

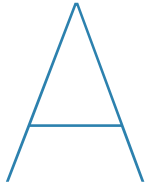
All's weld that ends weld

Ovni was one of the original pioneers of the all-aluminium 'go anywhere' yacht. The new 370 goes right back to those roots, being a 37' pocket blue water cruiser. **Sam Jefferson** takes her for a spin

In association with







h, remember the days when a 40' yacht was considered large? If you're under 30 years old, probably not. The economies

of scale have essentially ensured that the sub 40' cruising yacht has become something of an endangered species in recent years. One large manufacturer I interrogated about this admitted that it simply wasn't economical to make a boat under 35'. Yet lately it seems that manufacturers have also come to see that if they don't make boats that are at least vaguely affordable, then they sever the supply line of younger sailors buying yachts and falling in love with sailing. It's the boatbuilding equivalent of sitting on a branch and sawing it off near the tree trunk I suppose. It is therefore heartening that this year has seen the launch of a number of smaller production yachts. Yet the serious blue water cruiser market remained a bit of a desert for those after a smaller boat – until the Ovni 370 came along.

It makes sense for Ovni to want to go back to small boats – it's in their DNA after all. Parent company Alubat was one of the originators of the concept of the small, virtually indestructible all-aluminium boats that have become ubiquitous in any blue water cruising port the world over. The key features in addition to the use of aluminium were a swing keel, shallow draft and the ability to dry out if needs be. It was a winning and innovative formula that won both admirers and imitators



and made it all the more bizarre that the company ended up in financial strife between 2008 and 2012. Since then the company has bounced back and is very much a going concern, with a state of the art factory in Les Sables d'Olonne and a bulging order book.

Notwithstanding this success, there is still the question of how to make building a sub 40 footer pay and Ovni has given a lot of thought to this. The basic problem is that you need much the same time and effort to produce a 40' yacht as you do a 60' one. Ok, slightly less materials but not enough to offset the price differential. Ovni's design team of Mortain/Mavrikios and CBA design offices has put a great deal of thought into this and came up with a solution that works for aluminium boats. Generally yachts built in aluminium need longitudinal stringers in addition to latitudinal ribs and bulkheads

ABOVE

The 370 features relatively fine waterlines with lots of flare above, which boosts internal volume while helping provide surprisingly good light air performance

BELOW

The boat has a very defined chine that runs the length of the hull. The 370 is designed to heel early and then sit comfortably in this chine

to create rigidity, but slightly pre-curved the aluminium hull plates both longitudinally and latitudinally massively increases their rigidity. Marry this to thicker hull plates (10mm below the waterline and 8mm above) and it all means that in a 37' boat there is no longer any need for longitudinal stringers. This saves both cost and labour time.

It's not the only radical thing about the boat; one glance at the 370 and you have to admit she looks pretty radical. The design follows the recent trend for 'champagne glass' hull sections forward with narrow waterlines flaring out sharply above the waterline. This both increases volume forward and reduces pitching while also making the boat easily driven in light airs. There is a dreadnought bow which is well rounded to the point of being blunt and a solid aluminium sprit. Step back a couple of centuries and one particular talented journalist described the celebrated record breaking clipper ship Marco Polo as being 'built like brick fore and aft with a bow like a savage bulldog'. There are certain parallels with the 370 relating to the bow which definitely has an aggressive look.

The 370 is relatively broad aft with a very hard chine running all the way from stem to stern. This noticeable feature further increases the strength of the boat as the hard angle makes for a very strong weld. There is a solid arch aft which supports the bimini and provides both davits for the dinghy and marry that to a striking coachroof





which, although not sleek, provides masses of light and a wraparound windscreen and you have a boat that certainly dares to be different.

Aside from that, this is a relatively heavy boat at 9,400 kg. The design team spent a lot of time trying to ensure that the boat achieved a Category A rating which makes her an ocean-going vessel. This is relatively hard to achieve on a 37' swing keel yacht but it has been done. The boat has 3,000kg of ballast but the alloy keel has been kept light and given a semi NACA profile which makes it easy to raise and lower (it is achieved with a pair of ropes that run to one of the cockpit windlasses) and also much more efficient than a simple flat sheet of metal. The boat features twin rudders which are shallow and splayed well outboard to facilitate drying out. The propeller shaft is protected by a short skag set into the heavily rockered hull. A cutter rig is the standard set-up and the mast on the test boat was the optional carbon one. In addition, the boat featured the optional fat headed fully battened mainsail which further boosted sail area.

