



Swish & sporty from Sweden

Built by a Swedish company on an Estonian island, the Arcona 370 is a new and competitively-priced contender in the market for classy performance cruisers. David Harding went for a spin in the first boat to arrive in the UK

It's a question a lot of people have had to ponder: what do you buy if you want to move up from a thoroughbred performer such as a Contessa 32, Westerly Fulmar, Sadler 34, S&S 34 or Hustler 35?

You've had an excellent sea-boat that covers the ground at a good lick, will take you almost anywhere and might well have enticed you to do a spot of racing too, so unless you're planning a complete change of style you're unlikely to be drawn to a boat that majors on internal volume. You want speed, agility, enticing handling and the ability to make into a gale in open water if you have to. You're not sure that you've managed to get the racing bug completely out of your system and, what's more, you want

reassuring build quality and a top-rate finish. It's a tall order – so what's your choice?

An obvious starting point is one of the Scandinavian cruiser/racers from Finnulf, CR, Sweden Yachts or X Yachts. A Grand Soleil might also be an attractive choice.

Kathy Claydon, though, had other ideas. Sailing with Harry Allaway in their Contessa 32, *Hurrying Angel*, Kathy won the two-handed class in the 2003 Fastnet (and recounted her story of the race in PBO 448). The trouble was that the Contessas were the smallest and lowest-rated boats in the fleet, and by the time *Hurrying Angel* arrived in Plymouth the prize-giving had been and gone. Much as she loved the Contessa's handling qualities and ability to win races on corrected time, Kathy was getting a



David Harding is PBO's Technical Editor and boat tester, whose experience ranges from dinghy racing campaigns to Atlantic crossings

little peeved by regularly coming in after the rest of the fleet and finding both the food and the silverware cleared away. Missing the prize-giving for the Fastnet was the final straw: she had to get a faster boat.

Going jogging

A regular competitor in Junior Offshore Group (JOG) races, Kathy caught wind of a new range of performance cruisers that looked ideal for JOGgers moving up. So she got in touch with Tony Bottomley, who was importing the Arconas from Sweden, and went for a sail.

After a trip to Stockholm to meet the people behind the boats – which are built in Estonia before being finished in Arcona's Swedish factory – she placed an order, and *Arcsine* was launched in March 2004.

By the time I met Tony Bottomley and Kathy for a sail, *Arcsine* had covered 12,000 miles and competed in the 2005 Fastnet, so I wasn't expecting to see a boat that looked straight out of the box – especially as Kathy runs a business taking clients out on RYA courses, RORC and JOG races, local regattas and corporate team-building days.

Arcsine, however, looked remarkably fresh both above decks and below, though my initial interest was in her sailing ability. Would this Swedish Estonian from a designer few people in the UK have heard of really cut the mustard?

Performance

As soon as we dropped our lines and motored away from the pontoon, the Arcona felt eager to go; lithe and long-legged, yet steady and predictable. There was something of a coiled spring about her, just waiting to be released. It was a good start.

As Kathy does a fair amount of racing, she doesn't skimp on the essentials. She has carbon laminate

THE COCKPIT IN CLOSE-UP



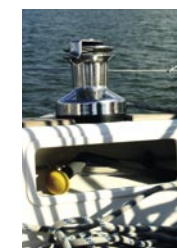
▲ The large wheel is recessed into the cockpit sole and gives the helmsman a good choice of steering positions. Winches and hardware are positioned for easy and efficient handling. A teak toerail can be fitted instead of aluminium



▲ Non-slip areas on deck are moulded in grey, which looks good and reduces glare but should cover more of the coachroof



▲ Halyard-tail pockets are built into the forward ends of the coamings. Lewmar winches are standard; these are Andersen



▲ Coaming lockers are a welcome feature in the cockpit, but the frames would be better in timber



▲ Instruments are on a well-protected swivel pod on the pedestal

sails from UK Sails' Hamble loft: a tape-drive main supplemented by 140% and 120% headsails, plus our choice for the day, the 105% blade, which sheets to a track on the coachroof immediately inboard of the shroud base.

