

## FACTS

Tested by **PIP HARE**

- ▶ **Where we tested:** The Solent
- ▶ **Wind:** 14-20 knots
- ▶ **Model:** Hull No 5, three-cabin, two-heads layout, upgraded Axxon carbon rig and deep V-boom and electric traveller.



Photos by Rick Tomlinson

## TESTED:

# X4<sup>9</sup>

A STYLISH PERFORMANCE CRUISER THAT IS BOTH MANAGEABLE SHORT-HANDED AND CAN STILL WIN RACES

**T**he X4<sup>9</sup> is squarely aimed at the no-compromise sailor who wants it all. It combines a comfortable, stylish interior, with clean, beautiful lines on deck and can even be raced with a minimal crew. This is a tough balance to achieve, and so often compromise can lead to disappointment.

Setting out on one of the only blustery days of the summer, with a crew of four, I was intrigued to find out if this 50-footer could really deliver the whole package. Within ten minutes of leaving the berth I was glued to the helm, blasting upwind with a grin on my face. When a company has 40 years of design experience, hybrid does not necessarily mean compromise.

The X4<sup>9</sup> is the third model to launch in the new 'Pure' X range, following the impressive X4<sup>3</sup> and X6<sup>5</sup> that we tested two years ago. This popular new range aims to bridge the gap between the Xp performance and Xc cruising lines. Some 18 boats have already sold since the







first hull launched early this year.

Hitting the sweet spot between comfort and performance is a tricky thing to achieve, but this boat appears to have it all. The stylish interior combines good looks and practicality. On deck the X4<sup>9</sup> cuts an equally subtle yet impressive figure. The pin stripes of a full teak deck run seamlessly from bow to stern with every piece of deck gear that may interrupt it recessed or covered.

Our test boat had twin carbon wheels on unobtrusive pedestals and carried a carbon rig and deep V-boom. No single item grabs the eye but the whole boat holds your attention. It's a powerful yacht, yet one that can be simply managed solo using well laid-out electric controls – perfect for a greedy helmsman.

Leaving our berth in the Hamble River, the wind was gusting 18 knots, with grey clouds scudding across the sky. It

was going to be a feisty day and I was interested to see how our small crew would cope.

### Power on tap

Looking up the 20m (65ft 7in) mast, I sensed the effort of hoisting the mainsail but no sooner had those thoughts crossed my mind than the main was up and the self-tacking jib set. Our test boat had an upgrade to electric power for all four winches and so handling the 119m<sup>2</sup> sail area was effortless: without this option, a lot of huffing and puffing will doubtless be involved.

Gently pulling the wheel down we bore away and almost immediately began blasting along at over 7 knots, the X straining to go faster. The instant power didn't seem to match with how easily all the sail appeared; it felt like we'd dropped the clutch on a high-revving engine and

**Above: a flush, uncluttered deck contributes to X4<sup>9</sup>'s pleasingly clean lines. Below: tester Pip Hare**



I half expected to see steam rising from the wake behind us.

The wind was at the top limit for a full mainsail as we set off on a bouncy beat, which provided a dynamic and rapid ride. The X4<sup>9</sup> felt tender in transition from a standing start to being powered-up close hauled, heeling to around 20°, but once under way our angle of heel remained steady and appropriate for performance.

At a true wind angle of 44° the X4<sup>9</sup> stormed along at 7.5 knots giving a performance on the fast side of the cruising/racing spectrum.

Helming from either position required only a light touch and even at maximum heel I felt completely secure standing against the single foot chock – even so, X-Yachts plan to offer a hinging steering 'platform' for greater stability on future models.

The low side deck only reached the back of my knees while standing and I wondered if this would be a compromise to comfort. In fact, it proved comfortable when heeled and felt natural with a great view of the sails and sea.

### Ease of handling

The wind remained shifty and 20-knot bullets of breeze started to bully us as we tacked between shallows. Our test boat was fitted with an electric mainsheet traveller below decks, an optional feature I was hugely impressed by. The flat winder is effectively a captive winch system that drives the mainsheet car up and down the recessed track. The motor dropped the car fast enough to keep the X4<sup>9</sup> on its feet during the gusts and only required a light touch of a finger to power us back up.

The standard X4<sup>9</sup> package has a German mainsheet attached to a central point and no traveller. An increasing trend in cruising boats, this seems an acceptable shift from the barely effective coachroof travellers. However, given the 'Pure' X ethos is firmly grounded in a quality sailing experience, I was surprised that travellers are not standard. I personally struggle with the performance compromise when trimming a mainsail on vang and sheet alone.

