ON TEST MOODY 54DS

In from the cold

If you had to pick a yacht to go sailing in the Baltic in December, the voluminous, warm and welcoming Moody 54DS would top a lot of lists. But her size can bring its own problems, reports Toby Hodges.
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A owner of Moody since 2007, again chose to borrow an existing hull mould. When the initial 54DS line drawings came back from the Dixon office they were reportedly similar enough to the existing Judel/Vrolijk-designed Hanse 575 to use that hull. It can be shrewd business to use a hull of a proven yacht – 145 of the 575 have sold in two years. Many production manufacturers do it to save on building a new mould – indeed, Hanse did it with the Moody 62, which shares the mould of the Hanse 630.

But at the same time it forces a comparison of dimensions that I find hard to ignore. To put it crudely, the Moody is a two-storey Hanse. Bear in mind that the Hanse 575 is already a very high-sided boat – so high that you need stepladders to reach the hatches from below – and you begin to get a picture of the size of vessel that greeted me in the fishing harbour of Laboe, near Kiel.

The superstructure of the Moody is gracefully designed to fit her length subtly. But the second ‘storey’ introduces a lot of weight high up – she is five tonnes heavier than the Hanse. And this extra weight introduces a whole new scale of loads. The added displacement requires more ballast, more engine power and more sail area to keep her moving in lighter airs.

In turn, the added loads require larger deck gear, halyards, winches, jammers – and lots of power to operate systems. It’s a sobering linear increase in dimensions.

So however impressed I might be by the grandiose features of the 54DS, from the fact, to a motor sailor or cruising catamaran. Bill Dixon has been very clever with the design, which looks elegant, especially when the yacht is heeled, and she provides unparalleled comfort for her size. The panoramic views and natural light are astonishing, and the incorporation of electrical appliances throughout gives this vessel the feel of a floating apartment.

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The shelter and protection of the cockpit is unsurpassed for a monohull. An optional soft bimini can completely enclose the cockpit. In addition to the vast amount of deck storage, there is also a tender garage, with stowage for a liberally

ON TEST: MOODY 54DS

Above: the 54DS amalgamates the best parts of the Moody 40DS (110 sold) and 62DS (12 sold), to create the ultimate decksaloon

Two-storey monohull
I couldn’t help but wonder, though, how such a bulky, high-sided yacht would fare at sea. In an effort to offer a quality yacht at production boat prices, the Hanse Group, although large enough to be used for a crew cabin, the sail locker is ideal for housing the large, downwind sails, cushions and fenders

Stanchions are neatly curved in amidships to allow for the genoa tracks to be mounted on the bulwarks. Extendable boarding ladders built into the rails are a necessity

The high bulwarks and fixed guardrails provide a superb sense of security when walking around the deck. Ironically, it is least secure between the wheels aft, where the deck is raised

The decksaloon roof is carried aft each side, which helps disguise the height with style. It also supports a very neat bimini that slides open manually – a design I’m sure we will see copied

Sheets and running rigging are led to electric winches on each side, controlled from switches on the pedestal. Reversible winches would make more sense here

In addition to the vast amount of deck storage, there is also a tender garage, with stowage for a liberally

Right: the twin-headsail set-up suits the 54DS perfectly. It allows you to change your easily from the helm, while keeping full foresails to suit all conditions

Although large enough to be used for a crew cabin, the sail locker is ideal for housing the large, downwind sails, cushions and fenders
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The effort required to convince the 54DS to go forward into the cockpit or heated saloon was a telling example of how her bulk can meet Denmark. The Moody makes for a very comfortable platform on passage, whether taking it in from the warmth of the saloon to thaw out. The ability to stand a watch here in complete protection and all-round visibility is the Moody’s winning hand.

The self-tacker is another winning hand considering it was full sail in flat water. During our European Yacht of the Year trials, the 54 went out in a Force 7 and steep waves, but needed the engine to keep her steady. The Moody rep said, “On an even more gloomy turn, the breeze steadied and the Moody made for a reversible option for these winches might make more sense, however, to keep sheets held safely in the self-tailers. And although there are fail boxes in the coamings aft, these are not large enough to prevent the cockpit becoming cluttered.”

