

LEADER
ESTONIA



SAARE 46

Is Saare Yachts Baltic boatbuilding's best kept secret? *Sam Jefferson* hunts down an example – the new Saare 46 – to find out for himself



It has been something of a mystery to me how, over the years, the Scandinavians have churned out a steady flow of beautiful, high quality cruising yachts. Given that all the countries in these northern latitudes enjoy summers even more fleeting than our own, it barely makes sense that they should have such a passion for sailing. I guess they must spend the off season painstakingly finessing their yachts.

The list of high quality marques that have graced our waters is remarkable; Hallberg-Rassy, Najad, Vindo, Swan, Malo, Finnulf, Maxi... I could go on. Over the years their speciality has generally been high quality bluewater cruisers noted both for their seaworthiness and the exceptional quality of the fit out. Now, the brutal fact is, they are not. A combination of high quality materials and workmanship combined with the high cost in labour across Scandinavia means all these yachts come with a hefty price tag.

All of which brings me in a roundabout way on to Saare Yachts: Saare is an Estonian boatbuilder based on the island of Saaremaa in the eastern Baltic. Despite decades of isolation in the Soviet era, →



Estonia's proximity to Scandinavia has meant it has always maintained a very strong connection with the Scandinavian bloc. Indeed, the Estonian workforce shares a reputation with their Scandinavian neighbours for exceptional craftsmanship. This was a fact not lost on Finnish boatbuilder Finnulf Yachts which shifted production of its high quality bluewater cruisers to Estonia in order to keep costs down while retaining quality. Sadly, despite these measures, Finnulf fell victim to the financial crash of 2007/8 and production ceased.

Yet, with all the ingredients of a top quality modern boatbuilder

1 One of the great benefits of a centre cockpit is the mainsheet is sited in just the right place for the helm

2 The cockpit area feels safe, secure and very well enclosed. Saare gives you the semi-customised choice of both centre and aft cockpits

3 The aft deck features a pair of deep lazarettes plus a couple of well positioned seats integrated into the pushpit

now in place in Estonia, production commenced on a completely new marque, Saare. The new company utilised the expertise of ex Finnulf supremo Stig Nordblad and also designer Karl-Johan Strahlmann. Since production started in 2008, the company has played a cautious hand, sticking to what it knows best and crafting a small range of beautiful semi custom bluewater cruisers. Given the company's history and geography, the yachts share an awful lot with the Hallberg-Rassys and Najads of this world. True, they aren't quite as well known as these marques, but the payback comes in the fact a Saare is considerably cheaper than its Swedish rivals.

Scandinavian style

The Saare 46 is the latest addition to the range and she boasts the sea kindly lines of her predecessors, the Saare 38 and 41. In common with her smaller sister, the 41, she's available both with a centre cockpit and aft cockpit configuration.

The yacht I tested was the centre cockpit version and one glance at her lines confirmed that she is without doubt a serious cruiser. The hull is relatively narrow – by modern standards at least – and there is considerable taper aft where the stern concludes in an elegant transom with a relatively narrow bathing platform. Naturally, given the yacht's bluewater aspirations, there are no chines and the forefoot is well immersed; all of which points to excellent sea keeping abilities. Predictably, she's no lightweight flyer, weighing in at just under 14 tons. The rig is keel stepped and

fairly powerful. You also have the option of fitting an inner forestay and turning her into a cutter if you wish. There is a substantial spade rudder and the keel has a generous chord width and a lead bulb. There's no question that she shares an awful lot in terms of looks and concept with rivals such as Najad and Hallberg-Rassy; this is a yacht that certainly looks like she would be at home shouldering aside great Atlantic rollers on an ocean crossing bound for exotic destinations.

Step aboard onto her broad side decks and there is something deeply reassuring about the manner in which the yacht barely flinches as you move around her. There are simply acres of wood on show here and the quality of the workmanship is truly excellent. A quick inspection of the thickness of the laminates of teak on the cockpit benches also suggests that no expense has been spared in terms of the fit out.

Saare Yachts is very much a semi-custom outfit, so the deck layout is a moveable feast and it was clear that the yard would do all it could to accommodate an owner's whim. This was hull number one, and Saare's sales representative was eager to stress that she featured all sorts of tweaks built in at the behest of the owner. As an example, the cockpit sole had been lowered to make for less of a drop down into the saloon. This had the added benefit of creating an incredibly deep cockpit that felt very secure. In common with all the yachts in the Saare range, her tapered aft sections mean that a well dimensioned single wheel is the sensible option, something of a rarity in this day and age. The beauty of the centre cockpit





● **SAIL PLAN**

Her heavy displacement means she features a generous sail plan

● **COCKPIT**

She's available with either an aft or centre cockpit

● **LINES**

By modern standards the Saare 46 is narrow – making her comfortable in heavy seas

