

Space invader

Think of a 32-footer and you might conjure up a Contessa. But, as Chris Beeson discovers, there's a new British kid on the 10-metre block - and she's thinking big

This boat is massive. Just huge. A marvel of dimension-dazzling proportions. If you step off a Contessa 32 and onto the Southerly 32, stand in the cockpit and you'll feel like a townie in the country, overwhelmed by space. You may feel compelled to step below, in search of familiar confines, but you'll emerge seconds later, beaded with agoraphobic sweat and demanding a tape measure. This can't be a 32-footer, can it?

Southerly has jumped designer Stephen Jones through every possible hoop to make use of every cubic inch of volume. The

SOUTHERLY 32

'Step below and you'll emerge seconds later, beaded in agoraphobic sweat, demanding a tape measure'

ON TEST
THIS MONTH

P92 **NEW BOATS**
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plumb bow, the reverse counter transom, the near-12ft beam carried right the way aft, the pilothouse, coachroof and coaming that – barring a few feet at the bow – run the length of the boat. The Contessa would most likely win a beauty contest, but if you spend more time on board than off, maybe that's not as important as space below?

UNDER SAIL

Outside Chichester Harbour, there wasn't much wind but inside the entrance, the Thorney and Emsworth Channels funnelled a brisk 13 to 17-knot northerly from the South Downs. She

settled easily into a wide, easy groove around 35° off the wind, making 5-5.7 knots. Tacking was simplicity itself – helm down, tack through 95° true, speed drops to around 4 knots then she accelerates – surprisingly easily for a boat that displaces more than a Vancouver 32.

The huge beam means she heels a fair bit but because she has twin rudders, there's no weather helm. The steering felt fairly stiff, to the point where you could take your hands off the wheel upwind and the Whitlock Cobra chain-to-rod steering wouldn't budge. She might creep slightly to windward in a gust but otherwise she could be left to her own devices – remarkable in a boat

with this much beam aft. We tried hauling the boom above the centreline to induce weather helm but it was still barely discernible.

She beam-reached nimbly, making 5.5-6.9 knots in 14-17 knots of true wind, responding quickly to changes in the breeze. Further offwind she glided along on a broad reach at 4.8-6.4 knots. Ben, the agent from Northshore, explained how the lifting keel serves just as a centreboard does on a dinghy – all the way down while beating, halfway up for beam-reaching and up almost completely downwind. Unfortunately, there wasn't a bowsprit onboard so we couldn't fly the gennaker, which was a →

Designer Stephen Jones (bearded, sitting to windward) was on board for YM's test session in Chichester Harbour



P96 AIS GROUP TEST

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'The cockpit suggests very easy management of the simple sailplan, and it's all but free of lines'

shame because, with her wide stern, twin rudders and flat underwater sections, she'd fly.

ON DECK

There's an asymmetric double bow roller with the main anchor to starboard and a snubbing or tripping line roller to port. There is a detachable stainless steel bowsprit that fits on the bow roller, to which a cruising chute can be tacked. The toerails are reassuringly chunky – 3in deep with a

UNDER POWER

Motoring down from Itchenor to Hayling Island Sailing Club, Ben from Northshore pointed out how little she dragged her stern, in part due to the enormous beam and in part to the near-horizontal propshaft. Because the engine is mounted so far below the cabin sole, engine access isn't as easy as it could be but you can reach everything you need. She cruises at 2,800rpm and her 29hp Yanmar engine and three-blade feathering prop ease her along at 6.4 knots. For the turning test, I expected her to struggle without the bow thruster as the prop is almost between the two angled rudders. Going forward, she turned in 1½ boat lengths, going aft she turned eventually. In her defence, it was fairly windy and she's not short of windage, and why would you fit a bow thruster if you're not going to use it?



3in teak cap – but there's only one half-inch drain well aft in each scupper.

The anti-slip surface on deck is top-notch and there's an easy, toe-friendly path along the sidedecks with good hand-holds between cockpit and shrouds. Chainplates are bolted to the coachroof, for easy inspection, and tank-filling caps are well placed, out of the scuppers. The cruising chute halyard is handled at the mast, fitted with a winch for the purpose, but all other lines are ducted aft. There are two banks of clutches either side of the companionway, just forward of a pair of halyard winches – the only two in the cockpit.

The cockpit layout suggests very easy management of the simple sailplan and a cockpit all but free of lines. The one exception to this is the cruising chute. If you're flying it on port tack, you'll need to secure the mainsheet on its clutch or cross-winch it over the companionway to the starboard winch, leaving the port one free for the sheet. Primary winches are an optional extra.

