

Sirius 310DS The multi-level space ship



When it comes to accommodation, sailing performance, build quality and scope for customisation in a 31-footer, the Sirius 310DS sets the standard, says David Harding

If you were choosing a boat for the elegance of her lines, the Sirius 310DS would probably not feature on your list. Nor would any deck-saloon cruiser of this size: by their very nature, yachts of around 31ft (9.4m) with raised saloons, inside steering positions and picture windows tend to be on the chunky side.

Boats like this major on comfort and accommodation, and few offer more of either than the Sirius. Yet this solid little ship from Germany is no floating caravan. Despite her modest length, substantial weight and ample proportions, she's also designed to perform under sail. She has an efficient rig, and the keel options include a performance, lead-bulbed fin giving a draught of 1.75m (5ft 9in).

The Sirius is designed for people who want to combine space and pace with almost infinite flexibility in interior layout (there are 15 variations), keel (six configurations), sail plan, fixtures and fittings. If the 'standard' options aren't enough, you can tell the builder exactly what you would like. If it's possible, it will be done.

So is she really all things to all men (and women)? That's what it sounds like on paper, though how a designer and builder can

squeeze up to two generous double cabins, 1.9m (6ft 3in) of headroom throughout, cavernous cockpit lockers and vast amounts of stowage into a boat of this length that actually sails is hard to conceive – until you meet the Sirius in the flesh.

Sirius thinking

Having sailed the Sirius 32 and 38 (see PBO April 2009), I had some idea of what to expect in the new baby of the range. I knew that the owner of the yard, Torsten Schmidt, is a master boatbuilder with an eye for detail as well as being a keen sailor who spends as much time as possible on the boats he conceives and builds. I knew that the yard – in Plön, just south of Kiel – has around 50 employees, all of whom are encouraged to contribute ideas and suggestions and to sail on the boats, with the



Whether steering is by wheel or the standard tiller, sheets are within easy reach and the ergonomics of the deep cockpit are good

owners, during an annual regatta in Germany. I knew that the quality and finish of the boats they build stands comparison with the best on offer from Scandinavian yards. All I didn't know was how the Sirius approach would work in such a small boat.

Sirius don't offer such a vast range of

options just for the sake of it. The choices reflect what customers want. Since the 310 was introduced just over a year ago, 18 boats have been sold encompassing nearly all 15 interior layouts on offer. All six keel configurations have been ordered, too: standard and performance deep fin, shallow fin, twin keels (accounting for more than half the orders), performance twins and fully-retractable swing keel with twin rudders (plus a mini-rudder immediately abaft the prop for manoeuvring under power).

Above deck, the sail plan on both boats can include a self-tacking jib or a genoa. Bolt on a mini-bowsprit for a larger genoa, or use the extra foretriangle length to fit twin furling systems for a genoa and self-tacker. Tack a lightweight drifter to the end of the bowsprit to make it three furlers in a row.

Semi-custom boatbuilding of this nature is normally on offer only with far larger craft, so to have such scope in a 30-footer (her hull is actually 9.3m/30ft 6in long) is exceptional.

Before we meet the two very different versions of the Sirius I tested, a couple of other important features need pointing out – starting with the multi-level accommodation. Like her bigger sisters, the 310 fits in more living space than a competent sailing boat of her size has any right to, especially given the lack of an aft cabin.

Her secret is the use of the space to port beneath the deck saloon. Here, the widest and deepest part of the hull can be used for whatever you choose. In many cases it's a capacious double cabin, with a berth that's excellent out at sea because, being central and low down, it's



PBO tested *Angharad* and *Slaandjivaa*, fin-keel and twin-keel configurations respectively



The twin-keel version of the new Sirius 310DS has been the most popular to date

close to the centres of pitch, roll and yaw. Down here in port or at anchor you won't be disturbed by water slapping under the stern, while having the cabin in the middle leaves the space under the cockpit seats free for a pair of vast lockers.

