

Saffier Sc 8M



Saffier Se 33

Going Dutch for the weekend

Given the number of cruisers that are used only for daysailing and weekending, shouldn't more boats be designed with this in mind? One Dutch builder believes they should be, as David Harding reports



Dennis and Dean Hennevanger at the Saffier yard in IJmuiden

Earlier this year I was walking around the Düsseldorf boat show – as one does of a January afternoon – when I stumbled across a rather attractive little yacht in the corner of Hall 18.

With her spoon bow, pleasing sheerline, counter stern, teak rubbing strake, small cabin and long cockpit she looked like a detuned H Boat or a modern and sportier interpretation of a Folkboat. There was something instantly appealing about her, so I moved in for a closer look.

As I stood looking on approvingly,

a voice from behind me said 'PBO should be testing this boat'. The voice belonged to Dennis Hennevanger, co-owner and director with his brother, Dean, of Saffier Yachts in Holland. Dennis told me that the boat we were looking at, the Saffier Sc 8M Cabin, was a recently introduced cabin version of the Saffier Se 26 on the other side of the stand.

He went on to explain that Sc stands for Saffier Classic, while the Se (Saffier Elegance) models make up the other half of the six-boat range that starts at 6.7m (22ft). A near life-size photograph of the newest addition, the 33 Se – a slim-hulled, sporty-looking weekender with a plumb bow, fixed bowsprit and carbon rig – was suspended overhead.

A name to know

Saffier is a name that will be recognised by some in the UK, because a handful of British owners – some well-known names among them – have realised that this Dutch yard builds exactly the sort of boats they're looking for.

All models were conceived for daysailing or weekending. They're also designed to sail well and to look good. In short, they're the antithesis of the archetypal, high-volume modern cruising yacht. Even the Saffier 10m, with a relatively shorter cockpit than the

rest of the range, has narrow beam, low freeboard and generous overhangs. She looks simply gorgeous and is an obvious competitor for the Rustler 33 (tested in PBO Summer 2012).

To introduce Düsseldorf show-goers to the company, Saffier were playing a video on a screen in front of the stand. Along with footage of the boats and the yard, it showed clips from Dennis's and Dean's childhood, eight years of which were spent sailing around the world with their parents. Their father, Richard, ran a shipyard in Australia, where the boys were born. He then commissioned a 65-footer from Bob Miller (otherwise known as Ben Lexcen, designer of *Australia II* and a name that will need no introduction to racing sailors). Richard built the boat and took his family on their extended cruise before eventually settling in his native Holland and starting a small yard building commercial workboats.

Dennis embarked on a career skippering superyachts but, in the mid-1990s, was back in Holland on holiday and saw an opportunity to get involved in the yard. By this time his father had designed and started building a 6.5m (21ft) open-decked keelboat, which Dennis thought had potential and needed to be promoted. Taking it to the HISWA boat show proved his point: he



Looking out from within. On the right is the 33 we sailed; on the left is an Se 26, on which the Sc 8M is based

came home with 15 orders. The 6.5, which he describes as 'a bit like a northern European version of the Tofinou 7', is still in the range.

A few years later Dennis and Dean bought the yard, chose the name Saffier and started building the brand into what it is today.

Following the 6.5 came the 8m, with a small cabin, and then the 32, a full-on cruiser that the brothers soon realised wasn't the sort of

boat they wanted to build ('the customers were more interested in the colour of their curtains'). The decision was made to specialise in weekenders.

Evolving lines

With Dean doing the design work, combining a background in the technical side of shipbuilding with an ability to draw fast, attractive sailing yachts, Saffier has become

well established in Holland and currently builds about 30 boats a year. Recognition further afield has been helped by two European Yacht of the Year awards, for the 26 and then the 10M.

If the ambitious, hands-on, design-build-and-sail Hennevanger brothers continue as they have been, Saffier is a name that we will soon be hearing much more about in the UK.

Saffier Sc 8M

A fast, classically-styled 26-footer with four berths, a large cockpit and an inboard engine

Given that most Saffiers to leave the yard are trucked straight off to their owners, timing a visit to coincide with the availability of a couple of models to sail was never going to be easy. Like most overseas assignments, it certainly couldn't be arranged according to the weather forecast, though as the date drew near it became apparent that shortage of wind would not be a problem.

