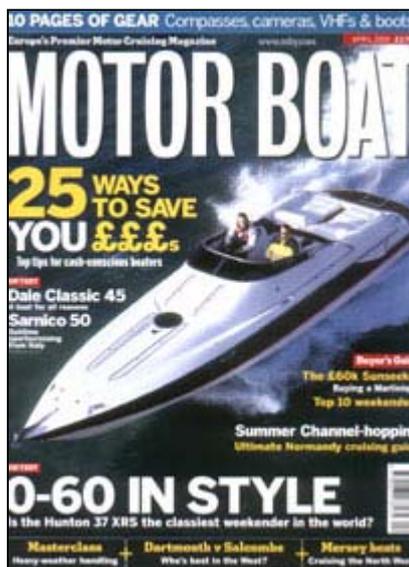


Dale Classic 45

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Wise man's whimsy: A beautiful boat, with a peerless pedigree, a unique hull, superbly made and sporting a host of practical cruising details. Who says the Dale Classic 45 is pure indulgence?



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Introduction

It only takes a few moments of gazing across the pontoons at Dale's new Classic 45 to suss out what this lovely boat is all about: it's a gentleman's plaything, a whimsy, an object of beauty to be admired more than used in earnest. And there's surely nothing wrong with that notion. Even more than second homes and flash cars, our boats are indulgences – probably the greatest extravagances of all. Why should we need any justification other than aesthetics for spending your hard-earned on a whimsy?

Step on board though, and that initial presumption begins to crumble. The 45 seems to be extraordinarily sturdily built for a gentleman's plaything. Not only is the build quality exceptional, but the engineering installation is clearly designed by people who have ventured far offshore and have prepared the 45 for the rigours of life at sea. Further evidence of this comes in the form of the 45's RCD rating: it is one of the very few boats built to Category A, despite its Sunday-on-the-river looks. That elevates it into the next category up from the B-rated Fairline Squadron 74, for example.

It's not just a tough boat, either; it bristles with practical details designed to make life on board safer and more accommodating. And when it comes to stowage, you will be hard pressed to find any boat under 46ft (14m) with more usable storage. Then there's the hardtop.

A few might argue that the Classic 45 has shades of New England lobster boat about it, but contemporary variations on this theme have been exploited by many builders. Whatever its lineage though, it is amusing to think that with their supremely practical hardtops, this old-fashioned style of boat has actually proved to be something of a trend setter: there are few builders turning out modern sports cruisers without a hardtop or the option of one.

Sturdily built, beautifully engineered, stowage rich, thoughtfully detailed and sporting a practical hardtop – so much for whimsy. And we have not even mentioned Dale's new hull design yet.

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New boat, new shape

Dale's new boat has a unique hull shape (see Hull Design, p109) and it



shows: on the water the Classic 45 feels different to anything I've driven before. Dale already had an established connection with Arthur Mursell at TT Designs, who designed their Dale Nelson 38 (MBY April 2000). Like all hull forms, the archetypal Nelson shape has pros and cons. However rough it gets, you're assured of a relatively gentle upwind ride. And unlike a planing hull, there's no need to drive at planing speeds to reap the benefits of the type. On the downside, the round-bilge Nelson form rolls more in quartering seas and is considerably wetter than a good planing boat.

The 38 is not bad in either department – better than most Nelsons – but Dale's top-dog Mike Reynolds still wanted Arthur to design something that was drier, faster, rolled less and had more internal volume than the typically skinny Nelson.

And that is exactly what Arthur Mursell gave him. On the water, the 45 feels like a cross between a good planing hull and a good Nelson. Even with its impressively flared bow it is not as dry as the best planing boats, but nor is it as wet as a typical Nelson. With a touch of deadrise at the transom and its extra beam, the 45 develops more dynamic stability as it picks up speed – not as much as a deep-vee planing boat, but more than a Nelson.

With 30 knots on tap from twin 500hp Yanmar diesels, any 45-footer is from time to time going to get its bow clear of the water as it powers upwind in lumpy conditions, and we found that it was still possible to occasionally thump the topsides and the area around the integral spray rail. But most of the time the 45's Nelson heritage shines through, and the ride upwind is smoother than you would expect on a similar-sized planing boat.



The seas on our test day were not big enough to uncover the 45's downwind credentials. With its flared bow, mild transom deadrise and extra beam I'd expect it to be fine, although I don't see it beating the very best of the planing boats that are superb even in the wildest conditions. Overall, the 45 is still more Nelson than fast planing boat. It's a boat I would be happy to venture offshore in, whatever the conditions.

