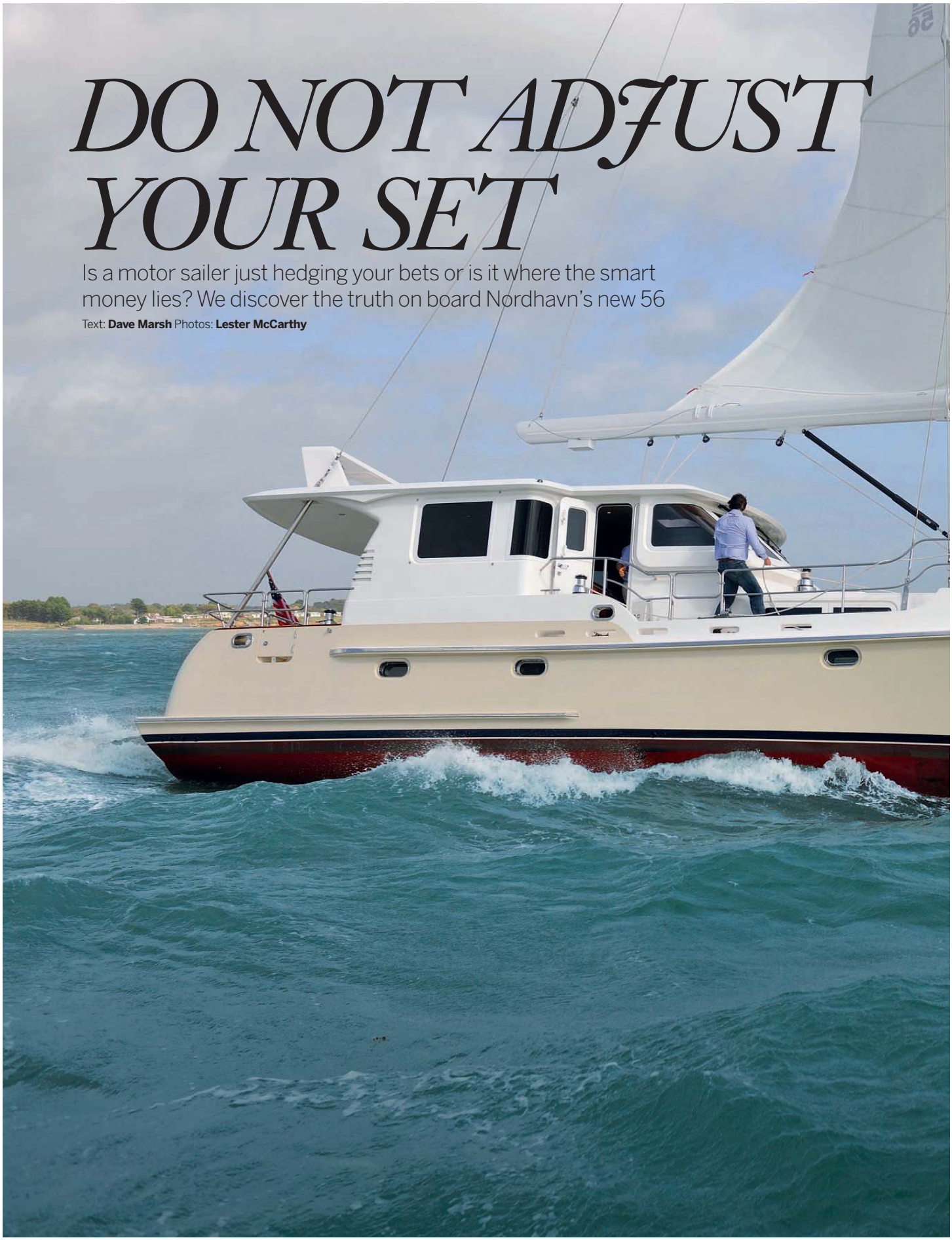
DO NOT ADJUST YOUR SET

Is a motor sailer just hedging your bets or is it where the smart money lies? We discover the truth on board Nordhavn's new 56