Barely two hours after boarding the plane in Southampton I was in the marina in IJmuiden, dressed in full waterproofs and tightening the chin-strap on my hat. The forecast was for even more wind on the way, accompanied by rain, so we decided to sail the 8M straight away and then hop across to the 33 before the weather closed in.

Dennis tucked a couple of reefs into the mainsail as we motored out into the harbour, powered by the twin-cylinder Yanmar 2YM. The folding prop on our test boat is an extra but, thankfully, one that most owners are persuaded to have. The other important part of the underwater configuration was the deeper of the two bulbed lead keels, giving us a draught of 1.30m (4ft 3in) instead of 1.03m (3ft 6in) with the shallower option. Few boats in this size and price range have lead keels, but then the Saffiers are designed to perform. And perform is exactly what this little boat did.

Initially Dennis set up the rig so as to make life easy for the boat and the helmsman, but soon wound on the power and we changed up a couple of gears. With a sizeable sea running in the harbour and the wind gusting to about 27 knots, we charged upwind with the GPS reading up to 6.5 knots. That was pretty good going for a non-racy 26-footer sailed two-handed, and was put into context by our tacking angle of a consistent 38-40°. I was struggling to get my head around the way this little boat was making

We surfed every wave we could find, peaking at 11.1 knots

light of the conditions and chomping along in such impressive style, but Dennis seemed unsurprised by the numbers. 'That's about right,' he said. Lest anyone should wonder, there's no tide to speak of inside the harbour in IJmuiden, so either the GPS was telling porkies or the Saffier Sc 8M Cabin is a remarkably speedy little ship. Even allowing for the fact that she was straight out of the factory with virgin sails, a totally smooth bottom, near-empty tanks and no kit aboard, it was some going.

Easy does it

It would perhaps be stretching things a little to describe sailing a 26-footer in these conditions as entirely relaxing, but the Saffier presented no challenges. Probably because of the reduced mainsail she carried practically no helm,

making me doubt that we were getting the best pointing out of her. At times our speed increased to 7 knots when I was glancing at the GPS and letting her fall off a few degrees rather than concentrating on keeping her on the wind. With the full main or just one slab in conditions that would



Unusually, the twin-cylinder Yanmar diesel is mounted abaft the cockpit to avoid a raised sole or companionway. Access is good, and from aft too



SAFFIER SC 8M CABIN PRICE FROM £57,695

LOA	8.00m (26ft 3in)
Beam	2.45m (8ft 0in)
Draught – deep fin	1.30m (4ft 3in)
– shallow fin	1.03m (3ft 6in)
Displacement	1,800kg (3,968lb)
Ballast – deep fin	720kg (1,587lb)
– shallow fin	800kg (1,763lb)
Sail area	18.35sq m (197sq ft)
RCD category	B
Engine	Yanmar 2YM 15hp saildrive
Designer & builder:	Saffier Maritiem, IJmuiden, Holland. Tel: +31 (0)255 512860 www.saffierijachts.com

allow it, I would expect a little bite to the helm.

It was easier to keep an eye on our speed downwind. We went straight into surfing mode and played every likely-looking wave we could find, frequently clocking double figures and peaking at 11.1 knots. It was fun and, for a boat of this nature that was also heavily reefed and being cruised around a harbour, more than I had expected.

Dennis makes the point that, for all her easy performance, the Sc 8M is no race boat. Owners who

choose a downwind sail usually plump for a gennaker; only one has a proper spinnaker with a pole. People buy her because she looks good, handles well and is easy to sail. On many boats the Harken 20 self-tailer on the port side of the coachroof is electric, for push-button hoisting of the mainsail and trimming of the self-tacking jib on its under-deck furling drum.

Hardware is well specified. A second Harken 20 to starboard on the coachroof handles the rest of the lines led aft, while an additional pair can be bolted to the moulded plinths outboard of the cockpit coamings for downwind sails or the optional overlapping headsail.

No traveller comes as standard: the mainsheet is taken from a strong-point immediately abaft the tiller, along the boom and down to a swivel cam on a raised plinth on the cockpit sole. It works much better than a centre-sheeting arrangement with no traveller.