This feeling of security is enhanced by the way the boat is engineered and the lot of the helmsman. The view out through the deep windows is exceptional, and Dale fit expensive double-glazed front screens that don't mist. Keeping the view clear in sunny conditions is the blue leather lining the dash – the best anti-glare I've seen.

One unexpected benefit of the new hull shape is the way it trims. From a standing start, the trim rises very gently and completely linearly with no perceptible hump up to a maximum of no more than 4.0° – at the lower end of the planing boat spectrum. Shorter people will have no problem seeing out safely whatever the weather and sea conditions or the speed they travel. Made by KAB, the seats are comfortable and fully adjustable with hingeing arms. And like all the seating throughout the boat, it's tailored to suit a 6ft 4in-tall (1.93m) owner and his equally lofty crew.



Not everything at the helm is perfect. Dale's unusual crescent-shaped instrument binnacle leaves me nonplussed, even though it provides the ideal shaded setting for the big chart plotter. Mirroring the trim-tab controls and gauges either side of the wheel is impractical. But none of this really matters: Mike Reynolds and his team at Dale are completely open minded, and if you want another arrangement it's no problem.

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Practical magic

One of the joys of the 45 is that its layout works so well on so many levels. The owner of our boat acknowledged that his single-cabin version will be used mainly for day trips and weekend boating, and in this regard it works admirably. The open-plan arrangement in the cockpit and the deck saloon are great for entertaining and socialising – you simply switch seats according to the weather and who you want to chat with.



As a short-handed boat, the 45 is superb because it is so easy to move safely and quickly around the cockpit and along the wide teak-laid side decks, and the excellent mooring facilities make it a simple task to moor up in a flash, even if you are on your own. As a boat for exploring inland waterways, it excels because of its low air draught – only 9ft 10in (3.00m) with the small hingeing mast lowered.

Yet one of this gentleman's plaything's least obvious but greatest strengths has to be its capabilities as a serious cruising boat. Close the half-height door at the aft end of the deck saloon and the 45 immediately feels very safe and secure. A zippered cover would complete the closure, both materially and psychologically, providing a cosy all-weather driving environment that would feel as protected as any flybridge boat's saloon but offering a manifestly better (and therefore safer) view out in all conditions. It's worth noting that the 45 is

also a very quiet boat – a prerequisite for relaxed long-distance cruising.

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A place for everything

For serious cruising, I haven't come across a boat of this size that has more abundant or better thought out stowage. Dale not only fit large under-seat drawers wherever they can (the best form of sea-going stowage), they also fit supplementary access traps above the drawers in seat-bases and the like. There are also lots of big lockers: the 4ft-long (1.2m) void under the helm seat; the full-beam lazarette under the cockpit floor; and in the forward cabin one of the biggest hanging lockers I've seen this side of a 60-footer. Odds and ends can safely be chucked on countertops because they all have fiddles. Of course, in the 45's more usual twin-cabin form, there would be less cabin stowage available, but there would be the same amount in the cockpit.



There are so many good points on this boat. Beyond the refined engineering of the self-stowing recessed anchor though, two areas really stand out: the galley and the engineroom. Heavy drinkers benefit from the galley's superb customised stowage for no less than 40 beakers and tumblers. More sober diners have their 12-piece dinner service securely packed into dedicated racks. A big coolbox absorbs the often under-utilised space in the corner. And gash can be swept off the countertop, through a removable lid, and directly into the waste bin below. You'd have to be Gordon Ramsay to want to find fault.

Inside the brightly lit engineroom, Dale have finished the well-compacted laminates in the bilges with gleaming white gel-coat. Above this, the hull sides and the stringers are completely lined with soundproofing, which helps to explain the 45's low sound levels. There is heaps of space around the 500hp Yanmars: even with the largest 720s (which should be good for 35 knots), there ought to be enough room for servicing.



To improve the handling and the stability, the fuel tanks run down the middle of the boat, and over the top Dale fit rubber flooring that is far kinder on the knees than the usual abrasive aluminium checkerplate non-slip. On top of this, there's a great string of fine details – remote header tanks, five coats of epoxy on the hull, a 12V socket, a flexible gearbox coupling, large interchangeable fuel filters, and one of my favourite details, comprehensive labelling on all the through-hull fittings. Spend enough money, and you can find an engineering installation as good, but you're unlikely to find one outside the ranks of Maritime and Coastguard Agency-coded superyachts that is tangibly better.

