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Photos Joe McCarthy

Rustler 36



Rustler Yachts are the epitome of traditional, ocean-worthy cruising yachts. **Duncan Kent** sails the 36 to see how she compares with recent designs

By now there is probably a whole generation of sailors that has never set foot on a long-keeled yacht with comparatively narrow beam, deep V-sectioned hull and hefty transom-hung rudder – rather like most sailing boats used to be, in fact. But Rustler Yachts has never let its designs run wild, or incorporated modern whims such as Saildrives, bulb keels and in-mast furling.

Don't get me wrong – Rustler certainly keeps up with all the new building techniques and materials, but uses them to a different end from most production boatbuilders. There is still the feeling that: 'if it looks right it probably is right' about its products.

The Holman & Pye-designed Rustler 36 started in 1980 as a development of the earlier Rustler 31, which was Kim Holman's natural extension of the sturdy Stella – herself derived from the legendary Folkboat. The 36 was intended for long passage making in comfort and safety, regardless of weather and sea conditions and, as such, doesn't quite have the enormous volume of a modern, beamy 'cruiser'.

A few early yachts were built in various yards until the formation of Orion Marine in

Falmouth, Cornwall, in 1987. The 36, and her bigger sister the 42, are still in production and little has changed on the 36 from the first to the most recent – the 104th – to leave the yard. Although there is a standard model, the yachts are all semi-custom built to an owner's particular requirements where at all possible, so rarely have two been built the same.

The Rustler 36's status was boosted in 1992 when HRH Princess Anne bought one. However, Orion's obsession with perfection and total dedication to its product and prospective owners, as well as its massive investment in the development of the 42-footer, put the company into deep debt late in 1998, forcing it to seek new owners and financial backing. This came about with the formation of a new company, Rustler Yachts Ltd, who produces both the 36 and 42 in new premises, but still in Falmouth.

The Rustler 36 won't suit everybody. She's certainly no fair-weather coastal 'caravan' and she commands a top-end price in the brokerage listings. But she is a seaworthy, long-legged cruiser, perfectly capable of taking you and your family safely across oceans in comfort and security.

Specifications

LOA	10.77m	35ft 4in
LWL	8.08m	26ft 11in
Beam	3.35m	11ft 0in
Draught	1.67m	5ft 6in
Displacement	7,623kg	16,770lb
Ballast	3,456kg	7,603lb
Sail area	64m ²	693ft ²

Designed by Holman & Pye

Current builder Rustler Yachts Ltd ☎ 01326 376107

Website www.rustleryachts.com

Owners' association David Clements (Sec), The Vineries, Lambs Green, Rusper, Nr Horsham, W Sussex RH12 4RG

Prices £55,000 (early models) to £128,075 (new)



