

# Flying Dutchman

Contest Yachts' ethos of performance, seaworthiness and comfort has always been a beguiling mix. *Sam Jefferson* tests the new 55CS to see if the blend is right



Everyone has a different idea of what makes the perfect blue water cruising yacht but there are a few basic premises that are

absolutely necessary. First up, a blue water cruising yacht needs to sail well and it needs to make you feel safe in heavy weather. Can we all agree on that? Good. I think I can confidently say that this is the basic ethos that Contest Yachts has stuck to for a good long time now – with an emphasis on quality and tailoring boats to customers' specific needs into the mix. All in all, it has made for a very successful formula over the years. Without in any way being about racing yachts, Contest has created it's own special blend. For those not au fait with this Dutch boatbuilder, this family run company was established way back in 1959 and established a reputation for building full-blooded cruising yachts with a turn of speed. Over the years, the company has built on that template, moving towards semi-custom yachts. Contest has also gained a strong reputation for its expertise in fibreglass work, leading the way in recent years with pioneering work on 'one shot' vacuum infusion construction. They are the only boatbuilder in this size range to enjoy full Lloyd's certification – a mark of quality that is far from easy to achieve and which the boatyard rightly prides itself on.

The new 55CS is the latest addition to the fleet and sits between the 50CS and the (also new) 59CS. In common with all of their launches in the last decade or so, the hull of the 55CS is designed by the hugely experienced team of Judel/Vrolijk who know a thing or two about blending performance and comfort. As such, the boat has decent but not excessive freeboard, beam is reasonable at 16ft but there is plenty of taper aft, pointing to a well rounded performer. Displacement is 24,000kg which is a good 6,000kg lighter than a Hallberg Rassy 57, for example, but also 9,000kg or so heavier than a Beneteau Oceanis Yacht 54. The sail plan is powerful and there is the option of a carbon mast. There

is a single spade rudder and a keel with a decent chord width as you'd expect from a serious cruising yacht.

Visually, this is an impressive looking yacht. Judel/Vrolijk have stuck with the plumb bow, integrated bowsprit and almost vertical transom that has given many of their designs an aggressive look of late. Hull number one which I tested was a glossy Contest blue, giving the boat a real air of purpose. Decks have been kept uncluttered, and the distinctive coachroof with wraparound portlights has been retained. The 55CS has a certain intangible air of the high end about her.

### On deck

Step aboard and you find yourself in a very comfortable cockpit which has been split into a lounging area forward with the 'working' area for steering and sail handling aft. This is a tried and tested formula seen on many yachts these days, but it works particularly well on the Contest partly thanks to the mainsheet securing point and main winch being centrally located between the two wheels. This makes for very simple sail handling with the electric

**ABOVE**  
Contest has worked hard to up light air performance on the new 55CS

**BELOW**  
Uncluttered decks and clearly delineated 'working' and 'lounging' areas are a hallmark of the 55CS

winch being in precisely the right place. I suppose the downside is you lose the wide corridor between the two wheels to the aft deck but I feel that is a price worth paying. The control panel is set into the starboard binnacle and allows you to control furling of the jib and mainsail at the push of a button. There is no traveller and instead the hydraulic vang is utilised to tweak sail shape

and depower where necessary. This worked very well and I found the 55CS one of the most simple boats to operate. The primary winches for the headsail are also located just outboard of the helm and in perfect reach. Aft of the wheels were a pair of white seats which are set back slightly from the wheels and are more intended for sitting in than sitting and steering the boat. They

provide a comfortable place to relax with the boat on autopilot. There is a convenient perch on the coamings for hand steering. Forward of this is a deep, oval shaped seating area with a decent sized table in the centre with a fridge integrated into it. This is a supremely comfortable area with nice rounded corners which are ideal for wedging yourself into when the boat is heeling and then sitting back and enjoying the sensation of yacht reeling in the miles. The sprayhood also provides good protection in wilder weather.

Aft of the steering wheels is a pretty large rear deck which would make a nice lounging area if you were cruising in more clement climes. Beneath this deck is the dinghy garage – a feature that is often the bête noir of any yacht designer putting together a yacht in the 50-60ft size range. This one is substantial and accommodated a slightly deflated 3.1m dinghy. It also doubles as an extremely spacious lazarette, which can be accessed from the deck. The bathing platform is substantial and drops down on electrically powered rams.

Out on the foredeck, things are smooth and uncluttered; again, there is a good deal of space here for lounging once the anchor is down. There is no crew quarters here as this is a yacht intended for owner cruising, but there is a very deep storage locker set abaft the anchor locker.

**ABOVE**  
Looking forward from the owner's cabin, through the linear galley into the saloon

### Down below

Step down below and you find yourself in extremely pleasant surroundings. The interior was designed by Wetzels, Brown and Partners, with the brief to come up with something that was luxurious without being flash and it has to be said that this has been achieved.

The main saloon is bathed in light and is a tasteful mix of pale fabrics and light wood. I should add at this point that each Contest is available with a high level of customisation so each will be different, but I will describe what was in front of me.