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Hull design

Like the Dale Nelson 38, the new Classic 45 hull has been designed by Arthur Mursell, head honcho at TT Boat Designs on the Isle of Wight, the company responsible for designing the Nelson marque. However, although the Dale Classic 45 clearly draws on this heritage, it has evolved from the original Nelson shape drawn by Peter Thornycroft in the early 1960s.



"Compared to earlier Nelsons, the main difference is that the aft sections have a greater deadrise. The underside of the transom is not horizontal as on earlier boats. This change results in a hull that has more constant sections and less warp in the bottom, which produces better dynamic stability," says Arthur Mursell.

"The hull is relatively beamy compared to the earlier Nelsons, and while the waterlines forward have been kept relatively fine, the sections flare quickly above the water to provide reserve buoyancy. The hull has a full-depth keel to protect the sterngear. This boat has a moulded in spray-deflecting flat, as part of the overall scheme was not to fit the usual bolted-on spray rail found on most Nelsons."

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The Verdict

Looks can be so deceptive. At first sight, I'm sure there are many of us who would pigeonhole the Classic 45 as a wonderful whimsy. And that's no surprise; with its timeless good looks, and the fact that the version we tested had no flybridge, you could easily draw that conclusion. And nor is there anything wrong with contemplating the 45 on that level alone – a good number of boats are bought as nothing more than flights of fancy.



However, this boat is so competent in so many departments that whimsy only begins to scratch the surface. The 45 is one very tough and capable sea boat, well able to withstand the rigours of offshore cruising in the roughest of seas. It has been engineered by

experienced seafarers, not accountants. And Mike Reynolds and his team at Dale are clearly happy to adapt and customise their practical, high-quality fit-out to suit their customers, and seem completely open minded to suggestions for improvement.

Let's not forget how easy it is to move around the Classic 45, its low air draught, and its low sound levels and amazing amount of practical storage. These are benefits that make it, respectively, suitable for short-handed passages, ideal for the inland waterways, and excellent for long-distance cruising. Gentleman's plaything or extraordinarily versatile cruiser? The unavoidable conclusion is that the Dale Classic 45 is absolutely brilliant in either role.

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Specifications

Dale Nelson 38 aft cabin data

RCD	category B (for 14 people)								
Overall length	46ft 1in (14.05m)								
Hull length	44ft 3in (13.49m)								
Beam	14ft 2in (4.32m)								
Draught	3ft 11in (1.20m)								
Air Draught	9ft 10in (3.00m) hingeing mast lowered								
Displacement	14 tonnes light, 16.3 tonnes loaded, (loaded = light + 100% fuel & water)								
Fuel Capacity	500 imp gal (2,273 litres)								
Water Capacity	80 imp gal (364 litres)								
Designer	Dale & TT Designs, 2004								

RPM	1,100	1,400	1,700	2,000	2,300	2,500	2,700	2,900	3,050
SPEED	8.5	10.6	13.6	17.6	23.00	25.00	27.00	29.00	30.50
Trim	1.0°	2.0°	3.0°	3.0°	3.5°	3.5°	4.0°	4.0°	4.0°
GPH	n/a	7.0	11.0	16.3	22.4	27.2	33.0	39.6	45.0
MPG	n/a	1.51	1.24	1.08	0.96	0.85	0.76	0.69	0.66
RANGE	n/a	606	495	432	382	341	305	278	263

Speed in knots; GPH & MPG figures use imperial gallons; range in nautical miles. NB: calculated figures based on standard (idealised) engine propeller demand data, adjusted for over-revving. Your figures will vary (sometimes considerably) depending on: air, water, engineroom & fuel temperature; hull fouling; sea state; boatbuilders' changes and other factors.

Range allows for 20% reserve, 75% fuel, 50% water, 3 crew, light stores
26.5°C air temp, 1,017mb pressure 12in chop, Force 2 for speed trials.

Engines and speeds achieved on test

Flat out	29.6 knots, 263 miles @ 3,050rpm
Fast cruising	25.2 knots, 305 miles @ 2,700rpm
Slow cruising	13.6 knots, 495 miles @ 1,700rpm
Engine	Twin Yanmar 6CX-GTE2 500hp @ 2,900rpm 6-cylinder 7.413-litre diesels
Price from	£679,150 inc UK VAT (twin 440hp Yanmar)

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