

BOAT TEST



YACHTING LIVES TEST OF THE MAXUS 26

MAY/JUNE 2018

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EIGHT SAILING YACHTS IN BURGEONING NORTHMAN RANGE

NORTHMAN are a growing Polish boat builders who started out as a small family yard, but who are now making steady inroads all around the world with their simple, clever sailing and motor yachts. Their philosophy is to develop and do as much as possible in house, but to specify their small sailers with only the best brand hardware, writes YL press test editor Andi Robertson.

They produce a total of eight sailing yachts, ranging in size from a 21 footer to a 33 and their brand leading 33.1RS, although some are derivatives based on the same hull form.

It is really since 2012-13 when they substantially updated and expanded their factory that Northman have accelerated their growth and expanded their export market into Europe, the

USA and Australasia. That may sound slightly grandiose, but in fact most of their increasing popularity is organic, through word of mouth and PR, but there are Maxus yachts in all these different continents now. The enlarged facility means that everything really is done in house, not just from the lay up to painting and finishing, but all of the wood work, metal work and upholstery.

One notable, remarkable standard bearer for the brand is Szymon Kuczyński who is sailing around the world right now in a modified Maxus 22. This will be his second circumnavigation, his first 'non stop' on the tiny 22 footer. Previously he completed his round the world trip after repairing his broken mast but, so the story goes, he wanted to make it around non stop. So, no sooner, had he unpacked his seabag and said hello to his partner than he was off again to do it non stop! The construction of the boat has been beefed up a bit and there are escape hatches and a stronger, deeper keel, but it is essentially the same yacht as you would buy from the factory.

Clyde based 360 Boat Services are the UK agents for Northman. Tom Simister and Callum Fraser are well known for their engineering and 'all services' operation around Scotland, but they have diversified into boat sales because they could immediately see the USP of the Northman and were especially impressed by the design and construction of the range.

In one sense their range of options is perhaps their weakness, in my opinion. These do tend to be entry level yachts for owners whose preference is to buy new. Owners early in their career need to be guided directly and carefully by the boat sales agents and so I do think some consolidation and simplification is a good idea.

That said, the '26' I sailed out of Largs, has four different keel options. There is a swing keel (ie pivoting ballasted centreboard for Cat C) a lifting fin, standard fin and a twin keels as per the version we sailed (all Cat B), which is the factory demo boat.

By all accounts it is not an inexpensive boat in this version because it is fully specified for show and demo use, but in particular the 360 guys suggest the outboard version offers a substantial





saving.

The base specification boat is around £37,000. Realistically the basic ready to sail boat is around £49,500 and the twin keel, boat show edition we sailed is over £65,000 including VAT. But bear in mind the Yanmar inboard diesel accounts for about £14,500!

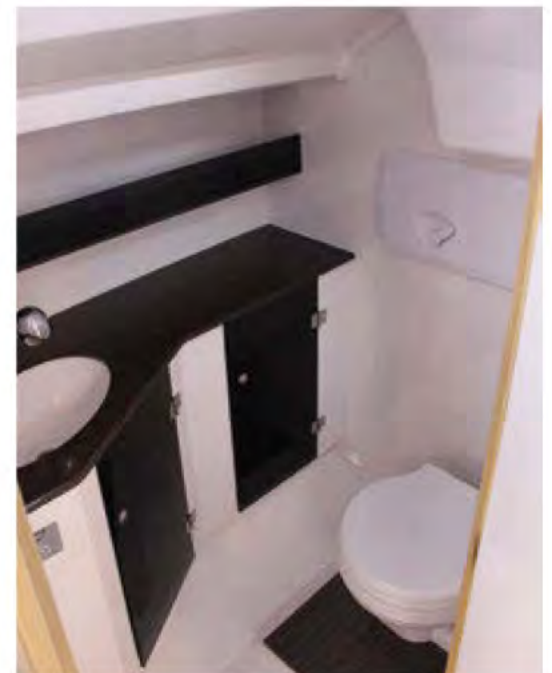
Simplicity, ease of use, space and safety are all fundamental to the Maxus 26. It is a proper small yacht which appeals for coastal cruising. A lot of the angular, slightly slab sided appearance is not exactly classic shaping and styling, but it is all about the accommodation inside, achieving spacious aft sections and the moderately

high freeboard allowing excellent headroom. I rather like how they are not afraid to push this and of course it is mainly the underwater canoe body which delivers reasonable speed and stability while the effective waterline length is maximised.

