



# Santa Cruz 37

It's not all about rating wars. **Andi Robertson** discovers a boat that puts a smile on his face when he takes the Santa Cruz 37 for a spin.

## Specification

<b>LOA:</b>	11.28m
<b>LWL:</b>	10.59m
<b>Beam:</b>	3.24m
<b>Draught:</b>	1.82-2.29m
<b>Displacement:</b>	3,929kg
<b>Ballast:</b>	1,692kg
<b>Sail Area:</b>	Mainsail: ?? Genoa: ?? Gennaker: ??
<b>Price:</b>	£??

**T**he Santa Cruz 37 has a very specific appeal. At the moment it very much fits a niche market but in due course there should be every chance of it becoming an in-demand one-design class.

The Santa Cruz ethos has always been about putting fast and fun before rating performance. The company were almost singlehandedly responsible for some of the best known and most successful USA west coast sleds. Santa Cruz yachts date back to 1971. Bill Lee was responsible for a train of boats that started with a 30-footer called 'Magic, then 35-footers 'Witchcraft' and 'Chutzpah'. The latter won the Transpac in 1973 and 1975. In between those years the first Santa Cruz 27s were



built and went on to sell 134 boats. And in 1977 Lee designed and built the 68ft sled 'Merlin', widely credited one of the first proper ULDBs (ultra light displacement boat), which won the 1977 Transpac and set a course record which stood for 20 years until it was finally broken by Roy Disney's Santa Cruz 70 sled 'Pyewacket'. In the modern Transpac Santa Cruz 50s



and 52s race as an active class.

In 2007 the company was virtually re-born, moving to Florida – Bill Lee is still development director – and the Santa Cruz 37 was launched last year. Since then it has won a slew of awards as Boat of the Year in her native USA, while in the UK the brand sits very comfortably within the line up of Hamble's Key Yachting.

### Class and concept

Santa Cruz 37 buyers to date have been – and will continue to be – discerning owners who want something different, something simple and turn-key. The Santa Cruz 37 puts a smile on their face for its performance and not necessarily because they have outfoxed the opposition by spending more or having mined the IRC rule better.

To date in the UK there have been two Santa Cruz 37s: 'Sonic', which was generously lent for testing is Stewart Hawthorn's new boat. Hawthorn has had a string of J-Boats over the years of all sizes and has been very successful with them, but for him it was time for a new challenge. Something to rekindle the fun factor, but which he can still also weekend on with his young family – in fact a matter of hours after we sailed he was off

cruising for the bank holiday weekend.

The Santa Cruz 37 is neither particularly IRC-friendly, nor does it have any inherent drawbacks. To date, both in the US and in Europe, the 37 has yet to prove it can top the podium among the best IRC custom and production boats around, but there is still a very long way to go with simple measurement and off-the-shelf optimisation to improve the results.

Paul Heys of Key Yachting considers the current boats are about 10 points high of where they could be simply by being weighed properly, and have around 20 rating points to be gained by opting for the bow down measurement trim – as was played successfully by the Ker 'Silk Glove'. Paul and his team have only been looking closely at the possibilities over the last few weeks, but he believes the gain should be relatively easily 'achievable'. But, he rightly points out, if you want a slower, heavier IRC boat for predominantly windward-leeward regattas then the Santa Cruz 37 would not be at the top of the shopping list.

When a critical mass is reached in Europe there will be class racing. The one-design rules are written and boats are already going into Germany, Holland, Sweden and Italy, plus seven in the USA. In a deep recession like this, that is a healthy sales figure for a high performance all-carbon 37-footer. You could easily see the SC37 getting traction in Italy where the Melges 32 has become successful – in some respects it is what a Melges 37 might be. This would also be a great boat for the Med, the French Atlantic coast and, dare we say, Ireland where they might now be regretting spending their wealth on an IRC p\*ssing contest.

