

## NEW BOATS DUFOUR 45e



## Dufour 45e

Speed, comfort and good manners | BY TOM DOVE

Dufour may not be as familiar to American sailors as the other major French boatbuilders, but don't skip over these boats just because you haven't seen many of them. The company stopped exporting to the United States for a few years, but is now back with a new owner, a new designer and a completely new product line. The new Dufour 45e, with its handsome appearance, advanced construction and sweet sailing characteristics, is a good example of why these modern cruiser-racers deserve consideration.

## CONSTRUCTION

The hull is handlaid vacuum-bagged fiberglass with a PVC core above the waterline and solid laminate below, with an NPG blister-resistant gelcoat. An interior structural frame reinforces the hull. The deck is injection molded with a PVC core.

## ON DECK

As with the rest of the new Dufour line, designer Umberto Felci gave the 45e's hull a distinctly Italian look. The low cabintop, sleek lines and clean deck layout all add up to a very attractive vessel.

The cockpit ergonomics are excellent for either singlehanded sailing or taking out

guests for an afternoon. Winch placement is just right, lines fall to hand easily, and the double-ended German mainsheet system is easily managed.

Dual wheels on a 45-footer really make sense. The cockpit of a modern boat this size is so wide the skipper has to take a bit of a hike during each tack, and the best way to have both firm control and a good view to windward is with separate steering stations on either side. It also makes it easier

to trade off the wheel to another helmsman. As a final bonus, it's much easier moving on and off the transom without a wheel in the way.

The downside is that the extra steering connections can cause drag or springiness in the helm unless they are carefully engineered.

We sailed the high-performance "Dynamic Version" of the boat with a triple-spreader mast, upgraded standing and running rigging, and asymmetrical spinnaker gear. This model also comes without sails, under the assumption that the buyer will want to specify his own sailmaker.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Our test boat had a three-cabin layout, with owner's accommodations forward and twin cabins aft. The owner's cabin has a nice-sized double berth, a seat with a shoe locker underneath, an ensuite head with shower, and plenty of storage space in lockers and a large drawer under the berth. Both heads have gravity-drained holding tanks. The optional four-cabin charter model adds a small passageway cabin forward with upper and lower bunks. In either version, buyers can have one aft cabin set up for stowage instead of sleeping.

The U-shaped dining area is to port in the saloon, facing a short settee that adjoins the nav table. The L-shaped galley is also to port, is convenient to the companionway and is strategically located where motion in a seaway is most subdued. The entire saloon has a contemporary look about it, enhanced by the varnished wood joinery and suede fabric upholstery. If you



The L-shaped galley is conveniently located just beneath the companionway

prefer traditional aesthetics, you will miss the "shippiness" exhibited by some other cruising boats, but if you enjoy modern elegance, you will appreciate this interior.

I have always liked the detailed finish on Dufours and was pleased to see that tradition has been maintained. The joinery and cabin sole on the 45e are Moabi, also known as African Pearwood, which resembles a light-colored mahogany, and the fit and finish of the parts are impeccable. All the locker doors—and there are plenty of them—have gas lifts, ventilation louvers and positive latches. The grabrails are integrated into the overhead, where they are inconspicuous and cannot bump a tall sailor on the head, but are still convenient to reach.

Since the deck is an injection-molded piece with a PVC foam core, both the inside and the outside come out of the mold with finished surfaces. This creates a very strong, light structure that is also durable and easy to clean. The attractive interior belies the fact that it is very efficient to build, with minimum wasted time or materials. That translates to better value for the buyer.

## UNDER SAIL

On a brisk October day off Annapolis, we set the main and working jib to a stiff breeze. As the afternoon wore on, the wind dropped a bit but remained in the 15-20 knot range. As I stepped behind the starboard wheel and we trimmed the sheets, the boat came alive and a grin hit my face. This was going to be a good day at the office.