One thing that does stay the same is that the linear galley is situated to port in the corridor between the saloon and the master suite. This has long been established in blue water cruiser design as the most practical arrangement, providing the greatest amount of security in a seaway. As such, this one is nicely laid out with the inevitable option of a dishwasher. The quality of the fit out was exceptional and it was also clearly evident that a lot of thought had been put into every detail of the layout. The saloon itself features a large lounging area to port and a L-shaped sofa area to port with a small table that can be raised and folded out to make a decent dining area. Two stools that are integrated into the port side sofa can also be detached and used as extra seating in the dining area if required. Aft of the seating on the starboard side is the chart





## ALTERNATIVE YACHTS



HALLBERG RASSY 57

A while back the blend between sportiness and cruising practicality was weighted much more toward the latter with Hallberg Rassy. Now though the 57 steps firmly on Contest's toes with this surprisingly sprightly German Frers design.

[hallberg-rassy.com](http://hallberg-rassy.com)



DISCOVERY 54

Designed by Ed Dubois and originally conceived as a Southerly, this design has been given a new life by Discovery Yachts and beautifully fitted out for blue water cruising while also offering the extra versatility of a swing keel if an owner wishes.

[discoveryshipyard.com](http://discoveryshipyard.com)



AMEL 50

A bit smaller and a lot quirkier but similarly aimed at the discerning cruising sailor who is looking for a boat that is a little bit different. This is a beautifully fitted out yacht crammed with clever touches.

[amel.fr](http://amel.fr)

table and there is the choice of having a forward-facing table or a fore and aft 'office style' desk.

Step forward and there is a small cabin to starboard which would generally be a bunk room with extra storage but on this model was a sort of 1½ bed – not quite a double. To starboard was a nicely sized heads compartment with plenty of room to keep the shower well away from the heads – plus some nice wooden slatted flooring. Further forward was a well dimensioned, and extremely light, forward double. Twin skylights overhead plus portlights made this a much more pleasant space than on many yachts. The resulting feel was that the boat was over 55ft in length.

Aft is the owner's suite which is suitably opulent, and the area that delivered the coup de grâce of the boat in the form of a huge aft-facing portlight which provided excellent views of any anchorage with the bathing platform down. It was a

stunning touch. The ensuite heads, further round to starboard, was roomy and beautifully fitted out.

Access to the engine is via a door set within the shower stall which allows you to walk in and inspect the engine. The generator, incidentally, is accessed by lifting up the saloon steps and this also allows you to get to the front of the motor if required.

### Under sail

We sailed from Contest's home base of Medemblik on a brisk September day. In fact, it was perhaps more than brisk, with between 20 and 23 knots of breeze and a suitably unpleasant short chop which is a speciality of the IJsselmeer. The shallow waters of this inland sea are not at all what the Contest is designed for - but the breeze certainly was. The engine was started but I didn't notice due to the extraordinary quality of sound insulation. The single spade rudder also means that a stern

**ABOVE LEFT**  
The master suite features a clever portlight which provides extra light and views of the anchorage with the bathing platform lowered

**ABOVE RIGHT**  
The interior design brief was luxury without being flash

**BELOW**  
On a beam reach, we hit 10.1 knots without any fuss

thruster really should be viewed as an unnecessary luxury by all but the most nervous sailors.

Once underway, the sails commenced to do what she does best; make sailing look effortless. This is a big, powerful yacht and one that somehow managed to make a 20+ knot breeze feel like absolutely nothing. The horrible short chop was also swatted aside effortlessly.

We started the test under full sail and the boat was unquestionably powered up and on the verge of being overpressed until we furled a touch of mainsail. As a result, there was a decent amount of feel in the rudder although even in the strongest gusts she refused to round up, which was impressive. Sailing hard on the wind (about 30 degrees off) we hit 9 knots and with the wind on the beam we hit 10.1. All the while the boat felt unhurried and unfussed but also a whole lot of fun.

## SAM'S VERDICT

No question, this is a magnificent boat; beautifully put together, fun to sail, luxurious and reassuring. It's a boat you could take around the world with complete confidence. In common with other recent Contests, there is definitely a nod towards Med cruising - plenty of lounging space, a powerful rig for light airs - but this deviates only slightly

from the traits of a serious blue water cruiser. Essentially, the 55CS offers a beguiling blend that will undoubtedly attract the discerning sailor with an eye for something a little special.

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

LOOKS: ★★★★★

COMFORT: ★★★★★

## THE SPEC

Specifications

**Length overall:** 17m (55'7")

**Length waterline:** 15.83m (51'94")

**Maximum beam:** 5.02m (16'5")

**Displacement:** 24,960kg (55,027lbs)

**Draft standard keel:** 2.55m (8'4")

**Mainsail:** 92.75m<sup>2</sup> (1,087ft<sup>2</sup>)

**Genoa:** 106% 71m (2767ft<sup>2</sup>)

**Engine:** Perkins 110kW 150hp

**Price:** (base) € 1,448,000 exc VAT

**Contact:** [contestyachts.com](http://contestyachts.com)

