

REVIEWS

New technology, boats, and gear for the cruising sailor



BOAT TEST BY DARRELL NICHOLSON

A Beautiful Cure for Rough Days

The Tartan 4400 deck-saloon cruiser won't let weather stand in its way

THE BEST DAYS FOR A BOAT TEST are those when you wish you'd stayed in bed. Your head hurts, the weather's atrocious, and everything goes downhill from there.

Unless a boat can stand up to terrible days, the really great

days will be out of our reach.

I'm rarely so lucky as to have rotten days for a boat test. Usually, the sea is benign and the sky is so blue you'd think the builder had the Big Guy on speed dial. And that just about describes the powder-puff scene last September, when I stepped aboard hull number two of the new Tartan 4400 series for what was supposed to be a leisurely three-day sail from Rhode Island to Manhattan.

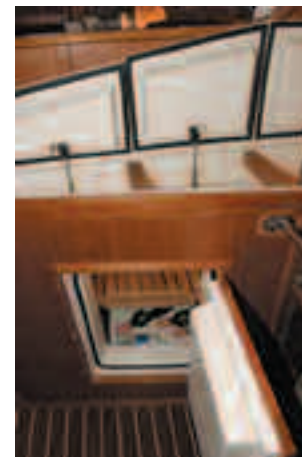
A 10-knot northwesterly

ushered us out of Narragansett Bay; with the Tartan's asymmetric cruising spinnaker flying and the apparent wind at about 120 degrees, the slippery-hulled sloop was sailing herself at just over 7 knots. The helm was about as perfectly balanced as it gets. As Tartan's Jim Egensperger and I jibed the boat around Point Judith, the wind petered out, we motored west, and I wished for something—anything—that might give our 12-ton Tartan a run for her money.

Thirty-six hours later, with 35 knots howling in the rigging, the rain driving through gaps in our foul-weather gear, and even the Department of Homeland Security bent on thwarting our passage, I got my wish and much more. By the time we squeezed into our berth on the Hudson River, the gale was blowing full stink, and I had no doubts whatsoever: We'd put the Tartan 4400 to the test, and she'd handled it with aplomb.

BILLY BLACK

BILLY BLACK



The inboard settee at the dining table lifts (far left) to reveal the 75-horsepower turbocharged Yanmar. The voluminous freezer-fridge (left) is designed for extended cruising.

Combining a fast hull shape and epoxy-resin construction with an elegant interior (main cabin above, owners cabin right), the Tartan 4400 delivers performance, strength, and comfort.

Something Different

The folks at Tartan spared no expense with their debut into the field of deck-saloon boats. The biggest advantage that the 4400 has over others in this class is an epoxy-resin and ATC Core-Cell hull that's vacuum-bagged and oven-baked, a process that produces stronger hulls that are better resistant to cyclical fatigue, water absorption, and the fiberglass print-through that plagues some polyester hulls. The resin-impregnation process ensures a consistent 65:35



glass-to-resin ratio, considerably stronger than the resin-rich polyester hulls built of traditional hand-layup techniques. Though costly for the builder, the process brings long-term value to the owner.

With a sail area-to-displacement ratio of 18.0 and an emphasis on hull strength, payload-carrying ability (which includes 200 gallons of water and 80 gallons of fuel), and luxurious accommodations (two staterooms, two heads, and a plush main saloon), the 4400 clearly leans toward the voyaging side of the spectrum.

But with a fine bow entry, a flat underbody, and sleek appendages (a beavertail keel and spade rudder), it won't disappoint longtime Tartan fans who like a turn of speed.

The more practical advantage of being able to crank out miles became evident after our overnight stopover in New London, Connecticut. A cold front that had been forecast to weaken was instead reloading and drawing a bead on New York City. But the kicker came when the Department of Homeland Security announced plans to close the East River the next day while President Bush addressed the United Nations.

"What next?" was all Jim could say.

Some quick calculations showed that if we averaged 8 knots, not only would we beat

REVIEWS

the security gauntlet, but we might also catch a fair tide at Hell Gate, the aptly named confluence in the East River where the current blasts 5 knots at peak ebb. So much for a leisurely sail. The two final days of our 3-day cruise would instead be an all-night sprint. Dubious, I tried to recall when I last used an 8-knot average to plan a passage.

Deck and Rig

For a skeptic facing tough odds, the Tartan 4400 proved a great ally. Tim Jackett has designed a big boat that's exciting and easy to sail without compromising cruising essentials. The boat reaches her maximum 14-foot-1-inch beam just aft of the mast and carries much of it to the stern. The result is a very roomy and well-protected cockpit. At anchor, five adults can eat around the fold-out cockpit table, and in a slick touch of extravagance, an electric ram lowers the through-transom swim platform for an easy dash to the water or dinghy.

Once the sails are set, the cockpit affords maximum control. The double-ended mainsheet leads through a traveler set forward of the companionway, then back to self-tailing Harken 42 winches mounted port and starboard on the cockpit coaming. Immediately aft of these are two Harken 56s for trimming the jib sheets. The convenient setup puts the helmsman within an arm's length of all sheets as he sits on the leeward rail on either tack. Owners of boats with conventional cabintops may find the 4400's raised house takes some getting used to. I'm 5 feet 7 inches tall, and though I could see through the forward windows when I sat at the helm, standing on the helm seat or sitting on the windward coaming gave me the best view of the horizon. The main halyard, reefing lines, and the traveler controls lead on the cabin top



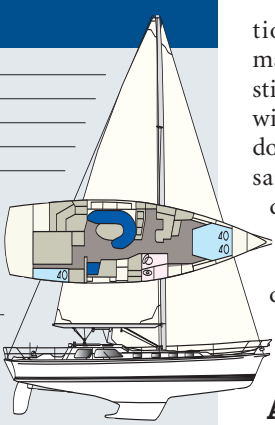
A gentle northwesterly that carried us out of Narragansett Bay showed off the Tartan's light-air alacrity.

hardware is well bedded and oversized for cruising. Wherever there are through-deck penetrations, Tartan replaces the balsa with solid glass. Two beefy rollers and an electric windlass accommodate working anchors, and six heavy-duty 12-inch cleats paired with ample chocks take dock and spring lines. Accessible through a deck hatch, the gargantuan forepeak compartment allows plenty of room for storage of fenders, lines, and sails. Forward of that is a dedicated self-draining chain locker; below the locker is a watertight crash bulkhead. A better gasket seal would improve the locker. Also, the two mooring cleats at the bow were mounted so close to stanchions that you couldn't fit a proper dock line around them. The folks at Tartan say they'll correct this.

