

Swede sensation

Sweden's Najad Yachts has emerged from a minor mid-life crisis with a new model. But what's she like?

Sam Jefferson finds out





Boat test ~ Najad 395cc

or some time now I have been banging on about the fact that boat manufacturers are just too damn good these days. The big manufacturers simply can't afford to turn out a bad boat and – to their credit – they very rarely do. The result is boats that always perform competently but – just sometimes – they are a little bit bland.

This isn't a claim I could level at the Najad 395cc, a yacht that has enjoyed an intriguing development process. The boat I tested was more than just a competent performer, she also had a certain amount of character – possibly borne out of her unusual development.

Najad is one of the band of Swedish manufacturers that came to prominence in the 1980s and garnered a name for building solid, sensible blue water cruisers that combined sensible Scandinavian designs to unsurpassed workmanship. For years this formula has worked a treat. Customers have been willing to pay a bit of a premium in order to enjoy the guarantee of quality that brands such as Najad, Hallberg Rassy and Malo could provide.

However, more recently, things have all turned a little bit odd in Sweden. Perhaps the ultimate expression of this was Hallberg Rassy launching a yacht with twin rudders. I found this disturbing. It's the yachting equivalent of Jacob Rees-Mogg turning up for work wearing a baseball cap turned backwards. Weird, compelling and just a touch undignified. Anyway, Najad weren't idle either and after a turbulent period that saw them axe their entire dealer network, the company is back on an even keel and working in conjunction with fellow Swedish company Arcona. A new management team is at the helm and the company can return to doing what it does best.

Yet in the midst of this turmoil, the Najad 395 was developed. She was successor to the popular and excellent 380 and featured a number of intriguing developments. First up, she was available in aft cockpit configuration – a set up that also



featured a very distinctive arch over the cockpit. Secondly, she was built designed by Bruce Farr – not someone I would generally associate with Najad Yachts. There's more too – she boasts a spade rudder (not twin, mark you) plus a saildrive. These are things that are going to rile certain members of the Najad family. For me though, I was in heaven. Here was a yacht that, whatever else she was going to be, was unlikely to be bland.

First impressions

To be fair, she's unmistakably a Najad. That distinctive white

ABOVE
The trademark maroon and white livery makes the Najad unmistakable

BELOW
The centre cockpit layout makes perfect sense for blue water cruisers

and maroon livery ensured there could be no mistake there. This was also the first centre cockpit model available which somehow just looks more congruous on a Najad and gives her an air of a serious cruiser. She's 39ft long and, these days, that's not a big boat.

The Farr design house evidently knew that they needed to provide internal volume so the freeboard is pretty high which makes her look a touch boxy, although the paint job helps to break this up and the iconic maroon stripe along her hull also hides the portlights nicely. In fairness, she looks modern and





ABOVE
Uncluttered decks
and acres of teak

BELOW
The interior is finished
to a very high quality
but is a bit lighter than
many earlier Najads

purposeful with just a nod toward one of Farr's other designs, the Bavaria Cruiser 37, about her lines.

Step on deck and the centre cockpit configuration certainly makes sense and also makes for an inviting space. Gone is the twin helm configuration and the single wheel pedestal is the hub of the boat.

Teak abounds and this is a really pleasant and secure place to be. What you also can't argue with is the quality feel of the yacht. Everywhere you look are those trademark little touches of quality: the teak-capped toe rail and the mirror-sheen finish to the varnished woodwork.

The layout also means that the somewhat distinctive arch over the cockpit that had to be used on the 395ac has gone and the mainsheet can be sited in the correct place aft. This massively improves the look and practicality of the yacht.

On deck

To my mind, the cockpit is a triumph in this configuration –spacious, comfortable and with absolutely everything to hand and in the right place. The throttle is where it should be, as is the chartplotter and the winches. Now, this sounds simple but honestly, you'd be amazed.

What was also amazing was that this particular yacht came with bow and stern thrusters which seemed a bit of an overkill on a sub 40ft yacht but anything to make life easier I guess. She also came with the optional powered winches and furlers (the mainsail was in-mast furling) with all the basic rigging controls leading back to two sets of jammers coming out of the cockpit coamings to port and starboard of the helming position. As you can imagine, this made sailing effortless and singlehanded sailing pretty much a formality.

There are also some nicely positioned and effective rope bins to keep things tidy. She has a low windscreen at the forward end of the cockpit and I thought this looked rather stylish. The

sprayhood seemed absurdly high and a bit ugly but, as soon as we were underway, a particularly intense shower demonstrated precisely how excellent this was.

I guess the real drawback of the centre cockpit configuration was that storage was a tad limited which is a definite drawback for blue water cruisers. There is room for ropes and fenders but not much more. The side decks were wide and comfortable and there were some nice touches – the headsail sheets led through the hand rail which minimises the risk of snarl ups.

The Najad weighs 12,000kg so she's no lightweight flyer. The sail plan needs to reflect that to an extent but this is ultimately a blue water cruiser, so she sets a relatively conservative 89m² of sail on a Selden twin spreader rig which is keel stepped.

Down below

Step down below and you enter a space designed by Ken Freivokh's team of interior designers. These guys know what they are doing. Combine that with Najad's trademark high quality joinery and you have a pretty sweet combination. It's also unmistakably Najad; plenty of dark, quality hardwood on show, all beautifully put together.

There is, however, a good deal more light than on earlier models and the overall impression is of a really pleasant and well thought out space. This model had a single aft stateroom with a more modest double forward. There are, of course, a number of layout options available but this set up is unquestionably the sensible one for blue water cruising.