I quizzed X-Yachts' founder and



- 1** A fibreglass or carbon fibre moulding can cover the stainless steel integral bow roller to give the appearance of a bowsprit.
- 2** Jib is self-tacking for ease when sailing short-handed.
- 3** A large sprayhood is stowed completely beneath deck panels on the coachroof.
- 4** Test boat has an Axxon carbon rig and deep V-boom.
- 5** All sailing controls are managed from positions in front of both wheels (pictured left). The area is well laid out with plenty of room to manage multiple ropes comfortably.
- 6** The electric traveller (track pictured left) is quick enough to respond to gusts and provides a safe and easy-to-manage solution for a boat this size.

**'I HALF EXPECTED TO SEE STEAM RISING FROM THE WAKE BEHIND US'**





designer Niels Jeppesen on this and he responded that not all sailors actively use travellers and that, particularly on larger yachts, they can be dangerous for novice crews or guests. This is good reasoning but I feel the recessed and motorised solution to this problem is beautiful, practical and safe – I would pay the extra £7,000 to control the leech.

When we eventually capitulated to conditions, tucking in a first reef, the angle of heel reduced and our ride instantly became less twitchy with little effect on speed.

For my first tack at the helm I announced “Ready to tack?” and received the confirmation from our crew of three. Steering slowly through the tack, I anticipated a flurry of activity, but instead watched the crew get up, cross the cockpit and settle themselves into the cushions again as the self-tacking jib flopped over. Again, I was surprised by the performance versus effort relationship. There is little for crew to other than to sit back and enjoy the ride.

All four winches are set to the back of the cockpit leaving the seating area entirely rope-free. Despite the frisky

conditions, the waves only reached halfway down the coachroof, leaving the cockpit totally dry.

Trimming is done from a slot in front of the helm, with a great view of the sails and its own foot support. The controls are quite low down so trimming on the leeward side requires crouching, which felt a little awkward when heeled.

Primary and secondary winches are of equal size and set well apart for simultaneous use. The bank of jammers and rope organisers are far enough forward to allow ropes to be taken to either winch in a sensible radius. Controls could be reached by the helmsman leaning around the wheel.

The standard package comes with a self-tacking jib, though all boats are engineered to take longitudinal genoa tracks. Of the 18 boats sold to date, none have chosen that option. Our North 3Di jib had a number of holes in the clew, which provided surprisingly effective twist control on the breeze – move the shackle up a hole to reduce twist, down to open the top of the sail.

For reaching, a well-placed padeye attaches to the toerail to create an

**Control lines – along with the sprayhood – are concealed beneath the completely uncluttered deck**

outboard lead. When powered up reaching under full main, we achieved 10 knots of boat speed at 100–110° to the true wind. I don't imagine you would use the jib much below 150° true, as the position of the jib car makes it difficult to fill or pole-out, wing on wing. We made speeds of 7-8 knots dead downwind under main alone.

Our test boat carried a 200m<sup>2</sup> asymmetric spinnaker on a top-down furler, which we set in the lee of the Isle of Wight. Off-wind sails are flown from a padeye on the stemhead, as the stainless-steel bow roller has no bobstay so cannot support significant load.

We carried the spinnaker in winds from 14 knots up to 20 knots, managing wind angles of between 130° and 150° to the true wind. Our boat speed peaked at 12 knots and steering was fun but quite a handful at the higher wind angles.

In the stronger breeze, the 2.4m deep rudder kept a good grip but needed active interaction, resulting in fun and energetic sailing. I hogged the helm downwind, enjoying the ride and eating up the miles.

#### Stowage taken seriously

Stowage on deck is in ‘the ends’ with both a cavernous bow sail locker and a lazarette cum tender garage. The transom drops down to create a bathing platform,



Different attachment points on the clew allow for subtle adjustment to jib twist when beating



A self-tacking jib on an X? It helps make a powerful boat easy to handle when shorthanded



The garage is 2.5m wide between rambs, but the test boat packed in a 3.2m RIB with deflated bow

revealing a garage 2.5m wide between the rambs. This is large enough to stow a small inflated tender and houses access hatches for steering gear, rudder bearings and the mainsheet traveller system.

There is dedicated liferaft stowage under the starboard cockpit seats, which lift entirely off a flat bottom enabling the raft to be slid-out rather than lifted.

The recessed sprayhood sits beneath a number of teak deck panels. To raise it, all panels must be removed, the hood erected, before the panels are replaced. It's a multistep process, so don't expect to be putting this up and down during a day on the water, but it's a stylish solution to the problem of ugly and cumbersome sprayhoods.

