

Noelex goes to the max

For those who really like their trailer sailers in jumbo sizes the Noelex 30 would be hard to beat. This boat is perfect for ocean racing and also delivers super inshore cruising comfort. James Hill reports.

Strictly speaking the Noelex 30 is not quite a true trailer sailer, at least not by the Trailer Yacht Association's definition. Its over-legal trailer width of 2.86 metres (nine feet, five inches) makes it 15-inches too wide for competing in trailer sailer events.

While the Noelex is wider than the legal limit it nonetheless meets the criteria of a maxi trailer-yacht in all other respects. To start with, its dry weight is within the towing capacity of a big four-wheel-drive vehicle or a V8 powered pickup, and with a special wide-load permit it can be trailed on roads just as easily as any other maxi TS. The wide-load permit which can be issued in any State enables you to tow just about anywhere except some narrow streets and after dark.

Maxi trailer sailers are by virtue of their extra size and weight different animals to other small to medium sized TS's. With boats of this size trailing is an option which you combine with periods of permanent mooring, rather than popping the boat in and out of the water for just a few hours of sailing. In parts of the country where there is simply nowhere to moor a boat, but plenty of room on the shoreline to dry-store, a boat like the Noelex 30 is ideal.

Of course there are quite a few maxi TS's on the market these days, many of which are less expensive than the Noelex. What makes this particular boat good value is a combination of red hot sailing performance and true offshore ability.

Without detracting from other maxi TS's, the fact is that not many are really suited to offshore sailing. At best they are not blisteringly fast performers. The reason is that in most cases the maxi TS is trying to offer a narrow beam, standing headroom and extensive cruising accommodation, all at the same time. The net result is that such a boat gives away a lot of potential performance and is usually relatively less



fast than smaller TS's.

Most buyers of maxi TS's are very happy to have a cruising boat, but if you happen to also enjoy racing then the Noelex 30 deserves a look.

The Noelex 30 not only offers maxi trailer sailer accommodation but also has standing headroom right through the main cabin, in the toilet compartment and for'ard Vee berth cabin. Thanks to the extra wide beam the boat is much roomier than any other maxi TS and, for that matter, most production keelboats of this size.

From the cruising viewpoint the Noelex 30 is very attractive as it offers comfortable accommodation for up to six adults, with the room to stay on-board for extensive periods, rather than

just overnight.

Coupled with the Noelex's cruising capacity is the boat's impressive sailing performance. This boat is one of the fastest 30 foot yachts currently around — including some more expensive one-off racers. Due to its very light weight, its powerful hull with wide stern sections and its advanced fractional rig, it has the speed potential of many 40 footers.

With a retractable bulb-footed centre-board keel and a dinghy-style hull and large mainsail, the Noelex 30 is capable of planing downwind in strong winds and achieving 15 knots.

Given its design parentage it is not surprising that the Noelex 30 is such a hot racing boat. The original concept of



Instrument panel over navigator's table features wind instrument readout.

the boat was developed by its New Zealand builders, Steve Martens and Alex Trethaway, who earlier produced the very successful Noelex 25. The smaller boat was a mini-maxi which sold over 300 boats in New Zealand and established the name of Noelex on both sides of the Tasman. Martens designed the 25 as a cruiser/racer which would be easy to sail with a family crew. One of the best features of this design was a self-tacking headsail, which made the boat very easy to sail upwind.

When Martens and his partner decided it was time to build a bigger follow-up to their 25, they decided to go for a boat which was basically a blown up version of the popular 25 with a bit more emphasis on racing and the ability to sail offshore. To give the 30 an edge over its competitors, Martens and Trethaway handed their design concept over to Bruce Farr, who shaped it into something that would be exceptionally fast around a race track.

The Farr style is apparent in the Noelex, although it has softer, more rounded sections than the usual designs. No doubt the rounded hull shape is deliberate allowing the Noelex to carry the styling of the smaller boat, but still be capable of speed.

Overall, the Noelex is aimed at club fleet and performance Handicap Racing (PHF), rather than the IOR. The hull is designed without any rule in mind, so the boat is much faster than equivalent sized IOR boats.

For club racing the retractable keel is designed to stay fixed down and not be raised while the boat is sailing. The retractable dagger-style keel carries the boat's 587 kgs of lead ballast, which adds up to a ballast ratio of only 31 percent. On paper this is a low ballast to weight ratio, given that most upwind performing yachts have a ratio more like 50 percent. However, since most of this weight is centred in the bulb at the foot of the keel it gives the boat a more effective righting moment.



Looking aft the galley features gimbal oven and stove and teak faced lockers.



Looking forward in saloon, centrecase is hardly noticeable in cabin.





Small self-locking headsail allows Noelex 30 to engage in close tactical dog-fights.

Transposed to the Australian sailing scene the Noelex is an interesting proposition. While the boat can legally meet IOR race requirements and successfully race in IOR style events, its rating is just too 'off the air' to give it a chance of winning anything on handicap. Several have raced in IOR events such as the Sydney/Mooloolaba and the Pittwater/Coffs Harbour race, and while in fresh downwind conditions they were able to keep up with the 40-footers they never got into the money at the end.

