

Sunbeam 36.1



Looking for something different, Chris Beeson took on a whistle-stop tour of Europe to test a boat from a family-owned Austrian builder



Narrow for her length and moderately canvassed, but also light and lively



This was a first for your humble boat tester: five countries in three days on one boat test. Photographer Graham Snook, UK dealer Dan Hills and I left Stansted early in the morning and arrived in Salzburg, Austria, where we were met by Gerhard, one of the Schöchl family that founded and still owns Sunbeam Yachts.

After a tour of the factory on Lake Mattsee, we loaded up Gerhard's Mercedes and tore south on silken routes that shame the UK, through Slovenia and into Croatia, where we spent the night aboard a Sunbeam 36.1 in the antiquity-rich town of Pula.

After testing her the next day, we barrelled through the Balkans once more and arrived at Trieste airport in Italy with exactly three minutes to spare before check-in closed.

Performance

It was disappointing, having raced through Southern Europe at hair-raising speeds, that we didn't have enough breeze to ruffle a fringe – 6-8 knots, 10 in 'gusts'. We motored out of

Pula with the optional three-blade Variprop bowling her along at five knots with the 28hp Volvo Penta clocking 2,500rpm, and once clear of the moorings we cranked her up to full chat, 3,800rpm, and logged seven knots. The high revs suggest she might take a bigger prop.

We shook out the Doyle sails, tuned all we could and with 6-7 knots on the beam glided along at 3.2-3.8 knots. As the wind sagged, we popped up the gennaker and made 3.9-4.9 knots with 5-6 knots on the beam, then hardened up a little to a fetch, still carrying the gennaker, and made 4.6-5.4 knots. After dousing the gennaker we found a convergent wind between the islands and headed upwind at 4.5-5.4 knots at 35° to the 7-10 knots of apparent wind, tacking through 100°.



Aft of the neat cascading washboard is a bridgedeck that also serves as a halyard bin

At the helm

It may have been a Whitlock wheel but the steering system is, we were assured, a direct drive system by Jefa. It certainly has that deliciously composed, judiciously weighted feel one associates with the Danish brand. Helming is comfortable, leaning

on the pushpit while sitting on coamings either side of the wheel, with enough room around you to cope any water on deck.

She's easy to sail shorthanded because the double-ended mainsheet exits the coamings to clutches just forward of the Harken 40 primary winches forward of the wheel. On subsequent boats, the binnacle is big enough to take a plotter and an instrument either side, which allows the helmsman better access to data.

Against the verdant backdrop of the Croatian coast, the Sunbeam 36.1 shows off her sweeping sheer, fine bow, deep forefoot and low-slung hull portlights



Design & construction

She certainly looks different to a lot of modern cruisers, with her sweeping sheer, comparatively deep forefoot and low-slung hull ports. The chines look too short to be functional but they too lend her a rakish touch.

The stats say she's quite narrow for a 36-footer, and moderately canvassed, but she is also quite light and has a long waterline length so she should be a fairly lively cruiser. Her high ballast ratio will undoubtedly favour smaller crews.

Gelcoat is hand-painted into the mould because hand-painting massages out any air and sprayed gelcoat tends to be thin, then a fine 300g mat is hand-laid with isophthalic NPG resins so that the hull looks smooth.