Close-hauled, the Dufour 45e responded to gentle inputs and tacked smoothly through a bit less than 90 degrees. The boat had been rapidly prepared for a show and with some tuning, I'm sure it could do even better than that. Off the wind, our speed climbed rapidly to the boat's theoretical hull speed of about 8.5 knots, with perfect control all the way. It was a bit too windy to set the asymmetric spinnaker, but in light air it should keep the boat moving nicely.

The source of this fine performance is evident in the numbers. Look carefully at the specifications and you'll see a rather light boat with a moderately low ballast ratio, a long waterline, a racy underbody and over 1,200 square feet of working sail. That's a recipe for enthusiasm, moderate enough to prevent an adrenaline overdose, but still plenty of fun.

Best of all, it just felt good. There was nice feedback to the helm, just enough heeling



to make the boat feel energetic and steady tracking through the choppy water. We never needed foul-weather gear, as no spray made its way back to the cockpit.

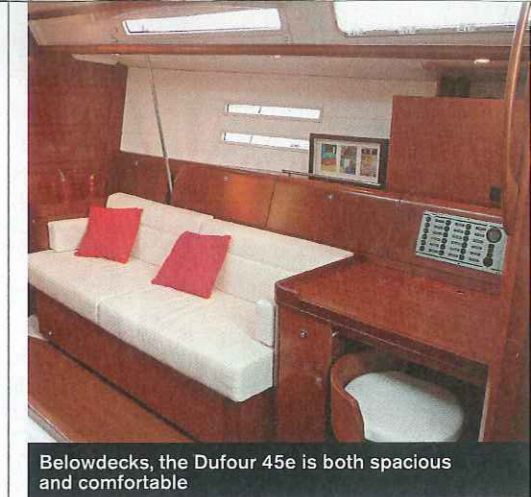
## UNDER POWER

I measured 6.8 knots at a comfortable 2,400 rpm cruise setting, and the sound level was a low 71 dBA. Quiet running like this can only come from careful engineering and construction, and I noted thick sound insulation and good seals around the engine compartment. The Volvo sail-drive should be simple to maintain. Raise the companionway steps or open the side access panels and you can easily get to all the vital parts.

Close-quarters maneuvers were simple and efficient, as the 45e turns in a circle of slightly more than one boatlength and stops and backs without fuss. There's very little kick to the wheel in reverse, and the boat tracks straight. These traits mean that returning to your slip after a pleasant sail with the family will not spoil the mood of the day.

## CONCLUSION

The Dufour 45e is a fine family boat with plenty of performance and excellent sailing qualities. It is always difficult for a builder and designer to cooperate in the creation of a good-looking boat that sails well and is economical to produce, but Dufour and Felci have managed to do just that. *AL*



Belowdecks, the Dufour 45e is both spacious and comfortable

## VITAL STATISTICS

HEADROOM 6ft 6in

BERTHS 6ft 6in (fwd); 6ft 6in (aft)

## SPECIFICATIONS

LOA 45ft 7in // LWL 39ft 9in // BEAM 14ft 1in

DRAFT 7ft 6in (std); 6ft 3in (shoal)

DISPLACEMENT 23,457lb (std)

BALLAST 7341lb (std)

SAIL AREA 100ft<sup>2</sup> (100% FT)

FUEL/WATER/WASTE (GAL) 66/140/26

ENGINE 55hp Volvo diesel

ELECTRICAL 2 x 100AH

DESIGNER Umberto Felci / Patrick Roséo (accommodations)

BUILDER Dufour Yachts, La Rochelle, France, dufour-yachts.com

U.S. DISTRIBUTOR Dufour USA, Annapolis, MD, 352-871-0362

PRICE \$401,148 (dynamic version)

BALLAST RATIO 31%

SAIL AREA/DISPLACEMENT RATIO 18

DISPLACEMENT/LENGTH RATIO 165

## OUR TAKE

## PROS

High-quality detailing

Pleasant, livable accommodations

Responsive and fun to sail

## CONS

Limited dealer network

Minimal house battery capacity

Shoal keel is fairly deep

## PERFORMANCE

RACER

CRUISER