

MD35



The MD35 promises ease, grace and beauty in a neat little package, **Andi Robertson** took this thoroughbred daysailer out for a spin and discovered she's no slouch on the speedo either...

They say a camel is a horse designed by committee, but it was a meeting of like minds which produced the modern thoroughbred MD35.

Designer Mark Mills deserves a chunk of the credit for beautifully executing the concept, but the boat is the synthesis of the desires of some of the most experienced sailors, owners and marketers around. It is the product of the combined ideas of four or five different

individuals, all with different motivations.

For at least four years Peter Morton has been driven to create something of this ilk. So, it transpired, was sailmaker-turned-project-manager Mike Rellings. Meanwhile, former Swan owner Gavin Maber was disillusioned with the grind of organising a big crew and constant logistical planning. Barry Carroll over in the USA was hearing the same things. And so a concept took shape.

More often than not the modern, successful big ▶

Y&Y
TEST



Above The MD35 has a nice, tight sheeting angle which will reward accurate helming and good main trimming.

Bottom The MD35's long lines and easy gait gives her the feel of a modern Metre yacht.



dayboat owners who are ready to move on. It also appeals to silver-haired Sportsboat owners who are shrugging off their mid-life crises but have finally decided that outboard engines belong to waterskiers and anglers: the MD35 packs a tidy little 13hp Lombardini diesel.

What this group were striving for is a thoroughbred, sit-in style of boat. Stability was to come from a big lump of weight on the end of the keel, leaving a crew of up to four to concentrate on the finer points of strategy, tactics, and making the boat go quickly, rather than spending their Mondays rueing their lack of stomach and thigh muscles.

The boat also needed to be big enough to ensure the ride was fast and dry – owners accustomed to a Farr 40 or Farr 45 want the same 'big boat' feel without getting unnecessarily wet. The layout needed to be exceptionally simple to minimise crew numbers, while the look and feel of the boat was also to be exceptional, hence the teak decks and sexy 'eye candy' appearance.

The boat's breadth of appeal was to be maximised, from age seven to 70, so nothing outlandishly modern or slavishly classic. Cockpit seating was to be safe, comfortable and inside the sheer line. Sail controls include an easily furled jib and a powered main winch to make the MD35 a boat which tests sailing guile and skill, not athletic ability. That little inboard engine has been deemed essential from the start. It should eliminate the need for expensive support boats.

The over-arching concept was of a get-on-and-go-sailing daysailer, racing within minutes of leaving a berth or a couple of hours from being fully containerised.

Fleets and rules

The first fleet of MD35s will be Cows. It is a logical nucleus given the population and profile of likely owners. The Etchells class has just had their worlds there and some owners are ready to move on, whilst Dragon owners currently spend considerable sums for just three or four – or even fewer – regattas a year. So between six and 10 MD35s are expected to be racing by next summer.

Building one-design fleets is neither science nor art, but the combined experience of Morty and his BSI team, and Barry Carroll – who together sold hundreds of Farr 40s, 45s and Mumm 30s – along with Fi Brown, who has been Melges class PR guru for years, should avoid many of the pitfalls.

Success is down to a vital blend of building solid home fleets for this type of boat – so there is always racing on local waters – with creating a roster of international events. So you'd expect fleets in the likes of Newport, Annapolis, San Diego, Long Beach, the Solent, Sydney Harbour or Auckland, with travelling to events like Key West, Block Island, Cork, Spi Ouest, Voiles St Tropez and the like.

Indeed the first boat, owned by Gavin Maber, is headed to Key West where they will race under PHRF as well as completing test and demo sails. But more recently there has also been substantial interest from Russia.

Of course, while it targets fleet racing, the MD35 will also make a lovely day cruiser for sunny days exploring secluded coves. You could envisage smaller fleets in Salcombe, Dartmouth,

or Falmouth.

With the experience of dozens of one-designs behind it, the class rules have been established from the start, controlling construction, sails and crew eligibility. The rules are based very much around a Corinthian spirit of amateur competition.

An owner-driver rule requires the owner, or an immediate family member who steers, to be Group 1. Any other category of sailor who wishes to steer must prove 100 per cent ownership of the boat, and 100 per cent responsibility for the running costs of the boat. Crews can consist of up to two Group 2 sailors, but if one Group 3 pro sails then the remainder of the crew must be Group 1. No financial remuneration is permitted beyond out-of-pocket expenses – so it won't appeal to the legions of Italian ice-cream sellers and dubious deck chair attendants!

Lines and layout

Along with the rest of the boating public, our first viewing of the MD35 was at Southampton Boat Show. Interest was considerable, not least because it is visually exciting with simple, wholesome lines. Mills worked very long and very hard to get the proportions just right, so that it gains that classic Metre boat long effective waterline when it heels and that long-legged easy action, but so too is there enough area in the aft sections to help the boat lift her bow and plane.

The layout is exceptionally clean, with a roller furler neatly recessed in the bow. The forehatch on this prototype will be replaced with a neat sliding one rather than a lifting type.

The little blister coachroof is perfectly proportioned. All of the halyards run through the decks and the jib sheets run to a simple barber-inhailer system and then pass neatly through the coach roof. The mainsheet system dead-ends to the traveller car and then is a single purchase to a powered winch. The mainsheet can be led back from the mast base block to the main winch for a little extra grunt. There is one long central foot rest which integrates with a neat little winch pod. The balanced spade rudder is set up with a custom carbonfibre stock and is all built into a very tidy cassette which lifts out easily.