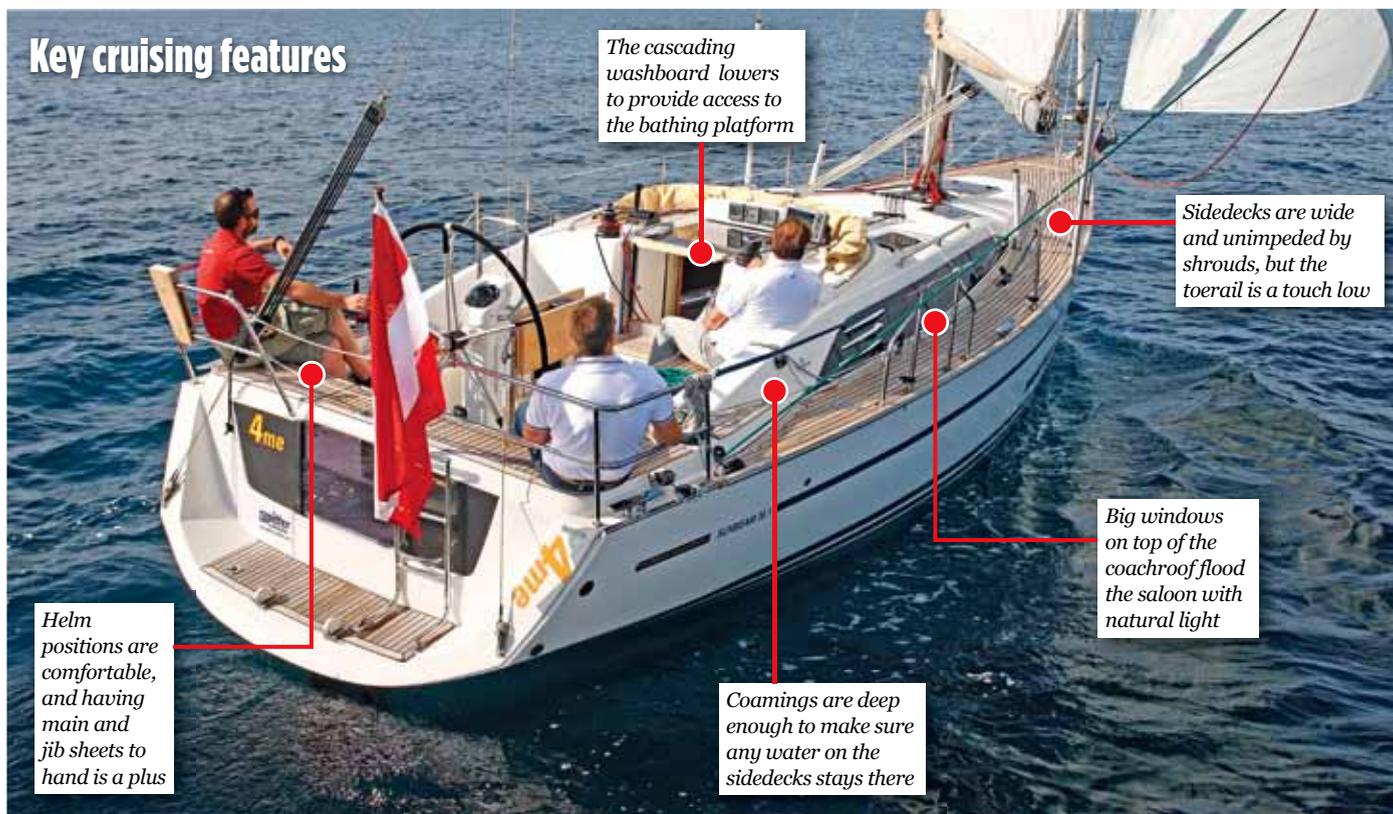
She's foam-cored to the waterline and solid laminate beneath. A liner is glued to the hull and all bulkheads are laminated into place.

The hull-deck joint is also laminated and the deck features carbon fibre reinforcement in areas of high load and aluminium backing plates below loaded areas.



Although designed primarily for a couple, the cockpit accommodated six of us comfortably for lunch

PHOTOS: GRAHAM SNOOK



Key cruising features

The cascading washboard lowers to provide access to the bathing platform

Sidedecks are wide and unimpeded by shrouds, but the toerail is a touch low

Big windows on top of the coachroof flood the saloon with natural light

Helm positions are comfortable, and having main and jib sheets to hand is a plus

Coamings are deep enough to make sure any water on the sidedecks stays there



Masses of light, and a relaxing ambience if you decide on the 'Elegance' option of teak bulkheads and cream upholstery



Light streams through large portlights on top of the coachroof

Living below

Light streams through the large portlights on the top and sides of the coachroof, but ventilation isn't so exuberant, with just two small opening hatches, excluding those in the galley.

Headroom is 6ft 2in at the companionway and 5ft 10in under the forward portlights. There are grab rails at the companionway and coachroof windows. Seat backs lift to reveal seaberths, 5ft 10in to port and 5ft 2in to starboard.

The forward bulkhead has excellent stowage, 5ft 11in headroom and a 6ft 6in double berth above the forward water tank. The aft cabin has 6ft headroom and a 6ft 7in double berth.

A sliding door opposite the galley reveals the heads, bright with good ventilation through two opening hatches. There are lots of great hooks and rails for hanging things, headroom is 6ft 1in, stowage is pretty good, and we liked the hanging locker aft with heater outlet and drain.

Chart table

It's small and aft facing but there is a bookshelf, stowage is good, the electrics are well organised behind the switch panel and the bars above are useful for stowing almanacs and manuals.

Galley

The curved design and the matching grains are appealing, while light and ventilation are good, though you'd have to rely on the companionway for ventilation at sea. Stowage is plentiful and well arranged. The sink cover folds out to provide extra workspace and has a kitchen-style button next to the tap that opens the plughole.

