

The Hanse story



Handsome boats, handsome profits: Peter K Poland celebrates the rapid rise, far-sighted business expansion and ongoing success of Hanse Yachts

Michael Schmidt is one of the most remarkable boatbuilders to have hit the European scene. His career has been varied and successful – and he’s still going strong. When asked how he got under way, Michael replies: ‘I started boatbuilding with C&C yachts in the mid-1970s, where we began production for Europe. In the early ’80s I bought my own boatyard and started building the first prepreg carbon-fibre Admiral Cuppers. Our race boats like *Düsselboot*, *Rubin*,

Pinta, *Outsider* and *Tina-I-Punkt* were successful offshore racers and won the Admiral’s Cup and Sardinia Cup. I sailed several times for Germany in the Admiral’s Cup.’ Thereafter, Michael was a successful Westerly dealer for several years.

When the Berlin Wall crumbled at the turn of the 1990s, Michael was quick off the mark and set forth in search of a boatbuilding property on the former East Germany’s coastline. He correctly suspected there would be bargains for those who got in ahead of the pack, and his search proved successful. ‘The factory was a shed where they built

and repaired wooden fishing boats,’ he remembers. ‘They had good woodworkers, and we trained the people in all aspects of boatbuilding. East Germany was a good place because the people were very motivated to build something up.’

Low overhead costs and labour rates also helped him to build boats at competitive prices. Michael explains: ‘We received some grants which made it easier to invest. On the other hand, there were difficulties getting established in the east because in those days the infrastructure was much more limited. However, with a good, motivated team and a clear mission, Hanse Yachts became successful.’

When you consider that Hanse’s first GRP production yacht only hit the water in 1993, you can appreciate how rapid Michael’s rise has been. Compared to the start-up dates of GRP construction

by other production boatbuilders – Nicholson in 1962, Beneteau and Westerly in 1963, Jeanneau in 1964 – Hanse was late on the scene. But having given major European competitors a 30-year head start, Hanse is now a market leader while others have faltered or fallen by the wayside.

Michael’s eye for a bargain also helped him get into yacht production in double-quick time. Instead of designing an all-new model then going through the costly and time-consuming process of producing plugs and moulds, he purchased the mould tools for an attractive Scandinavian cruiser-racer called the Aphrodite 29. A racing man at heart, Michael went for this pretty and sporty yacht rather than a ‘caravan’: and, thanks to the renamed **Hanse 291**’s performance, looks and extremely competitive price, it sold quickly. An early buyer was the then



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter K Poland crossed the Atlantic in a 7.6m (25ft) *Wind Elf* in 1968 and later spent 30 years as co-owner of Hunter Boats. He is now a freelance journalist.



Hanse 370: available second-hand from £55,000

hanky-panky in 1920s colonial East Africa.

'I entered the Round the Island Race that year. The wind was 12-15 knots, and she flew: spinnaker up at the Needles, and we were reeling in the Sigma 33s. On the last leg to the finish, more Sigmas were disposed of before we crossed the line – sixth overall on her maiden race. *White Mischief* will never be replaced. She does everything I want: she's pretty, unbelievably fast and I love her.' Which about says it all.

'All-Hanse'

While the revamped and slightly enlarged Hanse 292 continued to sell, Michael was working on another set of second-hand moulds. The Finngulf 33 was a sleek Scandinavian, and the re-branded Hanse 331 was a logical 'follow-on' to the top-selling 291/292. At around the same time, moulding work was moved to TTS in Poland.

Sensibly, these first two Hanse models were allowed to sell and sell before Michael took the next step: investing time and money in his first 'all-Hanse' model. He went to his old friends at the successful German design office Judel/Vrolijk and introduced the **Hanse 371** in 2000. By now designs had got wider and boasted broader sterns, so the 371 offered spacious accommodation (with stern cabin and aft heads) as well as exceptional all-weather performance. It also set the ongoing Hanse trend of offering a user-friendly



Hanse 371: available second-hand from £55,000

Sailing Scenes

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Westerly sales manager and now UK Dehler supremo Andy Hind. 'I stumbled across the embryonic Hanse stand at the Hamburg Boat Show,' Andy recalls. 'On it was a pretty 29-footer, the first Hanse 291. With a lovely, easily-driven underwater shape, tall fractional rig, narrowish 2.7m beam and perfect proportions, she looked quick. Inside she had five beds, a proper bog, a kitchen with cooker and fridge and a dining table that seated six! I became a victim of "boat show euphoria" and went home thinking hard.