The forward visibility is commendable over the deck. The helm didn’t overload and maintained engagement with the conditions. She certainly provides the horizon that remains empty until the Baltic meets Denmark. The Moody makes for a very comfortable platform on passage, whether taking it in from the warmth of the chart table or walking around the secure cockpit becoming cluttered.

But the most pleasure was still reserved for the social heart of the boat, linked by sliding doors to the decksaloon and galley. This is where owners of the 54DS will spend the majority of their time, at sea or anchor. Options include a drawer fridge and barbecue. The starboard lazarette locker provides fantastic stowage and is arranged tidily. Electronics, including bus modules and back-up 12V distribution panel, are mounted on the forward bulkhead and there is good access to the steering gear and stern thruster.

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The wind chill factor sent temperatures sub-zero sailing largely on my own, thanks to manageable sail systems and sheets led to the helm. Moody chose to install a C-zone digital switching bus system as standard, which reduces cable runs and provides intuitive systems monitoring on touchscreen displays. But, perhaps worse that some owners will not want to rely on such a modern system offshore. Moody has commendably also installed a back-up 12V system so that the main powered sailing and navigation systems can still be operated independently of the bus system.

If I had to choose a boat to sail in Germany in December, this new Moody ticked all the right boxes. Moody chose to install a C-zone digital switching bus system as standard, which reduces cable runs and provides intuitive systems monitoring on touchscreen displays. But, perhaps worse that some owners will not want to rely on such a modern system offshore. Moody has commendably also installed a back-up 12V system so that the main powered sailing and navigation systems can still be operated independently of the bus system.

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There is only one small cabin aft – an indication of how much stowage space there is in the lazarette and tender garage. This port aft twin cabin, with private companionway and separate heads, is an example of the yacht’s intelligent layout. It can either be a family cabin with day heads, or a generous crew cabin with ample space and privacy (if the sail locker is chosen forward). There is also the possibility to have the galley below instead of a fourth cabin. There is only one small cabin aft – an indication of how much stowage space there is in the lazarette and tender garage. This port aft twin cabin, with private companionway and separate heads, is an example of the yacht’s intelligent layout. It can either be a family cabin with day heads, or a generous crew cabin with ample space and privacy (if the sail locker is chosen forward). There is also the possibility to have the galley below instead of a fourth cabin.

The deckhouse is a remarkable place to sit and view the surroundings in comfort. But there are drawbacks to the abundant glass, notably weight and privacy – blinds are not offered for the forward windows because it is a problem to mount them discreetly, the builder says. The windows soon fogged up with three of us taking coffee in the saloon, despite demister fans. And the condensation that remained during our cold trials showed the task the forced aircon units are faced with. The windows soon fogged up with three of us taking coffee in the saloon, despite demister fans. And the condensation that remained during our cold trials showed the task the forced aircon units are faced with.

Forward cabin: The single series of hatchets and skylight above the berth in the forward cabin creates a fantastic view, especially lying on the berth looking up at the rig. The ensuite cabin looks plush, has good stowage, is flooded with natural light and decked out with the requisite entertainment mod-cons.

Guest cabins: The ‘VIP’ cabin reaches below the saloon and is big enough for an owner to think twice about which suite to choose – it only loses to the forward cabin in headroom. The double berth can be mounted either longitudinally or transverse. Stowage space is a little limited as there is a 680lt fuel tank below the berth, but the tall wardrobe is practical. Opposite to starboard is an airy, versatile cabin that can be a small double, Pullman, office or galley – one Italian client even has a gym here.

Conclusion
Owners of a 54DS will need to plan passages carefully to ensure a comfortable ride, but the pay-off is tremendous shelter from the elements. Arguably, the same applies to others in this market. The Moody 54DS sits in a bracket that will appeal to those also looking at motor yachts and cruising cats. A Lagoon 52, for example, is similar in price and weight for similar space, but the Moody provides greater sailing pleasure and has more of a semi-custom feel. The electronics, engineering and machinery demonstrate commendable build quality. For those who put high value on comfort and space – sensible if the major fly of your time spent aboard is at a respectable angle – look no further.

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### DATA MOODY 54DS

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