

Sessa C38

Italian flair and a keen eye on the bottom line – could this latest Sessa be the perfect sportscruiser for our times?

REPORT BY CARL RICHARDSON



Carl says...



Sessa is an exciting name in sportscruiser design but its focus has been on big, glamorous and pretty expensive models. This new 38 will have to be every bit as cool as its bigger sisters – and it has to be affordable.

Sessa's success is the big sportscruiser story of the last few years. Like an Italian Cinderella, this yard has stepped out from the shadows of Ferretti and Azimut – not the most ugly of sisters – with boats of real style and ability and has gone on to deliver one of the most exciting craft of the decade with the C68.

In short, Sessa has come a long way since the days of its 25ft entry-level cruisers, but the flip side to all this glamour and development is high costs.

Sessa may be good, very good even, but

premium looks come at a premium price. The £540,000 C46, for example, is almost £200,000 more than the Princess V45 and that's a hard sell in anyone's book.

Sessa's latest C38 is a stern-drive-powered 38ft hardtop cruiser, a far more mainstream model and one that needs to be competitively priced if it is to succeed.

The good news is that, even for a pound so weak it could have sand kicked in its face by a recently dug up drachma, the £250,000 ex VAT price looks to be in the right ballpark, if not a cast iron bargain.

The question is: will this boat still deliver that same Sessa sportscruiser-style hit we have grown to admire?

Design & build

Sessa has managed to create a definable, unique and alluring look for its C-series sportscruisers, an important factor in a market driven by style and status. It all started with the C52, swiftly followed by the C46 and C43. All three of these hardtop cruisers are packed with the kind of design and attention to detail meant to entice and excite and they succeed in almost every department.

What is striking as you look along the C38's smart hull and hardtop though, is that it actually carries a more refined look than its larger siblings. A quiet confidence runs from bow to stern, making the boat look larger than it really is. It seems to have more in common with Plymouth than Milan, as it almost out-Princess's Princess in the understated elegance stakes. Gone are the chunky silver hardtop supports and elaborate hardtop linings, to be replaced by simple, neat style that should stand the test of time.

Of course it's still Italian, so it's no surprise that features include an exciting hull-side window for

the mid cabin. You might miss it though as it blends into the optional and immaculate black gelcoat finish.

The remainder of the two-cabin interior might not quite live up to the glamour and detailing of its larger siblings but it is still very good and a real step up from the Sessa C35 – shortly to be withdrawn – with skylights and chunky portholes that just beg to be used and admired.

We tested hull number one, and given that it had covered some 600 miles before we stepped aboard,



Simplifying the finish a little has not hurt the ambience or the sheer style of the C38's cockpit

the whole boat looked in excellent shape with no obvious issues with the fitout. Sessa builds a neat boat – there is no mastic used to fill gaps, because there are no gaps, and fixtures and fittings are mostly chunky. Under the waterline the hull follows a fairly typical modified-vee planing form, designed by Christian Grande and powered by twin D4-300 Volvo Pentas.

These updated four-cylinder diesels are significantly cheaper than the six-cylinder engines that would once normally have been found in a boat like the C38, and now appear to be the norm for boats in this class. Twin D4s also free up

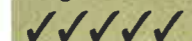
room in the enginebay. The bay is neatly finished but it is to be cleaned up further with Sessa adding a neat GRP liner and dropping the water tank into the bilge, making access and generally moving around the engines even easier.

But the main reason why you'll want to take a closer look at the C38 is that oh-so-cool exterior. Its hardtop is very subtle and sleek and there is

zero danger of this boat looking top heavy or pram-like with three one-piece windows wrapping around the cockpit, further sharpening and simplifying the look, while maximising visibility.

Design & build

Sessa's new confidence delivers a very cool cruiser



Easy access to side decks



Lots of easy seating and a sensible table design add to the obvious style



Enginebay service hatch



Forward sunpad means extra headroom below deck



Hidden chocks spring up from the bathing platform

Exterior

Standing on the bathing platform, looking across the C38's inviting expanse of two-tone upholstery, one major contributing factor to the boat's sleek lines becomes clear. The hardtop looks low because it is, with barely 6ft of headroom at its entrance. By comparison the Sealine SC35 and Nord West 370 both offer around five inches more. That might not sound like a lot on paper but it is significant, especially if you're over 6ft tall.

The C38 just about gets away with it though, because the cockpit retains a real sense of space thanks to a wide, inviting layout with the long, one-piece sidescreens helping out by opening

the cockpit up further. Sessa is planning to find an extra couple of inches above the helm by moving the GRP sunroof section back on future models, but had it opted for a canvas hood in the first place, as Nord West and Sealine have done, you can't help but think that the problem of headroom would have been solved, delivering a far larger aperture for the cockpit to boot.