The helm position is good – great sight lines, good seating and there's no problem leaning over the wheel to get at the throttle. It would be nice to sit outboard and lean against the pushpit but with this much beam in the stern, you'd need a huge wheel. Even with one this size, you need to step onto the cockpit seating to get forward.

That aside, it's a comfortable place to be – deep, safe, with good bracing and comfy coamings to lean or sit on. There's a pocket built into the port coaming with a large wooden fiddle,

perfect for stowing the winch handle, and a sole-deep cockpit locker to starboard.

The gas locker is under the port helm seat and under the starboard seat is a huge lazarette that also houses the fuel tank. The central seat unlatches and drops, allowing the transom gate to open out onto a bathing ledge with a ladder. A cockpit table attaches to the binnacle and the bridgedeck provides another place at the table.

BELOW DECKS

Again, the amount of space and natural light is absolutely remarkable for a boat of this size, and the space is used very cleverly. Stepping down from the bridgedeck, you'll find 6ft headroom at the bottom of the companionway and views out through the pilothouse windows. To port, the galley has the same headroom and views, great bracing on both tacks, a dedicated light and an opening port above the single 6in-deep sink. Storage is good and there's a well-insulated stainless steel fridge, though possibly a bit deep at over 2ft, an excellent two-burner stove and the calorifier is under the sole. Work space is good but it's at the expense of a second sink. To starboard, raised 9in to make the most of

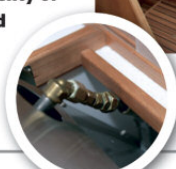
Photos: Graham Snook

»» BELOW DECKS



For a 32-footer, the size of the saloon beggars belief

ABOVE: Huge pilothouse windows drench the saloon with light and deliver views that reinforce the sense of space. RIGHT: Plenty of storage and good bracing in the galley but the gas fitting fouls on starboard



RIGHT: The chart table is great, everything to hand and wonderful views. ABOVE: the 'cosy' forecabin



ABOVE: The double berth in the aft cabin is nearly square and feels huge. Good light, plenty of locker space and the rudder stock tube makes a feature. INSET: The en suite heads with shower



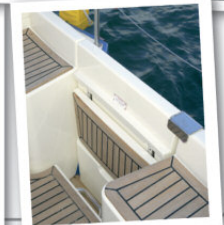
»» ON DECK



LEFT: Chainplates are easily accessible for inspection and maintenance. INSET: To lift the keel, simply push the rocker switch



BELOW: The transom gate won't open with the seat up – an entirely accidental safety feature' said the boat's designer Stephen Jones



the view, is a first-class navigation station. It's short of full chart size but with the instrument pod is straight ahead, just below eye level, with more instrument space outboard. Below the seat there's a locker and below that, built into the step, is the battery switch panel. The main switch panel is inboard on the nav station bulkhead.

Down a 4in step is the saloon with 6ft 4in headroom and a pair of 6ft 4in settee berths – add a lee cloth and they become seaberths. The settees seat six comfortably with views through eye-level hull ports. The large, two-leaved table hides the keel casing. There's a screw panel in the table and a watertight hatch in the casing for maintenance. There are storage bins outboard, though you'd need a bar to retain books, and behind the settee cushions is more storage and access to chainplate reinforcements. There's ample stowage under the port settee and more under the starboard one, next to the water tank.

Under the saloon sole to port is the hydraulic keel lift, and below the companionway sole are the battery housing and the engine stopcocks. This raised section provides space for systems without compromising headroom, while physically creating different living areas.

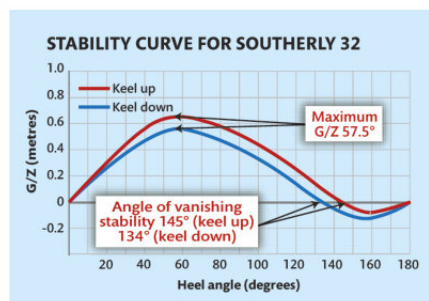
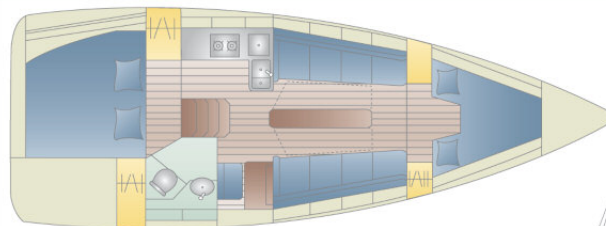
Down a step aft is the owner's suite. There's 6ft 10in headroom just inside the cabin door – but it only extends aft by 18in, so you can easily clout your head when bending down. The double berth is designed with the foot aft but, as it's a mighty 6ft 2in by 6ft 5in, sleeping athwartships is an option. Beneath the bunk is stowage space and access to the stern tube. There's one hull port and two hatches. Forward is an unfiddled shelf

that unclips and lifts for engine access, then to port there's a 4ft 4in door into the en suite heads.