While it has the feel of a small yacht, it is also quite dinghy like in the set up and ease of use. Loads are light in general and the cockpit fairly snug, allowing a decent coachroof which offers good protection.

The cockpit boasts three quarter length bench seats either side, the mainsheet coming to a single centre point. All of the lines are kept out of the cockpit which is therefore clean and easy to operate.

The sidedecks are good with a slightly raised moulded toe rail where the hull and deck join, this adds a useful level of security when moving about. The narrow shroud base allows a slim sheeting angle and of course gives better space to move around the sidedeck. And the foredeck is reasonable too with the moulded sprit extending to give a little extra space for anchoring and mooring manoeuvres. To this end





there is a good, big anchor locker where fenders and lines can also be stowed.

Short jib car slides are operated by the usual simple plunger system. The jib is set on a Furlex roller furler and the mainsail drops into a good lazybag system.

Standard hardware includes Andersen winches, Spinlock clutches and Lewmar blocks and cleats. You can spec the boat with an asymmetric kite or furling Code-style sail. For the extra money I would definitely go for the former.

We had an acceptable eight to 10kts of spring breeze for our test sail. We always seem to find a window in otherwise horrendous weather and the Maxus 26 enjoyed the conditions for sure. It would have been good to sail in something a bit more in terms of sea state and breeze, but what we saw we liked very much.

As a family cruiser the positives are that setting the sails is easy. Hoisting the main is a simple, one person operation that can be accomplished by the helm, as is unfurling the jib. Thus it is pretty much stress free. Self tailing primary and halyard winches are a boon.

Under way is simple and direct. The mainsheet is an easy to use multi-purchase single ended system, but there seemed to be adequate purchase. The backstay falls easily to hand too and so the helm will largely control the main and rig shape.

Upwind the Maxus 26 sails neatly and tracks well. This is not the strong point of the twin keel version and you do find yourself looking for a bit of keel area



to lean on to and power the boat up to get her moving, but the helm was light enough and the boat felt responsive.

You'll sail her dinghy style sitting on the comfortable little sidedeck coaming with a good foothold on the seat edge. This gives good all round visibility, most of all of the headsail tell tales!

It is certainly not especially quick upwind, but workmanlike and quietly effective when you are making 4.8 or 4.9kts and tacking through about 100°. This is achieved with next to no effort and the helm remains light and easy in the little puffs.

Otherwise the Maxus 26 impressed in its ease of use, while simple and polite in its handling and it tacked and gybed easily. Once again it is hard to gauge how much smoother the turn on the fin keel version would be, but this was absolutely fine.

Down below there is a big, open double berth forward which is completed with a small infill. This can be closed off with a bulkhead if required or a privacy curtain. I rather like the feeling of space of the open plan version.

Then, aft under the cockpit is another massive 7ft double. In the main space there is a really big multi-leaf table which serves to the long, comfortable settees. The galley is to port and then to starboard is the full headroom, spacious heads and shower room which is really excellent. There are a massive range of finishes (shown above, right).



Overall I really liked the Maxus 26. Whisper it, though, the 24 is also a great option as a genuine trailer sailer which will do much of the same things, but is easier to use in a range of different venues. Both, I have to say, would be great boats for the lakes and lochs - Lomond, Ness and so on. They are all certainly well worth further investigation!

MAXUS 26 SPECIFICATION

Twin Keel Version

Full length	8.4m
Length	7.62
Width	2.82
Draft Min/Max	1.25
Weight	2550
Sail Area	37
Mast height	10.8
Enginepower	5-14
Cabin height	1.83
Berths	5+1/6+2
CE	B