Outside the cockpit, the side decks are pretty narrow but easy to access from either side, although the transom gate works more as a visual aid, indicating that you are coming to the end of the boat, rather than providing any meaningful barrier.

Stowage is good with lined lockers under the seating and the forward end of enginebay left clear, although the addition of a storage tray or simple bulkhead down here would make the space far more useable.

Sessa's unique take on teak decking looks as cool as ever with wide planks running transversely instead of fore and aft. The wet-bar locker doors follow the planked theme, behind one of which you will find a drawer fridge. Overhead LED lights add a bit of class and there is

“ The main reason why you'll want to take a closer look at the C38 is that cool exterior ”



The helm console was lifted straight off the C43. We found the standing bolster position the most natural

no doubting that the overall feeling is of a place you want to spend time in.

However, there are two areas that need looking at and both concern protection of the upholstery. The lesser issue is the lack of a splashback for the wet-bar worktop as it meets the back of the helm seats. The bigger problem is found outboard of the aft cockpit seating where the port deck runs flush down beside the back rests.

Any spray or rainwater will simply run down

behind the upholstery but worse is the fuel filler that is sited just up from here. Sessa is aware of

the problem and is looking at a solution. A simple ridge or lip designed into the deck mould, to keep any spillage away from the upholstery, would seem to be the answer. >>>

Exterior

Hardtop is low, but the cockpit is still a winner



We tested the C38 in truly horrible conditions, with driving rain and 2m seas, and it still shone very brightly. For this boat's ideal habitat, though, see above...



Forward master cabin mixes leather and timber to create a warm, but still cool look. The C38's hanging lockers are lined with cedar wood

Accommodation

Sessa's interiors are the stuff of modern motorboat legend, unless, of course, you've been inside one, in which case the legend becomes reality. They are dazzlingly good – open yet inviting, clean but detailed. The C43 and C46 both drip with style and real class. So if there was one place the C38's more frugal take on finish was going to be felt, it would be here.

Across the two-cabin layout the trade-off between detail and realistic pricing is hardly noticeable thanks to the standard walnut timber mixing well with a high-gloss lacquer finish. One area that does suffer, however, is the saloon. It's

less to do with the detail and more to do with the fact that it is tight on space, hemmed in by the toilet and separate shower compartment's bulkhead. The seating here will struggle to take four adults, not a rarity on boats of this size, and it is smaller than on the Sealine SC35, Fairline Targa 38 and Nord West 370. All of these boats are North European in origin and perhaps better understand the need for a cosy but still useable retreat below decks. The Sessa's Mediterranean roots clearly want you to stay up on its expansive cockpit seating.

Across the way, the galley looks clean and is finished with the kind of de rigueur high-gloss

cabinets you will see on the latest 70-footers. The eye-level lockers are top-hinged and could do with a 'do not use at sea' warning label, as when opened these doors are at just the right height to brain oneself on. Similarly the electric hob controls are positioned in such a way that once the hob is turned on and the pasta is on the boil you won't actually be able to get near them again to turn the hob off. Still, the fridge is a good size and there is a teak worktop area.

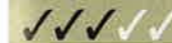
The master cabin is a far better place to be with more space and a luxurious finish of leather and walnut. Cedar-lined lockers, of which there are many, up the quality level and little touches like

his and her's 12V sockets either side of the double berth mean you can keep your respective mobile phones topped up.

The mid cabin follows the same fitout and its wide entrance, well-lit interior and those feature windows make it a place your guests will enjoy spending time in. The standard twin berths make up into an easy double and stowage is again

Accommodation

Tight saloon but comfortable, inviting cabins



good with a leather-topped cabinet doubling up as a useful perch to rest on. You can have a child's berth here instead, which cuts down on locker space, but it is a thoughtful, family friendly option.

