

# YACHTING

## MONTHLY

X-Yachts' cool new

fast cruising boat

# X 4<sup>3</sup>







## SPECIFICATIONS

**MAKE / MODEL**  
X-Yachts X4<sup>3</sup>

**PRICE FROM**  
£515,000 ex VAT

**DESIGNER**  
X-Yachts Design Team

**BUILDER**  
X-Yachts

# FIRST TEST X-YACHTS X4<sup>3</sup>

*X-Yachts' latest model promises to be a fast passage-making cruising boat that's fun and engaging to sail but won't scare your socks off. Theo Stocker went to find out how well the X4<sup>3</sup> toes the line*

Words Theo Stocker Pictures Richard Langdon

**Y**ou know the stars have aligned when you get Force 4-5 and bright sunshine, as well as a boat, crew, photographer and RIB all in the right place at the right time. Conditions could not have been better for testing the Mark 2 version of the hugely successful X-Yachts X4<sup>3</sup>. This was going to be fun.

We were lucky to have Pieter, the proud new owner of *Lexi* aboard, and as we motored down the river, he told me why he'd chosen this boat.

'I previously owned a mass-produced 38ft family cruiser, which was great, but I wanted something a bit bigger and with three teenage children who really enjoy sailing, we needed more for them to get

involved with on the boat. We wanted something that was really engaging to sail. I looked at Grand Soleil, Arcona and X-Yachts. I liked the X4<sup>6</sup> and my wife liked the X4<sup>0</sup>, so we settled on the X4<sup>3</sup>, and we're both happy it's the right size to have gone for.'

While Grand Soleil and Arcona are more on a par with the X-Performance range numbers wise, there are relatively few direct comparators to the X4<sup>3</sup> – perhaps a Dehler 42, or the slightly heavier and older Sweden Yacht 42. In short, this 'Pure-X' boat ploughs something of its own furrow between cruiser/racers and more dedicated cruisers. It's clear to see the appeal of a proper sailing boat with plenty of canvas and single rudder steering for decent performance, combined with a reassuring amount of ballast and the creature comforts of deep-fill mattresses, microwave and coffee machine. ➔





The wide cockpit makes sail handling and manoeuvres easy, but can feel a little exposed



## LOGBOOK

TESTED BY  
Theo Stocker

LOCATION  
Central Solent

WIND  
Easterly  
Force 4 to 5

SEA STATE  
Slight to moderate

DATE  
May 2023

## MORE THAN JUST SKIN DEEP

Now, cosmetic surgery comes in all shapes and sizes. When it comes to boat models, design updates are often pretty superficial – a chin-tuck here, some filler there – new windows, extra cushion fabric options, and maybe a tweak or two to the deck layout. Far from a simple facelift, however, the new X4<sup>3</sup> has undergone a full-scale transformation of its rear end.

Everything forward of the shrouds remains unchanged from the original 2016 model, but from the shrouds aft, it's a completely new hull. The boat is no beamier than the Mark 1, but that beam is carried all the way aft to supercharge its form stability with a stern fully 50cm wider. Drag-inducing wetted surface area has been reduced by lifting the rounded hull chines up and out of the water. This boat then has, in theory, both better light wind performance and better strong wind performance, but I'd have to take X-Yachts' word for it on the light wind stuff.

First impressions were good. The test boat, fresh out of the wrapper, looked stylish, slick and neat. The S-shaped stem adds support for the Code-Zero tack near the base of the fixed carbon bowsprit; the tack point at the end is for asymmetric spinnakers that don't require high luff tension. The broader stern, coupled with some extra space taken from the aft sidedecks, creates an enormously spacious

cockpit, but with two table options to provide bracing. Add in the new higher soft hull chines aft, and she starts to look a lot more fleet of foot than the Mk 1. Hidden from sight, the deep single rudder has been updated to make it both more powerful and slightly less balanced to provide better feel on the helm. Countless other small tweaks – larger hull windows, raised helm seats to keep your backside dry, a moulded recess for the self-tacking jib track (covered if not fitted) – contribute to a thorough refinement of an already highly successful model with more than 100 built since 2016. This is only the second model designed by the in-house design team since the retirement of X-Yachts co-founder and lead designer, Niels Jeppesen, but it remains every inch an X-Yacht.

## SHIFTING GEARS

A brisk Force 4 barreled up the Solent from the south east, and built through the day. With wind and tide together, the seas were flat, but as the tide turned, the chop would build. Full canvas was set to see how and when we would need to start shifting down the gears.

It took us a moment or two to get settled down – jib car positions, mainsheet traveller, halyard tensions, vang, outhaul and backstay all helped balance the power from a fairly generous sailplan. It was reassuring to feel through the wheel when the boat was, and wasn't, properly in her stride, which is hard to replicate with a twin-rudder boat.

