

X Marks the Winning Spot



Many sailors believe that sizewise, the sweet spot for cruising boats lies somewhere between 40 and 50 feet. That was certainly the case in the 2017 Boat of the Year contest, where five strong competitors — the Catalina 425, Dufour 460 Grand Large, Elan Impression 45, Hallberg-Rassy 40 MK II and X-Yachts X4 — constituted the fleet's single biggest class. When it came to deciding which was the best, the judges certainly had their work cut out for them.

As previously noted, the

panel was duly smitten by the Catalina 425 (see page 72). The French builder Dufour has also found much success in the BOTY competition; its 382 was named Best Midsize Cruiser for 2016. This year the company entered a larger yacht, the Dufour 460, which also drew praise from the judging team.

Tim Murphy said: "The boat is part of a series that includes the Dufour 500 and 560, and there's a definite theme among all of them. The design writ called for a boat intended for coastal cruising and social cruising, with the ability to make passages but not for long-term living aboard. And there are some interesting innovations. They have a pop-up galley in the stern with a grill, sink and fish-cleaning platform. They're

aiming at a whole lifestyle, I think. Down below, they've inverted the traditional layout of a cruising boat by putting the galley all the way forward. It was unusual, but it really worked. And it was pretty darn nice to sail. It's kind of the middle boat in this grouping; some of the others have extreme features off to the sides. There are a lot of good things going on here."

Good things were also happening aboard the 45-foot Elan Impression. "Elan's E and S lines are performance-oriented, while the Impressions are dedicated cruising boats," said Murphy. "There are four boats in this line, all designed by the renowned British designer Rob Humphreys. They're different from the performance lines, with a single rudder, not twin rudders; a keel-stepped mast, while the others are deck-stepped; and with the mainsheet controls up on the coachroof, not in the cockpit, so you can have a proper bimini. It's a fairly good value compared to its competitors, too."

Speaking of the competition, Carol Hasse was enamored of the Hallberg-Rassy 40 MK II. "The joinery down below is exquisite," she said. "The handholds and fiddles are exactly where they should be. There's an amazing amount of standard safety gear. There's no boat in the fleet that is more highly attuned to what is really seaworthy."

Murphy concurred with that assessment. "As far as the fit and finish down below, this is bar none the one that I would most like to live in," he said. If there was a strike against the Swedish-built yacht, it was that the MK II version was really an updated version of a popular 40-footer that's been in production for nearly a decade, with more



than 150 units already built.

The 41-foot X-Yachts X4, manufactured in Denmark, was the final boat in the class. "It's in between the company's Xp series, which is very directly performance-oriented, and their Xc series, which is cruising-oriented," said Murphy.

"It has, I believe, the best structure of all the boats in this category," he continued. "It's a galvanized steel grid frame in the bilge of the boat. It gives the boat incredible stiffness. It's also built with epoxy, which is the best resin you can build boats out of. They paid strict attention to the weight of the boat. I think they've largely hit their mark of providing more cruising comfort than their full-on performance boats do. And yet during our sea trials, it was clear they'd kept it a really nice sailing boat."

Hasse agreed: "It was a lovely boat to sail, an effortless helm."

Ed Sherman dug a little deeper. "It's a quiet boat," he said. "The construction level is very high. I loved the steel grid concept, and the fact that the boat could be lifted by

Clockwise from right: Made in Denmark, the 41-foot X-Yachts X4 features a galvanized steel grid frame in the bilge that provides incredible stiffness. The Dufour 460 Grand Large is another fine craft from the longtime French builder. Built in Slovenia, the Elan Impression is a full-fledged 45-foot cruiser. So too is the Hallberg-Rassy 40 MK II, another fine sailer.

one single eye that's actually part of the frame and is pretty much an X-Yachts signature trademark. It speaks to the integrity of the build and the weight balance, because they literally just hook that one eye and yank it up.

"The thing we need to balance out," he added, "is which side of the fence does it lean on? More toward the racer or the cruiser? In my opinion, it's more toward the racer, but I also like it as a cruiser/racer. It's a very versatile boat."

When the final votes were tallied, Sherman's colleagues readily agreed by naming the X-Yachts X4 the year's Best Full-Size Cruiser Under 50 Feet.