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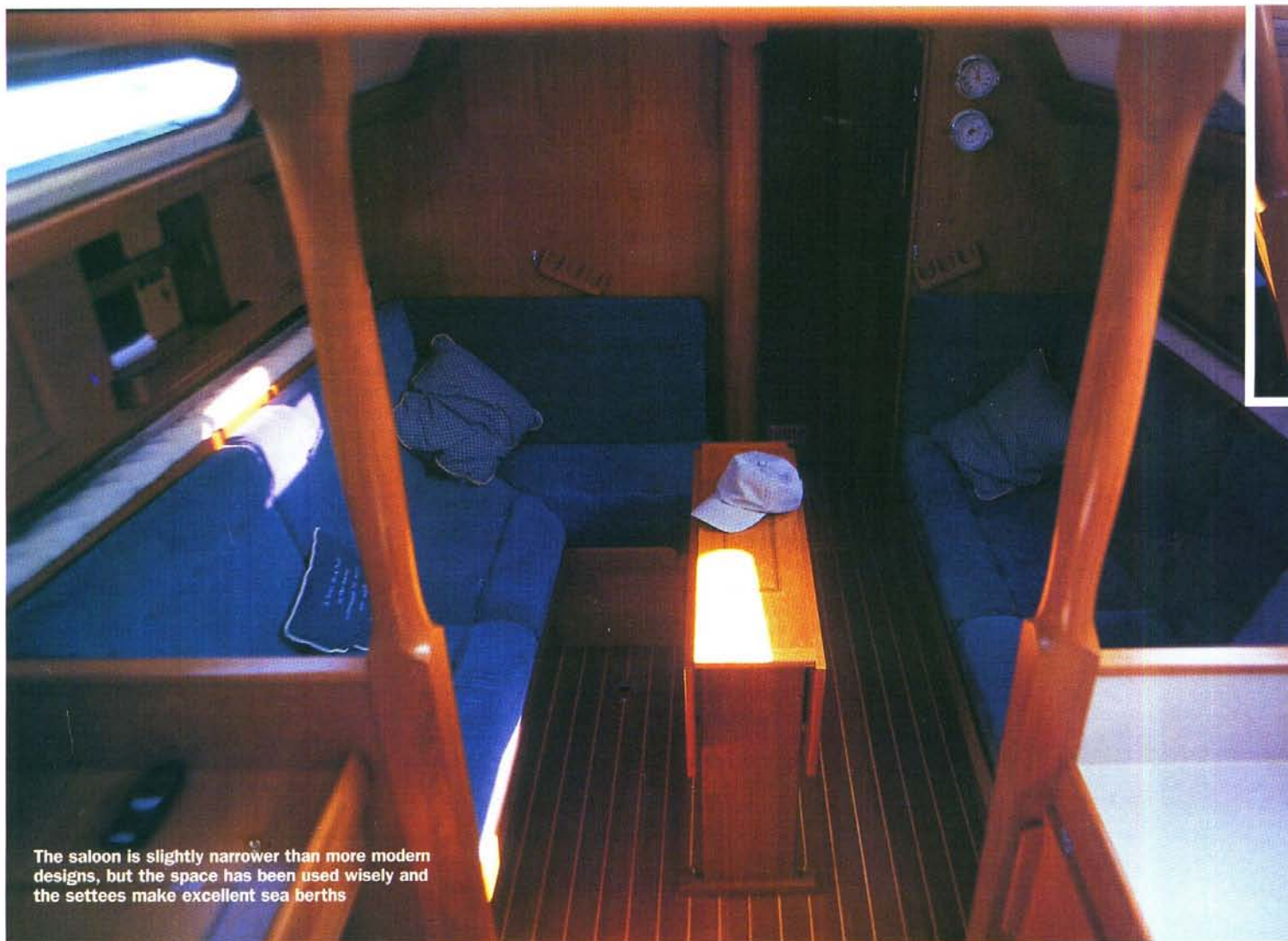
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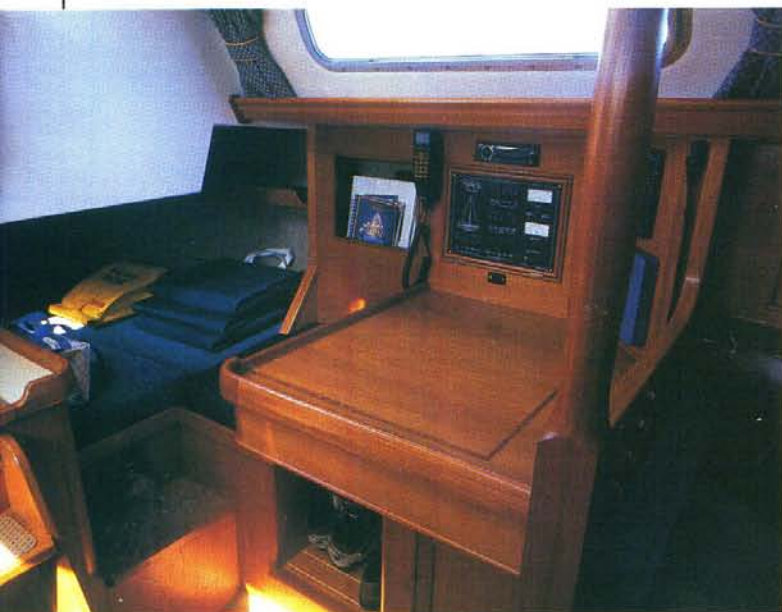
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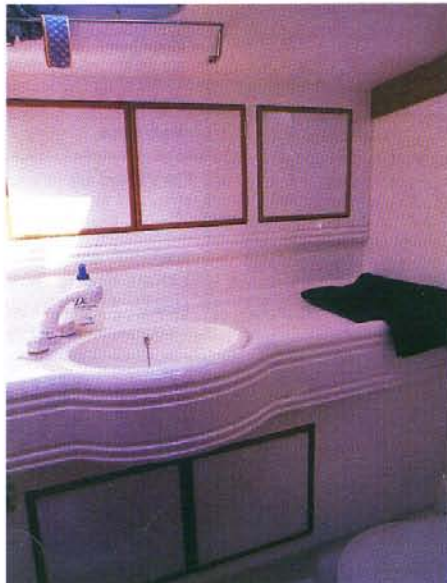
What's she like below



