



Double vision

Cruising multihulls in the sub-35ft bracket are surprisingly hard to come by. Broadblue's new 346 fits the bill, however, as **Sam Jefferson** discovers

These days there is no shortage of multihulls in the plus 40ft bracket. A quick glance at our Boat News on p14 confirms that there is a plethora of spanking new shiny yachts in this size bracket being launched with remarkable regularity. Yes, multihulls are booming; yet despite this, there is surprisingly little on offer when you move down the size spectrum a touch. Quorning's Dragonfly Yachts has carved out a nice little niche for performance cruisers, but when it comes to out and out cruisers, there is a real dearth of options.

Perhaps this explains Broadblue's decision to revamp its successful 345, which has been given a makeover and is now the all-new 346. The 345 was launched all the way back in 2008 and was designed by Plymouth based multihull specialist Dazcats and was initially known as the Voyager 10 before she was acquired by Broadblue and rebranded the Broadblue 345. A decade on and she has had a full revamp, with an all new deck mould

and tweaks to the interior layout. In the meantime the manufacturers have retained the features that have ensured that this yacht has a strong and loyal following.

Overall concept

The basic premise behind the 346 is that she is a comfortable family cruiser that can be easily handled by one or two people. Although performance is not necessarily a

'Performance is not priority number one but her weight has been kept down to 4,800kg'

priority, her weight has been kept down to 4,800kg so she's fairly light and boasts a decent spread of sail to push her along. One of the key factors in her design was that she was no more than 5m wide as this means you can take her through the French canals – an important consideration for those who don't feel inclined to wrestle with the vagaries of the Bay of Biscay. That said, she is rated Category A, so there is no need to shy away from

some more challenging sailing if you wish. She's available either with twin 16 or 20hp diesel saildrives, or there is the cheaper option of a single outboard set into a well in the middle of the cockpit.

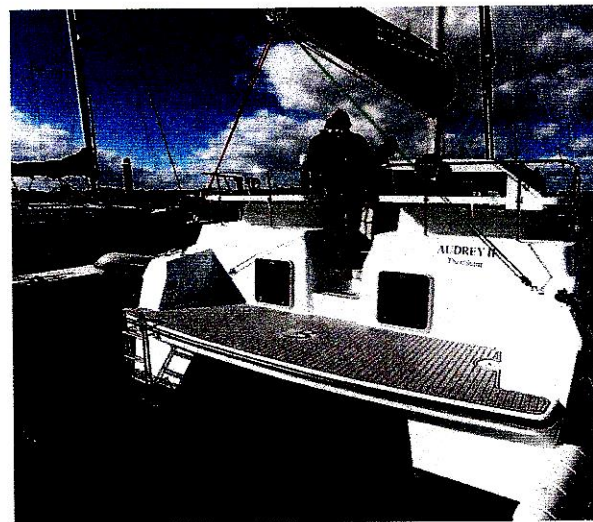
First impressions are pretty much what you would expect of a comfortable cruising multihull. You have to have a decent amount of freeboard, both to give the nacelle clearance from the water

and give you decent volumes of accommodation. This all means that she joins most of her cruising multihull sisters in not being about to win a beauty contest any time soon. Nevertheless, there is a certain pleasing compactness to her shape

The new deck mould features much more curvature to the deckhouse and that has really brought her looks bang up to date. Perhaps the most striking thing as you approach the 346 is her transo

ABOVE
Trucking along at 9kt in a stiff breeze, the Broadblue was unruffled

FACING PAGE
The new deck moulding on the 346 has given her deck house far greater curve



The bathing platform stretches the full width of the transom and is at an enticing height to allow you to step aboard with the greatest of ease. It gives the boat a nice open and welcoming feel, while the step up to the cockpit means that you don't feel at all exposed out at sea.

The cockpit itself is unfussy, uncomplicated and well thought out. The helming position is offset to port and offers an excellent view of the sails.

Aft of this is a seating area, while there is more seating on the starboard side plus a cockpit table. All sail controls are led to a bank of clutches located just to starboard of the companionway and ideally situated for the helmsman. They are well laid out with a good straight lead to the mast, minimising friction. A pair of winches can do all the work from here and on the yacht I tested one of the winches was electric which took all of the hard work out of hoisting the mainsail.

Stepping out on to side decks of a decent width, you head forward to a very roomy foredeck which is solid right to the bow which gives an even greater feeling of space.

There is a decent sized locker up here to store all your ropes and fenders in addition to further storage compartments beneath the cockpit sole.

There are removable davits set into the bathing platform for the dinghy and this is such a huge space that a modest dinghy could just be pulled up on to the platform and lashed in place on a coastal passage.