While winning on IOR is a long shot with the Noelex, nonetheless the boat can provide a very inexpensive introduction into this style of racing and give the crew a lot of fun as well as division line honours.

Given that the boat is suited more to the short distance style of ocean race and not so much to the longer events, it is better suited to the Junior Offshore Racing Group (JOG) scene. The JOG rule is much kinder on the Noelex 30, and in this format of racing it can provide a competitive performer as well as a regular line honours winner.

For those who don't want to ocean race, the Noelex can happily race in the normal handicap day races of the big keelboat clubs. With its small self-tacking headsail, the Noelex 30 is right at home in close-quarter harbour racing. In JOG and IOR events the boat is disadvantaged in light winds with the small headsail, since rules allow overlap headsails of up to 150 percent of the foretriangle base to be carried without penalty. In such conditions the Noelex throws away potential performance and a lightweight mylar genoa

would have to be considered a worthy purchase.

Test

Recently I had the opportunity to test the NSW Agents demo boat *More Imagination*, in a pleasant mid-week harbour race at Middle Harbour, Sydney. Noelex agent Tony Barnes has raced *More Imagination* for some two years now, and with fairly constant use the boat understandably had a few signs of wear and tear. Despite the varnish work below looking like it needed a touch-up, the boat presented surprisingly well. The exterior fibreglass gel coat looked very good and it was obvious during the test that the boat was well-built even if it wasn't brand new.

For our test sail we carried the standard rig of full size mainsail and self tacking jib. The wind was blowing a fresh 14 to 18 knots and in such conditions we needed the weight of all four crew up on the weather deck to sit the boat up. Tony says that in fresh winds he would normally carry a crew of six to gain some extra 'human ballast', but even with the four the boat handled the conditions quite admirably.

During the race we managed to hold off several larger yachts and gain on many smaller yachts which had started ahead of us. Downwind the boat skated away effortlessly, while upwind, with a bit of attention to the helm, I was able to coax a very impressive six knots.

The virtues of the dinghy-style fractional rig were most evident in such fresh wind conditions. The rig kept the pressure low and enabled the boat to

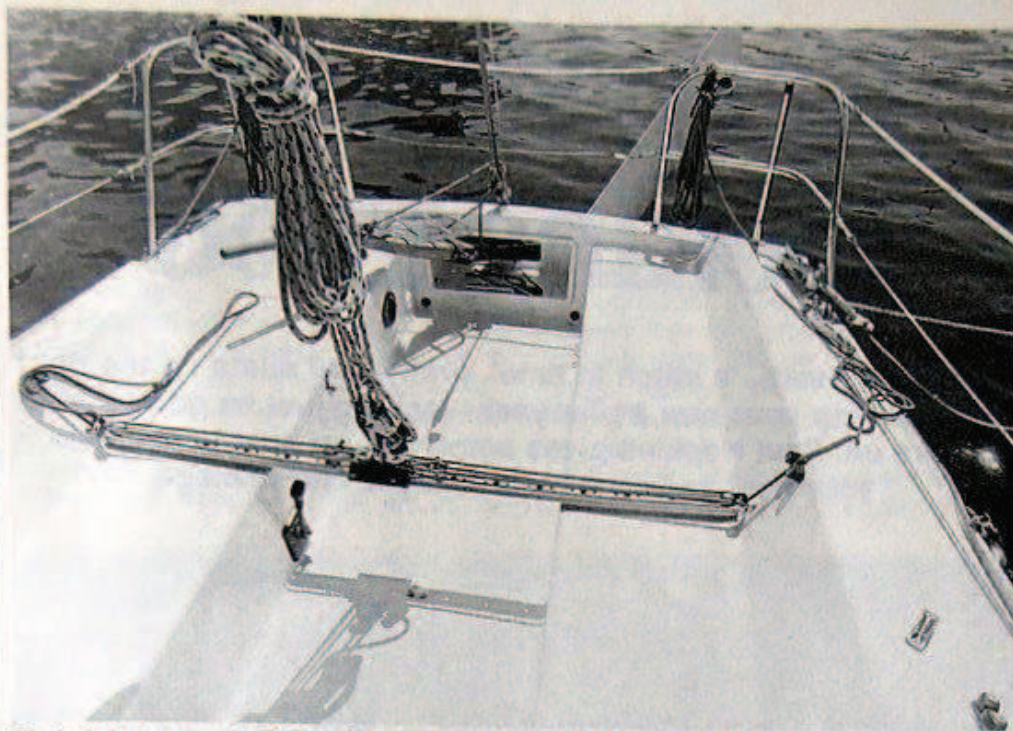
drive along easily without building up a heavy weather helm. With the bulk of the sail area in the mainsail, it was easy for just two of the crew to actually sail the boat while the other two relaxed.

It was a dream to sail a boat upwind through tacks without having to winch on jib sheets. Once I had decided to throw a tack in, all I needed to do was warn the crew and go through the motions. Apart from tacking itself, the self-tacker headsail does an excellent job of getting steam up on the new tack. Several times we seemed to come through a tack without losing any appreciable speed.

