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SR44**



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WINDY SR44 BLACKHAWK

Ten years after the SR52 Blackbird blew us away there is a new, smaller SR model ready to take on an ever-growing field of challengers. With a sunny Solent as our playground it was time to put the SR44 through its paces



Words: Jack Haines Photos: Benham/Harry Shuter

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omewhere, tucked away in a highly secure location at Windy's Västervik HQ, there must be a crystal ball. I say this because it was back in 2010 that Windy, in conjunction with Ed Dubois, created the SR52 Blackbird, a spellbinding custom-built 52ft chase boat with a deck-focussed arrangement and neat T-top perched above the helm. Wind the clock forward to the present day and you can't move for this style of boat as established purveyors of these

T-top deck boats, such as Fjord, tussle with new blood from the likes of Pardo, Solaris and even the high-volume builders in the Hanse Group and Jeanneau. There's no two ways about it, the traditional sportscruiser is being displaced by a new genre of fast cruiser and with the shadow of the SR52 looming large, Windy was well placed to strike and build a 44ft offering all of its own.

Like its bigger sister, the Blackhawk is the result of a design collaboration between the Dubois studio and Windy's longstanding hull design guru Hans Jørgen Johnsen, this time with superyacht designers Design Unlimited in the mix to handle the interior. A fine looking thing it is, too, especially in the surroundings of Lymington, where boats of this style aren't quite as common as they are in the South of France, Italy or the Balearics. Even in an all-white colour scheme with muted grey upholstery it still has plenty of wow factor in the flesh, and in the stifling heat of an unusually warm July day its large sun pads and expanse of relaxed seating look almost irresistible.

It's a bigger boat than it looks, partly down to its impressive freeboard and partly because of

the heft of its mouldings, particularly around the superstructure of the hard top, wet bar and coachroof. Chase boat duties were clearly a consideration during the boat's conception, confirmed by the chunky black rubbing strake that is draped around the boat's perimeter, including the optional hydraulic bathing platform. There's also the teak treads in the bulwarks, which cleverly disguise the filler caps for diesel and water, and can be supplemented by classy teak steps with built in lights as an option that will make boarding from a quayside or the mothership safer and easier.

From the pontoon it's easiest to access the boat via the bathing platform where there's a clever "boot" arrangement whereby the aft sun pad lifts quickly at the touch of a button to reveal a shallow lined storage area, perfect for stowing fenders and watersports kit. In fact, it's even large enough to stow a modest inflatable-bottomed dinghy if you want to keep the bathing platform clear at all times. This is also how you access the engineroom – the floor tray powers up on gas rams to provide excellent access to what is a very tidy machinery space. The drawback to this arrangement being that if you need quick access to the engines at sea you'll need to empty all of the kit out of the tender garage before you can get to them.

SEATING SHOWCASE

What's novel about the deck layout of the SR44 compared to rivals from Fjord and Solaris is the option to have just a single walkway to port, which allows the dinette seating to extend right over the starboard side. Not only does this give you comfortable

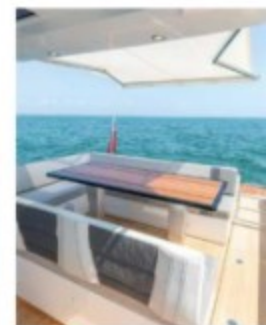
dining space around the table for as many as ten people but the corners of the seating create a lovely spot to recline into and watch the world go by with a drink in hand. It's possible to have a walkway down the starboard side if that's a preference but for me this gigantic central seating area is a simple but brilliant bit of design that sets the Windy apart. What's more, with Windy's usual sliding backrest arrangement on the aft sun pad, you can drop the dinette table down at the touch of a button, lay in-fill cushions on top and create an absolutely

enormous sun pad that stretches from the transom to just aft of the centrally mounted wetbar. As an option, a sun shade pops out from within the T-top though, rather oddly, this can only be operated from one of the MFDs at the helm, not via a button in the cockpit as you would expect.

