

Out of the blue

The Outbound 46 is a tried and tested bluewater cruiser with a strong reputation in the US. Sam Jefferson steps aboard to see if she can impress on this side of the pond





Whatever your opinion of Donald J Trump's trade war with China,

it has thrown out a few strange repercussions. The case of Outbound Yachts is a classic example; the company specialises in building bespoke, high-quality bluewater cruising yachts in relatively small numbers. High-quality bluewater yachts are far from cheap to produce, as we all know, and Outbound mitigated this cost by having the boats built in China. This formula worked very well for the last 20 years and Outbound has built up a strong reputation within the US. Although there have been some European buyers, the focus has always been on Outbound's home market.

All that has changed now because a swingeing tariff on goods from China has had a detrimental effect on the business model. As a result, Outbound needs to broaden its horizons, and the UK and European markets are firmly in its sights. The Outbound 46 is its longest-running model, and the hull design actually has a very impressive pedigree, dating back to 1999 and being the last design off the board of noted designer Carl Schumacher, who is better known for racing designs, such as the Alerion. His untimely death at the age of 52 made this boat one of his last. The 46 started life in 2000 as the Outbound 44 but, after hull number nine, it became the 46 with the doubling in length of the bathing step in the transom – and it has remained that way ever since.

First impressions

This was an intriguing test for me as, although the boat was new, the design was of a certain vintage – a time, in fact, when Donald Trump was just limbering up for his stint on *The Apprentice*. As such, this made for a fascinating contrast with some of the bluewater cruisers with more contemporary lines. While the modern trend is towards broad back ends and twin rudders, the Outbound 46 is reassuringly old school, with modest beam, an easily driven hull and plentiful taper aft.



PHOTOS: J???????

There is a decent amount of rake to the stem and the transom, and a powerful-looking rig. Combine that with a modest amount of freeboard and relatively low truncated coachroof and you have a good-looking yacht – although the look is somewhat compromised by the

ABOVE
A sea kindly hull that promises to deliver an easy motion in rough weather

BELOW
The rig is powerful but easy to handle with the twin headsails a boon for blue water

solid doghouse at the end of the coachroof. This is an optional extra and while it compromises the look of the boat, it does signal that this is a serious bluewater cruiser and proved mightily practical on the test.

Although this is no lightweight flier, displacement has been kept relatively modest at 33,000lb (14,900kg). There is a definite emphasis on quality and bluewater safety. To this end, the hand-laid fibreglass hull boasts a long bulb keel moulded into the hull itself and therefore featuring no keel bolts. There is also a watertight crash bulkhead 7ft (2.1m) from the bow, which provides an extra level of reassurance. The rig is relatively tall and powerful, and boasts the twin headsail 'slutter' rig, which has become the favoured rig of bluewater cruisers in recent years.

On deck

Step aboard you immediately notice how high the lifelines are – 30in (76cm) as opposed to the standard 24in (61cm) – which makes you feel extra safe. You'll find yourself in a relatively roomy cockpit that also feels extremely secure. The fact that this is a 46ft (14m) yacht





space with a fixed workbench and storage spaces for all your tools.

Sail controls are set up in the classic manner, with all lines led back to the aft end of the coachroof, while there are two big primary winches for the headsails on the coamings within reach of the helm. Step out of the cockpit and the decks are wide and uncluttered with good handholds.

Up on the foredeck, there is a substantial locker situated forward of the crash bulkhead. This is a really roomy space and ideal for stowing downwind sails, fenders or even a deflated dinghy. There is a padeye mounted on the deck and bedded into the crash bulkhead, which can be used to rig a stay for your storm jib. The anchor locker is very narrow and deep, and has been designed to minimise the risk of the chain fouling up. The keel-stepped rig features two winches mounted to the mast which is a useful feature.

ABOVE
The solid dog house forward of the cockpit is an optional extra that isn't great-looking but is very practical

BELOW LEFT
Wide side decks, high guard rails and lots of handholds are all excellent features for a bluewater cruiser

The fuel tank vents are another interesting and sensible feature, built in to the mid point of the guardrail stanchions. This minimises the risk of water getting into the fuel tank.

