

DUFOUR 455 GRAND' LARGE

ON TEST

THIS IS NO ORDINARY
AFTERNOON SAIL - RICHARD
MUSCAT AZZOPARDI HAD SIX
DAYS LIVING ABOARD TO REACH
A VERDICT ON THIS BEAUTY

It is not often that a journalist is lucky enough to spend a decent amount of time with a boat that is on test. Usually we spend a few hours aboard, and have to go through a whole list of things to check out. Once we've seen the boat well we take it out for a spin (or a sail) of a few hours. We have to make do with the weather conditions we have available - and while we might re-schedule a test if the weather is terrible, we usually go ahead with what's available on the day.

This test of the Dufour 455, however, was a very different matter. I managed to tag along on the delivery of the yacht from France to Malta - spending 6 days aboard in the process. As you can read elsewhere in the magazine we had a tough and long journey - over 700 nautical miles to cover, and for the most part we were doing just what was prescribed by the doctor - sailing.

Initially it was pretty hard to really appreciate how lovely this boat looks because it was surrounded by a sea of Dufour's in the marina at Cap D'Agde, which was our point of departure. The bow that dives perpendicularly into the sea, the sleek lines, the low transom - they all add up to a boat which gives a distinct impression of speed, even though it is part of the Grand' Large range - Dufour's cruising family.

The 455 I was testing was the four cabin version - the owner intends to use it as a charter boat so I will discuss the interior in this light. The cabins are all decently sized, even though the fore cabins could afford to have slightly larger beds. I don't think it would be a problem for a couple to sleep in them; however two people enjoying a platonic friendship might feel uncomfortable in such a tight space. Having said that, I was really impressed with the amount of space the cabins delivered - there is enough locker volume to swallow two suitcases and their contents - separately. There is a tall locker for items you want to keep on hangers

in each cabin too - all in all a very good set up for a couple. The aft cabins are larger and more comfortable, but the only trade off here is that they have slightly less headroom over the beds - but this is really a minor issue, and the cabins are still spacious and very liveable.

I also liked the fact that the front head and shower are separate, and the head also doubles as a shower. This means that three people can be having a shower at the same time (four if someone uses the shower on the transom) - severely reducing preparation time once in harbour. The result is naturally a pretty small head up front, but this really came into good use when we were in rough sea because you can't be tossed around if you're holding against the sides. The main head and shower lie on the port side of the saloon and are large enough for a comfortable shower. [The only problem with the shower floor was that (on our boat at least) the drain was not at the lowest point in the floor - nothing major though - this is sorted out through distributing weight correctly on the boat - Chris]



I personally prefer L-shaped galleys, and I was further convinced when we had to prepare food or warm drinks during the voyage. An L-shaped galley gives you everything within reach, so you can wedge yourself and reach everything without tumbling over as waves crash into the hull, however this was very difficult with the long layout of the galley in the 455. Once again the saloon and galley both offer ample storage space. The chart table and plotter are well located just to the starboard of the stairs down from the cockpit.

In addition to the obvious extra details I could gather about the interior of the boat by living on it for nearly a week, throughout the five days we were travelling I sailed the Dufour in a myriad of meteorological conditions – ranging from the ideal (a reach in 20 – 25 knots



The saloon is well sized, with a large table and a comfortable settee all around it. Eight people can sit around it with space to spare. The galley is laid along the side of the main cabin.

of wind) to pretty horrible (no wind once and gusts of above 40 knots on another couple of occasions). In good conditions she is easy to sail – her sails are very well balanced and she rides the waves

majestically. Even with a swell coming in at us at about 30 degrees she handled herself beautifully – minimal slamming and a constant feel of security.

In 15 to 20 knots of wind she sailed at anywhere between 7.5 and 9 knots, a very good pace for a boat this size, especially a cruiser. On a very broad reach and in gusts of over 40 knots the highest speed we reached was 13.6 knots, however in that passage we averaged 11 knots overall for around 5 to 6 hours. All this was achieved with a standard prop fit onto her – this creates a great drag. If she had been equipped with a more efficient folding prop my estimate is that she could have gained at least another knot or so overall.

The cockpit is spacious and visibility from each of the twin helms is very good, even with the spray hood up. The two benches are comfortable, but one thing we noted was that there isn't a very comfortable position for someone to sit in on long periods of watch. The spray hood kept us dry most of the time (except when we had a following wind, but there wasn't much we could do about that) but to keep dry while on watch we needed to be up front, standing.

Access to cockpit from a generous bathing platform or pontoon/quay is facilitated by a very ingenious basculating transom seat, allowing for an easy, natural flow of movement along the cockpit.

Overall I was very happy with the Dufour 455 Grand Large. With four comfortable cabins, a decently sized saloon and cockpit and ample storage space including a decent foc'sle on the fore deck, it certainly fits the bill as a cruiser. If this was not enough, it sails well and is certainly no slouch. If you're in the market for a family cruiser which can still offer some thrills I would definitely recommend having this on the list of boats to see and try out, especially since the 3-cabin version will offer you a "royal suite" forward worthy more of a 49-50 footer.

The standard cruising version, which comes complete and ready for sailing, is priced extremely well from EUR210,000 ex-VAT. The test boat, which had the Grand Cruising Pack including a taller mast, deep lead keel, fully-battened mainsail with lazy-bag and so on, was priced around EUR225,000 ex-VAT.

For more information about buying or chartering the Dufour 455 Grand Large please contact S&D Yachts Limited of Ta'Xbiex.

