

# Sigma 36

SECOND-HAND BOAT TEST

**The Sigma 36 was the big sister of the popular Sigma 33, but does she perform as well? Simon Jinks investigates**



**T**he Sigma 36 was launched in 1980, two years after the highly successful 33 – so she had quite a reputation to live up to. That she never attained the same cult status as the 33 is no fault of this excellent boat. She was designed by David Thomas as a stepping stone for 33 owners wanting to move up in size. The 36 offered more space and privacy thanks to the large aft cabin, while retaining the same sensibly proportioned hull lines and powerful fractional rig.

The Sigma range was strongly built by Marine Projects in Plymouth and these days their layup (nothing fancy – a solid GRP laminate, with balsa core in the decks) is considered heavy

compared to many modern cruiser racers. Underwater she featured a bolt-on cast iron deep fin keel and spade rudder, with the propeller shaft cradled by a P bracket.

We sailed *Happy Morning*, operated by Hamble School of Yachting for sail training and charter. She was one of the early versions, built back in 1980, and more than her fair share of eager crew trample her decks each year. Her basic structure has stood the test of time well, with no visual signs of weakness.

The non-slip sidedecks are wide and safe and the foredeck is a secure working platform. *Happy Morning's* deck colouring is starting to fade and wear, and this could be a consideration

when looking at examples for sale. The anchor locker is of adequate size, while the double bow roller is lightweight but up to the job. The single spreader tapered fractional mast is deck-stepped and halyards and control lines are led aft to Lewmar 30s, although the reefing lines are left at the gooseneck. Genoa sheets are managed by Lewmar 44 winches.

She was intended to accommodate lots of crew on windy races, so rather miraculously the 36 could sleep 10 six foot-plus winch monkeys. The aft cabin and chart area can be closed off from the main saloon by means of a door and sliding hatch. This makes a large owners' suite or, for family cruising, gives a little bit of privacy







**Left to right: a plain, sensible saloon layout; forecabin is basic; the galley is small but has good stowage; comfortable chart table; the heads compartment lacks headroom**

for the grown ups. The large double berth measures 6ft 8in x 4ft 2in (2.3m x 1.27m) and has an opening portlight.

The saloon is a standard layout with an L-shaped settee berth to starboard that converts to a double, and a straight settee to port. There is stowage outboard of the seat backs and pilot berths above. Positioned slightly to starboard, the drop-leaf table has plenty of floor space around it, making movement through the saloon easy. Four large portlights and a hatch give a light, airy feeling.

Headroom is well over 6ft (1.82m) in the saloon and a little over 5ft (1.52m) in the forepeak. Between the saloon and forepeak is a walk-through with two useful hanging lockers, one for wet gear and one for dry. The heads are located on the starboard side and are a useable size. Lockers abound, both above and below the sink. The forecabin itself is fairly basic, a V-berth with small lockers above.

The practical and comfortable chart table faces forward and is just aft of the companionway steps on the starboard side. This is a useful position for the chart table because any rain coming down the hatch cannot get to the table and turn your charts into *papier mâché*. However, communication between the navigator and helm is reduced. There's plenty of

stowage alongside the table, which will hold a well-charted portfolio and a folded Admiralty chart on top.

The galley to port is basic but has plenty of lockers and both above and below the work surface. There are two cool boxes; presumably one can be converted to a fridge and would have been an option from new.

The actual companionway hatch is small, which I personally like as it's harder for crew to fall down. Beneath it, the engine can be fully removed, giving excellent access to the three cylinder Volvo fitted as standard.

With her fin keel, spade rudder and engine, she's pretty manoeuvrable under power. There's a hint of propwalk that can be


harnessed for turning but can be dealt with quickly for reversing. She'll turn in a little over her own length with practice, and not much more than that without practice. But this boat is not about motoring. If you truly enjoy sailing you will be hard pushed to find a better yacht in this size or price range. The Sigma 36 is beautiful to sail. There are not many yachts that can compare. She gives a huge feeling of security in Atlantic storms, backed up by fabulous handling. In the light winds that

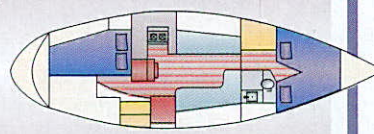
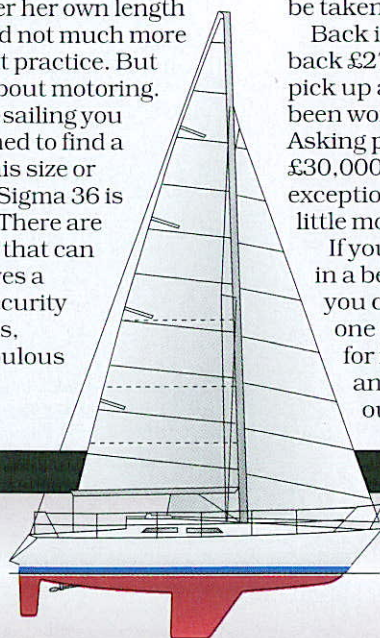
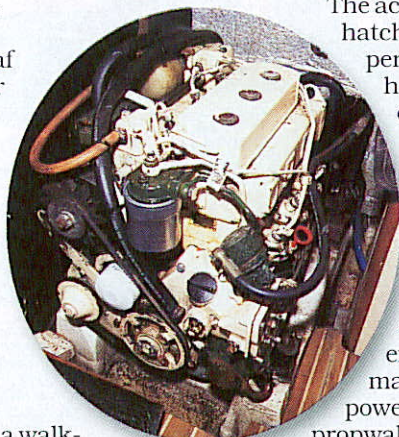
dominated our day she tacked positively through 85° and felt as controllable as a dinghy, with no tendency to gripe to weather; she just slipped effortlessly through the water on all points of sail.

On a previous sail in heavy weather we found it useful to use the backstay adjuster to depower the large main and if you were using her for cruising a furling jib would make life a lot easier. She is a confidence-inspiring boat, both easy and rewarding to sail - a rare combination. Downwind her flat aft sections left a clean wake through the water and gave a light feel to the helm.

Because Sigma 36s are commonly used for sailing school, charter or racing, there's a fair chance that they've had a hard life. With this in mind, a survey is vital, taking particular interest in the fore and aft part of the keel for evidence of heavy grounding and the deck area around the mast step for any deformities arising from over tightening the rig. The sails could also be past their sell-by date and the cost of renewal should be taken into account.

Back in 1980 a 36 would set you back £27,000. Today, it's possible to pick up an early 80s boat that has been worked hard for a similar price. Asking prices tend to be between £30,000 and £40,000 with exceptional examples going for a little more.

If you fancy some good fast sailing in a beautifully balanced boat then you could do a lot worse than try one of these. Don't take my word for it; there are plenty of schools and charterers who will take you out for a sail... for a fee. 



#### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**LOA** 36ft (10.96m)  
**LWL** 28ft 9in (8.77m)  
**Beam** 11ft 6in (3.51m)  
**Draught (max)** 6ft 1in (1.86m)  
**(bilge keels)** 3ft 8in (1.12m)

**Displacement** 12,500lb  
 (5,682kg)  
**Sail area** 741ft<sup>2</sup> (68.83m<sup>2</sup>)  
**Owners' Association** No