



Dufour Yachts seems to have shifted its strategy with the introduction of the new 530. Previously, the French builder maintained two lines: Performance and Grand Large, with the latter targeted at the cruising crowd. With the Dufour 530, however, Dufour decided to combine the two approaches in a brand-new hull meant to satisfy both markets. The result was not only a fine boat, but the winner in the “monohull flagship” category in this year’s *SAIL* magazine “Best Boats” contest.

Design & Construction

Despite the change in approach, Dufour stuck with its go-to design team, Felci Yacht Design. At first glance, the 530 also looks like a typical Dufour cruiser, with a plumb bow, a chine to help max out interior volume, a low coachroof and plenty of beam. Below the waterline, though, the 530 can be ordered with a 9ft 1in T-keel and bulb of a type found on Dufour’s performance models. (A medium-aspect “standard” fin drawing 7ft 5in and a shoal-draft keel drawing 6ft 4in are also available.) It’s interesting a boat with a 16ft beam has a single rudder, but it’s a deep appendage and works well.

Construction includes a solid fiberglass hull with an integrated structural grid topped by an infused deck. A plumb transom with a drop-down swim step works in tandem with the plumb bow to maximize waterline length. The 9/10 fractional rig features a tapered, deck-stepped Z-Spar mast and double spreaders. The mainsail can be fully battened or furling. To my mind, the best of the available sailplans for shorthanded sailing would be the self-tacking jib with a Code 0 attached to the sprit.

This brings us to how the 530 is being marketed. There are, in fact, three distinct versions of the boat available, with the rig, keel and a number of deck features all changing depending on the one you decide to go with. The “Easy” version is fairly basic, with minimal sail controls, and likely be found most commonly in charter; the “Ocean” interpretation is designed for more serious cruising owners and comes with a more complicated sail-control system; and the “Performance” version is expressly configured for either club or offshore racing, with a taller mast (including an additional set of spreaders) and an even more nuanced deck layout for getting the most out of the resulting increase in sail area. Dufour offers plenty of other options in addition to these three basic packages for further personalizing the boat.

On Deck

A boat has to function well not only under sail but at anchor, and Dufour has improved the on-deck experience aboard the 530 in both areas. When sailing, everything falls easily to hand, with the optional German-style mainsheet on our test boat leading back to a pair of primaries placed near the wheels. Two more winches for the jib sheets can be found on the cockpit coaming, with halyard winches on the cabintop near the companionway. All control lines are led.

A pair of sunpads can be added forward—a large one under the boom and an abbreviated one just ahead of the mast—and the side decks are nice and clear. In the cockpit, the twin helm stations are set on a pair of streamlined, angled pedestals, both with 12in Raymarine HybridTouch MFDs. Engine controls are to starboard and up on the pedestal, as opposed to near the cockpit sole, which is ideal when docking since it allows you to keep your eyes on where you’re going instead of looking down at your feet.

Overall, the cockpit is large and fairly standard. There’s nothing dramatically different here for the simple reason it’s a proven design that works. In addition to the drop-leaf centerline table (which can be configured to hold an optional refrigerator or removed entirely aboard the performance version), an optional sunbed can be specced between the two wheels, which makes for a great place to lounge, as you’re in the center of the action without getting in the way. Another standout feature is the optional outdoor galley, an amenity now synonymous with Dufour. When the swim step is down, the resulting “teak beach” becomes a great spot for the chef to stand and cook *en plein air* with the help of an Eno plancha grill and the sink and cutting board there. No more hot, greasy fumes inside the boat, and the chef remains a part of the action.



Accommodations

Belowdecks, the Dufour 530 is reminiscent of the many Dufour models that have come before it, again, with a wealth of opportunities to make it your own. Arrangements are available with up to six cabins (plus a skipper's cabin) and two to four heads. Our test boat was set up for proper private-owner cruising, with a master cabin in the bow, two cabins aft, and a nice open saloon that included an L-shaped lounge to starboard and a U-shaped dinette to port.

A signature Dufour split galley separates the master stateroom from the saloon, with a large single sink and three-burner Eno stove on one side of the intervening passageway and an Isotherm refrigeration and microwave oven on the other. Among the advantages with this kind of galley arrangement is that fact it allows the rest of the saloon to take full advantage of the boat's generous beam. It also leaves plenty of room for an aft-facing nav desk to starboard of the companionway. If you choose to load the boat up with a bunch more cabins, the lounge and the nav desk, not surprisingly, disappear.

The master cabin forward is brightly lit, with a large overhead hatch, deck portlights and hull windows. Its island berth has a set of drawers underneath for good stowage, and the ensuite head includes a large shower compartment to port and a sink and toilet to starboard. The fit and finish throughout the accommodations area are impressively up-market for a production boat. Dufour has long prided itself on its workmanship and forethought with respect to things like finding new ways of creating more storage space.

We couldn't have gotten luckier on test day, with a true breeze of 15-20 knots, perfect for this design. Setting sail, we glided along at 8.2 knots in 20 knots of true wind on a close reach. When we cracked off to a 110-degree true wind angle, we kept up a speed of 6.5 in 16 knots of wind. We never reefed, but also never felt overpowered and life aboard remained comfortable throughout, even in the gusts. This is the kind of boat that both builds confidence and allows a couple to challenge themselves without ever feeling overwhelmed.

Under Power

The Dufour 530 is available with a 75hp Yanmar diesel and saildrive or a 110hp Volvo Penta engine and straight shaft. Our test boat was equipped with the more powerful engine, and at wide-open throttle and 3,000 rpm, we motored at 8.2 knots on flat water. We found an economical cruising speed of 6.8 knots at 2,400 rpm. The boat responds quickly from a standstill as the prop wash passes directly over the boat's single rudder. With a bow thruster, the big boat is a cinch to fit into the tightest of slips.

Conclusion

Because the 530 replaces the popular Dufour 520, it had to be something special. Other builders have tried putting a cruising deck and interior on a performance hull with varied success. All too often, though, the resulting boats end up getting weighed down with all kinds of extra equipment while remaining tender and squirrely. That's not the case with the Dufour 530. In 20 knots, this boat felt downright regal, powering through the waves like a kind of waterborne Cadillac, always on her feet and reeling off the knots—a "Best Boat" if ever there was one.

Specifications

LOA 53ft 6in **LWL** 47ft 4in **Beam** 16ft 3in

Draft 6ft 4in (shoal); 7ft 5in (std.); 9ft 1in (performance)

Displacement 39,184lb

Ballast 10,140lb

Sail Area 1,345 ft²

Fuel/Water (GAL) 116/179

Engine 75 hp