Unlike many builders of small boats, Saffier haven't gone the backstayless route. They've fitted one with a decent purchase that's easy to adjust from the helm. The theme throughout is simple and non-racy, but efficient.

As one would hope and expect on a boat of this nature, there's no fence (guardwire). It can be fitted if you insist. Its absence allows a comfortable perch for helm and



Comfortable sitting headroom below decks and everything you need for a weekend. BELOW A fridge uses the space beneath the companionway



correspondingly long distance between keel and rudder leads to excellent manoeuvrability.

Accommodation

Below decks you find comfortable sitting headroom, two saloon berths that run aft under the cockpit seats, and a V-berth in the bow. The galley is amidships, and the heads – a sea-toilet that pumps into a holding tank – beneath the forward berth. A fridge fits under the companionway.

The interior is formed by a moulding that's laminated – not just glued – inside the hull. Detailing is good: end-grain is sealed, sole-boards don't rattle, bunk cushions lift individually for easy access to stowage and the teak joinery is neatly finished. Although production of a boat this size has to be reasonably slick for commercial reasons, corners clearly haven't been cut. For example, deck fittings are tapped into plates of stainless steel – not aluminium – bonded into the deck moulding. The flange on the keel is recessed into the hull moulding to combine strength with a flush finish. All that might worry me is that the fuel tank is fitted for life, beneath the cockpit sole, though the connections can be reached.

PBO's verdict

Designed and built by people who know exactly what they're doing, the Saffier Sc 8M is a joy to sail and to look at and would be just the job for daysailing, weekending or coastal cruising. She's also an impressive sea-boat and one that could make a great little club racer for a small crew.



Saffier Se 33

This retro-modern flyer is fast but still designed for comfort and easy handling

After the photo shoot with the Sc 8M, I focused the lens on the Se 33. With the wind peaking, fresh water descending from above to mix over the salt and the 33 skimming over the waves at an even more brisk pace, it was a lively time. One crest loomed over the horizon and, rather rudely, broke right into our photo boat to give my cameras a salty soaking. Thankfully the driver – Ryan, uncle of the two brothers – was a lifeboat coxswain for several years and knows how to handle small boats in big seas.

With the rain becoming heavier, cameras were put away and we all swapped boats. Dennis and I hopped aboard the 33 while Dean took the 8M back to the yard (just along the quay) so she could be prepared for delivery to her owner in Hamburg the next day.

The 33 had been dropped into the water the evening before I arrived and she too was out again immediately after our sail, having her 2.1m (6ft 11in) steel-shafted keel with its lead bulb changed for the owner's choice of the 1.7m (5ft 6in) alternative. Other options are

an all-lead L-fin (again 1.7m/ 5ft 6in) or another T-bulb giving a much reduced draught of 1.4m (4ft 7in).

Boats are in and out of the water and the yard at Saffier before you can blink. When they're afloat, they're tweaked up and ready to go. The approach here is in marked contrast to that of yards that have presented me with weedy-bottomed test models whose rigging is so slack they can't hope to sail. When the people who design and build the boats also sail them, launch and commission them and generally get their hands dirty, things seem to work a lot better.

Made for the Med?

Developing the 33 was a major step for the yard. The new boat was intended to broaden their market beyond northern Europe and the lakes of Germany, Austria and Switzerland to new territories including the Mediterranean. They needed a flagship for the Se range that was bigger, faster and more modern in style – but still a Saffier.

The result does indeed have a Mediterranean air: she's sleek, with a near-flush deck, clean,

uncluttered lines and a large recessed sun-lounging area abaft the long cockpit. She also has twin wheels. Some people – like me – would prefer a tiller but, given that most owners of the 26 choose wheel steering, there was never any question. Originally the idea was to have a single large wheel recessed into a cut-out in the cockpit sole. That didn't work ergonomically, so twin wheels it was.

This and other refinements were made during the tooling-up process. The deck plug would be lifted up and canted over to 30° so Dennis and Dean could see how things worked at an angle. The quest for style was never allowed to detract from the practicalities.