'Yacht broker Michael Schmidt & Partner in Hamble brought a 291 over from Germany,' Andy continues. 'Getting wind of this new arrival, I looked at her again; and bought her there and then. Michael Schmidt himself phoned me, saying "this is the worst ***** deal I've ever done!"

'Excellent. I called her *White Mischief* after that film about



Hanse 291: available second-hand from £17,000

Sailing Scenes



Hanse 470: available second-hand from £121,000

Sailing Scenes

self-tacking jib system.

Better still, it came with a lead keel. Peter Thomas of UK Hanse importer Inspiration Marine says: 'All models from 11.3m (37ft) upwards had composite iron/lead keels until approximately 2007, when the price of lead almost doubled overnight. Then they changed to torpedo all-iron keels, keeping the low centre of gravity previously provided by the lead bulb.'

Torsten Conradi of Judel/Vrolijk sums up the appeal of the 371 (and other early Hanse models) by saying it combined above-average performance with a below-average price, adding: 'Michael's idea was to create a yacht similar to the traditional "American east coast cruising yacht", but translated into a more modern concept. So we designed a timeless, nice-looking yacht with a traditional yacht interior, classic sheer and windows, but with much more space and volume.'

Australian Hanse dealer Peter Hrones of Windcraft remembers his first sight of the new Hanse 371 as boat No1 was being finished off – through the night – on the eve of its launch at the Hamburg Boat Show. At the end of the show's first day, Hrones asked Michael how the 371 had been received: 'Schmidt just shook his head in disbelief and grinned from ear to ear, saying "we have taken 25 orders today for this one model".' Hrones replied: 'Fantastic, but when can I get one?' Schmidt grinned again, saying: 'You can have Hanse 371 number 26, and

you'll need to wait a year!' Sure enough, Windcraft presented Hanse 371 No 26 to the Australian market at the Sydney Boat Show in August 2000.

Leading Irish sailmaker Philip Watson was one of the first to sail a Hanse 371 across an ocean, telling me: 'The 371 sailed very well for a cruiser. We competed closely with Elan 333s and X332s at major Scottish regattas, then took it on the ARC and did well. One night, we recorded 17 knots under autopilot as the watchman rushed into the cabin to avoid getting wet. In the event, the 371 never left the straight and narrow.'

Furthermore, she completed the ARC in 15-and-a-half days. Watson became a Hanse dealer, adding: 'I particularly liked the 311, 341, 371, 400 and 470 models, especially the deep-draught versions with lead keel bases. Schmidt was clever, providing a great mix of space and performance. By increasing freeboard and widening sterns, Judel/Vrolijk virtually doubled internal volume. But they avoided the trap of trying to save money by reducing rigs and keels and having undersize rudders. Schmidt wanted performance.'

Changing demands

The 371 unleashed a torrent of new J/V models and Hanse grew at prodigious pace, assisted by the construction of a new state-of-the-art factory with a capacity to build 2,500 boats a year (after the company floated on the German stock exchange in 2007). From its inception until today, Hanse has launched just under 30 new J/V models (not including the Moodys, Variantas and Dehlers, plus Fjord and Sealine motorboats, it builds). These new Hanses have ranged from the 8.99m Hanse 300 in 2001 to the massive Hanse 630 (19m, 2006) and Hanse 675 (20.95m) due out this year.

When I asked Hanse's Thorsten Will which were the top sellers, he replied: 'In the old days, the **370** and **400**, the 2006 models, were the most popular, built at the time when the market was growing every year.' (Before bonus-gobbling bankers unleashed the global financial crisis in 2007/8.) 'These days, the most successful model is the Hanse 575. With more than 150 boats sold, this is an amazing number since the launch in autumn 2012. We are the market leader in this category.'

With so many past and present models sailing around the world, it is not feasible to go into every one in detail. When asked to name the

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Hanse 400: available second-hand from £114,000

most popular earlier models, J/V's Torsten Conradi replies: 'I guess the 371/372, the 341 and the newer 370 and 400 belong to the best sellers'. He then describes the evolution of J/V's later designs, saying: 'With its ongoing success and growing sales, Hanse needed to develop its philosophy towards a "yachting lifestyle trendsetter". So the designs became more modern, cleaner in some way, more spacious, the interior moving more towards a modern loft style.

