

Weekender





Winning Ways

Sam Jefferson heads to the IJsselmeer in Holland to put the 26ft Winner 8 through her paces

The Dutch don't always come across as a serious nation, but when it comes to their sailing, I can assure you they are deadly earnest. Anyone seeking proof of this rather sweeping generalisation should spend a day out sailing on the Winner 8 with some of the team from the factory.

Based in the pretty little town of Enkhuizen on the IJsselmeer, Winner has built up a fine reputation for building quality yachts for serious sailors. Run Winner Yachts through your search engine and terms such as 'unfussy', 'proper yacht' and 'quality' will come up time and time again. Not without reason either – a quick tour of the factory confirms that Winner has a strong belief in a high quality end product being worth more than any marketing chicanery.

All its yachts come from the hugely respected Van de Stadt design house and are hand-built in Winner's small but efficient yard where many of the team have been in place for decades. Across the range, Winner boats feature conservative lines that will look after you on a stormy night in the North Sea. They are finer aft than most modern yachts and there has

been no effort to pander to the Mediterranean charter market.

The Winner 8 is the latest offering, the baby of the range, measuring in at 26ft. Although size precludes her from being an ocean-going Category C yacht, she is built to that specification. To this end, bulkheads are all laminated in, and hull to deck joins are also fully laminated – a laborious task – and the keel is bolted to a stainless steel grid. There is no larger subframe, as Winner believes that if you do ram your keel onto a rock, the damage done to a boat with an extensive subframe is much more fundamental. The overall feel is one of quality.

Yet Winner is also a big believer in the importance of good performance – the joy of sailing, if you will – so it has gone to great lengths to ensure this

little boat is endowed with a wicked turn of speed. A foam-cored hull and deck keep the weight down, while twin rudders give her grip and poise. Winner also provides the option of a performance pack which includes a larger rig, deeper keel, sportier sails, a hank-on jib, a folding prop and a stripped out interior. I was fortunate to put this Winner 'S' Performance model through its paces.

'She is endowed with a wicked turn of speed'

The Winner 8 points high and she can even do six knots in six knots of wind under gennaker

PHOTOS: C/O WINNER YACHTS

Meer magic

We headed out onto the IJsselmeer on a dank misty autumn morning. In the light breeze of seven knots, this little yacht was responsive, sympathetic and accelerated beautifully. What's more, she pointed so high it actually disorientated me. I kept having to adjust upwind to hit that sweet spot that was far higher than anticipated. The boat was also sensibly set up with the mainsheet track within easy reach of the helmsman and there were lots of thoughtful touches, from the deep rope bin just aft of the companionway to the neat little drop down washboards that disappeared without fuss and inconvenience.

The two Harken winches were ideally located on the deckhead and there was an excellent sheeting angle for the jib. Everything was nice and simple. The tiller steering was well positioned and the little Winner span through the tacks with gusto and minimal potential for the helmsman getting in a tangle.

When we headed downwind and set the gennaker, she was able to sail over six knots in six knots of apparent wind, which was impressive for a displacement yacht. Under power she was also very handy and benefitted from having a single cylinder 9hp diesel inboard with a saildrive to push her along. Many yachts of this size are blighted by the general menace that is an outboard in a well, so this was a very welcome addition. The sport version came with a folding prop, but this is an expense you may well manage without as a cruiser.



Above: The performance version has a stripped-out interior

Below: Compact but adequate galley

Below, the Winner was surprisingly spacious for a 26ft yacht, featuring forward and aft cabins with 2.05m of length to stretch out on, although both berths were open to the saloon, so there was limited privacy. The removable chart/saloon table slotted into a bracket on the starboard seat

and could also be shipped in a bracket in the cockpit, which was a neat touch, though it looked a tad flimsy.

The heads to starboard was a roomy affair and featured a large hanging locker, which really should be a standard feature on any yacht. The Porta Potti can be upgraded to a seawater loo. It was a bit of a shame I was aboard the performance version of the Winner, as it would have been nice to see the all-out cruising model, which you can kit out to whatever level of comfort you require. Other cruising options include a shallower keel, and a mast-lowering system. The Winner 8 is also trailerable, featuring an all-in weight of 3,500kg. ✨



VERDICT

Winner believes that just because you have a safe, comfortable yacht, you don't have to sail slowly – an admirable starting point. The Winner 8 was fast, uncomplicated and fun but also well made, comfortable and meticulously thought out. Little things like the water tanks located amidships and the retractable gennaker pole in its own watertight compartment point to a considered approach. The main winner here seems to be common sense.

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

ACCOMMODATION: ★★★★★

LOOKS: ★★★★★

WINNER 8

LOA: 26ft 3in (8m)

LWL: 23ft 11in (7.3m)

Beam: 9ft 4in (2.85m)

Displacement: 2,300kg (5,070lb)

Draught: 3ft 3in (1m)

Sail area (Upwind): 430sqft (40m²)

Berths: 5

Price: £57,600

Builder: Winner Yachts

Contact: www.winneryachts.com

