

Austral Yachts Clubman 36 Review



Product Information

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For a summer afternoon the marina seems exceptionally quiet as my mate David and I step it out along the pontoons trying not to miss our 3.30pm scheduled arrival time. We figure most people are still sleeping off their New Year's hangovers, or catching up on jobs around home. I hope I've remembered the directions and just before running out of pontoon, sight the only yacht in the row with people onboard. This must be it, the innovative cruiser/racer Clubman 36. A friendly hail confirms it before my slightly bloodshot eyes take in the details I've only seen before in photos.

The black Carbon Fibre rig with its swept spreaders stands out in a vaguely menacing contrast to the brilliant white Gelcoat of the hull and deck. Then, taking a slightly misjudged step aboard from the pontoon made me glad of the very functional diamond pattern non-slip surface gracing the craft's topsides.

The learning curve of yacht ownership is quite a steep one and expensive to boot. I daresay there are legions of yachties around our coastline who are somewhat reluctantly putting up with craft that inexperience lead them into purchasing.

Not so with Joe Mazzini, the proud and happy owner of this delightful Clubman 36. With a couple of decades of sailing experience under his belt, Joe did the hard yards of research. This included clambering over and inspecting every inch of the offerings at both the Sydney and Sanctuary Cove Boat Shows before getting together with Austral Yacht's principal Michael Keough.

While there are a lot of imported as well as Australian-built craft of a very high standard, none quite fitted Joe's requirements and preferences, or were overdone in terms of interior eye-candy - flashy timberwork that adds ambience, but comes with a weight penalty.

No, what Joe wanted was a superbly built and high-performing cruiser/racer, which did not compromise speed for interior flash, yet was still immensely liveable as a cruiser. And this is exactly what he ended up with, thanks to Austral's 30 years of experience in producing quality yachts and the design skills of the

renowned Scott Jutson and his talented team at Jutson Yacht Design.

Now it seems that there are those who would differ in the description of this vessel, particularly some whom Joe has vanquished in the twilight racing series run over the six months he has owned the craft. Those who reckon it should more properly be referred to as a racer/cruiser. A happy twinkle in Joe's eyes and a slight smile around the corners of his mouth is his only response.

Now Joe also possessed firsthand experience with the marque having owned and raced an Austral Clubman 8, so product quality was never going to be an issue in his mind and in fact local construction provided just the opposite. So, it was with the pride and confidence borne of observing each stage of construction, backed up by his race results and hours spent testing the rig that I was given a grand tour.

Joe pointed out that the Carbon Fibre rigging was an option rather than a standard fitting, but one he was glad he had chosen. And with the self-furling headsail and electric winch he could safely and comfortably sail the vessel with just one crew person, a huge advantage for cruising with that special person. Plus with no need to fold, bag and stow a headsail at the end of the day, there's more room left below.

From fore-to-aft the craft sports top shelf equipment such as Harken deck fittings, quality hatches, sleekly finished custom stainless steel pushpit, pulpit and chain plates - the list goes on. For instrumentation Joe chose Simrad instrumentation (including a chart plotter) and wishes to express his satisfaction with Quin Marine's advice and service.

But visually admiring fittings and fixtures is one thing, seeing them work together is another, so Joe suggested we put to sea without further ado. Onboard with Joe was his son Anthony an accomplished sailor in his own right and Anthony's mate Frank.

The 29 hp Volvo Saildrive kicked into life and we slipped our mooring lines and Joe deftly steered us from the berth toward the open sea.

We had a fairly light breeze from the southwest, but it had kicked up enough of a gulf chop to gain a sense of how the Austral would feel in a bigger seaway.

Joe handed David the helm while he and the boys adroitly and swiftly rigged the sails, which are pretty well sorted out, apart from the Lazy Jacks where there's still a bit of experimentation going on to finalise optimal positioning.

Under sail the craft felt to be easily driven by the light breeze and was directionally very stable with minimal steering effort required. Characteristics that Joe tells us are maintained in much fresher conditions and to an exceptional degree.

Sitting comfortably in the roomy cockpit, I relaxed against the backrests and half-listened to Joe outlining to David the various features of the ergonomic cockpit layout. I say half-listened because my mind kept wandering to offshore islands with pearly-white sandy beaches contrasting with an azure sea. Ah, well, I'd better keep buying lottery tickets I guess.

Poking around below decks impressed me with the practicality of interior layout focussed around a fore and aft galley opposite a generous settee with a centreline bolster seat.

To starboard is a well appointed navigation station that serves as the boat's command centre and doubles as a floating office.

Double cabins fore-and-aft provide comfortable and private sleeping quarters for times when guests are

aboard and both offer generous headroom and floor space. Space is not wasted or misused anywhere on this well thought out craft and this applies to the head as much as the sail lockers. So instead of trying to cram in two heads, the Austral 36 features one generous sized head with an enclosed shower.

Joe chose the interior finish with weight saving in mind and while it might appear a bit on the plain-Jane side to an aesthetic nurtured on blackwood, oak or teak, I sensed it as light, bright and definitely adding to the impression of spaciousness below deck.

Back on deck the breeze was fading somewhat, but we managed some tacking and a gybe or two before it died and once again the ease of these manoeuvres highlighted the simplicity of sailing with this rigging configuration.

Travelling the last mile or so back to the marina with a little help from the iron mainsail, we discussed some deeper construction details, such as the fact that Austral Yachts have a manufacturing history of high quality hand laid yachts using advanced knitted fabrics and foam cores.

The technically minded and knowledgeable reader will nod in approval in learning that the hull is laminated with Vinylester and polyester resins using E-Glass, Double Bias, Triaxial fabric with a foam core. The deck itself is foam cored with Double Bias E-Glass laminate and a high gloss isophthalic white Gelcoat sets off the exterior finish.

With the sails furled Joe backed the 36 footer into the berth with practiced ease and we took our leave with that satisfied feeling that only comes with time spent aboard a state-of-the-art vessel, which has fulfilled or surpassed its design and construction brief. Craft meeting these criteria are only too rare and all those involved in developing this craft can take a well-deserved bow.

Certainly, I would have preferred to be onboard the day the photos in this article were taken to experience more of the craft's speed and handling qualities in a stiffer breeze. And while that day may yet come, this magazine's deadline came sooner. And Joe, I hope you get to fully explore more of your vessel's cruising potential - and soon.

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