room. Cutting away part of the moulding should have no effect on structural integrity, but it would be a messy job. Volvo still recommends changing the gaiter every seven years.

Another problem I found is more easily solved. The floorboards – made from a hard-wearing plastic laminate – are screwed down so as not to squeak against the tray

2ft (0.61m) longer, had a lot to live up to.

Once aboard and waiting for the tiller extension to be fitted (how could a boat be tested without one?), I had a quick look around the deck. Like her larger sisters, the 315 comes with a Pfeiffer self-tacking jib track as standard. Tracks and cars for an overlapping headsail are provided, too, though they looked on the small side.

The rest of the hardware on the test boat came from several manufacturers including Lewmar, Gebo, Holt and Spinlock. Sparcraft supplied the double-spreader rig which, compared with an equivalent from Seldén, struck me as crudely finished.

### Sailing in style

Setting sail revealed an area where the builders had certainly saved money. The main and self-tacker, both of indifferent shape, were made from loosely woven cloth by East Sails in Germany and would have done the boat no justice. I hate to think what they will look like after a season's use.

No doubt the credit for non-supply of the standard sails would be minimal, but I'd order the boat without them and go to a

different sailmaker. The fully battened mainsail even came with plain plastic slides on the luff instead of roller cars. Not surprisingly, it had to be hauled down when the halyard was released.

But enough criticism for now. Though handicapped by her board-flat mainsail, the Hanse slipped along nicely in flat water and a wind that gusted from 10 to 18 knots. She felt far more sure-footed and purposeful than some of her beamier, shallow-draft and more lightly ballasted competitors, made a little over 5 knots to windward, tacked through about 75° on the compass and quickly picked up to 6.5 knots when eased away on to a beam reach.

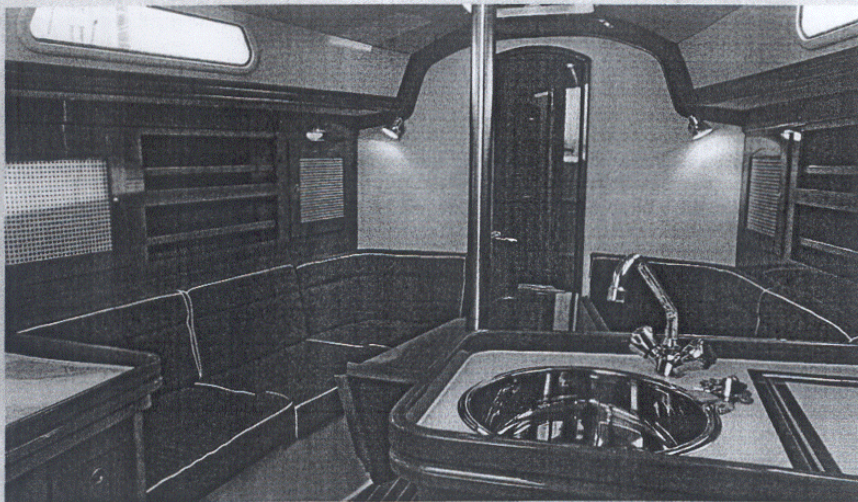
Another positive trait was her ability to hold her course when over-pressed, the deep rudder keeping her on track until the toerail was awash. Getting her to heel that far took some doing, thanks to the righting moment exerted by the bulbed, 5ft 9in (1.75m) fin, and when the rudder eventually stalled, she rounded up remarkably gently.

Still in a positive vein, I thoroughly approved of the angled coamings abaft the primary winches. They give the helmsman

a comfortable perch – provided, of course, you have a tiller extension. If I were to criticise anything about her sailing qualities, it would be the rudder balance. To my mind, the blade was under-balanced, resulting in a firm pull on the tiller the whole time. Combined with a modest but acceptable amount of weather helm, it made sailing her less relaxing than it might have been.

My other complaints would be more easily addressed. For a start, I'd want a mainsheet traveller. The track – a standard option – is designed to fit immediately abaft the locker, though it would leave little space for the helmsman to move across the boat when tacking except by hopping over the tiller.

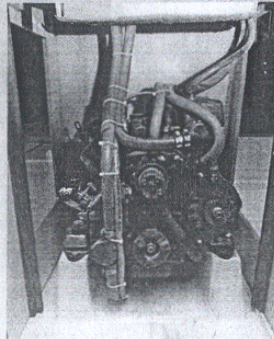
I would also increase the purchases on the kicker and backstay, but such jobs are relatively simple. The important point to make is that the Hanse's handling qualities place her in a different league from some of the boats to which she might be compared by first-time buyers attracted principally by the price: she's stiff, reasonably quick, and easy to sail. I suspect that she would be a powerful performer in heavy weather. ▣



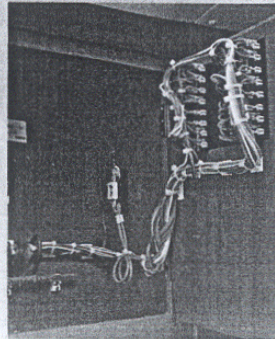
White bulkheads and shiny, red-stained mahogany give the Hanse a distinctive feel down below



A door opens from the heads into the cockpit locker



Engine access is good, but the gearbox is harder to reach



The switch panel hinges open and is neatly laid out

moulding. Small sections can be lifted up over the transducers, but getting at the strum boxes for the two bilge pumps would entail unscrewing and lifting out the large sections of floorboard at the foot of the companionway – not something you'd fancy doing if you were pumping in an emergency and the strum boxes became clogged. Urgent memo to Hanse factory: more lift-up panels, please.