If you don't need a second separate sleeping cabin (in addition to the roomy forecabin), you can use the space amidships for an expanded heads compartment or an office and, further aft, a utility room-cum-workshop with access to the plumbing, mechanical and electrical installations. Virtually any combination you want, whether it's in the brochure or not, Sirius can accommodate.

Torsten calculates that, in terms of square-footage of living space, the 310 offers as much as a typical 38-footer of conventional design.

Pace with the space

The 310 is designed by Marc-Oliver von Ahlen, responsible for the Etap 24i, 30 and 46DS, the deck-saloon Degero 31 (tested in PBO March 2007) and a number of racing yachts as well as the Sirius 310's big sister, the 35. Von Ahlen seems to be a designer with an ability to make high-volume boats sail. One UK owner is selling his sporty 40ft Scandinavian cruiser/racer to buy

a Sirius 35, complete with performance twin keels and a carbon rig, that he plans to race.

One of the two 310s that I tested also had twin keels, giving a draught of 1.25m (4ft 1in). The other had the first of the performance fins, drawing 1.75m (5ft 9in) with its lead bulb. It had a short bowsprit as well, creating a longer foretriangle, and a conventional mainsail instead of the twin-keeler's in-boom system. Although these differences precluded a direct comparison between a fin and a twin, it was still a good opportunity to pace the two boats against each other – and to compare the layouts, which we'll discuss later.

It would be unfair to expect scintillating performance from the 310. At around 6.3 tons (nearly 14,000lb) she's no lightweight. All that displacement has to be carried somewhere, accounting for the near-vertical topsides and the relatively deep canoe body. Because the boat floats fairly deep in the water, a lot of the headroom is below the waterline rather than above it. A relatively deep hull also creates plenty of cool, under-sole stowage in the bilges and the well-immersed forefoot (it's more than 45cm/18in below the waterline) makes for relatively simple installation of a bow-thruster. It should help to avoid slamming in a seaway, too – not that we had a chance to put that to the test.

Sirius have never been keen on wide sterns. The 310 is relatively beamier than the much older 32 in her aft sections, but still narrower than many modern designs. This reduces her wetted area and should help in light and moderate conditions, perhaps at the

Tech spec

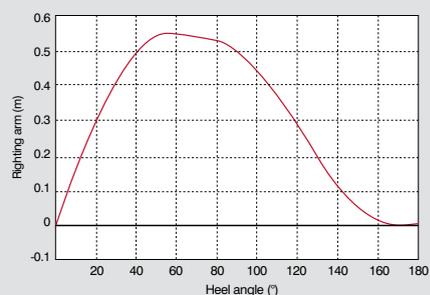


Keels can be swing, twins or four depths of fin

Workshop or second sleeping cabin: beneath the deck saloon, owners have a choice

Length overall (LOA)	9.30m (30ft 6in)
Waterline length (LWL)	8.53m (28ft 0in)
Beam	3.38m (11ft 1in)
Draught – medium fin	1.35m (4ft 5in)
– deep fin	1.80m (5ft 11in)
– performance (lead-bulbed) fin	1.75m (5ft 9in)
– shallow fin	1.15m (3ft 9in)
– twin keels	1.25m (4ft 1in)
– swing keel	0.75m - 2.00m (2ft 5in - 6ft 7in)
Displacement (standard fin)	6,300kg (13,888lb)
Ballast (standard fin)	2,400kg (5,291lb)
Sail area (main and foretriangle)	44.12sq m (475sq ft)
Sail area/displacement ratio	13.19
Displacement/length ratio	282
Engine	Volvo D1-29, 30hp saildrive
Headroom	1.90m (6ft 3in)
Designer	Marc-Oliver von Ahlen/Sirius
Builder	Sirius, Germany. Tel: 0049 4522 744 610 www.sirius-werft.de

PRICE: FROM £168,580



The GZ curve shows the maximum righting moment at 60° and no vanishing angle



BELOW Now you see it: access to the systems/utility room from the deck saloon



RIGHT And now you don't: who would have thought there's an entrance under there?