On deck

Climbing aboard you immediately grab hold of solid guardrails which set the tone for a very substantial, rugged boat. Ovni has decades of experience building blue water cruisers of this type and they definitely know what they are about. The side decks are wide and there is an ample sprinkling of grab rails as you move forward. Lower shrouds set inboard mean there is a clear walkway forward and there is storage for fenders in the forward anchor locker. At the bow is a fixed aluminium sprit for reaching sails and also a twin anchor roller set-up.

The cockpit features twin helms and comfortable seating for six. The cockpit coamings are thoughtfully curved for perching outboard and pleasingly festooned with non-skid – not always the case. The stern is fairly open, although seats behind the twin helms, bridged by a flip-up bench in between, provide an element of security and also extra storage space. There is a small locker for the liferaft just where it should be at the transom and a modest bathing platform. As mentioned, the solid

ABOVE
A modest bathing platform with additional storage in the helmsman's seats and the liferaft locker tucked in between

BELOW
The chart table is raised up and provides excellent all round views if you're sat plotting your position

aluminium arch also provides twin davits for a tender and also a bit of a platform for solar panels plus the frame for a roll-away bimini. The sprayhood is in canvas and at present there is no option for a solid aluminium doghouse as seen on larger models due to weight concerns relating to the boat achieving the boat's Category A rating.

The cockpit set up features four winches with two sets on the coachroof and two more within reach of the helmsman. The two closest to the helm are for the Code 0 or gennaker. The aim is that you can control everything from the shelter of the sprayhood if the going gets heavy. Meanwhile in more favourable conditions, the helmsman can play with the bigger headsails while steering. The only real peculiarity in all this was that you had to start the engine from the saloon which struck me as slightly odd. Otherwise the set-up was extremely well thought out and comfortable.

Down below

The companionway was broad and heavily angled making for a very easy entrance into a space that was bathed in light thanks to the massive wraparound window, which features five opening portholes allowing for excellent ventilation. The early



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Ovni's were famed for their rather stark and functional styling and while this remains to an extent, it has been softened to provide a space that is modern but also homely. The headlining is an interesting feature as it is a layer of painted cork which is both practical, sustainable and light. The light pine finish is also very pleasant and the ambience is relaxing. Ovni is providing two distinct options; one is more of a standard layout while the second is raised up in the classic 'deck saloon' manner. So far this layout has proven to be the winner, with all orders placed being for this option which certainly provides excellent levels of light and a good feeling of space.

The saloon layout features a very comfortable seating area to starboard which affords excellent views. Tucked beneath this seating area is an awful lot of storage space plus an inspection hatch for the lifting keel. There is the option to fit a second fridge in this area if required while behind this seating area is a capacious wet locker and warm air can be funnelled in here if you've fitted heating. The linear galley is to port and is well laid out with everything to hand.

Aft of the galley is a very pleasing forward facing chart table where it is possible to pretty much sail the ship if you feel so inclined. The electronics on the test boat were all run from an iPad which allows you to run everything on the ship remotely should you so desire.

There is a double cabin in the aft port quarter which offers a good amount of space, while the starboard quarter is designated as a workshop. On this particular version, two bunks had also been installed which were reasonably comfortable. This area also provided excellent access to the

rudder quadrants and mechanism – a very important feature in a blue water yacht. There was also access to the engine both from the rear and via the companionway steps. There is space here for a watermaker and generator if needs be. Just forward of this workshop is a very roomy heads area. The shower is separate and forward of the main saloon. This shower room is bafflingly large but I was informed that, because this was hull number one, this would actually be tweaked slightly with the shower room made slightly smaller in order to allow for a larger berth in the bows. Despite this, the shower room will remain very large which is a real boon on a 37' boat and there is actually space for a small washing machine in here should you wish to fit one. The forward double berth is roomy with a good deal of light and space. As mentioned, hull number two will have a slightly longer berth.

