



Maxi driver



Scandinavian manufacturers built a reputation in the '80s and '90s for designs that were a little more distinctive and characterful than the 'average white boats' coming out of mainland Europe at the same time. **Jake Frith** sees if the Swedish built Maxi 34 lives up to this standard.

Nimbus Boats was started in the early '70s by Olympic sailor and designer Pelle Petterson. His expertise helped give the Maxi range a usually deserved reputation for being well balanced in addition to being fairly rapid under sail.

Following on from the success of the Maxi 95, which capitalized on the boom in the worldwide charter market, selling over 3000 examples, Nimbus Boats developed the slightly larger Maxi 1000/34/340 model. Approximately 900 boats of this hull were produced from 1992 to 1998. Where the Maxi 1000 was a fairly conventionally laid out aft cockpit cruiser/racer, the 34 had a completely different deck moulding offering a centre cockpit, aft cabin arrangement. The 34 was aimed fairly and squarely at the pure cruising market with a smaller rig, sporting roller reefing main and self-tacking jib, and the shallower draught wing keel (an option on the 1000) as standard. She also has a slightly larger 28hp engine and the

distinctive solid spray screen. The 340 available in the late '90s was a cross between the two with aft cabin, smaller engine and bigger sails. With all these extra goodies, the 34 came out at £2500-£3000 more expensive than the 1000, but surprisingly it wasn't a package that greatly appealed at the Boat Shows, with only about a third of the models sold being in 34 format and most of those went to Norway and Sweden.

As you would expect of a model with a relatively long production run, the 34 became more sumptuous as time went on. Early models appear a little more spartan down below with white laminate bulkheads, teak edging and turquoise upholstery, but they evolved to incorporate much more wood and alcantara upholstery by the time that late models, such as *Misty*, the 1998 model tested here, were launched.

Given the Maxi's reputation for excellent handling, I stepped aboard eager to put this Swedish beauty through her paces. »





About the owner

Nigel Chilcott has owned *Misty* since 2008 and she represents a big leap up in size from his last boat, a 22ft Hunter Liberty. Nigel admits he's only really a holidays and weekends sailor, but he has already ventured as far as Penzance Bay with *Misty*. A big selling point for Nigel was the Maxi's light loads on her sail controls, which mean less experienced friends and his grandchildren can get quite involved in playing a meaningful part in sailing the boat.



ACCOMMODATION

1 Saloon

The centre cockpit does not encroach on the main living space as much as some. This is mainly because it's not a true centre cockpit, more a hybrid between a centre and aft cockpit in my view. This makes the saloon a workable area, with the galley and navigation area aft and a solid cabin table forward with ample room to sit six to eat. The drop leaves, double action catches and hinges of the fold-down table impressed me with their solidity, which is worth consideration, because the centrally mounted saloon table means the starboard leaf will be going up and down like a yoyo as crew access the forecabin, which has its door slightly offset to starboard. There's a mast prop through the centre of the table, which provides more of a useful handhold moving forward than an intrusion at dinner time. The settee berths each side in the saloon are a generous 2.00m (6ft 6in) long. The flooring on the cabin sole appears to be wood-look plastic over marine fibreboard, but it looks both attractive and hard wearing. The rest of the woodwork gives the impression of being a little better quality than the French and German offerings of the same era and, in *Misty's* case, is standing the test of time very well.

2 Navigation area

Arranged athwartships on the starboard side in the aft part of the saloon, chartwork could become a bit hairy on starboard tack. A decent strap could be rigged up fairly easily and the table itself is adequately sized with half Admiralty dimensions. The chart drawer beneath the table is satisfyingly deep and the clever spring-away stool beneath it is deeply satisfying.

3 Aft cabin

At 1.92m (6ft 3in) I found the walk through to the aft cabin on the port



side (*see photo 3a*) to be more of a crawl through and once was enough when it came to testing this thoroughfare. This is somewhat offset by the access hatch from the cockpit and by the fact that many prospective owners would have children or grandchildren for whom this small, self-contained but safe space separate from the grown-ups could provide an exciting lair. It is a light airy space, thanks to Perspex washboards and an aft portlight out onto the sugar scoop stern. It would also be excellent for storage and I liked the easy access to the rudder quadrant in evidence here. Adults trying to sleep would probably notice the encroachment of the rudder tube, but if you want your wheel connected to your rudder in some way, I'm not sure of many workable alternatives.

4 Heads

Situated on the starboard side abaft the chart table, this is the usual moulded-in affair with a shower, if you can spot it. (The shower head reels out of the sink tap.) It's sitting down showers only, because the heads slot under a side deck, but perfectly acceptable for a boat of this size.

5 Forecabin

At 7ft long and 6ft wide aft it's a decent sized space, though it comes to a point at

the bow, so you probably have to discount that last foot or so. Thanks to the water tank being under the starboard side

cockpit locker there's plenty of space for sails or similar storage under the forecabin berths. The hull sides are well insulated from damp and noise and an infill provides an increase in sleeping space when required. Because the headroom at the bulkhead is 1.66m (5ft 6in) I'd say this cabin has good sitting headroom rather than standing.

6 Galley

A dual burner cooker to port in the aft part of the saloon takes its Camping Gaz from a locker situated in a part of the anchor well at the bow. This is an arrangement that some safety conscious British owners or potential owners have found worrying, because salty, wet chain, shunting about in a seaway is not a good bedfellow for a painted metal gas bottle.

The pretty standard L-shaped galley is a pleasant place to be with a great view out of the saloon ports. The stowage is good behind the horizontal surfaces and there's a fridge freezer, but like the chart table the galley betrays its intentions as a 'cook in port only' setup with its lack of a strap to hold the cook in place in heavy weather. This, however, could easily be rectified.