The saloon is slightly narrower than more modern designs, but the space has been used wisely and the settees make excellent sea berths



More than just a token effort, the Rustler's navigation area includes a proper size chart table and instrument panel



The heads compartment has a good, electrically drained shower area and is fully lined with a GRP moulding for easy cleaning



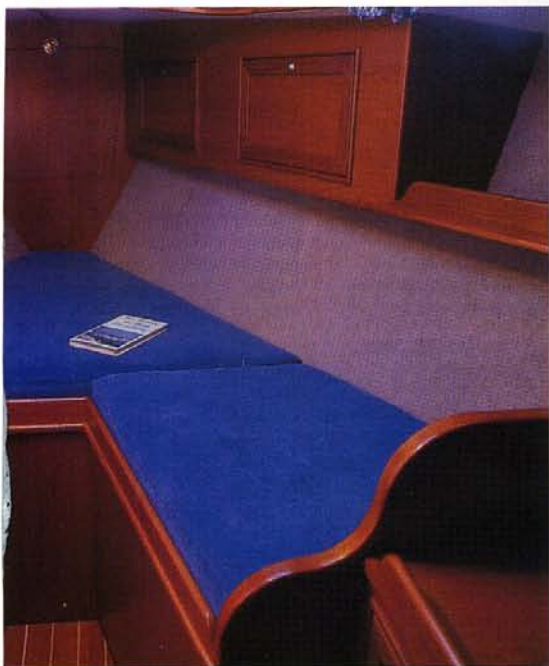
decks?



Top: An excellent working galley, where everything falls to hand, for long passages

Above: Engine access is a bit tight with the larger 34hp engine option fitted, but service points can just be reached and the extra power will help when motorsailing. Instruments and controls are normally mounted above the steps, which is annoying if you want to view the rev counter or start/kill the engine in a hurry

Below: The forecabin is roomy and comfortable with good berths, dressing area and stowage



Accommodation & interior

The Rustler 36 has a traditional layout, similar to many cruising yachts of the mid-'70s to early '80s, which has changed little over her 22-year life.

A high bridge-deck protects the companionway from flooding and solid teak handholds help you down the deep, but flat, steps, where angled sides would certainly make descending on a heel considerably easier. Once below you are embraced by a feeling of security – not exactly cocooned, as that would imply a cramped interior which, though narrower than many modern cruisers, is spacious enough for a family of six – but rather 'cushioned' from the effects of the outside environment.

Getting about down below when all hell is breaking loose above, is simply a matter of swinging from pillar to post, as one might say. The two chunky pillars at the inboard ends of both the chart table and galley worktop provide excellent handholds, while standing at the chart table or struggling to produce a hot drink as the sea sluices past the leeward port lights.

The navigation station, one of the most important areas of any vessel, but which is sadly under-developed on many modern production craft, boasts a large chart table and plenty of room for some decent, modern instruments. Rustler's MD, Chris Owen, who has been involved with the production of Rustlers since the early days, states that "Although the overall effect of the 36 is that of a sturdy, rather traditional cruiser, most boats are fitted with the latest technology available to the serious passagemaker. We have evolved the navigation area to suit, with a dedicated teak instrument pod, which can be viewed both at the chart table and through the companionway from the cockpit. The nav station is probably the most customised area of the boat, as every skipper has his own preferences. Some go for a smaller, outboard-facing table that is designed to be used standing, but with a larger area for an electronic chart plotter and radar, while others prefer a full-size, forward-facing Admiralty paper chart table".

Furthermore, Rustler provides a thoroughly up-to-date AC/DC electrical distribution system as standard, adhering to all the latest safety regulations laid down in the RCD. The comprehensive circuit breaker panel adorns and complements the brightwork beside the pilot books shelf above the table.

Our trial boat owner, Tim, selected a fairly standard chart table layout, but chose to enlarge the useful stowage underneath as a store for all his regularly used items, such as torches and tools. Directly behind the chart table is the quarterberth, its head used as the navigator's seat in the standard version. Two very good friends can just about use this berth, but at 1.07m (3ft 6in) across at the shoulders, the more generously-proportioned couple lack room unless overly amorous.

There's good stowage beneath the berth and, ingeniously, the inboard lid is designed to hinge up and fasten to enable wet oilies to be hung against the engine box, dripping into the bilge via the drained locker. Not as good as a dedicated foulies locker maybe, but a good working compromise nevertheless.

