



First Hallberg-Rassy 50 test sailed by Magnus Rassy

It is December 2020 and the first Hallberg-Rassy 50 “Rassker 50” has just been launched. Earlier in the year I invited various international journalists to come and test the new yacht, this December, from the yard at Ellös. They all jumped at the opportunity to sail the latest model. So many accepted the invitation that all of December appointments were filled, even the days between Christmas and New Year. Sadly, due to the current Covid-restrictions, many have cancelled their travel plans.

Unexpected situation

So, what do you do? We are sat with a well prepared, new model and no journalists to tell the world how fantastic this new yacht is. But there is one person who can test it, in fact he already has, and that is me. So, here I will let you know my impressions about the new Hallberg-Rassy 50.

Carbon furling mast

In fact, the new model is not the only big news itself, we also have a major leap forward in effortless cruising; this is the first carbon furling mast from Seldén Mast. We have been working closely with Seldén in Sweden and Elvstrøm in Denmark to create something that can best be described as a “wow” effect to cruising sailing. Not only the mast but the spreaders

and the boom are all in carbon. I will come back to what this means for the sheer joy of sailing her.

Modern, yet classic design

At the dock, the boat oozes attitude and a personal style you don't find from any other boat builder. It sounds like a contradiction, but this yacht is both modern and classic at the same time. Is that possible? The upright stem and stern with the beam carried all the way to the transom, an integrated bow nose, twin rudders and twin wheels all say this is a modern design. But the beautiful sheerline with the blue stripe around the hull and cockpit, the typical wind screen, the teak toe rail and teak deck combined with the magic proportions in the Frers lines, give a classic impression at the same time. So yes, it is possible to combine modern and classic in the same boat.

Leaving the dock is child's play with the bow and stern thrusters; the lithium batteries give full thrust, no matter the state of charge. The engine is impressively quiet. Deck storage for fenders and mooring warps is huge.

Efficient sails

The sails are Elvstrøm Epex FatFurl with Pentex fibers and double black taffeta, giving really stiff, low



stretch sails with a good service life. The main has an impressive headboard and generous roach, creating a powerful sail with proportions that are only possible with a big carbon crane on the back of the mast head, to allow enough space between the leach and the backstay. This takes the performance of in-mast furling another step forward.

We first used a FatFurl main, with headboard and big roach, almost ten years ago on the first Hallberg-Rassy 412. This was also after close cooperation with Søren Hansen at Elvstrøm Sails. The name FatFurl was actually an idea I had. Since some years we had teamed up with Jesper Bank and sailed the most demanding race in this area, Tjörn Runt, together several times. This turned heads, in particular when we with an in-mast furling Hallberg-Rassy 412 with the first FatFurl entered the Tjörn Runt. The competition in our class was lighter racing oriented yachts, but the Hallberg-Rassy 412 with FatFurl main was the first yacht in her class over the finish line and won the class on corrected time with even greater margin. That was the first time a boat with in-mast furling won a significant race. The new sails on the Hallberg-Rassy 50 are yet another clear step forward reaching a level nobody thought possible for furling sails.

Sailing

The sail area is controlled from the pedestal with push of buttons. The very first time the sails are unfurled, it is clear: Wow! This boat is very stiff. She carries her sail area very well. Every increase of wind translates into boat speed, not first heeling, and then boat speed. The boat is well balanced and controlled.



The boat speed on the instrument is amazing. 8.1 knots at 90 degrees off the wind in just 8 knots of true wind. Can the instrument really be right? We check the calibration, go different directions and compare speed over ground and speed through water. Yes, it really is that fast!

It is a combination of a well-designed boat, with the latest thinking in hull design, rudder shape and position, keel shape, sail plan, mast position, rig and sail trim. This modern hull shape is much more symmetric when heeled over than a traditional hull shape with more narrow transom. The boat is designed from the start to carry her weight. As a sturdy cruising yacht, she performs with ease, even with this displacement. She never feels overloaded, as is the case with boats designed to an idealized low displacement, which cannot be achieved in reality.

We go upwind in choppy seas and the wind increases as we go offshore. It is amazing how soft she moves into the waves. The hull shape is rather flat in the sections aft of the keel, where you don't hit the waves. But in front of the keel, the hull is rounded, almost egg shaped, where it does hit the waves, giving an even, soft entry, regardless of heeling angle. Sometimes you will hear a modern hull shape is less seaworthy than an older design, but this cannot be said by someone who has tried the latest generation of Hallberg-Rassy yachts. This boat sails softer and better than anything before. And she does it with ease.

