

On test

A good first Impression

Looking for an entry-level cruiser? There are plenty available, so *Sam Jefferson* finds out what separates the Elan-built Impression 35 from the crowd

For many years Slovenia's premier boatbuilder has battled with a split personality. On the one hand, Elan has established a fine reputation for fast cruiser/racers; on the other, its Elan Impression range of voluminous cruisers, from the drawing board of Rob Humphreys, has sold strongly. The Impression 35 that I tested is the successor to the Elan Impression 344 and is the entry-level boat. Its big brothers, the 394, 444 and 494, complete the range.

The market is fairly clogged with entry-level yachts around the 35ft mark, and most have a reasonable turn of speed and weatherliness. So what marks out the Impression 35? Well, she is built high in the Slovenian Alps,

and no vessel built in such a wildly beautiful and impractical setting can fail to have some individuality.

It is evident in this boat's distinctive looks and finish as well as little considerate touches here and there that she has a good dash of character.

The biggest factor, however, is the sheer volume of this little boat. The 35 is basically a reconfigured version of the old 344, first launched in 2007, and until last September was known as the Elan Impression 354. The hull is unchanged, but her deck layout has been tweaked: twin wheels replace the single pedestal, while the cockpit has been enlarged and her transom opened out in the modern style, to reveal great expanses of teak deck.

The overall feeling stepping into this cockpit is that you are



ALL PHOTOS: MATIČ KLEMENC

'Little considerate touches here and there suggest she has character'




on a much bigger boat. The twin wheels and coachroof-mounted mainsheet mean that there is a plenty of space to move around freely. It's also a very comfortable cockpit, with ample room around the table (admittedly an optional extra) to serve a meal for six.

Of course, something that has always marked Impressions out

from the fleet is the trademark deck saloon – a feature you either love or hate. The highly curved cabin top of the Impression is more harmonious than most and on the 35 adds to the feeling that the yacht is bigger than she is. Of course, there has to be a payoff for making a 35ft yacht feel like a 40-footer and, with her high freeboard, double-banked portlights,

broad beam and deck saloon, she can look a little tubby beam-on.

The other downside becomes evident as you head forward: the side decks seem just that little bit too narrow. The curve of the deck saloon is carried so far forward there isn't a great deal of lounging space (not such a problem if you're thrashing around the North Sea in springtime).



Running rigging

Lines are fed back under removable panels, minimising clutter on the coachroof

Fleet hull

Despite her fair displacement, the Impression 35 managed five knots plus in light airs and a steady six under power



More space

The Impression is based on the old 344, but her trademarked curved deck saloon has been carried further forward to provide more space

On the plus side, the grab rail is well positioned. The anchor roller is sensibly located well outboard and is even detachable, reducing the boat's overall length to just under 33ft (9.99m), so you can save on berthing fees. A windlass is a desirable extra, as would be midship cleats.

The running rigging follows a very conventional set-up. Lines are led back under removable panels, giving the coachroof an uncluttered feel.

Everything is eminently simple. On this yacht there was no gennaker to confuse this stolid cruising yachtsman, although this is, of course, an option, sited on a removable bowsprit. Thankfully, they haven't gone for that wretched German mainsheet system, which never fails to catch me out.

The rig itself is old school in its configuration; the mast is deck-stepped and she carries a 110 per cent genoa for drive and a smaller,

fully-battened main. With her quite long, shallow (1.5m) keel, this ensures she tracks and points well.

I took her sailing off the Slovenian coast on a pristine, gleaming day. Off our bow shimmered the beautiful town of Piran, jewel of the Istrian coast. It was perfect in every way bar one: there was no wind, at least until the afternoon, when the sea breeze wheezed recalcitrantly into life and filled our sails. By the late afternoon, we were trundling along in around 10-12 knots.

This late show on behalf of the wind at least gave us plenty of scope to motor around, and the 35 handled very easily under power. The only minor surprise was that she kicked to starboard, where most modern yachts go to port. She was fitted with a 19hp Volvo engine which shoved her along quite happily at six knots or so without any great fuss or noise. There is an option for a 29hp engine, ideal for those who don't like sailing.

Several hours of bobbing around, resisting the urge to crack into a cold beer, and the breeze finally

Transom options

For those who do not like the 'open' feeling at the stern of the yacht, there is an option for a double-length bathing platform which lifts to keep you firmly enclosed

were also sensibly placed within easy reach, and view, of the helmsman, something that's not always the case.

Off the wind in light conditions, the speed obviously dropped, but we were still trundling along nicely at five or so knots on a beam reach and four off the wind. The overall impression was of a thoroughly competent performer, forgiving, comfortable and easily handled by a small crew.

Size matters

So far, so standard. But it is when you step below that you start to feel the difference. The saloon feels like it belongs to a much larger yacht, with masses of headroom and natural light from the double-banked portlights and large cabin windows. The marketing men at Elan claim that this is the smallest production yacht capable of sleeping nine people in comfort. Who am I to argue?

In truth, unless you are a charterer, or have more friends than you really need, you might not want such a plethora of berths, and there is an option to have one very large double cabin aft. This seems like the sane choice to me. In this configuration, the master cabin becomes positively palatial and it also means that the rather limited locker space is vastly increased, which is always useful.