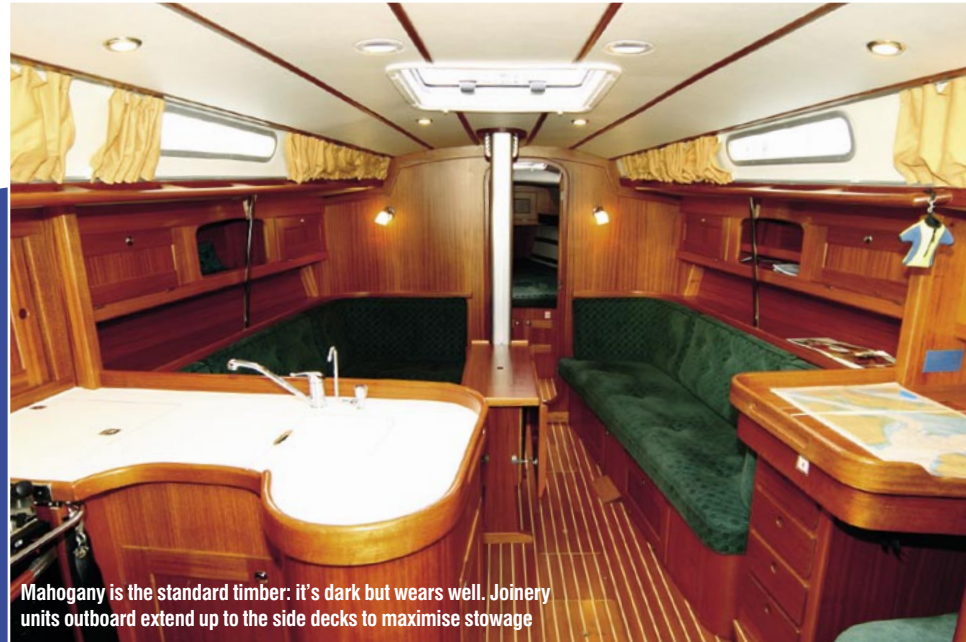
The standard sails are from UK Syverson in Sweden, who supply Najad among others. Despatching their boats with well-cut, durable sails is a sign of a builder who takes performance seriously. So too is the fitting of a folding prop.

As soon as we had the sails up and pulled into shape, we found ourselves reaching along in flat water at just under 7 knots in 10 knots of true wind. We hardened up once clear of Calshot on a Solent that was almost as flat as Southampton Water, driven by a breeze that picked up to between 13 and 15 knots.

In conditions like this any boat should give a good account of herself and the Arcona certainly did: she made upwind at a consistent 6.8 – 7.1 knots, heeling around 20° and averaging 28° to the apparent wind.

As she had indicated from the start, she was a true delight to sail, slotting into a distinct groove and giving the helmsman precise feedback through the 150cm (60in) wheel, which remained beautifully light despite the single turn from lock to lock. It only loaded up if we provoked the boat by bearing away with the sheets pinned in, whereupon she spun into the wind and hove to when the rudder lost grip at just over 30° of heel. This showed that the Arcona isn't the most forgiving of boats, but she's so sensitive and responsive that unless you've dozed off at the helm you know exactly how much grip you have left from the rudder and when it's time to de-power.

Downwind, of course, things can happen much more quickly and you have less chance to take any preventative measures. Since there wasn't enough breeze to press her downhill and we weren't carrying a kite, I was unable to see how she coped with any meaningful pressure. Kathy has on many occasions, however, and says she has never



Mahogany is the standard timber: it's dark but wears well. Joinery units outboard extend up to the side decks to maximise stowage

No signs of economy down below

Any doubts you might have about Estonian craftsmanship will be dispelled the moment you step below decks on the Arcona.

The joinery is beautifully finished in mahogany: proper laminated curves abound and the bulkheads are bonded to the hull and deck in the traditional manner having had the veneer removed (the telltale capping below the deckhead is always a sign worth looking for). In a similar vein, the joinery units each side in the saloon extend right up to the side decks to make the best use of space.

Floorboards are 18mm (¾in) timber with nicely rounded corners and sealed end-grain, while doors are held open by

simple but effective catches and an equally simple lift-and-slide system secures the engine cover.

The list of good points continues: vinyl-covered plywood deckhead panels that can be removed to reveal the wiring runs and the fastenings for the through-bolted deck hardware; lockers that hinge at the bottom rather than the top so the contents don't spill straight out; berth tops that are varnished top and bottom; a hinge-down switch panel at the chart table (where there's also space for pilot books); good hand-holds; stainless steel fuel and water tanks that could be taken out without the help of a chain saw – and it goes on.

So what's not to like? If dark

timbers aren't your style, you won't approve. Kathy Claydon favours mahogany because it wears well: with commercial use the joinery is going to be (and has been) bumped and dented, but it's a tough wood to start with and most dings can be rubbed down and made inconspicuous. *Arcsine* was a good deal tidier and fresher down below than most boats I've seen that have covered half as many miles.

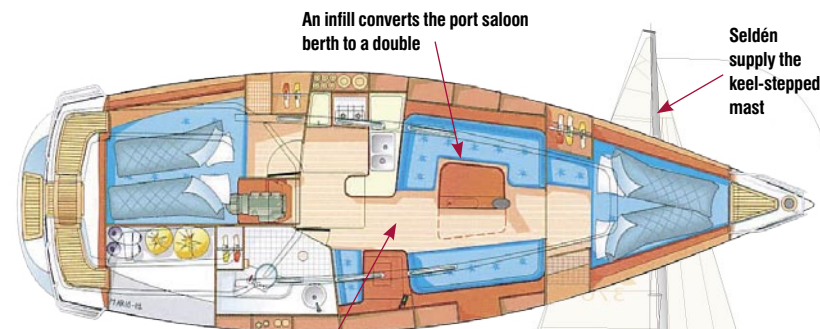
The layout is conventional, though the galley is worth a mention for its curved shape that looks good and provides useful support. Headroom is a respectable 1.88m (6ft 2in) and the berths are all comfortably long for six-footers – including the fore-berth at 2.03m (6ft 8in).