It is rather cold and the skies are dark this Decem-



ber day. The wind makes the temperature feel even colder than it actually is. It is nice to have good shelter behind the tempered glass wind shield with the canvas sprayhood above.

Less weight aloft

The carbon mast is stiffer and has less weight aloft, creating a notable reduction in pitching and less pumping than a traditional aluminium spar in harsh sea conditions. That combined with less heeling and a boat that is easier to steer, means that life onboard in heavy weather, or any weather for that matter, is simply more relaxing. Most people would think that a carbon mast is something for racing freaks, but this shows that a carbon mast may be even more useful for a demanding cruising sailor.

Easy reefing

We are sailing up wind and as it freshens to over 20 knots true. The weather helm is not excessive and the boat is still easily controlled, but the rudder indicators tell us we are no longer sailing efficiently and it is time to reef. The reefing process is easily managed from the port side steering stand. The outhaul for the main is eased, the electric main furler furls the sail in to the desired position. The electro-hydraulic outhaul can be adjusted even under full load and the sail is set. The headsail sheet is eased and the sheeting position of the car is adjusted forward with the control line from the cockpit. The under-deck electric headsail furler is furling in a bit. The headsail is sheeted in again with the big size 70 electric winch. Even halyard tension for the headsail and the mainsail are electro-hydraulically controlled from the cockpit, the

same for the back stay tensioners and the vang. When it is this easy to reef, you always reef at the appropriate time. When we bear away to go back into the wonderful West Swedish archipelago, we shake out the reef and reach 12.5 knots effortlessly.

Anchoring

It is the darkest part of the year, so already soon after 3 o'clock in the afternoon, it is dark. We find a nice, sheltered place to drop the stainless steel Ultra anchor. Everything is controlled from the starboard side pedestal in the cockpit. There is no need to go to the foredeck. The rode counter tells how many meters of chain we have out. The control buttons are back lit with a dimmer, and there is text on the buttons that describes the function. There is a useful cockpit sole led light.

Twin wheels

Twin wheels have many advantages: It is easy to move in the cockpit, from behind the wheel to the forward section, or the other way around. You get further out to the side of the boat, so you get better visibility when manoeuvring in the harbour, and also to see the tell tails of the headsail. And there is more room for screens and buttons.

New type of cockpit tent

A new "light version" of the cockpit tent is available. The sprayhood is a bit longer than usual and the aft end more upright, there are no bars to the extension and it is easy to zip it to the aft end of the sprayhood, in front of the steering pedestals. In that way, it is easy to create an extra room in the cockpit, dry and warm. There is a big and sturdy high gloss teak cockpit table, with a bar under it for good foot brace. Forward of the table, there is an additional pull out bar, for a good foot brace in the forward part of the cockpit. To lower the washboards into the cabin is easy, just pushing down on gas springs, so no need to store away any washboards.

Welcoming interior

Entering the salon is a warm, welcoming experience. At the push of one single button, you light up almost the whole boat. When standing up, you see out through the large, clear tempered glass side portlights. It is dark now but by day there is plenty of natural light through three angles of entry: deck hatches, ports in the coach roof and the hull portlights that are at eye level when seated in the salon. There is also plenty of ventilation, in addition to opening deck hatches, two of the forward portlights in the salon coach roof are opening, ideal for air circulation at anchor, but not for a cold December day. The interior is made in bright European oak with horizontal grain. Sweeping the varnish with my fingertips gives another "wow" effect. The armchairs and the sofa are covered in grey Alcantara, soft and pleasant to touch and the colours go well together. I take a seat in one of the arm chairs and put my feet up on the center seat. It is so relaxing! There is a retractable 50 inch smart TV in the salon. When you don't want it, it disappears at the push of a button



but when you do, it is really big! The sturdy salon table has a top opening bar. If you turn the lid over, the back is covered with heat resistant cork. Previously, there were quite high bulkheads between the salon and the galley, and between the salon and the chart table. They were there for torsional stiffness of the boat. These days, the hull stiffener, that used to be only under the sole level, is extended all the way up to the deck. That, and additional longitude stiffeners above the sole and below the hull portlights, stiffen the boat to the extent that the division bulkheads are no longer needed for structural reasons. That opens up the boat and makes the spacious hull feel even greater. The mast and main bulkhead are located well aft and the salon is consequently very wide. That combined with bright horizontal wood grain, all the portlights and the white varnished wooden panels around the hull portlights make wonders for great room feeling.

