



Salona ranger

Croatian boatbuilder Salona has been producing excellent cruiser/racers for many years now yet remain relatively unknown in the UK. **Toby Heppell** explains why that needs to change

The words performance cruiser can, to a degree, mean anything to anyone and are often deployed by manufacturers to add a little pizzazz to an otherwise fairly ordinary cruiser – and widen the target market. Is it a cruiser, is it a performance cruiser? Why not both the marketing department cries!

The phrase, then, tends to be something of a red flag when you read it in marketing bumph. But as much as the term might lack sufficient definition to easily categorise boats as either cruiser or performance cruiser, there

is an element of 'you'll know it when you see it'. Stepping onboard the Salona 380, it is easy to see performance is very much baked in.

The Croatian marque, though popular in the rest of Europe broadly and the Med in particular, has never achieved quite the reputation here they have elsewhere. In fact the UK seems to have erroneously dismissed the brand as a bit cheap and cheerful - at least that seems to be the reaction I usually come up against when discussing them on home-shores. Some might argue it stems from the quality of the interior finish, which has not always been their best selling point.

ABOVE
The 380 is narrower aft than many contemporaries and this points to a designer prioritising performance over volume

Deck and build

Whatever the reason the UK has not given the brand enough attention, the Maurizio Cossutti designed 380 really does grab the attention from dockside with sleek lines, retractible carbon bowsprit and a flying bow delivering a performance-oriented look.

Stepping aboard, this impression is enhanced by the deck fittings; large primaries, two coachroof winches, a proper German mainsheet with twin winches next to the helm and a cockpit width full traveller. The fact these all come as standard for the base model, really does go to show that Salona are setting out

their stall in delivering a true performance cruiser. Although the full width traveller running across the cockpit floor might feel like it would get in the way for some, there are measures to deal with this and she comes with inserts to cover the traveller when not sailing, which will prevent people accidentally stumbling over it.

Unseen features come thick and fast too; a stainless steel frame in the hull to distribute the loads from the rig and keel, vacuum-infused hull with PVC-cored topsides laid up with vinylester resin and clear gelcoat beneath the waterline. There is a decent level of customisation on offer too.

It is particularly noticeable that in modern terms she has a relatively narrow beam aft, eschewing the extreme beams carried aft we have seen dominate the market in recent years in order to create more space below. This points to a design which has been conceived first and foremost to sail well.

All this comes at a price point that is very impressive, especially when you consider just what comes as standard. When you look around the rest of the market, though you can see that she does need to be priced competitively. Sporty or performance oriented cruisers that come in at a smidge under 40ft is possibly the most competitive section of the yachting market at present, so the Salona will be going up against a plethora of options.

Rig

The 380 features an aluminium fractional twin spreader rig with adjustable backstay either as a rope and purchase or hydraulic system. The boat we sailed had the optional bathing platform, which will presumably be most popular in the Med, but without that option she features an open cockpit. With either option the backstay (whether rope and tackle or hydraulic) terminates on one side of the boat, meaning quick and easy adjustment of the backstay is



only achievable from starboard tack.

This might be a small gripe, but the rig setup felt good and responsive with the mast offering much in the way of flex should you want it, or stiffening up via the lowers. With that in mind, it would be great to be able to access the backstay easily while sailing on either tack to depower the main. However, it is worth bearing in mind the 380 is not designed as an out and out racer and here was the first evidence of a cruising compromise I had seen. The split backstay does mean that there is plenty of room to hop aboard over the transom with nothing in your way.

As an option to make the boat racier, you can opt for a carbon mast and laminate sails. The latter would certainly take a bit of weight out of the rig all up, but I was impressed enough with the responsiveness of the alloy mast, that the weight saving would be the key gain in performance terms.

ABOVE

A carbon retractable bowsprit and Dreadnought bow point to the Salona's racing credentials

BELOW

A well thought out and light interior

The headsail measures in at 36sq/m and is on an under-deck furler keeping the tack nice and close to the foredeck, offering plenty of horsepower upwind. Headsail cars and tracks are mounted on top of the coachroof, which offers a relatively close sheeting angle, all of which points to promising performance upwind. The fully battened mainsail measures in at 44sqm giving 80sqm total upwind sail area, which compares relative favourably with other boats in this class.

Our test boat also featured a high clewed, flat cut, top down furling asymmetric, which the owner had chosen as a good option for shorthanded cruising, which measured in at 90sqm and set from the bowsprit.

Down below

As mentioned Salona has not always had the best reputation for their fit out below decks but here the 380 offers plenty to like. It's not mind



Boat Test ~Salona 380

blowing but a well thought out fit out and a very light interior thanks to a number of portlights running the length of the hull. These are not to everyone's taste, I know, but they certainly manage to flood the saloon and forward cabins with daylight.