The galley, to starboard, once again displays all the airs of an area designed more for use at

sea than in harbour. It has everything well placed to hand so that the cook can reach the worktop, cooker, double sink and lockers while remaining safely strapped into the bum stop. A sturdy crash bar prevents users lurching into the flames in heavy weather and the standard Neptune three-burner/oven/grill cooker has plenty of unrestricted swinging room and boasts pan clamps and flame-failure protection. Food stowage is average, but the space is well used with efficient partitioning and all locker doors on the newer models are louvred for ventilation. Hot and cold pressurised water is standard, as is the top-loading fridge.

The open-plan saloon is straightforward and functional, but boasts many seamanlike features often forgotten in more modern designs, such as comfortable, straight settee berths for use underway. The port settee is L-shaped around a smart, solidly-fixed teak table that has twin folding leaves and an integral bottle store, while the starboard settee is straight. Both make good 1.98m x 0.58m (6ft 6in x 1ft 11in) sea berths. The thick foam seats are comfortable, both when sitting and lying down, and the contoured, raised edges of the bottom cushions help considerably with holding you firmly in position either way. Behind the seat backs is further stowage, ideal for storing bedding during the day. Mounting the table off-centre to port, in dinette fashion, leaves a clear corridor to starboard to the heads.

Many customers change the standard saloon design to incorporate the table as an infill, turning the settee into a comfortable double berth. Canvas pilot berths, which unfurl from their stowed position above the seat backs and slot into racks on the bulkheads, are standard, as are the canvas lee cloths, which are set up in the same fashion. Once again Rustler is happy to alter the entire layout to suit the owner, within the limits of the structural integrity of the yacht. This is reflected in Tim's smart, folding, teak cockpit table for *Little Dove*. It took a craftsman a week to make it exactly to Tim's meticulous requirements, but the result is a masterpiece to be shown off proudly to guests.

Forward of the saloon is a roomy heads and shower compartment to port, and a large, full height hanging locker to starboard. The heads is a full, easily cleaned GRP moulding with an electrically-pumped sump drain. There's plenty of dry stowage in lockers above and below the moulded sink area. Two doors on the standard model let the hanging locker and heads be *en suite* to the forecabin or open to the saloon.

The forecabin is light and airy, with the huge Lewmar forehatch providing bags of natural light and ventilation. The roomy, well padded V-berth measures 2.0m (6ft 7in) x 1.83m (6ft) head x 0.25m (10in) feet and makes a comfortable double with the infill in place. The hull sides can be lined with teak slats that not only give the cabin a cosy, warm feel, but also act as excellent insulation and ventilation to the bedding. A vanity unit is built above the head of the starboard berth with stowage for clothes on shelves inside. Extensive extra stowage is available in the cavernous bins beneath the berths.

Headroom in the dressing area – just about useable with the infill in place, but considerably better without – is a good 1.81m (5ft 11in).

How does she perform



Side-decks are wide, guardrails substantial and genoa tracks arranged for excellent sheeting angles



Tim and Sally Shears enjoying the strong wind aboard *Little Dove* and putting her through her paces during our sea trials



Bottom left: The cockpit locker is vast and deep enough for all the usual cruising paraphernalia including a dinghy. Some Rustlers have a partition between the two lids and fitted steps down inside

Bottom middle: The steering gear and autopilot ram are very easily accessed through a panel behind the wheel. Effectively, the tiller has been cut off short and steering cables led to the stub

Below: The sprayhood protects the cockpit well without interfering with forward vision and making her look top-heavy. Sail controls lead aft through it

Tim had these taffrail seats fitted so that he could watch over his 14 year-old son's progress at the wheel without interfering too much



at sea?

On deck & underway



Above: On *Little Dove*, all lines are led back to the cockpit for ease of sail handling, but many have kept the reefing lines and halyards at the mast to clear the cockpit of too much string

Below: The foredeck is uncluttered, easy to work on and sports twin bow rollers for double anchoring and cleats that wouldn't look out of place on a boat twice her size. An electric windlass draws the chain down through a hawse into a capacious locker below – one of the few arrangements that does feel a little old-fashioned. Those of us who regularly anchor at night would prefer not to have to run below every time the chain forms a pyramid, blocking the hawse. Having the windlass mounted below deck level and a self-draining chain locker with deck access is a boon for coastal cruising.