With a simple galley on the lower deck comprising a sink, fridge and some storage, the wetbar on deck will be utilised heavily for food preparation. It's well positioned in the middle of the deck and incorporates a stainless steel rail across its front end though necessary items like the fridge and Kenyon electric grill are optional extras. You can also have a microwave oven, though the ice maker will probably be the more popular option.

Moving forward, the benefits of the boat's high freeboard are abundantly clear because despite the lack of guardrails on top of the bulwarks their depth ensures it feels perfectly safe to ▶

BELOW The three supremely comfortable helm seats back on to the wetbar



ABOVE The attention to detail on this hi-lo table says a lot about the quality of the SR44

INSET With the table folded out there is dining space for ten people; drop the table down to create an even bigger sun pad



**This is a boat that appears to inhale
the sea ahead, firing it out the transom
in a great plume of white foam**

head up to the bow. Discreetly integrated hand rails run from just forward of the transom up to the bow so there is always something to grab on to at sea, and they also provide an easy spot to tie fenders anywhere along the boat rather than relying on stud-and-socket fender mounts like some rivals.

Deck-level living is clearly the name of the game aboard the SR44 but by inviting Design Unlimited to do its thing inside the lower deck accommodation, Windy has ensured that what there is of the interior looks and feels really good. There are light and dark themes to choose from but the Wenge of our test boat adds a sophisticated edge and Windy's practical detailing – such as dedicated storage slots for the chopping board and sink top – shines through. The open-plan double forward and twins amidships are better suited to a couple or family as the only privacy comes courtesy of a collapsible partition, but the small galley and an impressively large bathroom provide enough creature comforts for longer stints on board, especially if there are just two of you. The natural flaw with boats of this style is that there is nowhere to sit downstairs if the weather isn't good enough to be on deck but, given that they mostly head to destinations with reliably settled weather, it's a calculated design decision that is worth taking.

Let's talk about engine options. There are two IPS options with 440hp or 480hp per side and two sterndrive, both using the Volvo Penta D6 block with either 400hp or 440hp on the excellent DPI leg. And for the first time in this range outboards are also an option with various twin and triple arrangements available including a pair of Mercury's monstrous 600hp V12s capable of over 50 knots; you wouldn't have to ask me twice for a run out on that. The boat we tested had the largest of the two sterndrive engine choices – it's hard to see why the twin 400s are even on the price list, to be honest – and the optional joystick control.

Windy's strong reputation for handling and seakeeping precedes it and the tone is set by the driving position. On the SR44 the person at the helm sits squarely in the middle of the boat with a beautifully tactile single-spoke steering wheel sprouting out of the dash and the throttles mounted on a plinth in perfect geometric harmony. The dashboard is coated in classy glare-reducing material with two 17in Garmin MFDs dominating its upper sections and a neat run of buttons to port to quickly access functions that you don't want to have to swipe through screen menus to activate. Thanks to a lift bolster on all three of the seats it's comfortable to stand at the helm, but for those of 6ft the top of the windscreen might be in their eye line so it feels more natural to sit. As an option (1,185) you can spec a windscreen that meets the T-top to provide full protection.

BURYING THE THROTTLES

The seats are absolutely superb, and with a footrest well positioned at the bottom of the dash it's easy to get comfortable in what is a fabulously commanding driving position. With a twist and a flick of the joystick we are out of the berth and endure the 6-knot journey to the Solent before our photographer gives me an instruction that is music to my ears: "I'm going to count you down and then I want you to bury the throttles and head for the Needles." I obey the order and knock the throttles on to their stops, the 6-cylinder diesels responding with a moment of hesitation before the forced induction arrives and we surge effortlessly onto the plane. The needles tickle the rev limiter and we hit a top speed of 41.2 knots, the Volvo Trim Assist and Humphree interceptors working together faultlessly to maintain the optimum running attitude. This is a boat that will just devour long distances and appears ▶



The bathroom is a good size and has a separate shower cubicle

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The twin berths amidships are open to the rest of the cabin; the forward double can be sectioned off via a pull-down screen; striking interior décor thanks to Design Unlimited



Powerful and agile, the SR44 is an utter joy from the helm seat



Lock the steering wheel and she responds with glee, tipping her topsides towards the water and whipping around in a tidy arc

The storage void on the stern is large enough to stow a deflated tender

to inhale the sea ahead, firing it out the transom in a great plume of white foam. The IPS versions will be smooth operators but there's a lovely poise and quickwittedness to the stern drives that make the boat particularly enjoyable to helm, and so refined is progress that a 30-knot cruising speed feels positively lazy. It's quiet as well. The sound readings in our data table may appear a little high but that's due to wind noise; the engines themselves remain relatively hushed.

