Hunter 430
Looking for a used boat that’s not too long in the tooth? By Bill Springer

I’ll be the first to admit that I’ve got a soft spot in my heart for a classic hull shape, but many people are looking for a used boat that is long on accommodation space (and maybe even a little bit modern) and not too long in the tooth. Maybe you’re looking for a moderately priced 43-footer that’s under 10 years old and has all the following: a fiberglass arch to keep the mainsheet traveler away from small fingers, a large, comfortable cockpit, aggressively swept-back spreaders that do away with the intrusion of a backstay, three private cabins, room for six to eight adults in the saloon, two private heads, and, of course, a stereo with CD player. That used boat sounds very similar to the seven-year old Hunter 430 I sailed recently.

I’ve test-sailed many new Hunter models over the years, but I’d never had a chance to examine a well-used example. And this 1998 Hunter 430, Invictus, was different from the older boats we’ve featured in past issues. Each of those test boats had been lovingly cared for by an owner who was eager to show it off—or at least to share it with BoatWorks readers. This Hunter had been in charter for several years in the hot sun of South Florida. Invictus turned out to be the perfect candidate for my used-boat test because nothing will bring a boat’s good (and not so good) points to the light of day better than the regular use—and sometimes abuse—that charterboats endure.

UNDER SAIL
Conditions for our test sail off Miami Beach were ideal. Wind speeds locked in between 10 and 12 knots under sunny South Florida skies. The engine started on the first turn, and the boat behaved predictably as we compensated for a slight cross-wind and nosed out of the marina. Once we got out into open water, the seas contained just a hint of swell. It didn’t take long to discover that the sails were more than just a little worn. In fact, they were severely blown out and due to be replaced. But Invictus tacked through 100 degrees even with its tired full-batten main, high-cut roller-furling jib, and shoal-friendly (but not hyper-efficient) 4’11”-draft wing keel. The boat tracked reasonably well with a slight dose of weather helm. I sensed that if the wind had increased into the high teens, the big main would have needed a reef, maybe two. But the breeze never topped 12 knots, and upwind boat speed settled into the upper 4-knot range. Close-reaching, the boat remained easy to handle and speed nudged into the upper 5s.

The boat felt light under sail, and its displacement-length ratio of 194 helps explain why—the ratio is moderate for a family cruiser.
and well suited to light breezes. The sail area-
displacement ratio of 16.2 reveals that it has an
adequate sailplan for cruising.

Used 430s on the market are available with in-
mast furling or a heavily roached full-batten
mainsail that increases sail area by 15 percent.
But since the 7,600-pound wing keel draws only
4'11" and the boom is close to 10' above the
waterline, the 430's mainsail, whichever one you
choose, will need to be reefed earlier than on a
heavier, low-freeboard boat to counteract those
opposing forces. Owner Richard Caputo of Dana
Point, California, agrees with that assessment and
reports that "the boat heels excessively in 15 to
20 knots of wind."

With its standard 50-horsepower Yanmar
diesel engine, the 430 has more than sufficient
power. Cruising speed under engine was 7.5
knots; full throttle produced 8.5 knots.

ON DECK
With its distinctive arch, topsides styling, broad
stern, and B&R rig, the 430 looks like a typical
Hunter. But back in 1995 when the 430 was first
introduced, the Hunter look was not yet a
signature style. At the time, Hunter's designers
were gaining a reputation for drawing boats with
generous freeboard and voluminous

ACCOMMODATIONS
Many of the owners I contacted said the 430's
accommodation plan was a big selling point for
them, and it's easy to see why—there's lots of
elbowroom down below. The 430's standard
accommodation plan has two cabins; we tested
the optional three-cabin layout. The saloon has
room for six to sit around the curved settee,
which can be converted into a double bunk, and
the interior has a bright, airy feel thanks to
generous headroom and assorted large ports and hatches. A multitude of opening ports and hatches is excellent for saloon ventilation, but some owners report having had to fix leaky ports.

The longitudinal galley running along the port side of the saloon has excellent counter and stowage space. The two-cabin version may have a more spacious aft cabin, but each of the cabins on our test boat was sufficiently comfortable, with a large double bunk and decent stowage. The forward-facing nav station has a good-sized chart table with a comfortable seat, adequate stowage for charts and tools, and ample area to mount electronics. Our test boat was also equipped with two full heads with showers.

As with any used boat, the woodwork had a few nicks and bruises. There was some discoloration in the woodwork near the companionway steps, but no signs of serious water damage. All the door and drawer latches worked well, though one owner, who had sold his 430, commented that some of the hardware used down below felt a bit “plasticky.” The boat appeared to have held up well to the rigors of chartering, but some owners have had to reattach portions of the headliner. All in all, there did not appear to be any serious problems with the 430 I tested, including structural problems. These issues I mentioned can all be classified as normal for the age and condition of this well-used boat.

CONSTRUCTION AND SYSTEMS

The 430 was built on Hunter’s high-volume production line in Alachua, Florida, using hand-laid fiberglass, vinylester resin, and a solid-fiberglass structural hull grid. The hull-to-deck joint comprises two outward-facing flanges that are bonded and screwed together and then covered with a rubrail. Furniture units are built of marine plywood with varnished teak veneers and then tabbed into place. Bulkheads are tabbed

COMPARABLE BOATS

Beneteau Oceanis 44 cc is a center-cockpit cruiser with similar numbers and accommodations layout. www.beneteauusa.com

Catalina 42 is a similar cruiser with a lighter displacement but 600 pounds more ballast in a fin keel. www.catalinayachts.com

Island Packet 45 is moderate/ heavy displacement, full-keel alternative with spacious accommodations. www.ipy.com

Jeanneau 40 is a slightly smaller cruiser that’s a bit racier than the 430. www.jeanneauamerica.com
to the hull and bonded with adhesive to corresponding grooves in the deck.

One owner had complained on www.hunterowners.com that the wiring races that run through the boat were too small to accept additional wires when it came time to add electronics. In fact, in 2002 Hunter realized that some 430s (among other specific Hunter models) have a “weakness that may exist within the electrical system” that “may cause overheating of wiring or wire connections which become loose or corroded over an extended period of time.” In a letter to owners, Hunter offered a free electrical upgrade to rectify the problem. The problem affected 111 of the 515 Hunter 430s built from 1995 through 2000. The fix was a simple one. If you’re looking at a used 430, you should make sure the seller can provide proof that the upgrade was completed, but you needn’t be scared off by this situation. It shows Hunter is willing to stand behind its product.

**CONCLUSION**

Is a charterboat better for used-boat tests than a private owner’s boat? Sort of. Invictus had lots of use, but it was also tended by a full-time maintenance crew whose main directive was to go over the boat with a fine-tooth comb. At regular intervals they fixed potential problems at the dock before they become real problems for paying customers out on a charter. I was expecting to find a tired production boat whose best days were past, but instead I found a professionally maintained, high-volume production boat that had some issues but also more than a little life left in the tank. Most of the problems described by current 430 owners are typical of well-used boats. If you’re looking for a spacious family coastal cruiser that will perform well in light air and make an excellent liveaboard boat, the Hunter 430 is certainly worth a look.