Text: **Dave Marsh** Photos: **Lester McCarthy**



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Ah, the joys of the English climate. Leaden skies and 40 knots of wind over the deck welcome us as we nose our way upwind through a blustery and largely uninhabited Solent. Yet, this is just the sort of weather that an intrepid motor sailer should have no problem dealing with if it's to justify its existence. And despite its distinctly tubby, long keel, sailing-boat form, and the pendulum effect generated by the weight of its sturdy rig, our Nordhavn 56 treats us to a surprisingly comfortable ride as we power upwind through confused head seas at around 7 knots. Stripped of its sails – and what sane person would want to sail their way upwind into the teeth of a Force 8 on a boat designed exclusively for cruising in comfort – the motion is definitely more displacement motor boat than fast sail boat.

MASTER OF NONE?

That experience allowed us to tick the box that is central to effective motorsailing – ability under power alone. However, deciding what the other boxes should be is difficult, because the oddball motor sailer throws up such an unusual frame of reference. For instance, if the spacious accommodation that a voluminous motor sailer like the 56 provides is paramount, then sailing catamarans around this size have a very strong case too. Not only does a multihull such as the Lagoon 560 offer considerably roomier accommodation, it also sports palatial deck spaces which dwarf those of Nordhavn's 56.

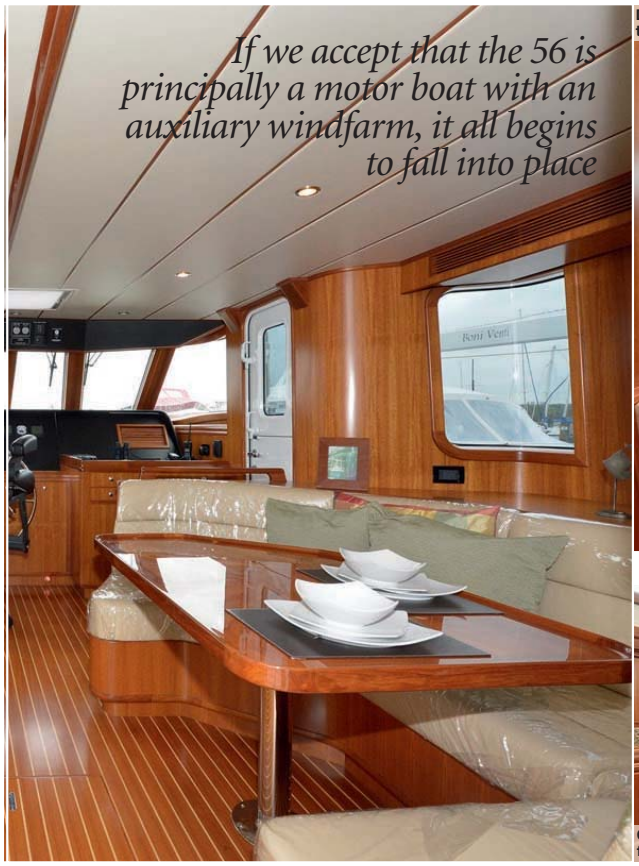
Likewise, if performance under sail is paramount, then the lighter catamaran again triumphs. And thanks to its slender hulls, a cat also provides extremely frugal performance when motorsailing or under power alone. Quite how sailing catamarans behave under power in a Force 8 gale I cannot say.