SAFFIER Se 33
PRICE FROM £94,410

LOA	9.60m (31ft 6in)
Beam	2.72m (8ft 11in)
Draught options from	1.40m (4ft 7in) to 2.10m (6ft 11in)
Displacement	2,800kg (6,172lb)
Ballast	1,100kg (2,425lb)
Sail area	45sq m (484sq ft)
RCD category	B
Engine	Yanmar 2YM 15hp saildrive

While she most certainly looks the business – and more modern than the 8M – the lines of the 33 are also slightly retro. As Dean put it, 'Do we go modern, or stick with what we believe?' He was referring to the shape of the stern as an example. Going the retroussé route would have been a major departure for Saffier. A more traditional shape, on the other hand, is in keeping with what the yard is known for and, with the transom hinging down to form a boarding step or bathing platform, it's more practical too.

The theme of modernity tempered by tradition continues throughout. Unlike the 8M, the 33 is built with a cored laminate in the topsides. The

interior moulding is cut to a minimum to save weight. Bonded into the hull, it adds rigidity to the structure as well. There's no dead weight in this boat: she weighs just 2,800kg (6,172lb), and 1,100kg (2,425lb) of that is in the keel.

We were grateful for this healthy ballast ratio as we set off into a near gale and out into the North Sea (as we had with the 8M, we poked our nose beyond the breakwater to see what it was like). As well-designed, light and sporty boats with slim hulls can, the 33 took it all calmly in her stride. With two slabs in the main she sliced her way to windward, rarely slamming even when falling off the larger waves and keeping us remarkably dry into the bargain, though it was hard by that stage to tell how much of the general wetness was fresh and how much was salt.

This boat had no instruments and my hand-held GPS kept losing its signal, so we had no accurate performance figures. I would guess that we were averaging over 7 knots on the wind and clocking double figures downwind much of the time – especially after our pit-stop to collect Dean and the Code 0. The wind had dropped a few knots and the temptation to try a bit of downwind flying was just too much.

A Code 0 is not the sail to get the best from a boat in these conditions – we needed something for deeper angles – but even so we all independently reckoned we were hitting between 16 and 18 knots down some of the waves, and none of us is a stranger to



Light, airy, modern and open is the theme below decks This is one of three layout options

those sort of speeds. The wheel remained beautifully light and the direct linkage told me exactly what the rudder was doing. The blade had a tenacious grip, only allowing me to slide into one minor broach when exploring the limits. You're allowed to do it once.

Sailing for fun

It's surprising how much fun you can have on the water when it's blowing old boots and tipping it down with rain. This boat is a blast to sail and a doddle to handle. The cockpit and recessed sun-lounger between them are big enough to accommodate a fair-sized party but, with all sail controls led to the helm, the idea is that only one person needs to do any work.

Our test boat sported the optional carbon rig – an extra £15,000 or so and well worth having for the gains in comfort, let alone performance. We also had an electric Harken 40 to port for the self-tacking jib. The German-style mainsheet occupied the starboard winch, so you have to move across the boat to trim one sail or the other. I would be tempted by a straightforward purchase from the end of the boom to the traveller instead of the German system.

Sailing the 33 proved emphatically that a boat that would look quite at home in St Tropez or Porto Cervo can also cope with the North Sea in a pretty vile mood. She's conceived as a daysailer or weekender but, like the 8M, has the speed and seakeeping qualities to take you pretty well anywhere. All 'daysailer' means in this context is big cockpit, small cabin and no guardwires (as standard). If I were in a gale in the middle of Biscay I would rather be on this boat (or the 8M, for that matter) than on a good many of the so-called offshore cruisers I've tested.

Accommodation

In keeping with her external appearance, the styling below decks on the Se 33 is much more



A neat fold-up backrest for relaxing and stretching out in the saloon

modern than on the 8M. The finish is simple to save weight – hull sides are flow-coated, for example – and light colours create an airy feel. Future boats will have ports in the topsides to let in more light.

Various layouts are offered, our test boat having what will probably be the most popular with a V-berth in the bow (heads underneath), galley amidships and settee berths in the saloon. Finish is good and detailing given plenty of thought.

PBO's verdict

The whole idea of the big daysailer/weekender has yet to take off in the UK, but to my mind it makes a lot of sense. So many fully-fledged cruisers are used mostly for weekending anyway.

Instead of calculating a boat's value by a formula that uses length, price, headroom and number of berths, maybe it's time to consider factors such as 'fun' and 'what am I really going to use the boat for?' If you do that, you might find you end up with something like the Saffier Se 33.

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