Maintenance

Access to all systems is generally very good, though you need to stretch into the transom area through a panel at the foot of the aft cabin to get at the calorifier. On our test boat the sole panels were screwed down but more recent boats have panels that lift to reveal the bilge pumps.

Sailplan

Although Sunbeam now uses Z-Spars for the 36.1 masts, ours featured a Sparcraft rig, 19/20 fractional with two sets of swept back spreaders. The jib sheeted between the shrouds' topside chainplates and the lowers inboard so the spreaders wouldn't allow much of an overlap. She had a good set of car tweekers and a 24:1 split backstay.

Deck layout

The stainless steel bow roller runs to starboard of the stem's forestay tang, and we used the loop that retains the shank as the tack for the gennaker. There's a windlass on a ledge in the anchor locker but I'm not sure you could fit your anchor into the chain locker.

Moving aft, past the custom cleats, we loved the padeyes forward of the mast, which are perfect for stowing halyards or lashing down a tender. We were also impressed by the stanchion bases, nicely faired into teak cut-outs, but thought the toerails looked a touch shallow.

Stainless steel grab rails lead you most of the way into the cockpit, where you will find all lines leading aft to a Harken 35 to port and an electric Harken 40 to starboard for the main halyard. The five foot cockpit benches are comfortable forward, although the coamings are too low aft.

There is a good sense of security in the cockpit as you brace yourself against the fixed table and make use of the handy grab rail on the binnacle. We loved the cascade washboards, one for the companionway and another for the transom that opens up the bathing platform.

The gas lockers, in-use and spare, are located under the quarter seating.

WATCH THE VIDEO

Scan this QR code with your smartphone (or go to the link below) to view a video of

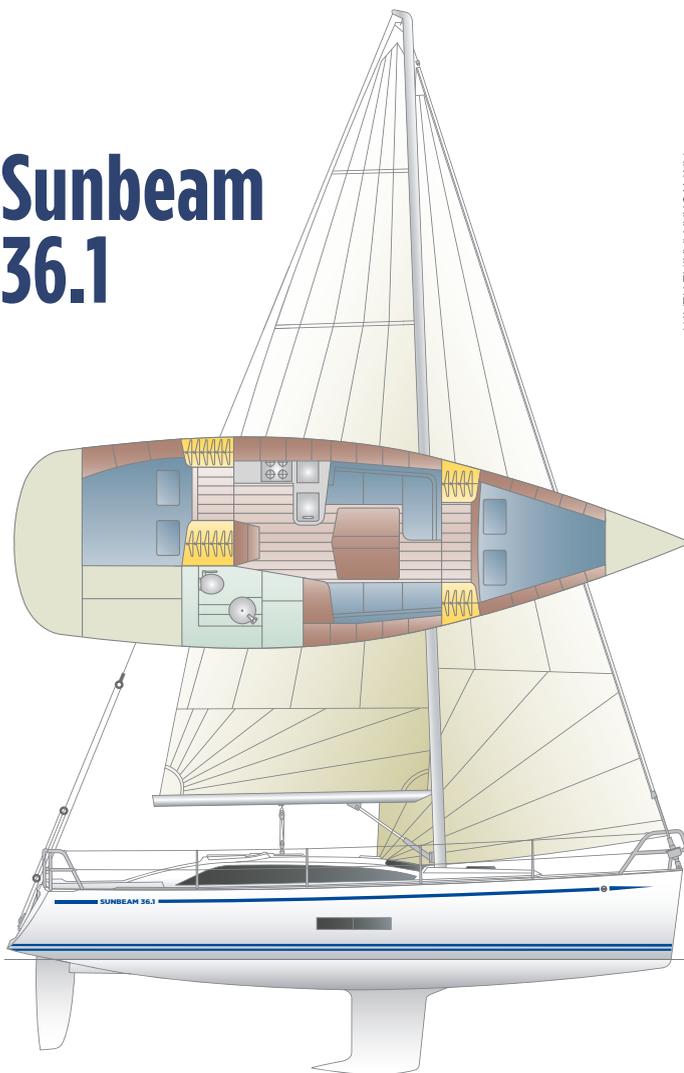


Chris testing the Sunbeam 36.1, PLUS a 360° virtual tour of the boat:

www.yachtingmonthly.com/sunbeam361

Sunbeam 36.1

ARTWORK: MAXINE HEATH

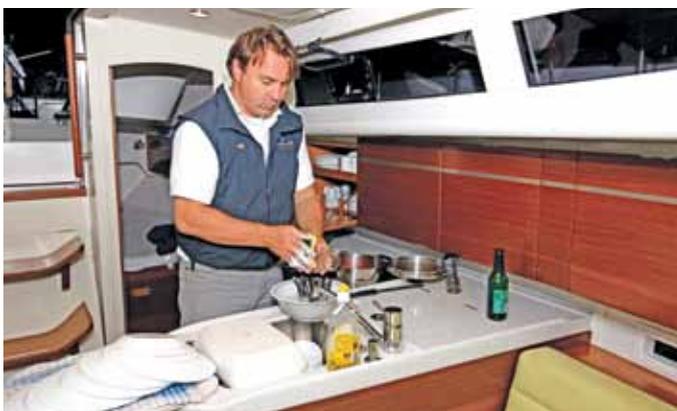


FACTS AND FIGURES

- **Price** Around £173,000
- **LOA** 11m (36ft 1in)
- **LWL** 9.9m (32ft 6in)
- **Beam** 3.42m (11ft 3in)
- **Draught** 1.9m (6ft 3in)
- **Displ** 5,800kg (12,787 lb)
- **Ballast** 2,050kg (4,519 lb)
- **Sail area** 62.5m² (673sq ft)
- **Engine** 28hp
- **Diesel** 145 lit (31.9 gal)
- **Water** 305 lit (67.1 gal)
- **D/L ratio** 166
- **SA/D ratio** 19.7
- **Ballast ratio** 35.3%
- **RCD** Category A
- **STIX** 49.6
- **Designer** Sunbeam Yachts
- **Builder** Sunbeam Yachts
- **Tel** 01590 676782
- **Website**
www.sunbeamyachts.co.uk



Light and well ventilated, the heads has a wet locker aft – but is it really the best place for the shower?



Gerhard uses the folding sink cover to increase workspace while washing

OUR VERDICT ON THE BOAT

What's she like to sail?

It's encouraging to see that yacht designers of every stripe – from Hanse's Judel/Vroljik to Nordship's Lars Buchwald and indeed the Schöchls of Sunbeam – have taken on board the fact that cruising boats are generally sailed by two crew and that they should design cockpits to reflect this. With main and jib sheets that lead to a primary winch within easy reach of the helmsman, the Sunbeam 36.1 can easily be manoeuvred singlehanded. Having the rest of the sail controls on the coachroof is a good compromise too, as they are used far less than the sheets and the helmsman isn't left ankle-deep in a snakepit of lines. Wherever the helmsman looks there's a comfy spot to sit. Resting on the pushpit the finger-light wheel was just in fingertip range so I might choose the optional larger wheel, only 5-8cm (2-3in) bigger, but that would be enough. You need to hop onto the benches to get round the wheel anyway so it's no great sacrifice. The Jefa steering system is a delight as ever, it's just a shame that the lack of breeze prevented us finding out more about how she could perform.

What's she like in port and at anchor?

Her distinctive – and, to my eye, rather fine – looks are reflected in some original thinking below. I'm not referring to the genuinely regrettable green of the 'Avant garde' version (I recommend the 'Elegance' for its cream upholstery and African teak) but instead the sliding doors into the forecabin and the heads. It's such an obvious space-saver that one wonders why they're not seen more often. The big coachroof windows bathe the saloon in light, the curves and matched grains in the galley are lovely. On deck the cascading washboard-style bathing platform access is a triumph, as is the very thoughtful stowage in the cockpit locker. But there are some ideas I'm not so sure about. The fold-out sink cover is ingenious in port but this also means you can't have fiddles inboard, so any water on the work surface will run off onto the sole, and you can't use the sink without opening it, so at sea I would be concerned about someone clattering into it and breaking the hinges. And the loo and the shower should really swap places, so that you're not walking water through the yacht whenever someone has showered?

Would she suit you and your crew?

This yacht will suit a couple with a bit of individuality about them, who don't want to follow the pack into the world of the average white boat, and who will welcome her design quirks. With her fine bow, sheer and deep forefoot she'll handle the sea well, and she's light enough to make up for the fact that her sail area is similar to that of some sporty 34-footers – to notch up 5.4 knots in such a weak breeze is testament to the fact that they've got the balance right. Although we comfortably sat six for lunch, the cockpit design is tailor-made for a couple to go sailing. She has a decent ballast ratio too, which should keep her stiff.

The rather meagre ventilation in the saloon suggests she'll be happier in northern Europe than southern, with all those coachroof windows eking out the best of the daylight. She's not the cheapest 36-footer you'll find but build quality is generally very good and on our boat, a hard-working charterer built in 2011, there were few signs of wear and tear. If you're looking for something a bit different that still delivers, she's well worth a look.

Would she suit your style of sailing?

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