'Good looks were always a must, combined with better sailing performance than comparable boats. As Hanse was always a trendsetter, we will continue this and develop concepts that follow changing demands. Sailing and boating needs to become even more easy: comfortable onboard living combined with performance in all aspects.'

Inspiration Marine's Peter Thomas puts much of Hanse's success down to its construction methods. He says that bulkheads are bonded to the hull rather than stuck in GRP grooves with silicone: also, every hull is a solid laminate, as opposed to a sandwich, beneath the waterline. In addition, the first two laminates use osmosis-resisting vinyl ester (as opposed to polyester) resin. He also puts great store in the 'mass customisation' that Hanse invented, saying: 'Customers have multiple choices of layout, rig options, draught options, four choices of wood interior, three choices of floorboards, 30 choices of cushion fabrics, two choices of mattress, eight choices of exterior canvas colours and two styles of Corian galley top. All of this is just one push of a computer button, and a unique boat comes off a modern production line.'

Sailing qualities

And the proof of the pudding? The annual Atlantic Rally for Cruisers (ARC) from Gran Canaria to St Lucia is always an interesting reference point because increasing numbers of standard production boats with amateur and family crews join the fray. Many 'baby boomers' – if fortunate enough to have a wife who loves sailing! – invest in a yacht then set off on an adventure while they're still fit enough. Luckily for them, there are now many capable and affordable production cruisers between 9-18m (30-60ft) – including Hanses. In the 2011 ARC, for example, the starting line included the **Hanse 545** *Twelve Moons* with a German crew, a Norwegian

Moody 41 Classic:
available second-hand
from £157,000



Sailing Scenes

Hanse 370e, a **Hanse 470** from France and a Hanse 470e from Spain. A truly international fleet.

In the 138-strong cruising division, *Twelve Moons* took third place. The skipper remarked: 'We had a stress-free Atlantic crossing. We needed 15 days for 3,080NM at an average of 8.5 knots. No 24-hour run was under 200 miles!

'The boat makes a solid impression, and the sailing qualities are also impressive. With its equipment it is a few tons heavier than the standard. We now sail on to Panama and will take part in the world ARC around the globe.'

In the 2014 ARC, there were 11 Hanses sailing down the trade winds to the Caribbean. These included three 505s, a 575, two 470s, a 430 and a 385: the top performer was a 470 that finished third in its class. The 385, *Interlude*, is owned by Brits Simon Pickard and Helen Opie, who worked in Australia then decided to buy a boat and take a sabbatical. 'The 385 is a perfect size for us: a large berth at the front, huge amounts of storage in the two-cabin version we picked, very strong and quite heavy compared to other boats in her class. The price was great and we had an amazing UK dealer at Inspiration Marine who helped us every step of the way.

'Every boat journey is different, some better than others, but we've been extremely happy so far. Buying a boat was stressful, and Phil at Inspiration did his best to make sure we had the right



Hanse 345: available
second-hand
from £125,000

Sailing Scenes

options. Most people don't sail their 385s from Germany to Australia so there were a lot of email exchanges making sure the boat would work for us. We've got a water maker, solar and all the safety gear required for long passages.'

And how did they fare on their first trans-ocean passage? 'The ARC was a great experience. We started well in our class and were extremely pleased with how *Interlude* handled the conditions. We did have some sail issues due to wear and tear during the crossing, which caused us to slow down. By the end we were just running a jib but sat back, relaxed, and enjoyed the great weather in the last week. We sailed double-

handed. Couldn't have been happier with her during the trip and always felt safe.'

As regards what's next, 'we're heading down to the San Blas islands then through Panama. We hope to get back to Australia around the end of September.'

If you want to follow *Interlude*'s progress, click on www.sailing-interlude.com – maybe it'll inspire you to throw off the traces and take a sailing sabbatical.

Well equipped

If you fancy cashing up to enjoy liveaboard voyaging on a bigger yacht, you could follow the example of Australians Wayne and Barbie Williams. They show how Hanse has succeeded in bringing



big-boat voyaging within the reach of many. As they explain, 'we both just turned 60 and have planned our retirement to start with a 10-year sailing adventure from Europe back to Australia via the Med, Caribbean and Pacific.