Saloon with a view – and a lot of space for a 31-footer



Stowage galore, and there's stacks more beneath the sole



LEFT The utility room complete with work bench and engine access

RIGHT Instead of the utility room, the space under the deck saloon can be used for a second double cabin



expense of surfing ability downwind when the breeze picks up. A reasonably low centre of gravity (it's the same with all six keel options) and a ballast ratio of around 38% should allow her to carry a decent spread of canvas to drive all that hull through the water, and we had ample sail on the fin-keeler because of the bowsprit and genoa. For the comparison between the two boats we changed to the self-tacker, but took the fin-keeler for a spin on her own first to see how she went.

Torsten and I were joined by her owners, Paul and Li Ching, whose previous boat had been a Westerly Konsort Duo. They had thought about moving up to a Scandinavian performance cruiser before deciding that they rather liked the deck-saloon concept after all and plumping for the 310 with the first of the lead-bulbed performance fin keels.

Performance plus

In flat water with around 13 knots of true wind, a fin keel, a folding prop (standard on all Sirius boats), a clean bottom and new, well-cut sails, most boats should be able to sail at somewhere near their optimum – at least upwind.

The genoa was the right sail for those conditions, driving us along at 5.3-5.4 knots between tacks of less than 80°. That's good going, and we'd undoubtedly have overtaken a fair few conventional cruisers of similar size had we found any to sail against.

A notable feature was the lack of transom-drag, the water flowing cleanly from the stern. She was easy to sail, with a nicely balanced helm that loaded up progressively if she was

deliberately pressed. Provoking her by bearing away in the stronger patches with the sheets pinned in would take the rudder to the limit of its grip, but she kept it all together.

A tiller is standard, though this boat and the twin-keeler both had wheels. A tiller would give more feel as well as a greater range of helming positions for both comfort and visibility, allowing the helmsman to perch on the nicely-shaped coamings.

Sitting on the seats, you can see through the deck saloon. Sitting on the coamings and when standing, you can see over it. The door is clear from top to bottom, so when it's hinged open the instruments behind it can still be seen.

The mainsheet is taken to a strong point on the pedestal immediately forward of the wheel, and the self-tailing Andersen 40 primary winches (the plinths can take 46s) are within easy reach of helm or crew.

It's a deep cockpit because there's no aft cabin beneath, and well protected because of the deck saloon and the high coamings.

After our sail in the fin-keeler we returned to Hamble Point, changed the genoa for the self-tacker and headed out again in company with *Slaandjivaa*, the twin-keeler. Torsten told me that trials in Germany had shown the twin-keelers to be a match for the fins in most conditions and

sometimes to pull away from them, much to his (and the designer's) surprise. This time, however, the predictable happened. With her twin keels, smaller jib, in-boom reefing mainsail and greater weight of equipment, *Slaandjivaa* couldn't match *Angharad* with her greater sail, lower weight and deep fin. While their pointing angles were almost identical, the fin-keeler simply had the legs, consistently pulling away and feeling lighter and sprightlier to sail. Were the keels the only difference, I suspect the boats would be much more closely matched.

The flat water allowed us to bring them alongside one another whenever we felt like a changeover, so Torsten and I, plus our owners and crew, had the chance to try both boats.

Having worked our way upwind – feeling under-powered because it really was genoa weather – we set the drifters and reached and gybed our way back. If you wanted to use a self-tacker most of the time, it would be



Whether you're in the cockpit or the deck saloon, the Sirius is designed to give you the same eye level for visibility and ease of communication

is a heads compartment from the Sirius 38. The linear galley to starboard and the deck saloon make up the rest of the obvious living space, but lift up the seat to port at the aft end of the saloon and you can drop down into the surprisingly roomy utility-and-systems room, at the aft end of which is access to the front of the engine. Side and stern engine access is via the cockpit lockers.