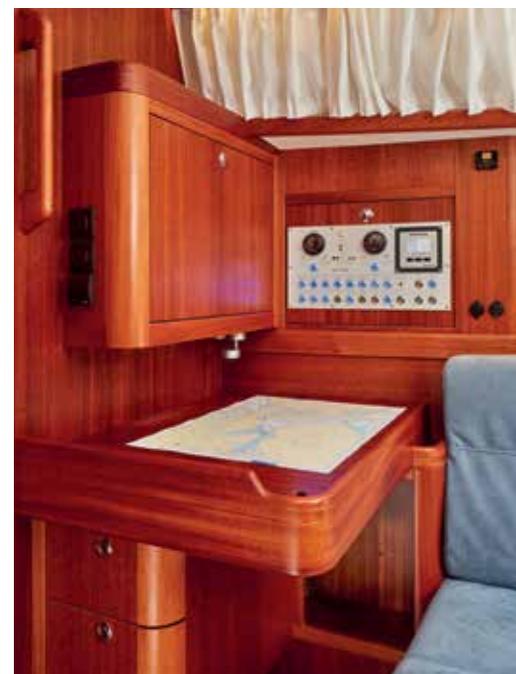
configuration is that you can locate the traveller just abaft the wheel with the mainsheet leading to a single winch situated to starboard, both out of harm's way and within handy reach of the helm. The two primary winches are sited well outboard and are also within easy reach of the helm, making singlehanding a painless operation. Understandably, the cockpit isn't as huge as on your standard Mediterranean style cruiser with an aft cockpit and huge aft sections, but it provides plenty of room and feels very self contained, with the fixed windscreen adding to this feeling. Meanwhile, the beautiful teak gratings and substantial sump beneath underline that the priority here is sailing oceans with confidence. Aft of the cockpit there is a large

area of open deck with a pair of lazarette lockers along with a couple of beautifully fashioned wooden seats on the pushpit. There is a modest bathing platform with excellent steps down and the liferaft is also tucked thoughtfully behind and exactly where you would need it to be in an emergency. On the 46 I tested, the transom was raked aft, but there is the option to have a sugar scoop transom, if preferred. Moving forward, the side decks are nice and wide and the solid teak capping rail is a nice touch too.

Down below

The lowered cockpit sole on this model meant that heading down below had none of the usual sensations of feeling like you're

descending into a crypt. The downside is that it did reduce headroom slightly in some areas aft. She felt unmistakably Scandinavian down below, both in terms of the quality of the fit out and also large quantities of dark wood - although naturally there is a choice of different finishes. Again, the layout is very much a moveable feast, but Saare offers three options in its brochure just to get you thinking. On the boat I tested, the linear galley was to starboard of the companionway running down a corridor that led aft to the master cabin. This layout meant there were ample bracing points and there was also excellent storage. Being a relatively narrow boat, the saloon did not feel huge and the styling was conservative, giving a certain →



'It soon became evident from sailing her that this was a classy yacht'

old school feel to it. The chart table was generously proportioned and situated in the forward part of the saloon to starboard. Situated aft on the starboard side was a rather impressively shoehorned bunk room, providing an extra pair of snug berths ideal for either extra security in the off watch or for visitors with youngsters in tow. The forward cabin was a decent size with a double that could be accessed from either side rather than jumped into from the back. These sorts of features become increasingly important as you get older. There was a heads and shower just abaft of this. As you'd expect

on a centre cockpit yacht, the aft cabin was very roomy and featured an en suite. The main engine access was also located back here and, for a 46-footer, it was mightily impressive as you could crawl in there if (god forbid) this was required.

On the water

The day of my test sail dawned glassy calm, with the breeze eventually building to a fitful 15 knots as an absolute maximum but mostly sticking at 10-12kn. This was barely enough to corrugate the waters of the Baltic and I didn't hold out any great hopes of

ABOVE LEFT
The interior may be a touch staid, but the quality of craftsmanship is simply excellent

ABOVE RIGHT
A well dimensioned chart table is one of many touches that marks out the Saare 46 as a serious bluewater cruiser

the Saare performing too well in the conditions given that she was lugging around 14 tons displacement plus all manner of bells and whistles in terms of gear, not to mention full water and diesel tanks. Despite this, she was clearly on a mission to prove me wrong. It soon became evident from sailing her that this was a classy yacht. She sailed with a sort of feel and accuracy that is often sadly lacking. The steering was nicely poised and she was surprisingly eager to get going given the modest amount of breeze on offer. Flipping her through the tacks in flat water she was able to keep her way on nicely and accelerated well when the wind did fill in. She was close winded too; nudging up to 41 degrees off the wind at a push and we managed to get a little over seven knots out of her on a close reach which I felt was good going in the circumstances. She performed very well, but I'm willing to wager she would have done even better if the going got tough and it would have been great to have had her out in a F6 with a decent chop.