### Quiet thinking

Rounding off the criticism for now, I couldn't help thinking that some engine insulation would be a good idea. And I noticed water dribbling into the shallow tray beneath the engine from the anti-siphon valve in the raw water cooling pipe. Apparently the valve's failure to close properly is a problem recognised by Volvo, which is why spares are provided.

These issues apart, I liked the Hanse's interior. The doors are made of foam sandwich, which is a sensible idea because any weight saved above the centre of gravity improves stability. I was also pleased to see removable headlining panels, a tidy-looking switch panel that hinged open and plenty of conduits for wiring.

## PBO new boat test Hanse 315

HANSE 315 SPECIFICATION	
<b>LOA</b>	31ft 0in (9.45m)
<b>LWL</b>	26ft 6in (8.07m)
<b>Beam</b>	3.20m (10ft 6in)
<b>Draft</b> – deep fin	5ft 9in (1.75m)
– shallow fin	4ft 7in (1.40m)
<b>Displacement</b>	8,509lb (3,860kg)
<b>Ballast</b>	2,755lb (1,250kg)
<b>Sail area</b> (main and 100% foretriangle)	536sq ft (49.80sq m)
<b>Engine</b>	18hp Volvo 2020 diesel saildrive
<b>Headroom</b>	6ft 2in (1.88m)
<b>RCD category</b>	A
<b>Angle of vanishing stability</b>	122°
<b>Maximum righting moment</b>	0.77m at 53°
<b>Designer</b>	Judel & Vrolijk
<b>Builder</b>	Yachtzentrum Griefswald

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The long coachroof gives over 6ft (1.83m) headroom throughout the saloon

Wheel steering is an option

A shallow fin is an alternative to the standard deep keel

Righting moment (kpc-m)

Heel angle (degrees)

The GZ curve shows a vanishing angle of 122° and a maximum righting arm of 0.77m at 53°

Plenty of room in the anchor locker, but no plinth for a windlass

### A test of temperament

In less than 12 knots of wind, on the other hand, the self-tacking jib would leave her under-powered in anything of a seaway – even with a fuller-cut mainsail. The other major problem with self-tackers is that a large part of the sail loses drive as soon as you bear away and ease the sheet a few inches; for efficiency on a reach, you need a barber-auler taken down to the toerail to control the twist. You might also want to lead a line aft for heaving to, though moving the leeward plunger stop up the track achieves the same effect if you don't mind going forward.

When spinning in tight circles, of course, you can ignore the jib entirely. And the Hanse spins more tightly than most boats. She performs some interesting pirouettes when left to her own devices, too. From hard on the wind, she tacked, bore away and gybed to complete the circle, tacked again, stopped just short of a second gybe and then settled into a figure-of-eight routine, tacking every 20 yards or so. She wouldn't stop and wait if you fell overboard when single-handing, but neither would she be likely to sail off over the horizon.

Since ease of handling with a small crew is one of the Hanse's selling points, I thought I should try a few other routines, such as dropping in a reef. Sparcraft eschews complexities like back-to-back blocks in the boom, instead preferring to use a continuous single-line system. It worked, bringing the luff down first, although the position of the two sets of reef points meant there

was little sail left when the second slab was taken in. When ordering alternative sails, it may be an idea to ask for three sets of points.

Poking around in the cockpit as we reached back home, I was pleased to find a locker across the full width of the stern and a bigger one to port, which housed the holding and calorifier tanks and could also be entered via a door from the heads. Between them, these full-depth caverns should swallow most of the kit you'd be likely to carry. Many modern cruisers have so little stowage space that the fenders end up dangling over the stern.

The only thing I didn't like was the valley in the pipes from the cockpit drains; the water sitting in the bottom would stop any leaking gas from finding its way overboard.



The Hanse performed well to windward, but would benefit from better sails

### Logical thinking

While some aspects of the Hanse 315 could, perhaps, do with a little more thought, or more money being spent on them, the builders have incorporated some neat features. Stowage for the washboard is one example: it sits on top of the sliding hatch and disappears under the garage. You would just need to find somewhere else to keep it with the hatch pulled shut.

As for handling under power, you couldn't ask for better manoeuvrability. Few boats are easier to wriggle into and out of tight spaces: the Hanse spins on a sixpence and goes exactly where you point her in astern. In ahead, the 19hp Volvo 2020 saildrive turning a fixed, two-bladed propeller, pushes her along at about 6.5 knots with the throttle fully open (3,400rpm). But if you let go of the tiller, she'll veer off sharply even at lower speeds.

So, does she maintain the spirit of the original Hanses? To a large extent, yes. She's one of the relatively small number of boats designed for cruising yet satisfying to sail for those who appreciate good performance and crisp handling. She doesn't have the good looks or addictive character of her smaller sister, but you can't expect that in every boat. The baby Hanse belongs to a very select group indeed. Nonetheless, if I had a budget of £50,000 and was offered a 315 with a little more balance on the rudder, some upgraded hardware, a set of decent sails and a few mods down below, I might be tempted.

**STOP PRESS** Hanse has just announced that boats sold in the UK are now being fitted with Doyle Sails from the loft in Southampton