The advantage of this easy tacking was that we were able to throw in a lot of tacks at one stage of the race, just so we could work the wind shifts and get onto the favoured side of the course. We probably would have still done as many tacks with an overlapping headsail, but I think with a self-tacker you become inclined to tack more often than you would with headsails that have to be sheeted home on the new tack.

The self-tacking jib is the same set as that used on the smaller 25. The clew board of the sail is sheeted on a 2:1 ratio to a raised 1-beam track which runs the width of the trunk cabin-top. The track sheet is double-ended, with one end running back aft to the control panel at the front of the cockpit.

The long-footed mainsail comes standard equipped with a mainsheet traveller and control lines which run the width of the cockpit seats. In fresh winds it's necessary to drop the traveller as far as possible and then haul



Cockpit features raised coamings and central mainsheet traveller.

it up a bit in the lulls.

We found it was best to sail the boat off the mainsail rather than the headsail. The mainsail is so big, the boat gets most of its drive from this sail. Sometimes I was pointing up in gusts to the extent that the jib was luffing while the leech of the mainsail was still driving.

While the boat is fitted with an adjustable backstay, this stay is kept loose in fresh upwind work. The tapered Bavastock mast allows mainsail sheet pressure to bend the top of the mast pretty easily, so there is no need to have the backstay hard on. Off the wind, the swept-back spreaders again give most of the support to the rig and the backstay only needs to be tensioned to stop tip mast lay-off in really fast, rough-riding conditions.

Interestingly, the backstay comes into its own in light winds as it can then be used to pre-bend the mast at the top to give a better mainsail without the leech closing off.

Working from bow to stern, the Noelex has a useful anchor locker with double doors right for'ard. There are two big bronze anchor cleats and a bow roller of worthwhile size. A smoked perspex hatch lets light and air into the forecabin which has twin vee berths. These can be converted to a single double berth. Around the mast there is a walk-in sized toilet compartment which fills in the space alongside the centrecase. This compartment has an attractive teak grate board, wash basin and vanity unit.

The side decks are fairly narrow but still make comfortable seats for the crew. Below, the saloon offers an

L-shaped dinette to port, with a settee berth opposite. The dinette converts to a double bed once the mahogany table is removed.

A special feature of the interior is a slide-out food bin which incorporates the companionway steps. This unit has two deep fibreglass-lined containers with enough capacity for a cruise of several weeks. This feature alone should win some cruising-minded buyers over to this boat, even if the rest of the accommodation does not impress.

The interior accommodation is completed by a port quarter berth and a hinged navigator's table which swings up under the deckhead. It even has storage for charts.

The interior is clean and attractively finished with fibreglass furniture mouldings taking in the galley and all the bunk units. There is a moulded fibreglass headliner and the hull sides and centrecase surrounds are finished in a smart beige woven fabric material called Frontrunner.

While the interior is very much that of a fibreglass boat, there is enough timber trim and timber panelling to lessen the effect of GRP. The main bulkhead and bunk trims are in timber, as is the galley front. The toilet compartment is completely lined in timber, as is the large full-length hanging locker opposite.

The cockpit features comfortable moulded seats with high backrests for extra security and spray protection. It's roomy enough for five or six people to sit, although the tiller takes up most of the space behind the traveller. These days straight racing boats don't worry

about such things as coamings, but obviously this was one concession the Noelex builders were willing to make for cruising folk. The coaming can be used as a seat by the cockpit crew, especially if the lifelines are slacked off a bit.


Some of the features of this boat I particularly liked included the footsteps moulded into the transom, the way the tiller lifted up out of the way to give more room in the cockpit when moored, the electrically operated hydraulic keel ram, the way the boat moved in fresh winds and the ease of the self-tacker.

Features which I was not so pleased with included the fact that the control buttons for the keel lift were down alongside the casing in the cabin. I think it would be handy when cruising in shoal waters to have the controls, or a duplicated set, closer to the cockpit. I also found the side decks a bit narrow for easy access but I have to admit that I can't see any way around this problem, unless the beam is widened still further, which in turn would make the boat too hard to tow.

I would have liked to see some air vents below, particularly if this boat was to be sold in northern Australia. Actually, I think this would be an excellent boat for places like Darwin and Northern Queensland, where boats have to be hauled out of the water for half the year and secured on land.

With its lift keel and super accommodation I imagine this boat would be excellent for towing up north for a shot at the Whitsundays. As Tony points out, you could even race the boat up north on the sunshine circuit of races and then trail it back home. Either way it sounds pretty good to me.

Naturally, a boat of this calibre doesn't come cheap. The deluxe sail away model which we tested costs \$43,470 including sales tax. To this can be added the cost of an auxiliary engine, which can be either outboard or small inboard diesel plus spinnaker kit and safety pack. All up that comes to around \$48,000.

Sounds good? Well, start saving! 

Specifications

Length	9.41 m
LWL	8.15 m
Beam	2.85 m
Draft	0.52-1.92 m
Dry weight	1875 kg
Ballast in keel	587 kg
Sail area mainsail	26.06m ²
jib	14.13m ²

Manufacturer: Marten Marine, Auckland, NZ.