In recessionary times one-design also represents a good investment. In the US there are boats on both coasts, with five or six due into Annapolis. There is a trailer option but so far none of the first 10 boats have gone for the trailer. For a potential owner in Europe there is the great option of racing in Florida next winter before shipping for next season. It adds nothing to the shipping fee.

Current customers include owners who are reducing their exposure from high spending programmes like TP52s and Farr 40s, and the SC37 is a nice, manageable but fun alternative.

### Design and build

Momentarily casting aside objectivity, the SC37 is first and foremost a sexy looking boat. It has a meaningful appearance, modern and well proportioned. The lines by designer Tim Kernan are clean and sweet without being overpowering, a nice flattish, powerful stern, which is not too draggy, and clean bow sections that look to have ample reserve buoyancy.

The deck and cockpit is kept very simple, the rig is tall all-carbon Selden with a 105 per cent jib, powerful main, short fixed 'bumpkin' bowsprit for the Code Zero, and a retractable bowsprit that does not impinge on the forecabin space. All-up the boat weighs in at only 3,929 kilos with a 43 per cent ballast ratio, so something like half the weight on an Elan 37 and a tonne lighter than the smaller J/109.

The hull is precision vacuum bagged using a PVC core in a carbon/epoxy carbon layup with biaxial and unidirectional reinforcements. The structural reinforcement is in E-glass with unidirectional carbon reinforcement ▶

**ABOVE** The rig is a tall, all-carbon Selden affair, with a 105 per cent jib and powerful main.

**BELOW** Upwind the Santa Cruz 37 accelerates nicely, but the slender foils reward experienced helming to balance speed versus height.





**ABOVE** Even without a full crew on the rain, the SC37 was a rewarding mix of relatively stiff yet responsive.



and the main bulkhead is PVC foam/carbon sandwich too. Overall the standard of the moulding and detail work appeared to be excellent.

Space and working areas around the cockpit are excellent. We'd like to see more foot bracing, both for the helm and the mainsheet trimmer, and a deeper lip to the cockpit seats would be appreciated at times. For the helm the twin carbon wheels are an excellent solution, with excellent all-round vision and comfort, plus good space between them for access. Under the helm's feet there is a large lift up storage area for a tender or, more usually, the liferaft. The rudder blade drops into a rotating cassette and is easily accessed and lifted.

There is an option to have the keel lifting utilising a hydraulic system. In the US more and more marinas are silting up because regular dredging is not easy due to environmental restrictions, and so while the lifting keel option finds favour in terms of travel, storage and moving, there are also practical issues on the water.

The typical sail package for the boat is main, three jibs (Codes 1, 2 and 3.5), a minimum of two chutes and a Code Zero and that is pretty much you ready to take on the world. Point to point racing would be a lot of fun and rewarding on this boat. 'Sonic' has already lived up to her name with speeds of just under 22 knots in stronger winds, but she has also proved quick in the light stuff, taking comfortable line honours in the Spring Series on her debut race.

## On the water

The boat appeared easily worked, it felt light in almost all aspects: very responsive on the helm, easy to change gears and the sheet loads seemed to be very manageable. While it will double as a fast cruiser - in competent hands - it is certainly a boat that is set for the experienced owner.

In 11-13 knots of breeze the Santa Cruz was a real delight to sail in all directions in predominantly flat water and an occasional chop. We were not fully crewed at all, with at most three and sometimes four bodies on the rail, but it was a rewarding mix between being relatively stiff yet never feeling stodgy.

With some anticipation it was relatively

easy to convert the puffs into small acceleration upwind. The foils are slender and so it is a refined balancing act between building speed over them to gain height and keep working at it, being careful not to overcook it upwind. The 37 has the hallmarks of a boat that will reward the confident, experienced helm working in concert with a good mainsheet trimmer.

Upwind it was relatively easy to get to around 7 knots with just the four on the rail and with a full team there would be another quarter to a third of a knot for the taking. As expected the boat seemed pleasingly close-winded. Good, clean tacking in the boat is probably worth working at - although she seemed not to lose too much way - but a little encouragement, communication and coordination from the trimmers would be well rewarded.

