

Sailability members meet THE BOSS



'Wow – that's a weapon'

By Chris Hodge

'Hugo Boss', Alex Thomson's Vendee Globe-challenging Open 60 yacht certainly makes a striking first impression.

We first saw her during SYC's Coastal Skipper/Yachtmaster practical course in April last year. We were in a Beneteau 37 and feeling quite pleased with ourselves; barrelling downwind along the Solent in a decent blow with the log reading over 8 knots as we surfed off the odd wave. Hugo Boss appeared on the horizon. On a close-hauled course across our bows, she picked up her skirts and, literally, flew over the water in front of us on her enormous foil wings.

A few minutes later and already a couple of miles upwind, she turned around, pulled out a Code 0 and swept back past us as though we were standing still. We guessed she was doing 30 knots. Of course, it turned out we were under-estimating her.

Later that week Sussex Sailability members and volunteers, Chris Hodge, Tony McCoy, Laurence Woodhams and Dave Carroll got to take a closer look.

When not being sailed single-handed around the world, Hugo Boss is sailed by crews of four. It turned out that the RYA examiner, who was putting some of us through our Yachtmaster paces, was part of the team. As we attempted to show off our marina skills in Gosport's Haslar marina, he got us to raft up alongside Hugo Boss, and invited us aboard.

Hugo Boss is black, very black. Almost everything on it is black as if to emphasise the sheer amount of carbon that has gone into this machine. Only a patch of day-glo yellow on the coach-roof and day-glo yellow rudders (required by class rules) break up the black. There is surprisingly little metal – shrouds are rods of carbon, shackles are dyneema, blocks are low friction carbon rings, and the spaghetti-junction of dozens of lines in the cockpit is controlled with lightweight rope constrictors rather than jamming cleats. Carbon spreaders emerge sideways out of the deck and foils

likewise out of the hull, slightly above the water line. Coming alongside must be a perilous exercise.

Despite the high-tech design of the boat, the cockpit is actually quite simple. It is dominated by a black coffee-grinder pedestal that is linked to a few winches. Class rules demand that everything apart from the auto-pilot and the canting keel are manually driven. There is no mass of instruments and controls – just two regular B&G repeaters, a compass and a tiller directly linked to the twin rudders.

Going below is like entering the space shuttle. A water-tight door is pulled behind you. Ahead of you are five sealable bulkheads, each of which can be closed off to keep the boat floating and sailing in case of a collision. There is little by way of creature comforts. A bed can be pulled into place by the first bulkhead. The sea is 2.5mm of carbon fibre beneath your feet. Toileting is 'bucket and chuck-it', albeit in a high-tech, carbon fibre potty. And catering stretches to packets of dehydrated food.

On that point at least, our comfortable cruising boat could leave Hugo Boss standing.



Laurence Woodhams, Tony McCoy, Chris Hodge and Dave Carroll aboard Hugo Boss.



Tony McCoy and Dave Carroll go below.