Still, given enough breeze, the 56's small rig will push its 43 tonnes along surprisingly quickly all on its own. During our previous outings, also in very breezy conditions, we recorded speeds of up to 7

Big cruising chute will be ideal for intrepid ocean crossing using the classic trade wind routes

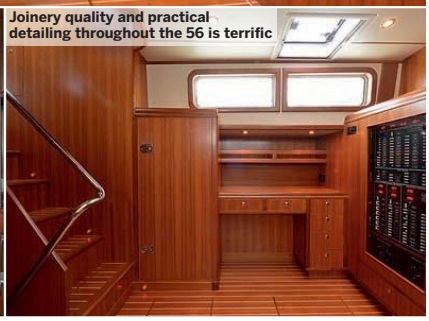
Swivelling seats can be swapped for a much deeper sideboard on the port side

Furling sails and powered winches make sailing the 56 an easy task



Dinette is large enough to handle all six crew

Galley is blessed with numerous large drawers, far more seamanlike than big open lockers


Joinery quality and practical detailing throughout the 56 is terrific

knots, and this with the sails heavily reefed in deference to their newness. Given that I've sailed for over three decades on countless craft from International Moths to J24s, I was surprised just how much fun it was to plough along at these modest speeds with the sense of unstoppable invincibility that all Nordhavns engender. However, despite its surprising alacrity, to describe the 56 as an enthusiast's sail boat would be akin to describing a Land Rover Defender as principally suitable for track days. The 56's hydraulic steering has no real feel and little feedback, and with nine turns lock-to-lock its response is unsurprisingly sluggish. That's pertinent because when the 56 gets clobbered by a gust, the boat's weather helm builds up rapidly unless the mainsheet is released pronto.

So where does this leave the Nordhavn 56? Well, if we accept that it is principally a motor boat with a modest auxiliary windfarm that runs on fuel that's free, then it all begins to fall into place for the Nordhavn 56. With our single 165hp Lugger running flat out, we achieved a two-way average top speed of 9.5 knots. This means that the 56's cruising speed and top speed are no different to any other full-displacement motor boat, so no downside there.

SAIL AWAY WITH ME

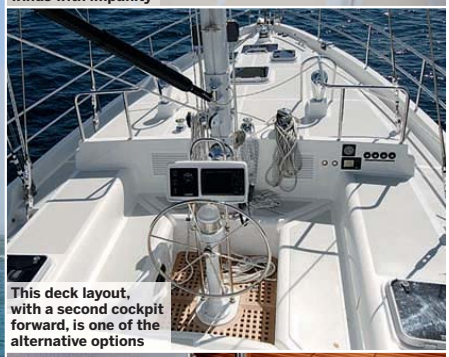
With the windfarm employed to supplement the big slow-revving diesel, what most of us would already consider very sparing fuel figures under power alone become almost implausibly frugal and could easily double or treble its 3,000-plus mile range at 7 or 8 knots.

You can increase that thrift with the Hundested variable-pitch propeller. This allows the load on the engine to be optimised, from high-pitch, high-load conditions under engine alone, up to where the 36in (914mm) diameter prop is completely feathered to minimise drag under sail, with all the fine-tuning variations in between.

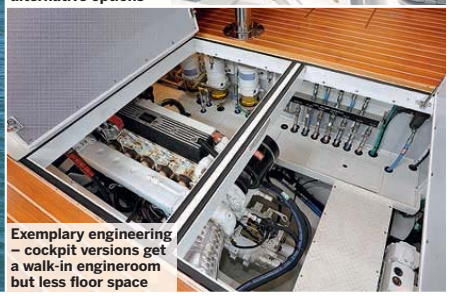
Owner's suite is very motor boat-like, with a full-beam affair and a roomy ensuite

If this guest cabin isn't roomy enough, there's a full-beam version to rival the owner's cabin

Our 56 shrugged off the Solent's lumpy state and 30-knot winds with impunity



This deck layout, with a second cockpit forward, is one of the alternative options



Exemplary engineering – cockpit versions get a walk-in engineroom but less floor space

Dramatically reducing fuel consumption is far from the only benefit the rig bestows. Without stabilisers, most displacement motor boats will eventually encounter conditions that cause them to roll around, sometimes quite alarmingly. Even the smallest sails help to stabilise a motor sailer considerably and can reduce or eliminate the need for mechanical helpers. Somehow, I can't imagine a well-maintained Nordhavn ever breaking down. Nevertheless, if it's windy enough, those sails could save your bacon if engine failure ever struck you close to a lee shore.