In 14 knots true wind, we found that sailing at 32°-34° the speed settled around 7 knots, topping out at 7.2 knots with just over 20 knots across the deck.

Pinching 5° higher saw the speed drop to 6.5 knots. That's not bad going for a boat this comfortable. With the true wind speed creeping up to Force 5 (17-18 knots) and 30° of heel, it was finally time to put a reef



## PERFORMANCE FIGURES

POINT OF SAIL	AWA*	AWS**	SPEED
Close hauled	30-32°	17-21	7.0-7.2
Fetch	60°	20-22	7.6-7.9
Beam reach	90°	16-19	7.8-8.2
Broad reach	120°	11-12	6.7-6.9
Run	170°	9-12	5.7-6.3

\*APPARENT WIND ANGLE \*\*APPARENT WIND SPEED  
Under engine: 7 knots at 2,200rpm

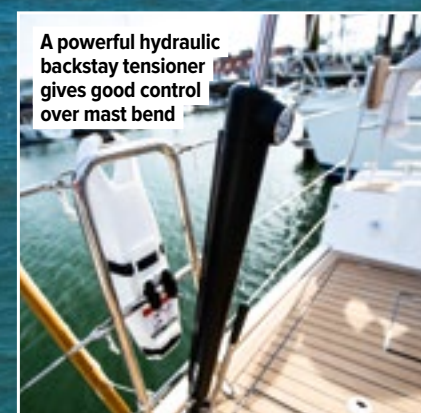
Coachroof jib tracks give a tight sheeting angle, with lines neatly ducted back to the cockpit



Chainplates are neatly hidden within the moulded toerails, and stanchions are neatly fitted



A powerful hydraulic backstay tensioner gives good control over mast bend



Norlam Xi sails from North Sails responded well to the tight sheeting angles



Downwind sails and bulky kit is swallowed by the forepeak locker



A neat hook keeps the lazyjacks and stack pack out of the way while sailing



A wider stern and higher chines give more stability when heeled and less drag in light airs





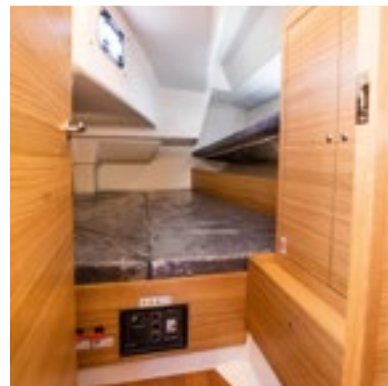
Two opening hatches each side and a large deck hatch ensure good ventilation in the stylish saloon, finished in Nordic oak



RIGHT: Stowage abounds in the galley, and there's a microwave in the overhead locker



ABOVE: The three-cabin version has a small aft-facing chart table rather than the larger forward-facing one in the two-cabin model



ABOVE: Pipe cots are an option in both of the aft cabins



Access to the starboard aft cabin is through the sink area of the aft heads



Tick the option for the en suite owner's heads if you would like more privacy in the forward cabin

## This is a proper sailing boat with a generous sailplan and all the creature comforts

in. Unsurprisingly, with a more sensible sail plan, she sat up to 20-25°, the helm eased and the speed climbed.

Where a pure performance boat might punish inattention, a good cruising boat should be a little more forgiving. Munching sandwiches and chatting over lunch on one of the beats, I wasn't watching the telltales closely. It was easy to sail by feel and the boat didn't stray from 28-32° to the wind, though pinching saw the speed down at 6.5 knots. While a bit of concentration found us the missing half-knot plus, the boat had happily sailed on in the right direction.

### PRUDENCE PREVAILS

Our top reaching speed under plain sails was 8.2 knots, which was surpassed once the Code Zero was up on a broad reach, lifting us to a comfortable 8.5-9 knots, with the occasional foray above 10 knots in the gusts. Had we been racing, an asymmetric spinnaker might have been risked for some more double-digit speeds, but that's not how she'd be sailed when cruising, and with both sailmaker and owner looking on, prudence prevailed.

While out there, I tried to overpress the boat, bearing away with the sails pinned in hard. The amount of grip from the single rudder was impressive, and she didn't let go, even as the helm loaded up in complaint. Only at close to 45° of heel did the boat start to overpower the rudder, though never out of control. A slight luff and an ease on the sheets had her back at heel. Similarly, when overpressed with the Code Zero up, I was always able to force the bow back downwind to bring the boat more upright without needing to ease the sheets.