Puttering back to our berth, I was also struck by how quiet the Volvo Penta 53hp saildrive unit was when she was under power. All in all, the boat had a sort of stateliness about her, which she only dropped when under sail where she proved herself surprisingly playful. →



SAM'S VERDICT

The Saare 46 is unquestionably a top-end bluewater cruiser: she performs well, is beautifully built and fitted out and looks and feels the part. Chatting to her owner – a former boatbuilder himself – I asked what had drawn him to the Saare 46 and he said it was the attention to detail. He cited features you don't initially notice such as access to wiring and plumbing circuits, which were excellent on the Saare compared with other boats he had looked at. In many ways, this is the thinking man or woman's bluewater cruiser: it is a boat for someone who has plenty of experience

with the vagaries of production yachts and the adaptable nature of Saare's boatbuilding and design methods mean that an owner can tailor to their own requirements.

Finally, she's no slouch either and if the interior is a touch conservative, it's redolent of a yacht that is full of highly sensible and well-thought-out touches.

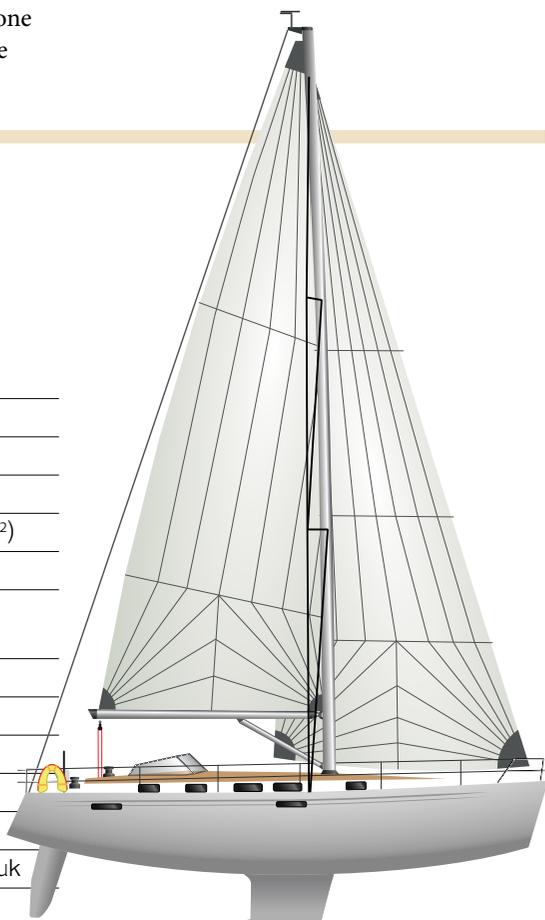
PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

COMFORT: ★★★★★

BLUEWATER: ★★★★★

THE SPEC

- LOA: 46ft (14.1m)
- LWL: 41ft 2in (12.58m)
- Beam: 13ft 7in (4.2m)
- Sail area: 1,194sq ft (111m²)
- Draught: 7ft 2in/6ft 5in (2.2m²)
- Weight: 13,600kg (29,982lb)
- Sail area/displacement: 19.7
- LWL/displacement: 212
- Base price: £414,000
- Price as tested: £509,000
- Contact: saareyachts.com
- UK dealer:
- Web: saareyachts.co.uk
- Email: steve@saareyachts.co.uk



CALISTA PAXTON

Weight Speed
 For a fuller explanation of stability and performance figures see sailingtoday.co.uk

All quotes exclude VAT. Insure this yacht with Craftinsure
from £1538
 Boat insurance at the touch of a button



25

NEXT MONTH

Contest 67CS
 On sale 25 August

ALTERNATIVE YACHTS



NAJAD 450

£410,000

A Swedish centre cockpit heavyweight with very serious bluewater pretensions: Najad's reputation and pedigree in this category is arguably equalled only by Hallberg-Rassy.

craftinsure quote: from £1222
najad.se



X-YACHTS XC45

£381,000

X-Yachts takes on the bluewater cruiser is more performance-oriented. She provides an interesting alternative to her heavier rivals and offers looks, performance and comfort.

craftinsure quote: from £1129
x-yachts.com



HALLBERG-RASSY 44

£403,000

Halberg Rassy's new 44 represents something of a sea change for the venerable Swedish bluewater specialist. She features a number of design firsts for the company, including twin rudders and a plumb bow.

craftinsure quote: from £1200
hallberg-rassy.com