Your particular cruising lifestyle would determine what combination of sail and power is used. That said, I see the 56's self-furling genoa remaining largely unused and the big cruising chute becoming the sail of choice. Given this boat's sailing characteristics, I can't see why anyone would want to force their way upwind when that process is so comfortable under power alone. Crack off a few degrees though, head for the trade winds, and the comfortable motorsailing repose that is broad reaching under autopilot beckons.

OOZING OPTIONS

As always, Nordhavn gives you choices: two or three cabins, double berths or bunk beds, two heads or three, full-beam pilothouse or a slimmed down version with a secure walkaround on one side. Perhaps the most significant choice to ponder is the cockpit or non-cockpit alternative. Not the big one at the stern that you access from the back of the pilothouse, but the one in the middle of the boat that sits between the pilothouse and the mast. Each to their own, but personally, even as a motorboater I'd have the cockpit.

Devoid of a flybridge, the 56's roomy cockpit becomes the obvious area for the crew to loaf around outside and enjoy the sunshine. And although it's not difficult to steer the 56 from inside the pilothouse, even given the likely autopilot controlled set-and-forget nature of the sailing, it's more fun to sail the 56 from outside. Below decks, the intrusion of the cockpit means the big engine no longer lies hidden below the floor, instead it's housed in a walk-in engineroom beneath the cockpit. I feel that's a more than acceptable exchange for the loss of open floor space down here, especially as I'd invariably opt to eat upstairs in the light saloon, rather than around the dinette below. The optional layout variations are so great that, along with Nordhavn's willingness to entertain an owner's personal whims, the Nordhavn 56 is as close to custom built as it's possible to be for an ostensibly production-built craft.

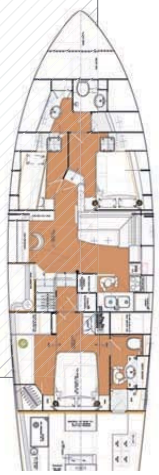
Dramatically reducing fuel consumption is far from the only benefit the rig bestows

QUALITY SPACES

One of the nicest surprises the 56 has in store is its internal volume compared with its pure motor boat counterparts. Shaped as it is, you'd expect it to feel bigger inside than a conventional sailing boat. But it's still a surprise to see how little it loses out to a 57ft displacement motor boat. This is a boat that in one of its guises sports a full-beam owners cabin, two more double cabins (both ensuite), a reasonable saloon and pilothouse, plus a further full-beam room below decks comprising galley and dinette and mini-office. Okay, no flybridge, but it hasn't lost the enormous lazarette (below the aft cockpit) that's so vital for long-distance cruising.

Last, but definitely not least, it may have a rig but it's still a Nordhavn. So it has the same immaculate finish that all its boats are blessed with. It may be built as strongly as a munitions store, but it is as refined and as classy an outhouse as you will find anywhere. And if you are a nerdy type who appreciates the finest of engineering, best stay away from the engineroom, otherwise you may never emerge to join your partner in the cockpit and motor along sipping sundowners to the gentle flap of sail or hum of the engine. MBY **Contact** Norhavn Europe. Tel: +44 (0)23 8045 6342 Web: www.nordhavn.com

THE DATA

N56 SPECIFICATIONS

LENGTH 57ft 5in (17.50m)
BEAM 16ft 7in (5.05m)
FUEL CAPACITY 666 imp gal (3,028 litres)
WATER CAPACITY 208 imp gal (946 litres)
DRAUGHT 7ft 0in (2.13m)
DISPLACEMENT 43 tonnes
SAIL 1,217ft² (113m²)
TOP SPEED ON TRIAL 9.5 knots (single 165hp Lugger)
PRICE FROM approx £1.2 million ex UK VAT (165hp)
PRICE AS TESTED approx. £1.0 million ex UK VAT