This is in part thanks to the boat's significant form stability, and her impressive ballast ratio of 40%; the cast iron keel with lead bulb at the bottom of it makes for a very low centre of gravity. While a racing boat crew would see this as speed potential, for a cruising boat, it buys you a safety margin in bad weather and more stable, solid cruising in good weather. The boat tested had two reefs in the North Sails Norlam Xi main and a 106% genoa. Light wind

sailing wasn't something we got the chance to try on our test, but reports of the hull concept first trialled on the flagship X5<sup>6</sup> suggest that this hull is easily driven in the light stuff too, for which the owner had specified both large asymmetric and symmetric running spinnakers.

Little details also make a big difference, and I liked having the ability to furl away the stack pack sail cover and appreciated the clips fitted either side of the gooseneck to allow the lazyjacks to be hooked back when not in use. There were mast steps to reach the top of the stack pack, which is high as the boom has been kept above head height for crew in the cockpit.

Under engine, 2,200 revs got us to 7 knots in flat water, and 6.5 at 2,000rpm, with a Yanmar 45hp motor and saildrive transmission fitted with a three-bladed folding prop, upgraded from the two-bladed folding standard. Access to the engine is excellent from the front, as well as via large removable moulded panels on both sides in the aft cabins. The compartment also houses the 24-litre calorifier.

### SLEEK AND FUNCTIONAL

On deck, the layout is clean and functional. At the helm, large composite wheels are mounted with Jefa steering on pedestals with chartplotters, autopilot, and bowthruster control. A lifting foot chock for the helm was easy to deploy single-handed. Mainsheet winches can be reached from behind the wheel but are more comfortably used when sitting astride or ahead of the wheels. While there's no stern seat, the helm seat on the tail end of the coaming is comfortable under way. Numbers were visible on the coachroof mounted B&G Triton 2 displays, though to see the chartplotters you have to stand up; a pedestal repeater visible when seated would be nice. Deck hardware and controls are good. The T-sheeted



ABOVE: Narrow sheeting angles and a good set of sails let you point above 30° to the apparent wind, though best speed is just below that



BELOW: Cockpit coamings offer a comfortable and secure seat for crew, with good views forwards from the wheel



RIGHT: While not a planing hull, this boat will exceed hull speed under Code Zero or asymmetric

BELOW: A 24L calorifier is mounted above the 45hp engine

mainsheet worked well with high-spec blocks eliminating friction under load, and the 50ST Harken Performa winches were more than up to the job, with the port coachroof and starboard mainsheet winches being powered. The hydraulic backstay tensioner controlled the 2-spreader keel-stepped aluminium John Mast spar. Neat touches include the chainplates being hidden below panels in the moulded bulwarks, and the cleverly routed ducting for most lines on deck.

The cockpit's additional width is enormous. While there are bracing chocks on the centreline, for cruising one of the two removable table options would make the cockpit feel more secure. The bathing platform is optional too, though I can't see many owners going without it, especially as it folds level with the cockpit sole so as not to interrupt the clean lines and open feel.

Stowage on deck is good. In the three-cabin version we tested there's a sole-depth cockpit locker extending aft under the coaming for long items, plus two hull-depth lazarette lockers. Between them sits a large gas locker with space for two big bottles of gas – an unusual arrangement that works well. If you go for the two-cabin version, the cockpit locker becomes a huge hull-depth space that can be accessed through the aft heads. At the bow, there's a good deep anchor locker abaft the below-deck headsail furler, with a watertight bulkhead between it and the cavernous hull-depth forepeak locker. This is also a watertight compartment, but it can be drained into the main



bilges via a seacock in the forward cabin. Little details like this and the absence of rough edges in out of the way places reveals the quality of build.

PRACTICALLY ELEGANT

Practicality continues as you head below, noticing as you do that the companionway hatch doors fold back into recesses, hiding rope bins for the halyard tails.

Below, it's a sensible, practical layout – L-shaped galley to port, heads to starboard, C-shaped saloon seating and an aft-facing chart table against the forward heads bulkhead. The galley, including the microwave in the overhead lockers, includes good amounts of stowage above, behind and below the work surfaces, a top-opening fridge and an upright pantry locker abaft the three-burner gas cooker. The heads, to starboard, would be a generous space on the two-cabin version, but here it has been split into two; the door opens to the sink and lockers, with a door aft for the starboard cabin, and a door forwards into

BELOW: Once on a beat, the X43 will just want to keep going without asking too much of the crew

the toilet and shower compartment. It's slightly odd access to the aft cabin, but otherwise makes excellent use of space. It's a shame there's no wet locker, but a removable wet hanging rail is an option in the shower.