The heads has a huge 6ft 7in headroom with a big shower sump, hand shower with a bulkhead fitting and excellent access to seacocks. There's good storage, light and an opening port for ventilation but I couldn't find a drain in the ventilated wet locker.

The forecabin has 6ft headroom and a section bolts into the U-shape to complete a berth 7ft 5in long, 14in wide at the foot and 6ft 6in at the head with cavernous storage below and the bow thrusters tube. Stowage is plentiful, but with the berth completed, there's not much space to move around – proof that the laws of physics are indeed unbreachable, even by this boat. ▲

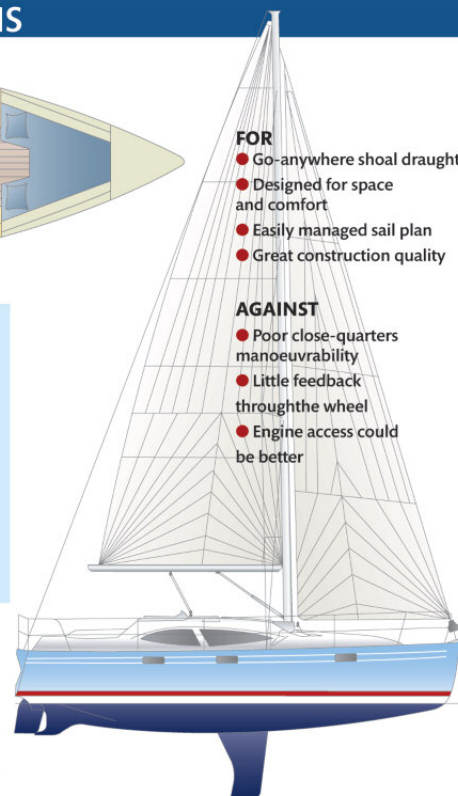
TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS



CONSTRUCTION

Moulded in multi-axial and unidirectional GRP using the Nordseal system, and with a balsa-cored sandwich above the waterline and clear gelcoat on solid laminate below. Laminate thickens towards the keel plate. The deck is balsa-cored GRP sandwich with plywood reinforcement around fittings and stressed areas. Hull and deck are bonded and bolted together and the join covered with a teak cap.

Price	£140,082, commissioned (ex-delivery)
LOA	9.97m (32ft 9in)
LWL	8.8m (29ft 10in)
Beam	3.6m (11ft 10in)
Draught	0.7m/2.12m (2ft 4in/6ft 11in)
Displacement	7,192kg (15,855lb)
Ballast	2,718kg (5,992lb)
Sail area	55.7m ² (600sq ft)
Engine	Yanmar 29hp
Fuel	137lit (30 gal)
Water	160 lit (35 gal)



FOR

- Go-anywhere shoal draught
- Designed for space and comfort
- Easily managed sail plan
- Great construction quality

AGAINST

- Poor close-quarters manoeuvrability
- Little feedback through the wheel
- Engine access could be better

The keel is cast iron with a structural grounding plate and a swing keel on a stainless steel pivot pin and rudder stocks are also solid stainless steel.

Displ/length ratio	264.8
Sail area/displ ratio	15.2
Ballast ratio (%)	38
RCD Category	A
STIX	Not available
Design	Stephen Jones
Builder	Northshore Yachts
Contact	Claire Horsman Tel: 01243 512611

* All prices quoted in YM boat tests are inclusive of VAT

» VERDICT

The Southernly 32 is a remarkable achievement. To squeeze this much volume into a 32ft boat and still make her easy on the eye is no mean feat. Less remarkable is Southernly's uncompromising attitude to materials and build quality. Having probed every nook and cranny, we found one very slightly ill-fitting wet locker door.

It's easy to forget Southernly's USP: the lifting keel. There are plenty of places, such as the drying ports of the Normandy coast, that you would struggle to visit with fin or bilge keels. At the push of a button, you can lift the keel and rest assured of a soft, stable landing, provided you've checked the ground. While the steering system failed to excite, the performance was surprisingly spritely.

OK, so the Contessa 32 is undeniably better-looking, but most boats would suffer in comparison. Performance-wise, she may not have the Contessa's Horn-rounding hardiness, but how many of us do that on a weekend? Here's a fairly good-looking boat with livelier performance than the Contessa in most wind ranges and – rocks and reefs excepted – she can go absolutely anywhere. She's comfortable, thoughtfully designed and well appointed. Yes, she's over £100,000 more expensive than a Contessa, but if you've got the money, you won't compromise on comfort and you're prepared to wait until the end of 2009 to get one, you really should take her out for a test. And bring a tape measure.