The fin-keeler, *Angharad*, has the popular four-berth comfort layout with a smaller forecabin and heads and the space beneath the deck saloon devoted to a second double cabin. Optional hullside ports in here make it another room with a view.

On both boats the finish is hard to fault, the level of detail is superb and every cubic inch of space is used. Self-closing drawers are everywhere. Galley stowage is designed around the owner's crockery and cooking pots: that's the sort of boats they are.

PBO's verdict

This is an amazingly big little yacht in which everything has been thought through with exceptional thoroughness and put together with obvious skill and care. It would take a week of testing and a report long enough to fill an entire magazine to do her justice.

Despite the Teutonic logic and precision that underlies every aspect of the design, however, she does exude a certain charm. Even her appearance doesn't take that much getting used to. While undeniably high-sided, she's much easier on the eye than many boats with this much freeboard.

A longer boat would inevitably mean longer legs for passage-making, but there's a lot to be said for smaller alternatives when it comes to running costs and ease of handling and the 310 does have a very respectable turn of speed.

She offers so many big-boat features in terms of quality, space, attention to detail and scope for customisation that I suspect a lot of people will decide there's no need to buy anything bigger.



With the comfort version of the 'for 2' interior, the space forward of the main bulkhead is devoted to an enormous forecabin

worth considering the taller rig with its 20% extra sail. Even so, had I been blindfolded I don't think I would have guessed that I was sailing a heavy, high-volume deck-saloon cruiser. In the moderate conditions of our test, both boats were pleasantly responsive and rewarding to sail, stiff, well balanced, obedient and manoeuvrable – but give me a tiller any day!

Easy movers

One notable point about the 310, which I appreciated during a day of non-stop hopping around above decks and below and jumping from boat to boat, is how well the ergonomics work. Despite packing a lot into a short hull, she's clearly designed around the human form. It's possible to bang your head, knock your knee or stub your toe on any boat, but the practicalities of both moving around and sitting down on the Sirius have been given a great deal of thought.

The cockpit isn't vast – three is a comfortable number, or more if you make use of the seats in the stern rail – and the side decks are inevitably on the narrow side, yet there's no need to shuffle anywhere and the wide, flat top of the deck saloon is a secure platform from where to stow the mainsail.

Decks are edged by bulwarks that are high enough at the bow to create a secure, sunken foredeck. As on the bigger Sirius models, the deck can be surrounded by tubular guardrails rather than guardwires. They're an extra that many owners choose, as are the 10mm, vacuum-bonded teak decks. Through-deck scuppers let water drain away without streaking the topsides and plenty of chunky cleats – including two sets amidships for springs – make life easy for coming alongside. Everything looks as though it comes from a bigger boat: nothing is under-sized (except possibly the primary winches if you're going to carry the genoa to the top of its wind range).

A fundamental element in the design of the Sirius is the 'one eye-level': whether you're sitting

in the cockpit, standing at the galley or sitting in the deck saloon, you maintain the same height of eye. That makes it easy for the helmsman or cockpit crew to carry on a conversation with someone who's preparing lunch, doing the navigation or simply sitting out of the rain.

If you're worried about the large expanses of glass for offshore sailing, there's no need. It's tough. Torsten's own test involved letting a 150kg (24-stone) man attack it with a newly-sharpened axe on a 1.5m (5ft) handle. After an intensive 20 minutes, he had succeeded in scratching it. That's why storm-shutters aren't needed for Category A classification under the RCD. The deck-saloon windows are also double-glazed.

As she did under sail, the 310 proved obedient and remarkably manoeuvrable under power. The 29hp Volvo D1 30 saildrive mounted well aft gave plenty of prop-wash over the rudder, with a partial skeg making sure the blade didn't become over-balanced for straight-line motoring.

Accommodation

Slaandjivaa, the twin-keeler, has the comfort version of the 'for 2' layout, with the space forward of the main bulkhead devoted to an enormous forecabin. Aft of the bulkhead to port