Under the water, the X4<sup>o</sup> uses the T-keel of the Xp but has deeper sections and more rocker, like the Xc, for a more comfortable motion upwind. Topsides culminate in a substantial moulded



## ‘I HOGGED THE HELM, ENJOYING THE RIDE AND EATING UP THE MILES’





toerail, and there is a gentle sheerline as the deck rises up to meet a blunt bow.

Strength and quality are cornerstones of X-Yachts build and design. Hulls are vacuum-infused, post-cured epoxy foam sandwich, with three watertight bulkheads. Rod rigging is standard.

### Below decks

Below decks the Pure X4<sup>9</sup> is understated but stunning. The standard finish of Nordic oak is earthy but not dark and no reflective materials have been used in proximity to LED downlights to eliminate any ugly pinpoints of bright light. Overall the effect is soft and welcoming.

The saloon felt instantly comfortable, a warm space with room both to live and practically stow all that's needed.

The eye-catching centrepiece dining table is surrounded by a U-shaped sofa. There is stowage under the seats, accessed either via lifting tops on gas struts or deep pull-out drawers. Lockers at head level surround the entire cabin.

All bench and cupboard tops are fitted with ergonomic fiddles, which add to a secure feeling moving around under way.

Located forward of the heads is a dedicated navstation. When not in use, instruments can be hidden from sight behind a locker door and, if a chartplotter is required, an additional wooden structure can be fitted over the chart table at eye-level.

The L-shaped galley is spacious and ergonomic, with white Corian worktops including a stove cover, a double sink, the option for two fridges and space for



a microwave and the ubiquitous espresso machine. Opposite the galley is the aft heads, which has an integrated shower.

### Smart cabins

The owner's cabin is forward, an area flooded with light from two separate full-size deck hatches and bed-level hull windows. The main feature of this minimalist cabin is the large island bed and thick mattress. The bed lifts revealing stowage beneath.

The ensuite heads is a generous size and has a separate shower cubicle.

The X4<sup>9</sup> is available with either two double guest cabins or a twin and a double aft cabin arrangement. Our test boat had the latter as well as bespoke fabric pipe cots.

The twin singles can be converted to a double using an insert which creates versatility. Set up as a twin, the cabin did not feel cramped, there was plenty of room between the berths and I was able



**Interior fit-out is understated but with a soft and welcoming feel**



to sit comfortably upright on both bunks.

Both cabins have large hanging lockers and drawers as well as under-bunk stowage. Access to the space under the cockpit is through side hatches from both cabins – here there is room for a generator, and a washing machine should they be chosen as options.

Our test boat had an uprated 80hp engine which seemed to fill every inch of the space under the companionway. There are additional access panels on both side of the engine bay but you won't be getting in there to service the engine without a bit of a wriggle. ■



### Our verdict

The X4<sup>9</sup> is an impressive beast that certainly seems to have it all. It is elegant and stylish without being showy and the consistent, thoughtful design and high quality build will appeal enormously to the experienced sailor.

But the magic really happens when you hoist the sails. It kept me engaged from the first moment I grabbed the helm and I was blown away that such a dynamic sailing experience could be

achieved with such little effort.

There's no doubt that our test boat, with its carbon rig and top-quality sails, gave an enhanced performance, but even without these features I believe this boat could feed our sailing souls.

There is truly a delicate balance between comfort, style, performance and the effort required to sail a boat of this size, but the X4<sup>9</sup> has the potential to keep everyone happy. This is not a compromise – X-Yachts has nailed it.

### DATA X4<sup>9</sup>



### SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	15.0m	49ft 7in
LWL	13.58m	44ft 5in
Beam (max)	4.49m	14ft 7in
Draught (standard)	2.4m	7ft 0in
Displacement (lightship)	12,900kg	28,493lb
Ballast	5,380kg	11,860lb
Sail Area	129.1m <sup>2</sup>	1,290ft <sup>2</sup>
Berths		6
Engine		57hp
Water	310lt	68gal
Fuel	300lt	66gal
Sail area/displacement ratio		23.9
Displacement/LWL ratio		144
Price ex VAT		£450,364
		(Typical boat with extras £615,000)
Design		X Yachts

[www.x-yachts.com](http://www.x-yachts.com)

### Rivals

#### Grand Soleil GS48 Performance

A sizzling new design launched this autumn with multiple configurations to suit racers too.

Price ex VAT: €415,000. [www.grandsoleil.net](http://www.grandsoleil.net)



#### Solaris 50

Still the benchmark for Italian fast cruisers style at this size.

Price ex VAT: €480,000 [www.solarisyachts.com](http://www.solarisyachts.com)



#### Arcona 465

Arcona specialises in elegant cruiser-racers – this flagship is built all in carbon.

Price ex VAT: circa £420,000 [www.arconayachts.com](http://www.arconayachts.com)