SOLID AND SILENT

The chart table is small but functional and would fit a leisure folio chart. There's a bookshelf and switch panel above it, but on this boat no instrument displays were fitted. On the two-cabin version this becomes a full-size forward facing nav station. I'd have liked a couple more handholds around the bottom of the companionway for moving around below while heeled.

In the saloon, the elegant table is surrounded by C-shaped seating and folds out to serve the straight starboard settee, supported by a fixed base housing the obligatory bottle stowage. Both settees are long enough to make decent sea-berths. Tanks are beneath the seats, with 340 litres of water to port and 200 litres of diesel to starboard, which keeps weight central, though limits saloon stowage to the inboard ends of the C-shaped seating and the overhead lockers.

This is more than compensated for with the stowage beneath the double bed in the forward cabin, the base of which hinges on gas struts to reveal four large bins below, as well as the overhead lockers and the upright locker to starboard. You'd get even more if you don't opt for the en suite heads on the port side, though I'd be reluctant to sacrifice that in the owner's cabin.

In the aft cabins, this boat had the option of pipe-cot sea berths above and outboard of the generous double berths, in place of longitudinal shelves. Whether they're regularly used as sea berths or not, they'd make extremely useful stowage in which to dump kit bags or children. Horizontal grained Nordic oak joinery and bulkheads, coupled with a moulded headlining throughout gives the boat a crisp, clean feel, with removable panels for maintenance access.

Part of the reason the boat sails so well is its stiffness. The hull is vacuum-infused, post-cured epoxy laminate over a foam core, while the deck is hand laid-up polyester resin over a foam core. As with boats of this calibre, bulkheads are bonded in, and there's also a steel frame taking the keel loads with additional reinforcement from carbon box sections. Under way in chop, there wasn't a single squeak or rattle – this is a beautifully built boat with the performance to back it up.



X4<sup>3</sup>

THE TEST VERDICT

This boat is undeniably fun to sail; engaging on the helm, responsive to being sailed well and reassuring in a blow. If you are after a racing machine, there are other performance cruisers that are faster, including from the X-Yachts Performance range. Similarly, the X-Yachts Cruising range offers a more sedate boat that would be better suited to blue-water cruising. But the Pure X range has found a niche in the market for fast cruisers.

There were a couple of tiny niggles: the slightly odd access to the aft cabin through the heads might grow on me, but I wasn't sure, and I'd have liked a wet locker somewhere on board; I thought it could do with a couple more handholds around the galley and the bottom of the companionway.

But that's nit-picking. This is a boat pretty devoid of hidden gremlins. Craftsmanship is top-notch throughout in both finish and construction, making a very stiff boat with a fresh, modern look. The design developments over the Mark 1 appear to have made a materially better boat with more power, more feel on the helm, and more stability.

WOULD SHE SUIT YOU AND YOUR CREW?

While this isn't a beginner's boat – it's a boat that rewards active sailing, engaging with sail trim and rig settings – it is a boat that makes you look like a better sailor because it just wants to go, even if you're distracted eating lunch while helming. It's got the power and the balance to do that.

At the same time, the slightly heavier displacement and whopping ballast ratio means this boat has pretty unrivalled stability, which is what you want for cruising. There's loads of stowage in various places, even more so if you go for the two-cabin version.

Lexi's new owner loves to sail, as do his crew and they want to get stuck into some proper adventures. If you've got that sort of pocket money, this is a boat that will get you to where you're going fast, in style and comfort, and with a big smile on your face.

PROS

Engaging and enjoyable to sail  
High build and finish quality  
Capable and stable cruising boat

CONS

Heavier than other performance cruisers  
Chunky price tag  
No wet locker

FACTS AND FIGURES

PRICE AS TESTED INC VAT	£618,000
LOA	13.24m (43ft 4in)
HULL LENGTH	12.67 m (41ft 6in)
WATERLINE LENGTH	11.33 m (37ft 2in)
BEAM	3.99m (13ft 1in)
DRAUGHT (Standard)	2.20m (7ft 2in)
(Shallow)	1.85m (6ft 1in)
(Deep)	2.50m (8ft 2in)
DISPLACEMENT	9,400 kg (20,723 lbs)
BALLAST	3,700 kg (8,157 lbs)
SAIL AREA (main & 106% genoa)	99.0 m <sup>2</sup> (1,066 sq ft)
SA/DISP:	22.6
BALLAST/DISP:	39.4%
ENGINE	YANMAR 45hp
FUEL CAPACITY	200L (44 gal)
WATER CAPACITY	340L (75 gal)
RCD	Category A
DESIGNER	X-Yachts Design Team
BUILDER	X-Yachts
UK AGENT	Stuart Abernethy X-Yachts GB
WEBSITE	www.x-yachtsgb.com

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