Interior

Stepping into the comfortable saloon of the 345, there was a tremendous feeling of space. In fact it's not so much a feeling of space as a simple reality. It's surprising that cruising cats are getting so large these days as one of the great things about a multihull is that you can get a huge amount of volume into a relatively modest waterline length. The saloon is a commodious space and there is a definite step up in the amount of joinery compared to the 345, with natural oak abounding, which gives a nice feel of quality. Down below the 346 has a nice uncomplicated, clean feel to her and while she is not stark, she feels low maintenance

'We were soon storming along at 8.5kt and topped out at 9.4kt which is not bad going'

and uncluttered. There is a saloon table to port combined with ample bench seating augmented by some rather nifty flip-out stools. There is a fairly decent sized chart table which has excellent visibility forward and the L-shaped galley is situated aft of this and is simple with Corian work surfaces. Storage for all of your supplies is excellent.

The standard accommodation for this yacht is two large double aft cabins and a single cabin forward in the starboard hull as standard. The master cabin to starboard has an ensuite forward and there is the option to increase the number of berths by incorporating a single cabin amidships on the port side

ABOVE

A simple cockpit arrangement means that all the running rigging is led to a set of clutches within easy reach of the helm

ABOVE

The aft bathing platform is extremely practical and makes getting on and off the boat incredibly easy

and if you really want to cram people in there is the option to fit a double berth in the saloon. The pair of double berths set aft in both hulls are something of an oddity compared to most multihulls, as they are quite distinctly raised up. This is to accommodate the twin diesels beneath, as in the past many small multihulls have circumvented this by placing the prop aft of the rudder. This might work well for providing extra volume but it makes the boat mighty hard to manoeuvre. As it is, the layout works rather well as it gives a nice feeling of space when combined with the large aft hatch, which gives you an excellent view from your bedroom window.

The other consequence is that access to the engine is excellent.

The owner's ensuite was quite unusual as the first thing you are confronted with when you step in this relatively narrow space is the toilet, with the shower set right forward in the bow. This seems a bit baffling, although it works just fine and is apparently due to the width constraints in here at waterline level due to the substantial 'step' in the hulls. It's a light and roomy enough space and although it initially feels illogical, it works very well. There is also the option of a second head in the forward berth on the port side, which would make this an excellent yacht for two couples.



ABOVE
An uncomplicated saloon that is well lit and easy to maintain

BELOW
The galley is well thought out with a good bracing point if the boat is pitching into a head sea

Under sail
I tested the 346 on a blustery, bright March day on Chichester Harbour with a breeze as sharp as a scimitar and a clarity of light that made me feel like the contrast had been turned up. The wind was all over the place inside the harbour but blew anything between 15 and 25kt, generally erring on the 20kt plus side things. This meant we were in for a risk sail and we opted to put a single reef in the mainsail. It also meant that her flat cut Code 0 was not going to be necessary. This, however, would undoubtedly be an extremely useful sail in breezes below 10kt. It has also been cleverly set up so that the Code 0 sheets can be led via a simple to the main winches on

the coachroof. This saves on setting winches outboard and means that you can still control everything from the helm. Recent trends have seen many manufacturers setting their masts well aft as this gives the headsail more power and cuts out on pitching. The Broadblue was evidently ahead of her time as she had this configuration even in 2008 and it has been retained in the 346.

We headed off down the Emsworth Channel and were soon storming along at 8.5kt and topped out at 9.4kt, which is not bad going. In common with most cruising multihulls, she featured hydraulic steering but this had substantially more feel than on some models I have handled and after a brief period of adjustment I found her responsive. She also has a decent turn of speed as below the water that big step in the hull means there isn't a great deal holding her back. Combine that with a modest displacement and you have a nice recipe for speed – particularly in the 25kt gusts. Predictably, she neither pointed as high as a monohull in the same cruising genre nor did she tack as crisply. Yet she performed both tasks competently and she was also utterly unruffled in the sort of conditions where a 34ft monohull would simply be screaming along on her ear.



SAM'S VERDICT

It was quite clear to me that the Broadblue 346 has come about as the result of a long period of evolution which has ensured that the current model has been carefully and thoughtfully refined. There were certainly no teething problems and this was a yacht that immediately inspired confidence. In common with most of her cruising multihull sisters, looks are not her strongest asset, but she does make up for that with the cleverness and simplicity of her layout combined with impressive accommodation.

In terms of handling, she was lively and handled boisterous conditions with the greatest of ease. Ultimately, if you're after a cruising catamaran in this size bracket, look no further. In part because there are precious few options – and this yacht is excellent.

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

COMFORT: ★★★★★

LOOKS: ★★★★★

THE SPEC:

Length overall	33ft 4in (10.2m)
Beam	15ft 7in (4.8m)
Displacement	4800kg
Draft	1.01m
Fuel	1 x 200lt
Water	2 x 250lt
Mainsail	28m ²
Self-tacking jib	19m ²
Gennaker	45m ²

Price

£139,950 (base)

£169,000 (as tested)

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