▲ Neat, simple catches hold the doors open

with a lid each side, and a large locker to starboard with a false floor above the fuel tank. Delving into the stern locker revealed a sag in the cockpit drain's pipe that acted as a gentle but unnecessary U-bend.

As a compromise between vast expanses of plain white moulding and heavy, expensive teak decks, the moulded grey non-slip pattern on the Arcona makes a lot of sense.



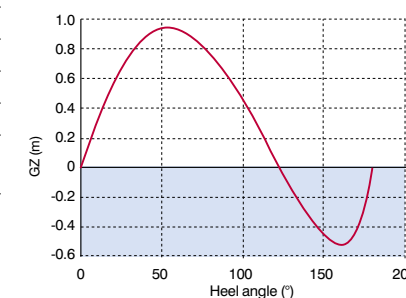
Headroom in the saloon is 1.88m (6ft 2in)

ARCONA 370

Price	£133,447 (delivered Hamble)
LOA	11.1m (36ft 5in)
LWL	10.3m (33ft 6in)
Beam	3.6m (11ft 10in)
Draught	2m (6ft 7in)
Displacement	6,300kg (13,888lb)
Ballast	2,133kg (4,704lb)
Sail area (main and 100% foretriangle)	74.2m ² (799sq ft)
Displacement/length ratio	22
Sail area/displacement ratio	165
RCD category	A
Engine	Volvo D1-30 diesel Saildrive
Headroom in saloon	1.88m (6ft 2in)
Designer	Stefan Qviberg
Builder	Arcona Yachts, Sweden www.arconayachts.se
Distributors	Arcona Yachts UK, Hamble Point Marina, School Lane, Hamble, Southampton SO31 4NB. Tel: 02380 457770, email: info@arconayachts.com, website: www.arconayachts.com



The lead keel gives a draught of 2m (6ft 7in)



The GZ curve shows the maximum righting moment at 55° and an AVS (angle of vanishing stability) of 122°

OTHER BOATS TO LOOK AT



Finn Gulf 37

PRICE: £167,926

Perhaps the Arcona's most obvious competitor, she too has the magic spark that makes you want to sail her. Fast, easy to manage, nicely finished and well engineered. Part of a range from 8.5-14m (28-46ft).

■ Builder: www.finnulf.com

■ Distributor: A-Board Yachts Ltd, tel: 02380 456169
web: www.finnulf.co.uk



Salona 37

PRICE: FROM £111,000

Recently voted European Yacht of the Year in the 10-12m category, this J&J design from Croatia is easy to handle and fast, but not in the same league in terms of finish.

■ Builder: www.adboats.hr

■ Distributor: Wittey Marine Ltd, tel: 01844 344723,
web: www.witteymarine.com



Grand Soleil 37

PRICE: £140,644

Some high-profile successes have established her racing credentials, but she also comes in 'performance cruising' guise and, like the Salona and Arcona, uses a steel stiffening grid inside the hull.

■ Builder: [Cantiere del Pardo, www.grandsoleil.net](http://www.grandsoleil.net)

■ Distributor: Grand Soleil UK, tel: 02380 455977 web: www.grandsoleil.co.uk

History and construction

Arcona's main construction facility is on the island of Saaremaa, off Estonia's west coast. They used to produce all their boats in Sweden, but built the new yard six years ago to take advantage of lower labour rates. They also prefer the privacy afforded by an island.

Saaremaa was a Swedish territory until about 150 years ago, Swedish is still spoken there and

the yard's management are Swedes. The designer is Stefan Qviberg, who has been responsible for Arcona's boats since 1980.

Production is currently running at about 50 boats a year, making Arcona the third-largest Swedish builder. A dozen or so boats are destined for the UK in 2007.

Structurally the 370 follows Scandinavian conventions by using

a Divinycell core in the hull. It's moulded in two sections and has a solid laminate about 1m (3ft 3in) wide along the centreline. The seacocks are fitted through single-skinned sections away from the core.

The Arcona's most significant structural feature is the galvanised steel frame – bolted into the hull from the forward bulkhead to the front of the engine – that take the loads from the chainplates, mast and lead keel.

For everyday sailing, importer Tony Bottomley says it allows you to

tension the backstay without worrying about whether your boat will adopt a banana-like shape in heavy weather: he raced a one-design for some years which went bendy because of the rig tension.

He also recounted a story of a 370 that hit a rock in the Stockholm archipelago at full tilt. The owner was airlifted to hospital, and by the time he was discharged a couple of days later the boat had undergone a minor repair to the hull at the aft end of the keel and was back in the water.