Under sail

The day of the test was heralded by very light winds which were to slowly fill in and peak at 12kn. There was a long, lazy rolling swell. Given this is a heavy boat that is designed to deal with whatever the weather gods throw at it, this was probably the most challenging of all conditions. It did make manoeuvring a piece of cake though. One thing about a twin rudder swing keel boat is that it can handle a bit like a shopping trolley if the breeze pipes up. The bow thruster has been a game changer in this respect, however and has taken the spice out of close quarters manoeuvring. Once out at sea we put up the main and the large gennaker and poked the bow

ABOVE LEFT
A generously dimensioned seating area with the hanging locker just aft followed by the entrance to the heads

ABOVE RIGHT
The linear galley with chart table aft

BELOW
Modest conditions off Les Sables d'Olonne provided a different sort of challenge for the Ovni which is built to handle heavy weather

into 6kn of true wind on a close reach. The boat sailed bolt upright in these conditions meaning that wetted surface area was kept low and we trickled along at a respectable 4-4.5kn. As the breeze grudgingly filled in, we heeled reasonably sharply and sat in that heavily defined chine as we continued to make impressive progress. I had eyed the rather stubby rudders doubtfully but they seemed well balanced and the helm was light and responsive for a heavy boat in light conditions.

In fact, the boat was rather fun and, as we continued to accelerate across the rolling swell with the breeze gradually building, it was hard not to smile and eye that horizon wistfully. Eventually though we turned tail, rolled away the big gennaker and set the jib. Hard on the wind we made good progress. The boat was happiest and in the groove at 040 degrees off the wind but could be nudged up to 035 degrees if required. All in all, it was a brisk and satisfactory sail in conditions the boat is not necessarily optimised for yet in which it behaved impeccably. I was impressed. ✦





SAM'S VERDICT

Alubat knows its game very well. Their boats have a very loyal following and stick to a tried and tested formula. Although the 370 is radical and clever in its design it also ticks all the boxes that the traditional Ovni buyer demands and the result is that they have turned out a really polished blue water cruising yacht. It's great that the boat is on the smaller side and

the amount of volume provided was impressive. I walked away wondering why a cruising couple require a bigger boat than this. The looks are striking and may divide opinion but the result is a powerful, rugged, versatile performer that inspires confidence.

COMFORT: ★★★★★

BLUE WATER ABILITY: ★★★★★

LOOKS: ★★★★★

THE SPEC

LOA: 11.95m (39ft 2in)

LWL: 11.40m (37ft 5in)

Beam: 3.99m (13ft 1in)

Draught: 0.92 to 3.08m (3ft 0in to 10ft 1in)

Displacement: 9,400kg (20,700lb)

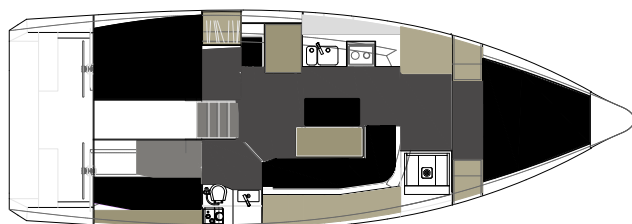
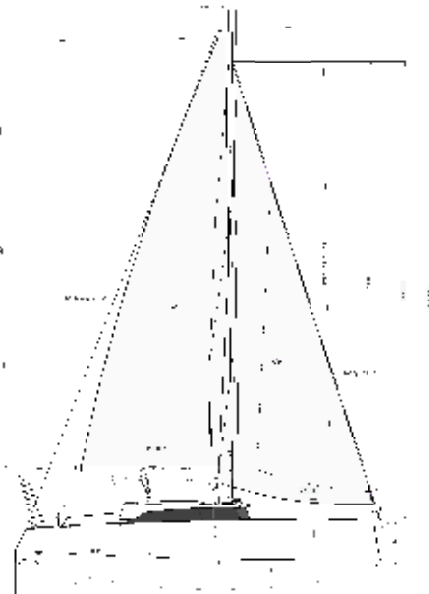
Ballast: 3,000kg (6,610lb)

Price: €282,000 ex VAT (base)
€450,000 (as tested inc VAT)

Builder: alubat.com

UK broker: North Sea Maritime
northseamaritime.com

Tel: 01702 584821



ALTERNATIVE BOATS



ALLURES 40.9

Larger and therefore more expensive but, as mentioned, there aren't many yachts available of this type in the sub 40' bracket. The 40.9 also features an all-aluminium hull and swing keel.

allures.com



DJANGO 12.7

Another radical French design that offers similar levels of versatility but with a fibreglass hull. This is a somewhat more performance oriented yacht that features the options of either swing, fixed or even twin keels.

Mareehaute.fr



RUSTLER 37

An different beast but still the sort of boat that sailors with a desire to go blue water adventuring will consider. This is the pipe and slippers alternative to Ovni's vape pen and Ugg boots.

rustleryachts.com

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