Even with twin cabins aft, the space in both is very generous, and two portlights ensure they do not feel too dungeon-like. The forward cabin features a split berth, which feels a little tight for a tall man, but there is good headroom.

The main saloon is pure IKEA, all light hardwood trims and white Corian work surfaces. The quality of finish is very good and the overall effect is very pleasing. I was particularly taken with the saloon table, which drops down smoothly

gasped into life, ruffling the waters of the formerly glassy Adriatic. The Impression is no lightweight flier (she displaces a respectable 6,000kg), nevertheless, she responded eagerly to the light airs, almost as impatient as us to get along, and soon there was a reassuring chuckle emanating from her forefoot as she leaned into the modest afternoon breeze.

The Impression has no claims to being a racer, but I was impressed at her speed in these light conditions and, as the breeze filled in, she

responded well, easily touching five knots in the light conditions. This was good going. Her big genoa and fully-battened mainsail allowed her to point well (around 38° off the apparent wind) and you didn't have to nag her to keep her going. Steering was light and responsive and she rattled through a series of tacks with the minimum of fuss.

The twin wheel arrangement meant that you could snug yourself comfortably against the rail, relax and enjoy the sail. The instruments

FOR MORE new boat tests, large and small, click on to:

 sailingtoday.co.uk



Pure IKEA

The finish below is modern and attractive, while the high coachroof and copious windows lend volume and light

1

Design flair

Pleasing touches are the drop-down saloon table, which helps give the boat its nine berths, and the flip-up chart table

2



to form an extra double berth. Yacht manufacturers have been refining cruising yachts for the last 50 years, but in all that time, only two per cent have ever managed to create a decent drop-down saloon table. If you own a boat with such a rarity, treasure it. If the yacht wears out, build a new boat around the drop-down table. I'm serious.

Of course, every new yacht has its very own party piece, and the 35 is no exception. Its chart table is one of those pleasing touches. If you pull a handle on the back of the starboard saloon settee, a section of the bench rotates right around and, presto, you have a chart table, fore and aft facing and fully functional. A clever touch.

The galley is situated on the port side and is cosy enough to feel enclosed if the ship is rolling in a swell. The heads is roomy and well-appointed and fits in with the general theme of feeling like it belongs to a much bigger boat.



BOATBUILDING ALPINE STYLE

Elan's factory lies in the Slovenian village of Begunje. Along the valley floor, alpine meadows glow green and shimmer with wildflowers. At the side of the road, farmers cut hay with great scythes and gather it into hayricks by hand.

The reason for this obscure location is Elan's early success making skis. From

there, the firm shifted its expertise with moulding lightweight veneers and GRP into boatbuilding. The state-owned company at first specialised in small cabin cruisers and fishing boats. It wasn't until the 1980s that the firm started to establish a reputation for high quality cruiser/racers, with an Elan winning the Quarter Ton Cup in 1984.

SAM'S VERDICT

If you're after an entry-level cruising yacht, easily handled and comfortable, then the Impression 35 is well up to the mark. Having said that, all of Impression's main competitors in this class could claim likewise. So why would you choose an Impression? The Slovenian yacht has a touch of individuality about them that many of their rivals lack, both in looks, layout and ideas. The quality of build and finish is very good.

Of course, the 35's biggest asset is that roomy hull, so if space is a priority, then this little boat must be the class leader. This also makes you feel reassuringly safe and secure. The trade-off for this is what I feel are slightly dumpy looks, and side decks that are just a little bit too narrow.

These are, however, minor complaints. The general feel is of a well-thought-out all-rounder that will be a forgiving and friendly companion for cruising yachtsmen and women, particularly those with a couple of children in tow.

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

COMFORT: ★★★★★

BLUEWATER: ★★★★★

Insure this yacht with
Craftinsure from
£293.50
Boat insurance at the
touch of a button



THE SPEC

PRICE: FROM £69,000 EX-VAT

AS TESTED: £74,000 EX-VAT

LOA: 32ft 9in (10m)

LWL: 28ft 10in (8.8m)

Beam: 11ft 5in (3.5m)

Draught: 5ft 2in (1.6m)

Air draught: 48ft 2in (14.7m)

Displacement: 6,000kg (13,200lb)

Ballast: 1,820kg (4,012lb)

Water capacity: 238lt (52gal)

Fuel capacity: 110lt (24gal)

Engine: 19hp (29hp option)

Mainsail: 300sqft (27.8m²)

Genoa: 323sqft (30.25m²)

Spinnaker: 850sqft (79.5m²)

RCD category: CE A

Design: Humphreys Yacht Design

Builder: Elan,
impressionyachts.com

PERFORMANCE

AVS: 135°

Displ/LWL ratio: 330.4

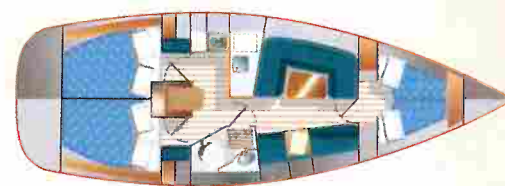
Sail area/Displ ratio: 18.4



Weight



Speed



For a fuller explanation of stability and performance figures see sailingtoday.co.uk