The carbonfibre two-spreader rig on the prototype boat is by NZ Rigging and uses an alloy boom. The main is relatively conventional with plenty of power low down and no square-headed AC-style roach to snag the backstay on every tack, but it's a big mainsail and a relatively small, easily managed, high aspect headsail. Certainly the intention is to have a boat which is quickly powered up in lower wind ranges making it suitable for Med racing.

This prototype was beautifully built by Craig Partridge in New Zealand in strip cedar. The production boats are being built by Javier and Julian Mendes at M Boats in Buenos Aires in resin-infused vinylster over a PVC core.

On the water

Our test sail was the first time the MD35 had been sailed in some decent breeze since it was shipped from NZ. And we had a ball. From the outset it is clear the concept works to a tee. What none of us expected was either the speed that the boat took off at on the heels of the first 20-22 knot gust, nor



Above Downwind the MD35 accelerates smoothly and the bow lifts progressively as you heat it up.

Left Upwind the MD35 is stiff and stable, driving smoothly through waves and out of the tacks.

Below The interior is minimal but with two settee berths, a coolbox, and room for a heads.



the ease of achieving a top speed of 18 knots within the first few minutes of sailing.

Upwind the MD35 feels predictably stiff but with a nice, tight sheeting angle it will reward accurate helming and good trimming of the main. It does not need helm action beyond a little occasional guidance over the bigger waves and just keeping the balance between building speed and maximising height. The main is a joy to work, especially with the powered winch – it really enhances the desire to work the main to the max, and sheet loads are surprisingly light.

Mills has achieved a very even acceleration. We noted that there was no real speed 'hump' to get over – that feeling of pushing water until the bow pops. Equally the helm remains very light but positive at most angles downwind. Heating it up the boat remains stiff and very controllable, and again that pleasing even speed build is evident. Ease the sheet and the bow lifts progressively as the boat heels to the increase in pressure. It really proved surprisingly well mannered, invigorating, rewarding and exciting without any 'knife in the teeth' Sportsboat drama.

The bowsprit system works well and there is a 2:1 on the downhaul which makes a big difference getting the tack down, or allows you to raise it when you are rolling deep downwind angles.

There is plenty of space in the cockpit to work, although there is surprisingly little crew movement required. A well choreographed gybe is totally pain free. Tacking too is about finesse, good trim and not oversteering.

The keel section is not extreme with a relatively moderate fin and T-bulb. Certainly we did not have too many problems keeping it driving and it picked up flow very readily through the tacks.

Overall it is a very rewarding and engaging boat to sail, and to race in one-design fleets will be just fantastic. It is a rewardingly quick boat, but very dry. And while there is no shortage of speed and enjoyment, racing in the fleet will be about tactical ▶



racing and small gains and losses.

Down below the little bijou interior contains a couple of settee berths which run aft under the cockpit seats, a large coolbox which sits to starboard, and there is scope to fit a WC. The keel system is clever too, with a point lift on top of the keel which lifts the keel and then the boat.

Verdict

The conclusion? Well it is hard to sail the MD35 in such conditions and not return wondering why we go 'furniture' racing at all. Why have tables and kitchens aboard which are never used? But, as we have concluded before, to some owners they represent value for money.

The MD35 is not a cheap proposition. Truth be told it would not work if it were. This is a design which exudes class, style and sophistication, and which will appeal to serious owners who have moved on and moved up. ■

Above The mainsheet pedestal has a powered winch with 'kick' buttons to free up a pair of hands during mark roundings.

ANSWER BACK

from XXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

MD35 specifications

DESIGN:	10.67m
LWL:	9.25m
BEAM:	2.22m
DRAUGHT:	2.15m
DISPLACEMENT:	2,450kg
SAIL AREA:	MAIN xxsqm
	GENOA xxsq m
	ASYMMETRIC xxsq m
PRICE:	£88,000
(inc UK delivery, ex sails and instruments)	

CONTACT: Mike Richards
Boat Sales International
Hamble Point Marina
School Lane, Hamble
Hampshire, SO31 4NB

TEL: 023 8045 7966
FAX: 023 8045 7977
EMAIL: info@boatsales.co.uk
WEBSITE: www.boatsales.co.uk

COMPARISONS... Where does the MD35 fit in? Here are some alternatives...



■ Brenta 38

Sexy Italian-built executive daysailer in the baby Wally genre. Fixed keel, carbon lay up, no sign of major fleets yet.

LOA:	11.66m
BEAM:	2.75m
DRAUGHT:	2.25m
DISPLACEMENT:	4,300kg
SAIL AREA:	
Upwind	85.8sq m
Spinnaker	130sq m
GUIDE PRICE:	€ 250,000*



■ Etchells 22

Worldwide fleets, one-design class racing second to none, but top end competition does not come cheap – hiking required!

LOA:	9.29m
BEAM:	2.12m
DRAUGHT:	1.37m
DISPLACEMENT:	1,564kg
SAIL AREA:	
Upwind	28.5sq m
Spinnaker	48sq m
GUIDE PRICE:	£35-41,000*



■ JS 9000

Whatever happened? Universally appreciated but just never quite took off like it should have. Ultra-cheap second-hand.

LOA:	9.125m
BEAM:	1.73m
DRAUGHT:	2.2m
DISPLACEMENT:	1,100kg
SAIL AREA:	
Upwind	40sq m
Spinnaker	53sq m
GUIDE PRICE:	£26,000*