ON DECK

1 Cockpit

This forms a decent length extra cabin for many owners who have invested in the appropriate sprayhood extension pieces. The wheel is a small one at 32in diameter, but it needs to be so to allow an easy walkthrough for those entering up the sugar scoop stern. The after part of the cockpit is the skipper's domain with both jib sheet winches and mainsheet winch an easy arm's length away and the sculpted aft cabin hatch located at sitting height – great for singlehanding. My customary hefty shove of the steering binnacle when the owner wasn't looking, showed it to be a reassuringly solid construction. *Misty* has a teak laid deck to her cockpit, fitted as an extra cost option from new, which appeared to be the proper thing, about 10mm thick, solidly screwed down and still looking attractive.

2 Rig

The 34 came out of the box with a self-tacking jib. For our light wind test day, Nigel had swapped this for his 140 per cent genoa, which obviously could not be rigged through the self-tacking car. The 7/8th rig of the 34 does not provide quite the same control over mast bend as the Maxi 1000's slightly taller rig, but



both come with a backstay tensioner. The Selden mast and boom on *Misty* were holding up well and the rod kicker was a suitably low hassle choice that complemented the in-mast reefing.

3 Sails

Misty is on her second suit of sails. The originals, by a Swedish sailmaker, were very well used when Nigel acquired the boat, so he recently went to Arun Sails for a new wardrobe. Once again, I need to be careful not to let my personal prejudices about roller reefing mainsails get the better of me. This is a boat designed for cruising and optimised also for short-handed sailing. With this in mind, a roller main is a sensible choice, though why buyers



weren't also offered a slab reefing main on this model is a mystery to me.

4 Side decks

With 18in of width at the narrowest point, the trip forward is a safe one. I'd imagine that if the self-tacking jib were rigged too, the inboard sheeting angle would make it safer still. The Rutgerson cars on both genoa sheet tracks and the self-tacking track looked to be of reasonable quality and heftiness. The teak deck provides a good compromise between wet and dry grip underfoot.

5 Foredeck

A smooth descent from the coachroof leads us onto the uncluttered foredeck where Nigel has fitted safety netting to the guardwires to provide extra security for when his grandchildren visit the boat. It's nice to see solid stainless steel mooring cleats here. The deep anchor well has a reassuringly hefty feel to its lid and a bounce up and down on the rigid foredeck reinforced the feeling of solidity and quality I was getting from the boat. »

USED BOAT TEST



UNDER WAY

1 Closehauled

Pelle Petterson's design skills and racing experience shone through with a quick bash to windward off Chichester Harbour entrance. Despite the fairly shapeless roller mainsail, *Misty* achieved 6.1kn through the water at 38° to 15kn of apparent wind. Her wing keel displayed good grip and she carried her way through the tacks with no problems. Short tacking even with the overlapping genoa was a breeze with all sheets led to within the helmsman's arm's length, the powerful winches and well thought out sheet leads making all sheet loads refreshingly light. The mainsheet traveller car being the sprung pin track type was not haulable to windward under load, which made it easier to just leave it in the middle somewhere and sail like a bit of a lazy so and so.

2 Reaching

The reduction in apparent wind once we bore away reduced our speed to 5.6kn on a beam reach with 10kn over the deck.

While manoeuvring the boat through all the points of sail my only reservation, and it is a minor one, was the fact that the convenience of all controls made me feel like I was hogging the show somewhat at the helm. There were four people in the cockpit and rarely did anyone else get to



touch a sheet. This was little hardship, because on all points of sail the boat felt beautifully balanced and she exuded at all times the feel of a boat designed by a sailing enthusiast for sailing enthusiasts.

3 Running

In these light airs *Misty* suffered a little with her cut down cruiser rig, achieving 3.2kn in 5kn apparent from dead astern. With the smaller self-tacking jib there would be even less power on offer, so she's a boat that would welcome the addition of a cruising chute.

Under engine

The handling of this boat under power was almost entirely vice free with a smooth ungrabby wheel when going astern and the two bladed folding prop shunting her from ahead to astern as reassuringly as a fixed three blader would. Into a 12kn headwind she seemed happiest cruising at 6.6kn and 3000rpm and only began to feel hard pushed at 7.0kn.

Conclusion

It's not often I test sail a boat I would like to own. She felt as precise as a racing dinghy on the helm, encouraging tomfoolery like close tacking around large stationary objects that would be inaviseable in many boats of this size.

I really liked the quirky little aft cabin and the fixed sprayhood. My fantasy variant would have the larger rig, deep keel and slab reefing main from the 1000/340, but the more powerful engine and centre cockpit arrangement of the

34. This late boat with her teak decks and handsome blue gelcoat, recently enhanced with a Tribos UV coating, was also pretty stunning looking on the water. Although perhaps a little under powered for those in a hurry in light winds and lacking a few rig controls I would have liked to fiddle with, she gets away with all of this by being utterly bewitching under sail.



For

Attractive looks
Balanced under sail
Above average finish
Useful aft cabin

Against

Not many available
Under powered under sail in light airs
Roller mainsail

Specifications – Maxi 34

LOA	34ft (10.2m)
LWL	27ft (8.2m)
Beam	10ft 7in (3.25m)
Draught	1.43m
Displacement	10,300lb (4.7 tonnes)
Ballast	3305lb (1.5 tonnes)
Sail area	270ft² (52.5m²)
Berths	6-7
Engine	19hp Volvo Penta
Fuel	80ltr
Designer	Pelle Petterson
Builder	Nimbus Boats
Owners' Assoc.	www.maxiowners.org.uk