



X-Yachts X4.3

X-Yachts' new contender is an all new, even better boat with the same old name.

BY CHARLES J. DOANE

In an alternative universe, I might be writing about how I test sailed the new X4.3 performance cruiser in a super-scary thunder squall, and the boat handled great. For it is true that when I sallied forth onto Chesapeake Bay with X-Yachts dealer Bob Rodgers aboard his new X4.3 *Ringle* (his, as in personally owned by him), and we spied said squall bearing down, we did consider for a moment that we might raise sail and carry on anyway. But then we noticed that the U.S. Navy's offshore sailing team, in their squad of battle-hardened 44-footers, was dropping sail ASAP and scampering for cover. We reckoned if it was scary enough for the U.S. Navy, it was scary enough for us.

Our discretion was rewarded. When Bob and I reconvened about two weeks later on a gorgeous fall day on Fishers Island Sound off Mystic, Connecticut, conditions were perfect: bright sun and a very puffy northwest breeze.

The new X4.3, lest there be any confusion, is not the same as the old X4.3. In replacing what had been the most successful boat in their Pure X range, the circum-

spect Danes at X-Yachts did not simply fiddle about with old molds. Though the two boats look notionally similar, the latest iteration is an entirely new design, built with all new tooling. It is beamier aft, with a soft radius chine, to increase both initial stability and interior space in the aft cabins. The larger cockpit has a higher sole to boost vertical clearance over the aft berths. Up front, a longer integral bowsprit allows for larger offwind sails. A taller mast also helps improve light-air performance.

Construction quality, as on any X-Yacht, is superior. The vacuum-infused, post-cured epoxy hull is foam cored with fully bonded structural bulkheads and a collision bulkhead forward. The ballast bulb is lead, bolted and glued to a cast iron fin; the entire keel is coated in glass and epoxy. Rig and keel loads are carried by a galvanized steel grid incorporated into the hull. The interior, meanwhile, is superbly finished.

Bob's boat *Ringle* carries the standard aluminum mast, which at 66 feet 6 inches is just a bit too high for the ICW. (The optional carbon mast is even taller.) She also carries the standard-draft, 7-foot-3-inch, torpedo-bulb keel. (There are both deeper and shallower alternatives.) Her

interior layout sees one aft cabin deleted in favor of an enlarged aft head with extra storage behind it and dedicated space for showering. There's another small head forward in the master stateroom, which features an island double berth. You can nix that second head if you like (I certainly would) and can also select twin aft staterooms, with both heads or just one—a total of four potential layouts.

On deck I found that Bob had specified natural teak for the deck and cockpit sole, eschewing the optional plastic Flexiteek. A nice touch. The transom is open, with a narrow fold-down swim platform beneath it. The working cockpit is very businesslike and ergonomic—twin wheels behind a full-width main traveler carrying a German sheet controllable from either helm; high coamings round the seats; a very solid table, removable for racing; a backstay on centerline with hydraulic tensioning; and a battery of six proper-sized Harken Performa winches, one electrified for hauling on the main halyard.

I've never been aboard an X-Yacht that didn't sail well, and this one was no exception. We flitted about the sound under a single-reefed main and a 106% headsail and had no trouble fielding the sometimes boisterous gusts that rolled over us. Pinching well inside an apparent wind angle of 30 degrees, we made better than 7 knots in an apparent breeze of 18 knots. At just 32 degrees, she was fully powered up at 8-plus knots. Bearing away to a close reach, in a decreasing apparent wind, she was pushing up toward 9. Off on a broad reach, under working sails alone, she easily made 6 knots in just 8 knots of apparent wind. Fast enough for jazz, as they say.

The folks at X-Yachts took some trouble shaping the rudder on this boat, and it shows. The helm felt very smooth, with excellent tactile feedback. As those big gusts jumped on us, and the boat heeled smartly to them, the wheel loaded up not abruptly, but quite evenly. Holding on to more mainsail trim than was advisable, I found no hint of the rudder wanting to stall out.

My bottom line on this evolution is pretty simple: X-Yachts replaced an excellent boat with an even better one. Reason enough to pin it for one of our Top 10 Best Boats nods. And I am quite certain now we could have handled that squall no problem. *A*

LOA/LOD 43' 5"; 41' 7"
LWL 37' 2"
Beam 13' 1"
Draft 7' 3" (std); 8' 2" (deep); 6' 1" (shallow)
Displacement 20,723 lbs (std)
Ballast 8,157 lbs (std)
Sail Area 1,076 sq ft
Power Yanmar 45hp w/sail-drive
Designer X-Yachts Design Team
Builder X-Yachts x-yachts.com
Price as tested \$595,000

Owners can opt for longitudinal cabinhouse tracks for an overlapping headsail, as shown above, or a self-tacking headsail handled on an athwartship track installed ahead of the mast. A belowdeck Furler furler for the headsail comes standard.



The elegantly appointed interior features a very functional and traditional layout—with straight full-length salon settees, a galley to port aft, opposite a nav station to starboard. (Note that the two double-cabin layouts feature a larger nav desk with dedicated seating.)