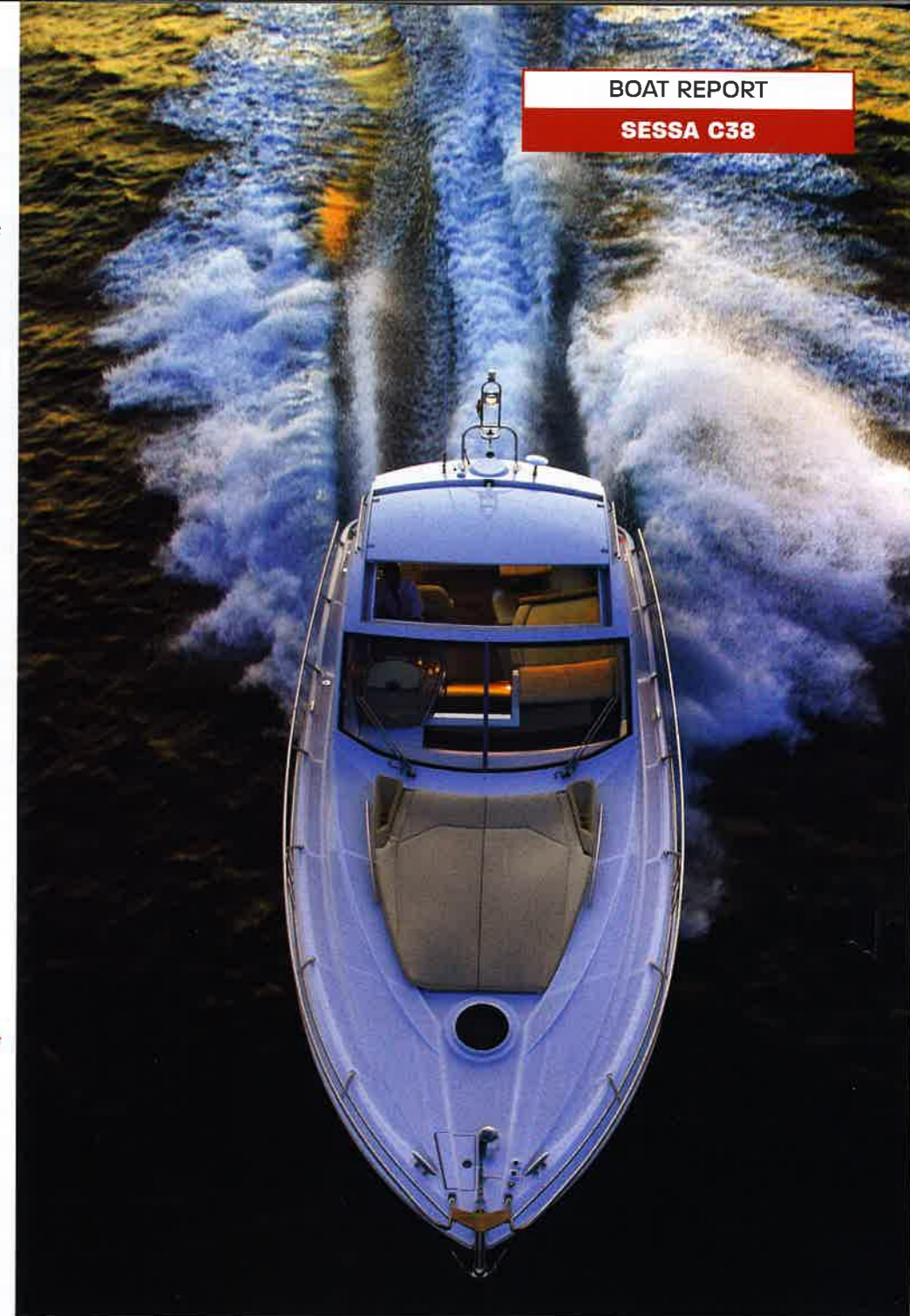
Performance & handling

Italian hulls can be less dynamic and rewarding to drive compared to some but we are pleased to announce that the new C38 is lots of fun to helm. More Rocky Marciano than rocky road, it feels fast, capable and fluid across the water, hitting 34 knots with ease with the leg trim at its best between -1 and +2.

We might have squeezed another knot out of the D4-300s if it weren't for the small matter of big waves. In some pretty testing conditions we did, however, find ourselves cruising at a very respectable 28 knots in 6ft seas. Now we are not really sure that it's sensible to use the words 'cruising,' '28 knots' and '6ft seas' in



More Rocky Marciano than rocky road, it feels fast and capable across the water



Clean deck arrangement features moulded foredeck consoles for various sun worshipping paraphernalia



The mid cabin offers a wide and well-lit entrance – and a feature window



Stowage is good and the twin berths can convert into an easy double



Galley apes the Targa 38's but doesn't work as well



The separate shower is a major plus



Saloon feels tighter on space than some but it looks good

BOAT REPORT

SESSA C38

the same sentence but at any rate it serves to illustrate how good this hull is, if not how clever we are.

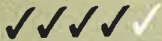
Even at 20 knots, though, falling on the chine will feel hard and send a shudder through most hardtop boats and it's no different here. What is different is that if you allow this boat to stay level the hull feels very sharp as it cuts through the waves. We fell into the kind of holes that leave stomachs up near ears but time after time the C38 gave a reassuringly cushioned landing.

As far as direct comparisons go, whether it is as good as the non-hardtop Targa 38 or the Nord West 370 SportsTop is hard to say. Performance figures between the three are very close with the same D4 engines, and given the C38 had to fight some pretty heavy seas on its test day the 1.7mpg to 1.8mpg efficiency we recorded between 20 knots and 28 knots is excellent.