Off the wind with the A-sail the biggest problem we encountered was trying not to smile too much. At all times the boat was very manageable, even fully heated up the boat tracked very cleanly and smoothly, requiring minimal use of the helm in the flat water. But there was enough bite to feel like the boat could be worked hard in bigger seas and stronger breeze, and you would certainly relish a long, fast downwind leg, say back from



the Fastnet. There are plans afoot to have at least one SC 37 in the next Sydney-Hobart: this is a boat which might not be too painful offshore upwind, but which would certainly be lightning fun downwind, whilst still offering excellent creature comforts below decks.

The SC37 was happy to roll down relatively deep in the moderate breeze but most of the time it was sailing slightly higher, hotter angles, which kept us sprinting along at 11-12 knots without any measure of hard work at all.

Fast is fun, as the Santa Cruz advertisement says, but it can be a little lonely. The 37 has promise to deliver under IRC in due course in mixed fleet racing, but for me it should come into its own class racing, either in the UK, Europe or the USA. It's also the kind of boat the Aussies, with their penchant for TP52s and Farr 40s, would be served well by.

**Interior**

The interior is surprisingly spacious, airy and comfortable. The aft sections are

basically open plan with big, symmetrical, double quarter berths, easy to get into and out of.

To port there is a fully fitted galley with a twin burner stove and a full sized oven, pedestal sink unit and excellent deep icebox. There is an excellent heads and shower unit forward in the boat. The main saloon seating area is generously proportioned with good stowage, leading forward to an equally good forecabin. So, while this will double as a good weekending boat, maybe even longer, for those who wish to sleep on board during regattas then there is a surprisingly high level of comfort for a boat which does offer grand prix performance from a production boat.

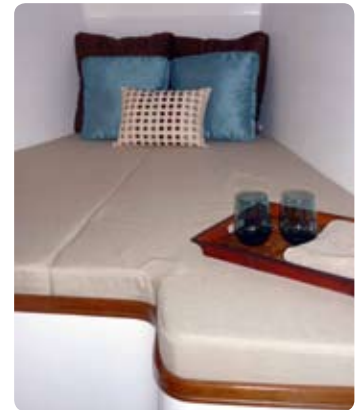
**The verdict**

Overall it was hard not to be totally taken by the Santa Cruz 37. Without doubt it does everything well enough to deserve a level of success. Short-term the design needs to at least hold its own at a few key IRC regattas as an initial springboard,



but hopefully there are enough far-sighted individuals who value their pleasure and enjoyment at least as much as the quest to fill the trophy cabinet. This may be a boat for those who are at a stage in their lives or their sailing careers where the heart and soul take precedent over the head. ■

**ABOVE** The 37 is enjoyable and comfortable downwind, happy to roll relatively deep in a moderate breeze but also to sail slightly higher, hotter angles.



**Brenta 38**

**LOA:** 11.66m  
**Beam:** 2.75m  
**Draught:** 2.25 m  
**Displacement:** 4,300kg  
**Ballast:** 2,200kg  
**Sail Area:** Mainsail: 55.8sq m  
 Genoa: 30sq m  
 Gennaker: 130sq m

Chic, all-carbon, head-turner, but a day sailer or compact weekender. Easy sailed, stable, sleek and simple and ideal if you subscribe to the less-is-more ethos.



**Ker 39**

**LOA:** 11.85m  
**Beam:** 3.52m  
**Draught:** 2.55m  
**Displacement:** 5,950kg  
**Sail Area:** Upwind: 95sq m  
 Spinnaker: 135sq m

Bona fide turn key IRC orientated performer with a fair record. Good all round with the potential to win regattas without spending top dollar on a custom boat.

Answer Back

**From XXXXXXXXXXXXX**

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**ABOVE LEFT** The interior is spacious, airy and comfortable for either weekending or living aboard during a regatta.

**ABOVE** The aft sections feature open plan big, symmetrical, double quarter berths.

EDITORS