The interior comes in three optional layouts: two doubles aft; a double and large lazarette with the heads close to the saloon and opposite the galley; or with the heads tucked further aft a smaller lazarette but a nav table space. Our test boat had the larger lazarette option and I would suggest this version or the option with smaller lazarette will be popular. Without a great deal of beam running aft, two doubles aft would probably be a bit of a squeeze and I suspect might be the option favoured by the charter market.

There is always going to be compromise to some extent on a boat that is under 40 foot and on our test boat the heads was probably the biggest one. It was plenty roomy but there is no getting away from the fact that it opens more or less into the galley. The large lazarette is impressive but I'd be inclined to forgo the space, have a heads set slightly further aft and get a space from which to navigate properly. There are plenty of handholds to help when down below under sail and a few nice little touches. Nothing below is particularly outstanding or class leading, but then I cannot think of a cruiser I have been in this sub-40 category recently that would elicit a very different response. It works, has a few nice touches and generally looks to be well built and thought out.

Under sail

Our test took place in pretty variable and gusty conditions. Early on we saw mid-high teens, occasionally hitting the 20 knots apparent upwind. Later on the wind was slowly dying and we finished our test in some 8-10 knots. Given our test ground of Southampton water, the sea state was negligible with a very small, sharp chop being the worst we encountered.

Upwind with full sails up



and 20 knots over deck, we were understandably hard pressed, but the 380 coped extremely well, never putting a foot wrong. Obviously in these slightly overpowered conditions, the traveller really comes into its own and with plenty of backstay to flatten the mainsail she never felt much of a handful.

In fact, I was quite pleasantly surprised by just how responsive she was on the helm even when this hard pressed. It was extremely easy to get her sailing in the groove and with a bit of traveller down in the bigger puffs she was easy to keep driving and remained impressively light on the helm. Often keeping a boat on her toes and driving through big

ABOVE
Upwind in 20kn of breeze, flat water and full sail, the Salona was hard pressed but well behaved

BELOW
Fingertip control off the wind as the breeze dropped off

gusts can feel like a bit of a wrestle but no such problems here. She easily sailed in the mid 6 knot range boatspeed and sometimes hitting 7 knots at an AWA of around 32-35°.

The twin wheels offer a good vantage point for helming and though our test boat was temporarily without foot rests - the owner is in the process of moving them to their preferred position - with these refitted sitting to weather would make for a good spot from which to helm. Twin wheels is not my personal preference on something this size, but I can't particularly fault them here, offering a decent helming position and great response.

Sadly by the time we got round to setting the chute and heading downwind, the breeze had already started to moderate, turning what I hoped might be something of a blast into a slightly more relaxed downwind experience. This sensation was almost certainly added to thanks to the relative flat cut of the asymmetric spinnaker and it's high clew making it a little underpowered.

That is not to say that the 380 didn't pick up her skirts and make for fun ride downwind, particularly when the last few of the day's dwindling puffs blew through. She managed to regularly sail at a little over 6 knots boat speed in around 10-12 knots at 120° AWA, which is impressive enough, and felt she would be an absolute joy to sail with a slightly bigger downwind sail



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and/or in a little bit more breeze.