Some Italian handling traits persist though, such as the classic 'not being able to reach the steering wheel when seated' – a design, we believe, that was first implemented by Ferretti in the 1970s and is, it seems, still popular today.

Performance & handling

Excellent fast cruising through the chop

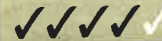


Specification & value

Sessa has got it right in terms of the balance between price and finish. To understand how right it has got it you will need to think back to the days before quantitative easing, when a pound bought you something more than sympathy from foreigners. For instance, and this will hurt, a couple of years ago the C38's €250,000 ex VAT price tag would amount to about £210,000 inc VAT. Today, however, it comes out at around £260,000. See, we said it would hurt.

Specification & value

Clever balance between price, looks and finish

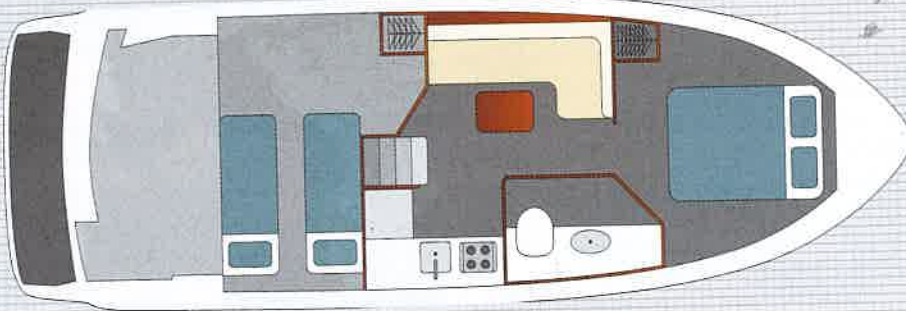


MBM verdict

Sessa has delivered the right kind of sports cruiser for our times. The sleek outside but tight inside hardtop design might be an issue for some buyers, yet overall the C38 looks cool and runs true. Most importantly the boat is clever and confident enough to trade just a little bit of Italian glamour for a whole lot of value-for-money sense.

MBM rating 8/10

Sessa C38 technical data



specifications

BUILD	GRP
RCD	B
LENGTH OVERALL	38ft 3in (11.7m)
BEAM	12ft 6in (4.4m)
DRAUGHT	3ft 1in (0.9m)
DISPLACEMENT	8 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	210gal (960lt)
WATER CAPACITY	66gal (300lt)



The clean, painted-out enginebay

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	7in (18cm)
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 3in (1.9m)
HEADROOM IN MASTER CABIN	6ft 2in (1.87m)
MASTER CABIN BERTH	6ft 6in x 4ft 6in (2.0m x 3.7m)

performance

Engines	twin Volvo Penta D4-300 diesel						
Configuration	4cyl 3.7lt 300hp @ 3400rpm						
Conditions	SE'lly, Force 5, sea state moderate						
Load	fuel 50% water 50% crew 4						
Rpm	knots	lph	gph	mpg	range	noise	
2200	15.2	40	9	1.68	280	79	
2500	20.4	50	11	1.85	310	80	
2800	26.6	70	15	1.77	297	80	
3000	29.2	78	17	1.71	287	79	
3300	32.4	98	21	1.54	260	81	
3400	34.2	112	25	1.40	236	82	

Range figures quoted above are in miles based on standard fuel tanks and include a 20% margin. GPH & MPG refer to imperial gallons. These figures may vary due to weather conditions, air, water, engine temperature, crew numbers, hull fouling, fuel quality and other issues. Noise readings in dB(A) were taken in the cockpit.

prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with D4-300 diesels	£261,499
UK DELIVERY & COMMISSIONING	standard
TEAK COCKPIT	£3700
BOW THRUSTER	£3600
AFT COCKPIT CANOPY	£1300
LEATHER INTERIOR	£1800
HULL COLOUR	£3600

BOAT AS TESTED £275,499

ENQUIRIES Bates Wharf Marine Sales
Tel: 01932 571141
www.bateswharf.co.uk

the rivals



FAIRLINE TARGA 38

From £221,370 (D4-260)
About to enter its fourth model year and still a real contender. No hardtop but new reduced D4 engine pricing helps keep it interesting.
Tel: 01832 273661
www.fairline.com



NORD WEST 370 SPORT

From £273,317 (D4-260)
Option of open or hardtop models, with the latter delivering a smart canvas sunroof. Beautifully built and finished as ever.
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SEALINE SC35

From £183,418 (D4-260)
Smaller boat and less money but you won't necessarily realise it as you walk around the SC35's cool cockpit and spacious interior.
Tel: 01562 749100
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