Seagoing galley and one level sole

The sole is in one level throughout the boat. That makes it easy to move, no matter if at anchor or under sail. The linear galley is big and seagoing with large Corian countertops. It is both like a part of the salon area, and separated from the salon at the same time. There is a big Miele induction stove with built in combination conventional oven and microwave. Over the stove there is a carbon circulating-air filter. There are four fridges, of which two may be used either as a freezer, or as a fridge. The built-in dishwasher is well hidden.

Generous aft cabin

The aft cabin is wide and generous. This is comfort worthy of a king. There is a 42 inch super thin TV to the bulkhead towards the engine room. Under one of the aft cabin seats, there is a mini safe with code lock. On the starboard side there is a seat with work table, or make up table, whatever you like to use it for. There is a wrap-over window in the aft cabin, going from the aft cabin roof, aft to the superstructure side, down to the aft deck. That gives additional light, ventilation and a unique design for the Hallberg-Rassy 50. You can even watch the stars from the aft cabin centre line bed!

The aft head is big with lots of lockers and a separate shower with acrylic glass doors. Into the engine room, there is a combined washer-dryer. That makes for a quiet installation, and if necessary, the unit can be taken out of the boat the same way as the main engine and the generator could be removed; through the bolt down cockpit floor.

Walk-in engine room

The engine room is walk-in, with aluminium platforms. The efficient sound insulation is covered with metal plates. The shape of the engine room is narrower and longer compared to older designs. That allows for the great galley with the big Miele induction stove. That is possible thanks to the 110 HP Yanmar common rail engine, which is narrower than other comparable engines. There is a permanent pump for oil change. There are two switchable fuel filters for

the main engine. It is possible to change from filter 1 to filter 2 by tuning a valve, even when the engine is running. There is a manual pump connected to the deepest point of the lowest of the three diesel tanks, so it is possible to pump out possible water or sediment from the tanks, as that is always heavier than the diesel fuel. So if you pump until you get clear diesel, you know that all tanks are OK.

Quick charging

The generator is a 15 kW unit with sound shield. The batteries are lithium ion, with huge capacity. There are seven big batteries in the forwards section for service and big consumers in this area, such as electric furling mast, outhaul, windlass and bow thruster. Aft, there are two additional big lithium batteries, for stern thruster and electric winches. With as much as 300 A 24 v charging when the gen-set is running, the service batteries may be charged from empty to full in around three and a half hours. That is extremely fast and would never have been possible with traditional lead batteries. And in reality you don't go from full to empty to full again so charging times are even shorter in reality.

Forward heads

Moving forward in the interior, there is another head, also with separate shower and acrylic glass doors, electric towel heater and electric Tecma toilet with soft closing lid. The water maker controls are located inside the shower. The water maker has a huge capacity of 235 liters per hour, so you don't need to run the unit for a particularly long time to get more fresh water than you need. That is a feeling of freedom.

Another owner's cabin?

The starboard cabin is generous but the forward cabin is just fantastic! It is justified to say it has the standard of an extra owner's cabin. There are twin deck hatches with clear glass, and two hull portlights. As the cabins are located further aft than previously has been the case in this size of boat, the cabins are wide and airy, with lots of storage.

Clean and uncluttered deck

On deck, this yacht is clean and uncluttered. The top shrouds come down to chainplates close to the toe rail and the lower shrouds attach close to the superstructure giving a wide separation and easy passage down the side. With this set-up, headsail is easier to sheet efficiently and the wide spreader base is more sturdy too. The forward deck area is big and flushed. The deck locker in front of the forward cabin and aft of the chain locker is just huge. Additionally, there is deck storage above the chain locker, in a cockpit locker, and two quite big lockers in the aft deck. The hatches, anchor windlass and headsail furler are all flush mounted. No control lines from the mast to the cockpit are needed.

Transom platform

The bathing platform is big and wide and when folded up there is a teak step on the upper end that



makes a strategic step when entering from a half height dock. This also makes the platform lighter, allowing manual operation with the help of gas springs and improves the appearance of the wide transom.

Conclusion

Now it is time to go back to the yard marina and although her predecessors have set the bench mark high, sailing and spending time on this impressive new design has proved it exceeds these high expectations in all terms; ease of handling, control, performance, the safe and comfortable feeling, the generous interior, the storage available, and the exciting exterior design.

Note: much of the mentioned equipment is optional

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