WORTH THE PREMIUM

Dial in some lock with that lovely steering wheel and the Blackhawk responds with glee, tipping its topsides towards the water and whipping around in a tidy arc. Having not tested the IPS version I can't say for certain but, having experienced plenty of IPS boats of this size, I would imagine the pod drive boat wouldn't react with such positivity from the helm and could feel a bit more ponderous than its stern drive cousin. The benefit of IPS is that joystick integration is just so good and, although the DPI legs are a big leap forward when it comes to stern drive joystick control, IPS will be smoother at close quarters.

It feels incredibly surefooted at speed though, even when doing silly things like crossing

the wake of the chase boat at full chat when that large T-top structure can kick up a bit of a fuss if you catch the hull on the chine. The hull feels unwaveringly solid, however, even if it wasn't put through its sternest test on a benign day in the Solent.

What separates the SR44 from the crop of other talented T-top sportscruisers? Its price for one thing – the starting price is over 100,000 more expensive than Solaris's new IPS-powered 44 Open, but, as with every Windy there has ever been, it's abundantly clear that the premium is being put to good use.

This is a seriously classy operator that combines the desirable main deck leisure spaces with the sort of dynamics that make it an absolutely sensational fast weekender and manage to banish any notion that the Blackhawk could be a case of form defeating function. The tone was set a decade ago with the SR52 and Windy, with or without the benefit of a crystal ball, has produced a brilliant successor.

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DASHBOARD
Clear, classy and easy to use. Windy's helm designs are up there with the best

WHEEL GOOD
It's a simple single-spoke design but it looks and feels great

WINDSCREEN
As an option, this can meet the T-top for full protection



POWER PLANT
The tray of the tender garage lifts to create engine access

SEATING
A walkway down the starboard side of the cockpit is an option

TREADS
These teak treads aid boarding and hide the fuel filler caps

ANCHOR
A folding anchor mechanism is an (expensive) option

TOP SPEED



CONSUMPTION



RANGE



NOISE



PRICE



SPECIFICATION

LOA 46ft 0in (14.03m)
Beam 12ft 10in (3.96m)
Draught 3ft 6in (1.10m)
Displacement 9.5 tonnes
Fuel capacity 900 litres
Water capacity 300 litres
RCD B for 12 people
Designer Dubois, Windy & Hans Jørgen Johnsen

COSTS & OPTIONS

Price from €690,000 ex VAT
Joystick €10,000
Air-conditioning (20,000 BTU) €11,260
Retractable sun shade €15,750
Onan 7kW generator €18,500
Hydraulic bathing platform (300kg) €26,300
Cover package €4,300
Wetbar fridge €1,995
Search light €3,800
Teak cockpit €9,200
Underwater lights €4,500

PERFORMANCE

Test engines Volvo Penta D6 440, 440hp @ 3,800rpm. 5.5-litre, 6-cylinder diesels

	ECO					FAST			MAX
RPM	1,000	1,400	1,800	2,200	2,600	3,000	3,400	3,600	
Knots	7.1	9.5	12.6	18.6	24.7	31.8	37.3	41.2	
Litres per hour	9.2	12.8	42.0	60.0	82.0	3.46	142	169	
Litres per mile	1.30	1.35	3.33	3.23	3.32	3.46	3.81	4.10	
Range (NM)	556	534	216	223	217	208	189	176	
Noise dB(A)	64	71	77	78	80	82	84	85	

Calculated figures based on real-time readings, yours may vary considerably. Figures allow for 20% reserve. All prices ex VAT. 37% fuel, 75% water, 3 crew + safety stores. 27° air temperature, F1 and calm for sea trial.