The teak decks and dark blue hull of *Little Dove* make her stand out in a crowd. Combined with her gentle sheer towards her sharp, steeply overhanging bow, she has the air of a serious passage maker – which she is.

The coachroof melds subtly into the deck, looking every bit a part of the overall structure rather than an add-on box to extend the interior volume. The cockpit is a safe working environment with a well that's narrow enough to brace oneself against the opposite seat when heeled well over and the coamings are comfortably angled and high enough to keep out the bulk of the big greenies. The only downside is that they're too narrow to sit on comfortably when using an extension on the standard tiller. The wheel option works well, however, and is now becoming the popular choice on new models. It uses an Edson wheel that has a small diameter to clear the seating. Despite the boat having a slight tendency to weather helm when over-canvassed, the cable/wheel system proved light and positive, even when we regularly pushed the lee rail well under during our trial sail.

The foredeck is level and easy to work on, although the base for the optional inner forestay is a toe-cruncher when the stay is not in place. She has sturdy twin bow rollers for double anchoring and cleats that wouldn't look out of place on a boat twice her size. An electric windlass draws the chain down through a hawse into a capacious locker below – one of the few arrangements that does feel a little old-fashioned. Those of us who regularly anchor at night would prefer not to have to run below every time the chain forms a pyramid, blocking the hawse. Having the windlass mounted below deck level and a self-draining chain locker with deck access is a boon for coastal cruising.

Grabrails extend all the way to the foredeck and tall, double guard wires are held with some beefy, through-bolted stainless steelwork.

The Selden masthead rig is unsurprisingly rugged and conservatively proportioned with wide, straight spreaders, forward and aft lowers, caps and single backstay. (A second forestay is optional for setting a storm jib closer to the mast without disturbing or removing the furling genoa.) *Little Dove* has the standard fully-battened mainsail with lazyjacks. When asked if many owners requested in-mast furling, MD Chris Owen said: "So far no Rustler 36 has ever been built with a furling mainsail – it might be something to do with the fact that they usually listen to my advice when it comes to rig selection and I am extremely nervous about adding extra weight aloft and complicating a rig which has been proven, over 20 years, to be completely fail-safe."

Under sail

We set out in a solid 18-22kn wind, with full sail set. Despite being past the recommended comfortable reefing point of 18kn across the deck, she doggedly scythed her way through the chop at a fairly constant 5.5kn close-hauled. Later, after adjusting the rig to suit the elements, she settled into her stride, making slow but steady headway to windward.

Cracking her off a tad to around 45 degrees

apparent wind angle, she picked up speed to hover around the 7kn mark – nothing remarkable, but entirely as expected for a boat with such a comparatively short waterline. More important for long-distance cruising is her seakindly hull shape, which makes eating up the miles an effortless task, and her comfortable motion guaranteeing the crew a good night's sleep.

Each tack in the now gusty 22kn wind took us through 90-95 degrees, with the large genoa setting beautifully thanks to the fine sheeting angle and long tracks. She isn't lightning fast through the tacks, but in cruising terms this is often an advantage, especially with a large, overlapping genoa, because it allows the crew time to shift the sail around the rigging to the leeward side and sheet most of it in before the wind fills it again.

One slight disappointment is the position of the primary winches, which are too far forward for the helmsman to reach from behind the wheel. Ditto the mainsheet on a track in front of the pedestal. That said, they are both perfectly positioned for a crewman sat forward of the wheel, and the reliability of the Autohelm 5000+ makes it safe enough for a single-hander to leave the helm to trim or tack.

Off the wind, the Rustler 36 ploughs a steady course with excellent directional stability thanks to her long keel and deepish V-section hull.

Under power

The Rustler's long keel makes her slightly tricky to handle, but the deep cutaway forward makes her more agile than many full-keeled boats, and the effect of the big prop directly in front of the large rudder allows the prop wash to be used to the maximum effect. All in all, once you've mastered her particular quirks, she is no more difficult to handle at close quarters than any modern fin and skeg hull. Considerably easier, in fact, than a Saildrive installation where the prop is some considerable distance from the rudder.

ST

SAILING TODAY

Verdict

The Rustler 36 is a competent and seaworthy cruising yacht in which you could embark on any serious ocean passage with confidence. Accommodation might not be as voluminous as on many more modern designs, but she more than compensates for this with her enviable sea-keeping reputation

FOR

Seakindly motion
High build quality
Seaworthy accommodation

AGAINST

High initial cost
Small interior volume
Slightly sluggish

NEXT MONTH
Maxi 95