

Boats & Yachting



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Even though it might sound repetitive & obvious, Dufour Yachts have built themselves into somewhat of a niche in the cruising production market. When you see the nomenclature “Grand Large” appended to the end of a boat name you immediately know what to expect. With a range of boats from 32 to 52 feet, Dufour pretty much have most of the market covered and even though as the models grow you get more space and a faster hull, each one of them offers great cruising performance, reliability, seaworthiness and, most importantly for the mass-market, incredibly good value for money.

The cruising ranges of some other brands might sell higher numbers, however with most of the other boats you can usually sense that the intended audience is not that keen on sailing in itself but more concerned with creature comforts. The *Dufour 445 Grand Large*, on the other hand, is a boat which feels as if it was built with sailing firmly on the designers’ and builders’ minds. This is not to say that Dufour have skimped on any of the luxuries that one would expect on a cruiser, however at every point you realise that when there was a choice, the sailing option was taken over comfort.

Even though it is slightly narrower than its predecessor (the 455 Grand Large), the *Dufour 445 Grand Large* offers a lovely and spacious saloon. Dufour Yachts can really appreciate the importance of natural light and it has flooded the 445’s living area with it. With windows all round and large hatches in the cabin’s roof you are guaranteed to make the best out of any available light. The boat we tried out was also fitted with blinds which make blotting all the light out a charm if you ever wanted to sleep in (or wish for some privacy from nosy neighbours on your pontoon).

In addition to being wide and airy, the saloon is well laid out and practical to use. The L-shaped galley is large and, as we have learnt to



DUFOUR 445 GRAND LARGE

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expect from Dufour, very well equipped. It comes with ample refrigeration space and a separate freezer – both of which come into a lot of use if you plan to do any long-distance cruising. If I had to criticize something about the galley, though, it would be the fact that the bench (which sits opposite the galley) on the boat I tried has no backrest, so you really have nothing to hold onto if you like cooking at sea. To their credit, the builders added quite a lot of grab rails all over the saloon. Each one is very cleverly disguised as decoration, however once you find them

you will realise that you can't live without them. The French yard have a habit of hiding practical bits and bobs all over their boats, and this is no exception. One of the floorboards in the saloon, for example, lifts to reveal a shoe rack, a welcome addition to the wine-cellar we have become used to on other models. These little touches make living on board a Dufour that little bit more special – and are all welcome additions.

Dufour claims it has two master cabins, one in front and one at the back, on the

port side. Both have large berths and en-suite bathrooms, however I know which one I would claim for my own if the boat were mine – I suspect the people at Dufour know which they would, too. The fore-cabin is very spacious and, with a bed which you can practically walk around and separate heads and shower, you can be sure that this is where you will find all but the most generous boat owners. The aft double cabins are both very comfortable and I'm pretty sure you won't have any guests complaining about them. If you have particularly keen-eyed guests in the

cabin on the starboard side, however, they might just about realise that the berth in their cabin is a few centimetres narrower than the one on the other side of the boat – so don't let them have the second portion of pasta they had been eyeing all night long...

The first thing one can notice about handling the *Dufour 445* is that this is a boat which is comfortable to be sailed single handed. Even though we admit it could have done with a couple of extra winches, Dufour fitted locks at the right

places to help you handle tacking single-handed with the addition of the German mainsheet system. Having said that, its cockpit, with a table that folds away easily, is also spacious enough for manoeuvring the boat in company – you won't be bumping into people half way through a gybe!

Sticking to the sailing aspect of the boat: albeit labelled as a cruiser, there is no denying that she performs well, especially for a cruiser. We weren't too lucky with the conditions on the day we took her

out, however in constant 10 knots of wind we were averaging speeds of about 6.5 knots; in occasional gusts of 12-14 knots the boat sprinted to 7.6 knots of speed, which is pretty impressive, especially when you consider that we were just allowing the boat to balance itself as we tried her out – at no point were we pushing her hard. Despite the apparent lack of wind we had quite a swell lingering from the previous days but thankfully the Dufour is very well-behaved and tackles large waves without fuss and, more importantly, without any slamming.

Since she is a cruiser, the *Dufour 445 Grand Large* can also be expected to cover quite a few miles under engine. When pushed hard (2,400 rpm) she can comfortably top 8.5 knots, but the real surprise is that pulling the throttle back slightly (2,000 rpm) will save you a significant amount of fuel but still give you a very comfortable 8 knots – that should get you over to Sicily in under 8 hours, or (in more practical terms) just in time for a lovely plate of pasta for lunch if you left Malta at dawn. This little difference in engine revs also translates in increased economy – on average the 445 should give you a very modest consumption of about 5 litres per hour – giving you approximately 50 hours (or 400 nautical miles) of motoring on a full tank.

The *Dufour 445 Grand Large* is just as brilliant as we should have expected it to be. It is fast and fun under sail, economical when motor-cruising, large and spacious, practical and a good looker.

The boat on test had a price bracket of EUR250,000 with all optionals added, however a ready-to-sail fully equipped boat comes within a bracket of EUR225k. For viewing, inspection or a test sail please contact the local Dufour Yachts dealers: S&D Yachts Limited of Ta'Xbiex on 2133 1515 or info@sdyachts.com.