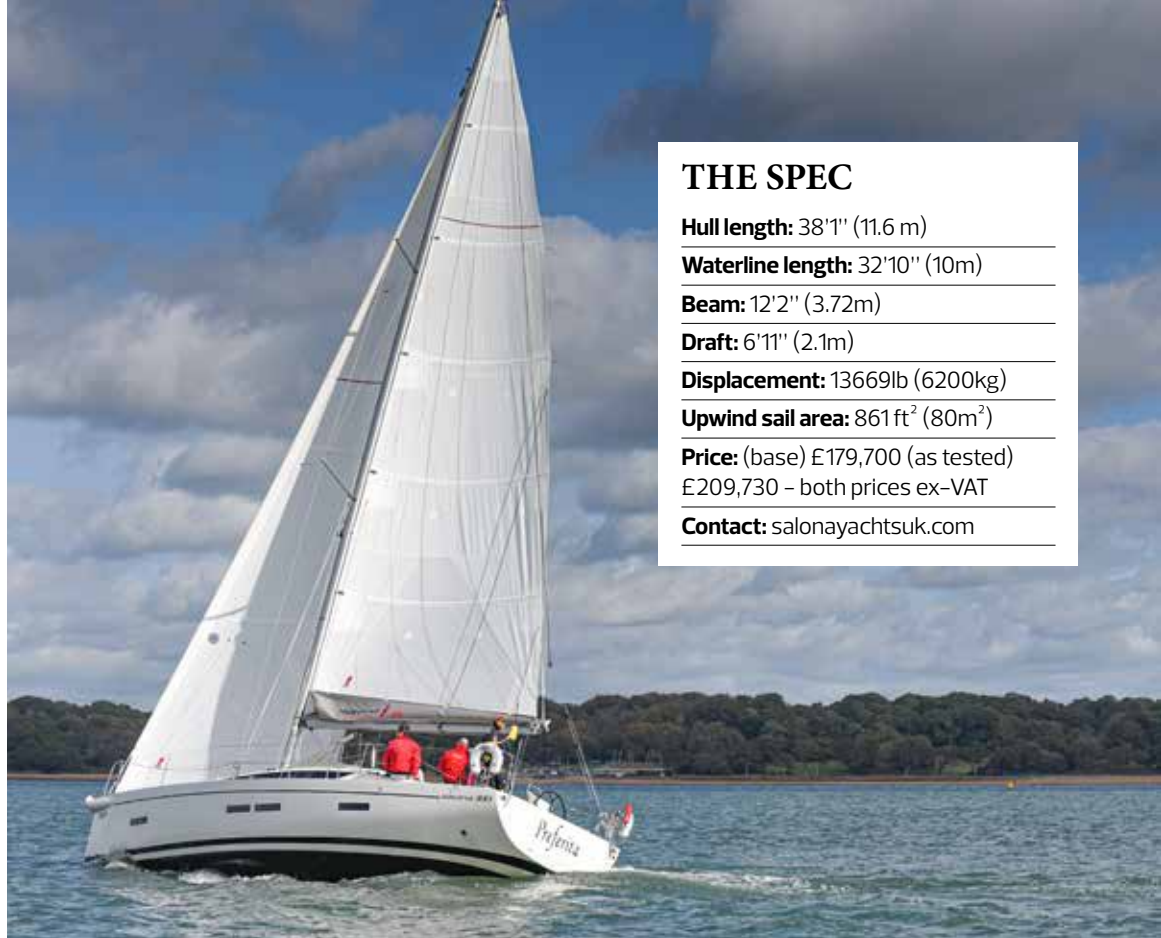
Once again the helm was very light downwind and was real 'finger tip control' stuff. All in all she felt very responsive here too. As someone who started out racing dinghies, it is rare that you get to sail a yacht not built as a pure racer that offers you the sort of feedback you get from a dinghy, but the 380 was certainly getting close to that.

Motoring

The 380 was well behaved under engine and was easy to manoeuvre both under sail and under engine. I was a little surprised to see she was fitted with a bow thruster and enquired about this. The UK dealer, Russell Hodgson, explained the flying bow did mean she was liable to being picked up by the wind a little more than she would be without, so the bow thruster option would be something he would recommend.

I can't help but think this is a shame. Something sub 40ft with a single rudder, really should be manoeuvrable enough not to need a bow thruster. I suspect it would not be absolutely necessary; one always gets to know the foibles of your own boat over time. The flying bow does reduce wetted surface area but provide greater waterline length when heeled, increasing the performance of the boat particularly in lighter winds, so maybe this is a compromise that is worth making.

Our thanks to FlexiSail for the use of the test boat and RIB flexisail.com



THE SPEC

Hull length: 38'1" (11.6 m)

Waterline length: 32'10" (10m)

Beam: 12'2" (3.72m)

Draft: 6'11" (2.1m)

Displacement: 13669lb (6200kg)

Upwind sail area: 861 ft² (80m²)

Price: (base) £179,700 (as tested)
£209,730 - both prices ex-VAT

Contact: salonayachtsuk.com

TOBY'S VERDICT

Under sail it is hard to fault the Salona 380 if you are after a sporty sub-40 footer. She was an absolute pleasure to sail upwind and, though there was very little for her to contend with in terms of seaway, I feel certain that with her relatively (compared to very wide recent boats) narrow beam aft and flying bow with knuckle clear of the water, she would cope with much bigger waves very well indeed. Downwind she could well offer no end of fun and would deliver you to your destination quickly and with a smile on your face.

Down below this probably represents a bit of a step forward for Salona and everything seems

well thought out and built to a good standard.

She has clearly been designed and built to hit the performance cruiser market and, as such, does offer a couple of compromises in terms of outright comfort, but this is exactly what I would want from a sporty boat. If that's not what you are into, then this would be the wrong boat for you. But if you are in the market for something around the 40ft mark, which offers a scintillating sailing experience then you would be hard pushed to look much further than the 380. And that is before you consider the price - especially when you consider the level of fit out in the base model.

RIGHT
The three different layout options available