Though aluminum is an option, the Tartan's standard mast is a lightweight carbon stick. Keep-it-simple cruisers will appreciate the 90-degree double spreaders, minimizing sail chafe off the wind. The quick-release inner forestay (and running backstays to support it) allow you to quickly set the flat storm jib you'll want for clawing off a lee shore.

A Cherry Cabin

Belowdecks, the 4400's warm cherry interior allows plenty of natural light and ventilation through its big windows, hatches, cowls, and opening ports. The raised cabin's large center window opens, drawing breeze into the main saloon. When the sun goes down, remote dimmable switches at key locations—the companionway, the galley, the entrance to cabins—give you bachelor-pad



Tartan 4400

LOA	45' 0" (14.07 m.)
LWL	37' 6" (12.01 m.)
Beam	14' 1" (4.37 m.)
Draft	5' 6" (2.72 m.)
Sail Area (100%)	943 sq. ft. (88 sq. m.)
Ballast	9,000 lb. (3,855 kg.)
Displacement	24,000 lb. (10,886 kg.)
Ballast/Disp.	0.375
Disp./L	203
SA/Disp.	18.0
Water	200 gal. (727 l.)
Fuel	80 gal. (294 l.)
Mast Height	63' 0" (19.2 m.)
Designer	Tim Jackett
Price (as tested)	\$450,000
Fairport Yachts (888) 221-0300 or (440) 354-3111 www.tartanyachts.com	

to sheet stoppers and Harken 42s beside the companionway. Such small details as a suspension lift for the heavy cockpit-locker lid and a larger propane locker to accommodate at least 40 pounds of propane would be worthwhile improvements for extended cruising.

The emphasis on ergonomics continues outside the cock-

pit. With wide side decks and inboard shrouds that allow for flat sheeting on the jib, the layout makes moving fore and aft a breeze. Substantial 2 1/4-inch-high teak toerails, 30-inch-high life lines, and teak handholds along the cabin top also add security.

The balsa-cored deck is clean and uncluttered. The

command over the mood (and energy consumption). At each station, your choice of LED floor lights, primary halogens, romantic accent lights, and Hella turbo fans are right at your fingertips.

As you come down the companionway, the guest cabin is aft to starboard through a separate door and two steps down. Aft-cockpit boats usually leave little room for quarters here, but the Tartan's raised cabin top provides over 7 feet of standing headroom. The cabin has a hanging locker and enough storage for another couple to join you on an extended cruise.

A head and shower with vanity sink is to port of the companionway. Although the head's location is convenient, the toilet is installed under the side deck, requiring that you hunch over to sit there. Forward of the head, a roomy J-shaped settee seats five. Tartan wisely keeps the main saloon's center of gravity lower than on other deck-saloon boats; as a result, the view when seated is more sky than landscape. The forward-facing navigation station opposite the settee, however, is slightly elevated so the navigator can scan the horizon.

The U-shaped galley is two steps down to port, with a huge refrigerator/freezer running athwartship, and the two-basin sink is well inboard to allow proper drainage on either tack. The configuration puts anyone standing in the galley at eye level with those sitting in the main saloon, so the cook is always a part of the conversation. There are a few galley details I'd prefer to see changed. Partitions in the galley shelves and drawers need to be sized to handle standard, not Lilliputian, plates and cutlery. I'd replace the galley's countertop garbage can for food waste with a larger storage bin for pots and pans. The design drawing indicate 4

inches of insulation under the freezer fridge; I'd trade some interior fridge space in order to get 6 inches. Finally, I'd remove the propane solenoid shutoff valve from behind the stovetop. Where it is now, a grease fire would separate you from the switch.

Opposite the galley is the large head with separate shower. One entry links it to the main cabin, the other to the master cabin forward. The master cabin has a queen-size centerline berth, a cedar-lined storage locker, and enough shelf and drawer space for two modest wardrobes.

As for systems, the layout offers excellent access to the engine, which is right in the middle of the boat under the raised cabin sole. You can also easily inspect the rudderstock, steering linkages, rudder bearings, and autopilot drive through a wide hatch in the aft cabin. All the domestic saltwater service, except engine cooling, taps into a single sea chest, putting it in one easily accessible area and reducing the boat's number of through-hull fittings.

When we arrived at Hell Gate at 0300, missing the tide by a couple of hours, the turbocharged 75-horsepower Yanmar 4JH3 and three-bladed prop kept us churning against a fierce current at 4.5 knots. In flat water, we averaged over 7 knots at a conservative 2,600 rpm.

The Tartan 4400 scores huge points for its epoxy hull, advanced construction, fine performance, and overall good looks. By the time we squeezed into our slip, tied up, and ducked out of the wind-driven rain into the comfort of the cabin, the Tartan 4400 had me hooked. We'd sailed headlong into the maelstrom of Murphy's Law, and still we'd come up smiling. Now isn't that what cruising is all about?

Darrell Nicholson is *Cruising World's* senior editor.