The saloon was not revolutionary, but it was pleasant, with room for six to gather comfortably for a dinner. →



Boat test ~ Najad 395cc

The linear galley is to port running aft toward the main stateroom. This is laid out as it should be on a vessel with blue water pretensions and is wide enough to work in but narrow enough that you can brace yourself against something if you are trying to cook in rough conditions. To starboard is the chart table which is forwards facing and has a somewhat high, commanding position. Traditionalists will argue it is a bit on the narrow side, but, let's face it, this is the way things are going these days.

Step aft, and you find yourself in a truly palatial stateroom that would not be out of place on a 50 footer. I was impressed and, again, the fit out was absolutely top notch. This would be a very comfortable place to sleep if you were cruising long distance.

The ensuite heads/shower is to starboard and is also decently dimensioned. There is a door at the forward end which leads you back out into the main saloon, giving easy access during the day.

This was particularly important on this model as there was actually only one heads compartment on the boat – this boat's owner had bypassed the optional forward heads compartment in favour of a walk-in wardrobe. Now, this is a yacht that is under 40ft so the main question that hits you as you come forward and walk into a space where a heads should be is, why? I mean WHYYYYY?

As the broker who showed me around the boat explained, one of the more satisfactory options is to have this forward space as a designated shower – no heads involved. That makes for a really pleasant showering area.

Anyway, forward of this is a decent sized double offset to port. You can have a vee berth instead but this seemed like a sensible layout and there was more than enough room. Aside from that, access to the engine was excellent and the overall impression was of an interior that was nicely put together. The issue of storage reared its head to an extent but this is a 39ft yacht – and I guess the walk-in wardrobe option solves that issue entirely.



Under sail

It was time to head out to sea. The weather was feeling particularly capricious on the day of our test and decided to dole out an interesting mix of breeze that varied from 0kn up to 20kn, with a pleasant combination of blinding sunshine, torrential rain and at one point, hail. Anyway, that was all to the good for the test team and we motored out of Lymington on the Solent full of expectation.

The first thing to note was that, under power, the yacht was prone to wander if left to its own devices. By that I mean she would sort of veer off – presumably this is because the rudder is well aft of the saildrive. This is not an issue at all, but it does keep you honest and

ABOVE
Trucking along nicely in moderate breezes...

BELOW
...and trucking along nicely in strong breezes

alert when steering under power.

We set the sails to a 7kn breeze and, being relatively heavy, it took a while for her to gain way. However, she was soon forging along happily despite the modest conditions.

The first versions of this yacht in aft cockpit configurations seemed to have an issue with friction in the steering system but this has certainly been remedied in the CC version (doubtless the AC too for that matter). The steering was smooth, light and responsive with enough weather helm to keep you interested.

The breeze gradually built and she trucked along nicely, hitting the high sevens without fuss as the breeze hit 15kn. Sadly, that was about as good as it got, because an intense rain squall killed the breeze altogether and, as the breeze dropped to zero, we were left plowtering helplessly off the Needles. This was not the fault of the yacht at all.

Shortly after, the breeze once again filled in – somewhat reluctantly this time – and she began to perform well, sailing with a very comfortable, reassuring gait that is probably aided by that bit of extra displacement.

Sail handling, as already noted, was absolutely effortless and the general feel was that this was a nice boat to sail. She's not going to set the world alight if she competed in the Round the Island Race but that's not what she's designed for. Mooring, as you can imagine, was a breeze with bow and stern thrusters. →



ALTERNATIVE YACHTS



HALLBERG-RASSY 40C

The natural rival for the Najad. Fresh off Magnus Rassy's drawing board, the Hallberg-Rassy is strikingly modern, featuring twin rudders and a plumb bow. She's a bit bigger than the Najad and 100kg lighter. At present, she's only available in centre cockpit configuration.

hallberg-rassy.com



C-YACHT 1250I

A Dutch centre-cockpit design from a marque that has specialised in this configuration. Their designs are proven blue water cruisers and the emphasis is definitely on cruising comfort and sea-kindly lines. This is the flagship of the range and their newest design.

c-yacht.com



SIRIUS 40DS

If you're after something a little bit different, look no further. The Sirius is an unusual deck saloon design that is crammed full of clever touches and set up well for long term blue water cruisers. Perhaps not the easiest on the eye but deceptively quick and incredibly clever and versatile.

Sirius-werft.de



SAM'S VERDICT

The Najad 395cc follows the Hallberg-Rassy trend of trying to be progressive while also staying true to its core values of quality and seaworthiness. In terms of quality, they definitely succeed both above and below decks. The boat is also easily handled by a couple and sails well. The centre cockpit configuration makes more sense for Najad's core customer base and irons out a lot of the quirks that were initially a problem on the 395ac. That said, there is still something slightly quirky about

the 395cc. Essentially, she just feels a little different from a run-of-the-mill yacht these days. This gives her a certain charm all of her own. How buyers will adapt to the fact that the Swedish blue water manufacturers are moving away from skeg-hung rudders and true blue water hull profiles is a wider question and I guess it's one we won't know the answer to for some while yet.

COMFORT: ★★★★★

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

BLUE WATER ABILITY: ★★★★★

THE SPEC

LOA: 39ft 4in (12m)

LWL: 36ft (11m)

Beam: 13ft 2in (4m)

Draft: (standard) 6ft 10in (2.1m), (shallow) 5ft 11in (1.8m)

Displ: 21,337lbs (9,678kg)

Sail area: 958sq ft (89m²)

SA/D: 19.92

D/L: 204

Engine: 57hp Yanmar saildrive

Price (base): £362,000

Contact: Najad.se

UK dealer: arconayachts.com

Tel: 02380 457770