'We researched sailing boats for three years before settling on the Hanse 575. A friend in Cairns had a Hanse 470 and we were impressed with her strong build, ease of sailing and speed. But we needed a larger boat to be a home for about 10 years.

'The provisional information we received on the 575 looked good and we liked the cabin layout options, the open and spacious cockpit and the range of options which could be added to the base boat. She had the self-tacking headsail and strongly-built hull which Hanse are known for. We also liked the aft dinghy garage feature.

'We flew to Hanse's factory in Greifswald and looked over 18 575s under construction. The visit confirmed our selection, and we ordered our 575.'

To get an idea of just how complex and comprehensively equipped a modern cruiser can be, options they selected include washer/dryer, extra refrigeration and freezer, wine refrigerator, microwave, coffee machine, generator, reverse-cycle air-conditioning, electric winches, three-cabin/three-en-suite layout, upgraded sail selection, large-screen pop-up LED TV in the saloon, air compressor in the RIB's dinghy garage, electric tables in the cockpit, water maker, bow and stern thrusters, upgraded navigation package (two 12in plotters and one 8in plotter, broadband radar, AIS, autopilot), inverter, extra 'house' batteries, other options in the 'comfort, cruising, performance and entertainment' packages offered by Hanse, a larger generator, larger anchor, increased anchor chain length and additional 300lt fuel tank in the forepeak.

They also had a scuba diving compressor fitted as well as a six-person liferaft and the 3.1m RIB. How's that for a specification for a production yacht?

In addition to the impressive 575, current Hanse models include the 325, **345**, 385, 415, 455, 505 and 675. All share the range's new low-CG keels (usually with torpedoes), wide waterlines for space and stability, sleek looks and self-tacking jib. And they sell well. UK agents Inspiration also handle brokerage, so they can

Moody 45DS:
available second-hand from £238,000



Sailing Scenes

advise on new and used boats. Broker Andy Cunningham says: 'The 312s and 315s sell well, as do mid-range craft such as 370s and up to and just over 400 / 40. A wheel is always a good selling point and can make a big difference on the speed of sale and price achieved.'

Extra ranges

There's more, however, to Hanse Yachts than Hanses. Schmidt was canny at picking up extra ranges. When Dehler got into trouble, he bought this iconic brand of cruiser-racers, incorporating it into Hanse as its high-performance arm. The new Dehler 38 won Yacht of the Year in 2014. Then there's the Moody name, now carried by the new Bill Dixon-designed and Hanse-built Deck Saloon 45, 54 and 62 and Aft Cockpit **41 Classic** and 45 ranges (sold here by Boat Sales International). When I sailed on the first **45DS** (called *Apple Crumble* after Michael's favourite pudding) I was impressed by its 'one level' deck saloon and cockpit configuration and by its good performance. These deck saloon cruisers have the market to themselves and are serious contenders, offering all-weather sailing and comfort galore.

One owner toasted his Moody 45DS *Murphy* after his 16-day, 14-hour ARC crossing with the words: 'Our wonderful boat has carried me over 6,000 miles over the last seven months, from the Baltic to England, across the Bay of Biscay, to the Mediterranean and now across the Atlantic.



Present and past: the current Hanse 575, left, and Andy Hind's Hanse 291

'It's amazingly versatile, surprisingly fast and just the right choice for us.'

At the budget end of the market, Hanse launched its new Varianta range. The Varianta 37 (based on the Hanse 370) and 44 (based on the Hanse 430) are sound J/V designs and marketed with basic specifications to keep the price really low. Buyers can add and upgrade if and when they wish. It will be interesting to see if this recipe catches on in the UK: I was impressed by the V37 at the 2015 London Boat Show.

Rounding off Hanse's portfolio are Fjord and Sealine motorboats. These already take up much production capacity and, like Beneteau, Jeanneau and Bavaria, Hanse aims to build more.

Thorben Will says: 'Our strategy

is focused on growth. In all brands we see the bigger boats getting more popular.' When Aurelius AG bought out founder Michael Schmidt in 2011, Hanse was therefore poised to push onwards and upwards.

So what's Michael up to now? He says: 'I was looking for a replacement boat for myself – a good, easy, performance cruiser in the 80ft range. I ended up creating a new company, Michael Schmidt Yachtbau, and building the Brenta 80 DC. Now we're also building these boats for other customers. The second boat has been started and the first is being launched this month.' Watch this space!

NEXT MONTH
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41- to 45-footers

