



A31

Archambault seem to keep getting the balance right between performance and pleasure, **Andi Robertson** tried out the new A31 – and thinks they've done it again...

There is no arguing with the success of Archambault's A35 and the A40RC. The latter may have been hit a little by the downturn in the market overall but that should now be compensated by what should be a rosy future for their new A31.

The new boat arrives at just the right time. The company can certainly be thankful that they are not launching, say, a 50-footer at this time. Call it a recession-buster if you wish but there is a huge amount of fun on tap with this kind of smaller sporty, performance cruiser-racer, just as there is with her rivals in this size band, like the J/97 and the SunFast 3200. These modern designs go at the speed of the 35-37-footers of yester-year, but are inherently simple to sail. In this day and age small is the new big. Size is not everything.

The lineage may be short but both the 35 and 40RC have returned considerable successes under IRC. Archambault's formula is very simple but they execute it well, perhaps better than any other

company of their size and profile worldwide. They keep it simple, delivering cost-effective, competitive race-orientated boats. By comparison to some they have fewer frills, less bells and whistles down below - a bit less furniture racing and more yacht racing, usually to a very competitive IRC rating.

The A31 was revealed at the Paris Boat Show in December and the first boat launched earlier in the season. Already they have won Spi Ouest and the Grand Prix de Croesty, while our test boat, Nick and Myles Stratton's Clyde-based 'A Neet Djinn' recently trounced all-comers at the Scottish IRC National championships in all weights of breeze, from 8 knots to 22 knots. The boat has won on the Mediterranean IRC Series as well as in Spain. There is no doubt so far that Joubert-Nivelt-Mercier have worked their magic on the IRC rating again and, as well as being a fun, straightforward boat to sail, it should be relatively easy for competent, experienced teams to sail to the A31's rating.

Specification

LOA:	9.55m
Beam:	3.23m
Draught:	1.9m
Displacement:	3,050kgs
Sail Area:	Upwind 50sq m Downwind 102sq m
IRC Rating:	??
Guide Price:	£??





ABOVE Upwind the boat was a pleasure, preferring to be sailed a little freer for speed as trying to pinch and feather forces her on it's ear.

RIGHT The A31 has a modern, easily driven hull, IRC rounded bow knuckle, and trademark blister coach roof line.

Archambault are selling boats all around the world: to Europe, Australasia and the USA, yet they are still a relatively small company. They are still exporting 60 per cent of what they build and their tight business economics mean they do not build for stock at all – boats built are pre-sold to customers. As director Christophe de Kerdrel notes: 'We are a small yard and we have not felt the incredible crisis that has been seen in other part of the marine business in our country. We just don't take any risks. We want to keep our dealers. We don't want to see them going under. That is in no way good business for us and so we are honest with them and they are honest with us. We don't push them to take boats they won't sell or can't sell.'

Since the A31 was launched in February

they have names to 20 boats by the end of July. The first boat into the UK was for the Strattons on the Clyde. An auspicious start to the Brewin Dolphin Scottish Series was halted after some old-skool deck chocking ended their regatta prematurely. The spar was kinked and a replacement was received in double quick time. The second UK boat is on order by Wessex Marine and will be at Southampton Boat Show, with export boats going to Norway, Canada, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Spain and Italy as well as the UK and France.

Design and build

The 31 has a clear family resemblance to the 35, which in some respects helps it look a little bigger than it is. But without question it is a good-looking, business-like boat. What we like about Archambault is that they appear to be a hard working, driven company who take constant feedback from their key race teams. And so the boats seem to hit the market well developed and ready to do well on the racecourse. All designs, whether they are the 35, 40RC or new baby, are raced consistently on the French IRC regatta circuits from February to November and so there are no hiding places for faults or rating misses.

The lines of the 31 aft are a little smoother than the 35. According to designer Bernard Nivellet there is a gain of about four per cent less drag but with little in the way of rating cost. The particular gain is when the boat is running. They have also done some considerable work with the keel forms for the rating and the current thinking is to have something closer to an original semi-elliptical fin, rather than a fin and



bulb. This of course produces a very nice, forgiving feel to the boat, with an easy groove... but more of that later.

The very obvious virtues are the modern, easily driven hull which has ample power aft to develop higher downwind speeds without incurring extra drag in the light stuff, the IRC rounded bow knuckle, the trademark blister coach roof line, a big, safe and workmanlike cockpit which is very much orientated to performance sailing, with excellent ergonomics.

Simplicity is key in every department. There is easy control of the very simple non-overlapping twin spreader alloy 9/10ths rig, made by Soromap. Primaries are by Lewmar and the deck clutches by Spinlock. The T-shaped cockpit leaves lots of space at the back of the area, with relatively short benches.