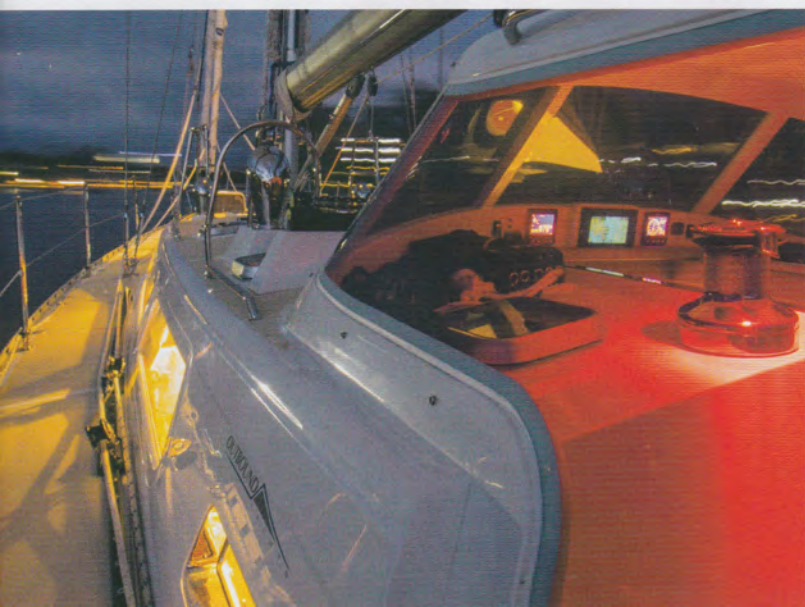
Down below

My experience of American yachts' interiors is that they tend to follow a slightly different path to European manufacturers, going for a more classic look. I guess this is a risk-free approach as they are far less likely to age badly. The Outbound confirmed my belief, and there was a very traditional feel to the fit-out, with plenty of beautifully varnished American cherry (although teak is an option). The companionway access is good, with just three steps down into a light, airy saloon. The layout is very conventional with a decent sized U-shaped galley to port, which has plenty of places to brace against in rough weather. There is a three-burner hob and



yet it doesn't have twin wheels comes as a shock, but it is by far the most sensible set-up for a boat with a decent amount of taper aft. The cockpit is deep and narrow but seats six comfortably, and the benches are sufficiently long to allow you to stretch out, while the fixed doghouse adds to the feeling of being safe and enclosed while also providing excellent shelter.

There is good storage in the cockpit, with a designated locker aft for the liferaft, while the starboard cockpit locker seat lifts up to reveal a substantial workshop





well proportioned fridge/freezer with both toploading and front loading capability. In addition, there is ample storage space. An unusual feature these days, the manual salt and freshwater pumps are a real boon for bluewater cruisers.

Aft to starboard is an old-school chart table with ample room to lay out a chart. Moving forward you have a generously dimensioned settee to starboard, which is wide enough to relax and lounge on. It also makes a good sea berth and has a lee cloth. To port is a U-shaped seating area with a dining table. All tankage is located centrally beneath the floorboards. This means that all the spaces under the seats are devoted purely to storage.

Unusually for a serious bluewater cruiser, the Outbound has the owner's stateroom forward. This is a nice space and you can walk around both sides of the bed, so it's easier to climb into without launching yourself headlong into it. There is masses of storage under the bed, too. The sink is actually outside of the heads in the forecabin, which frees up more space in the actual en suite heads compartment. That said, it's a relatively modest space. The larger heads compartment is on the starboard side of the main saloon, just abeam of the companionway. This is a really generously dimensioned space and the shower stall is well partitioned off from the toilet and sink. The aft end of the shower stall has a watertight door set into it that allows access to the workshop if required. To port, aft of the galley is the quarter berth and this is a decent sized double with standing headroom at the head of the berth and good

storage. It also features a hanging locker for your wet-weather gear.

Under sail

It was time to go sailing and I was fortunate to test the on a brisk day with 10-15 knots of breeze. The test boat had already crossed the Atlantic and was actually en route to Sweden. This meant she was absolutely loaded with all the gear required for serious bluewater cruising, so this was going to be a proper test. The boat behaved predictably under power and raising the fully battened mainsail was no chore thanks to the electric winch on the coachroof to starboard. There is a hydraulic backstay tensioner – not that normal on a bluewater cruiser but very useful for tweaking the rig.

We set off upwind with full main and inner jib. In the moderately building breeze the Outbound demonstrated that Carl Schumacher's final design was no slouch. Despite her displacement, she went extremely well in the

ABOVE
The interior features a very high standard of joinery

BELOW
The outbound boasted an impressive turn of speed for a bluewater cruising yacht

modest breeze and, as it built, she really started to spread her wings. Before long, with the wind building, we were heading upwind at a steady 7kt. The helm was nice and poised, with excellent feel and just a hint of weather helm to keep you interested. The boat fell into a groove with ease and she made you feel like a good sailor by making it all easy for you. The two primary winches were also well placed for the helmsman and sail handling in general was very simple.

Cracking the boat off the wind, we unfurled the big 140% genoa and were soon speeding along at 7-8kt. The motion of the boat was extremely comfortable and there was something deeply reassuring about the manner in which she dealt with the slowly building seas. I came off the water impressed with the performance. It was clear that her slightly old-school lines made for a supremely seaworthy, easily driven and sea kindly hull.





SAM'S VERDICT

The Outbound 46 is a carefully put together boat that boasts extreme attention to detail. Whether it's the beautiful joinery downstairs or the little touches designed to make life easier for the sailor and the absolute plethora of handholds, this is a boat for the serious bluewater sailor with a specific vision of what he or she has in mind. Given that the design of this boat dates back to 1999, it's hardly surprising that her look both on the water and down below is a

little bit retro compared with, say, a recent Hallberg Rassy. Yet, this is also one of her assets as it ensures the boat stands out from the crowd. While some may be turned off by the old-school hull shape, others will covet a yacht with a tried and tested hull shape that marries seaworthiness and performance so seamlessly.

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

LOOKS: ★★★★★

COMFORT: ★★★★★

THE SPEC

LOA: 46ft 4in (14.1m)

LWL: 40ft 3in (12.2m)

Beam: 13ft 6in (4m)

Draught: (standard keel) 6ft 6in (1.82m),
5ft 6in (1.67m)

Disp: 33,000lb (14,900kg)

Sail Area: 1,083sq ft (100m²)

Price: £450,000 (inc delivery to
Southampton)

outboundyachts.com