Construction is as per the 40RC and the 35 with a standard vacuum-bagged resin infusion sandwich supported by a structural all composite frame. As ever they have taken exceptional care to keep



the centre of gravity as low as possible and keep the ends light. The PVC sandwich deck is injection moulded.

On the water

We had truly exceptional conditions for our test sail on the Gareloch on the UK's first A31. With a summer north-easterly breeze blowing off the Helensburgh shore, giving us the perfect chance to sail upwind into a diminishing chop in winds of 12-18 knots and roll away downwind in a delightful estuary 'swell' – certainly enough to give the A31 an extra boost. In truth it was day when a bath tub and bed sheet would have been fun, but the A31 was an absolute delight. It was fun to sail in its precise performance, not in out-and-out speed, a la Sportsboat.



orientated. Hence the mainsheet track and controls are behind the helm, with the block and coarse end cleat just a couple of cms back from the rudder head. On the one hand this is great for minimising clutter in the busiest part of what is after all a 31-foot boat. If your tactician and mainsheet trimmer can be one and the same person then that is ideal. The mainsheet trimmer has all the speed controls with the powerful cascade backstay, coarse and fine tune and mainsheet track all to hand, but it introduces a lot of string to a small area and so he or she has to be super organised. The downside is that it is easy to let the mainsheet tail slide into the rudder head and the tail needs to be tacked carefully each time. Also, this system does rather preclude short-handed sailing where the helm looks after the mainsheet.

Extending the helm's moulded foot brace another fifteen cms back would create enough area for the mainsheet to lie on at a flatter angle, or alternatively a short kick bar incorporating a pair of tail bags would be just the ticket. The upside of course is that this keeps the front part of the cockpit clear and free of people and clutter, making it an excellent working area.

Downwind the A31 took little effort to keep her moving at max velocity. Extremely easily worked, delivering extra speed in the rolling wind and waves for an extra pump here and there and

ABOVE The cockpit is open and ergonomically designed, with the mainsheet clutter kept well aft.

LEFT Downwind the A31 is very easily worked, delivering extra speed with a pump here and there and judicious work on the helm.



simply careering about the ocean keeping the boat under a big asymmetric, although for sub-15 knot breezes there is a big powerful masthead.

Interior

Down below the layout is functional, airy, simple and low maintenance. Everything is there to live on board at regattas, or indeed cruise. There is 1.82m of standing headroom and six good berths between the saloon, a good double in the open forepeak and an aft cabin on the port side behind the galley.

In essence it is a great little interior, still with space for sail handling on the racecourse. The full-length roll style back rests can be specified so they unclip and open out to form proper pipecot-style seaberths. The GRP moulded table support felt a little flimsy, otherwise the functional areas are excellent: a good galley which can take a full cooker with oven, plenty of stowage, and – opposite – a nice little nav station which is quite compact.

All of the living areas have neat fabric stowage pouches. In the aft cabin these are larger and actually remove from the hull side so they become bags you can take off the boat with you.

Aft of the nav station is the WC/shower which opens back to the main, huge cockpit locker in the same way as the 35. As standard it needs a zip or Velcro in divider. Otherwise it's a bit like having your loo or shower in the garden shed!

The verdict

Overall the A31 is simply irresistible. It seems to deliver competitive, race winning

performance with a high fun factor. It will be interesting to see how the boat does in the hands of club standard sailors, but certainly it has no vices and seems very easy to get to 90-plus per cent of potential. Handling is refined and rewarding, the finish is excellent with a keen eye on value for money. Good times. ■



ABOVE LEFT The stanchions have two optional heights for guardrails for optimal hiking.

ABOVE RIGHT The heads compartments is very functional, but the interior is plenty comfortable enough for living aboard during a regatta.

BELOW There are six good berths between the saloon, a double in the open forepeak and an aft cabin on the port side behind the galley.



ABOVE The rig is a simple non-overlapping twin spreader alloy 9/10ths rig, nicely made by Soromap.

judicious work on the helm. Besides being fundamentally quick downwind, it's great to be sailing a small, responsive boat which you are not only in control of but can derive more for the extra finesse and attention to detail that you put in. It's certainly not the Sportsboat mentality of



J/97

LOA:	9.65m
Beam:	3.35m
Draught:	1.9m
Displacement:	3900kgs
Sail Area:	Upwind 61sq m Downwind 90sq m
Guide Price:	£113,850

A different concept with the J-Boats' A-sails and sprit set up, therefore easier to handle with much more cruising potential. Slightly more expensive but a close rival in the new 31-footer market.



SunFast 3200

LOA:	10.1m
Beam:	3.48m
Draught:	1.9m
Displacement:	3400kgs
Sail Area:	Upwind 62sq m Downwind 83sq m
Guide Price:	£100,000

Great potential for the short-handed racer and cruiser and those who like their speed with easy handling, but does not have the IRC potential of the A31, or indeed the J/97.

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