

A40RC



The battle of the French cruiser-racers is shaping up to a close contest this season. **Andi Robertson** checks out Archambault's much-anticipated new offering, the distinctly race-orientated A40...

With some new models you simply can't wait until they arrive. Such has been the success of the Archambault A35, that there has been a distinct air of anticipation surrounding their new Michel Joubert Bernard Nivelt and Alexandre Mercier-designed A40RC. Of course Archambault's success is founded on the best selling Surprise, which fills the lakes and inland waters all over central Europe. But the A35 proved a great performer under IRC (top

boat in class at the 2006 Rolex Commodores' Cup) and has gone on to sell 80 boats all over the world, including a dozen boats into the UK and Ireland, and continues to represent race-winning performance at sensible money.

So, on the back of a very successful 35-footer, the A40RC represents the 'difficult second album' – taking the same concept and going bigger, and hopefully better.

Archambault are still a modest sized company. ▶

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Right Downwind the boat tracked neatly but required good communication between trimmers and helm, especially in the lighter conditions



They are no major series producer, nor are they into short-run production lines like, say, the production Corby, Ker or Mills boats are. What they do is bridge the gap between the production cruiser-racers and the short-run or one-offs.

Archambault Yachts are built in Dangé St Romain. Halfway between Paris and Bordeaux this modern yard builds about 160 boats a year and now exports about 60 per cent of their production outwith France. They have a growing market in the US, Australia and New Zealand as well as in the immediate IRC hinterland.

The A40's concept is a simple one: an unpretentious 40ft racer with a very scant cruising appeal. There is little regard paid to the niceties of soft furnishings, hi-tech WCs and sinks. Bernard Niveit is charged with producing a boat to a competitive IRC handicap. And on initial form it looks like he they have done the same kind of job they did with the 35. At Spi Ouest the first three new A40RCs took second (to Gery Trenteseaux's First 45 'Lady Courier'), 'Aria' took fifth (counting and 'Batistyl' seventh in the 40-boat IRC Class 1.

The Commodores' Cup and Solent regattas will be critical for the A40RC because the world looks to the 'home' waters to see what will be successful under IRC. Archambault expect at least three of the four 40RCs will be in French teams for the Rolex Commodores' Cup this summer. They have already sold eight boats, including one, so far, to

the UK which is going to the Army. But their aspirations are relatively modest. They only expect to sell about 15 40RCs in the first year, with four boats already in Brittany ('Tiger', 'Batistyl', 'Paprec', 'Aria'), one going to Port Camargue, and two already ordered for Sweden and Norway the boat is well on its way in years.

The company admit that economic uncertainty will make their market hard. The 40ft market is a tough one, but this particular boat will be successful – or not – on the strength of the equation of performance per Euro. There is no cruising caveat. This is a boat which should do what it says on the brochure: 'Optimised to win regattas'.

Archambault are very passionate about the success of their product and there is an obvious spin-off for UK customers. When there are four well-founded teams going at it against each other in France, then it should be relatively straightforward to get a boat off the shelf and tap into that knowledge base and go quickly from race one to race one. It is a refined turn-key modern IRC raceboat.

Design and build

The finish and attention to detail on the A40RC is very good. They don't build in luxury, superfluous covers, flash lockers, or Gucci gas bottle containers. They do enough to do the job and do it, but the standards of the mouldings and internal work is notable.

The hull to deck join is neat and uses minimal filler. The hull is infusion-moulded vinyl ester resin over a PVC foam core and the deck uses a modern resin transfer system for a PVC foam sandwich. The main internal bulkheads are all infusion-moulded too to reduce weight and improve stiffness.

The standard rudder is polyester but the top raceboats are using a custom carbon blade and stock which weighs just 16kgs, and these are available. So too are carbon wheels instead of the standard titanium 950mm wheels.

The 7/8ths rig is two-spreader alloy, but the majority of serious racers will opt for the Formula Spars rig pack in high modulus carbon with two alloy spreaders swept to 20 degrees. Tuning controls include a hydraulic jack, Farr 40-style Rod rigging is standard with the Race Pack option. The carbon rig adds an extra €42,757, and the carbon wheels and rudder an extra €16k approx.

The hull shape bears a family resemblance to

Below Upwind the 40RC is light on the helm, with a subtle groove, but rewards weight on the rail.



the A35 with a stretched waterline. The slightly squarer stern section is a little more powerful perhaps with a modest overhang, which reduces drag in the light stuff but adds effective waterline as the boat heels.

The no compromise cockpit and deck layout are generally excellent with plenty of space but ample footholds. We sailed with a crew of nine and the ergonomics, even on an unfamiliar boat, were good. Everything fell to hand and it was always straightforward changing gears as the breeze built. As well as being functional care has been taken to maintain some sympathetic details – for example, the curved shelf at the front of the cockpit bulkhead helps direct the halyards.

On the water

We took the opportunity to go to Pornic, a small town 30 miles south of La Trinité where 'Batisty' is based, sailing with a Basque crew who are minded to swap their J/133 for a new A40RC. They, too, were impressed. We had between six and 11 knots of winter weight breeze, and sunshine. Perfect.

The helm has plenty of space with the wheels, and rudder, quite far forward. This leaves ample room for a dedicated tactician if that is your preference. The helm has five simple foot braces, and a good seating position. The mainsheet system is a standard German A-style with the Ronstan track running full width of the cockpit floor just forward of the helm affording good communication, essential on this boat.

The boat was simply a pleasure to sail, but not especially easy to get on and drive 100 per cent all the time. It's a 40-footer which will reward reasonably accomplished helms and good crews, which is not to say it is a hard boat to sail. It feels every centimetre a sweet modern racer-cruiser and, joy-of-joys, with everything set up perfectly for the racecourse it was a delight.

Upwind the 40RC is fingertip-light on the helm, with a subtle groove. When you are in that groove it is obvious because you have max speed and built height and it is a challenge to the senses, skill and communication to keep on that high note. There is little weight on the rudder and while each movement is positive it would be easy to over-use the wheel. In 7-9 knots of true breeze we climbed through 6.9 to 7.1 knots boat speed, tacking through about 73 or 74 degrees. Anything above 7.1 or 7.2 and you were erring low. In marginal conditions communication with the trimmers is vital, not over-squeezing the jib coming out the tacks and giving the boat seconds to build speed when the breeze is lighter.

Certainly the boat felt quick and responsive hard on the wind. Crew weight on the rail is rewarded. It is not especially tender but neither does it feel stiff when pressed. The few times we had her pressed there was ample feel on the helm, although our opposite number from a Spanish magazine did manage to spin the boat out on a tight spinnaker reach.

Changes to sail and boat trim got an immediate response. The A40 accelerated evenly out of the tack, but rewarded rather than required good tacking. It is always tough assessing performance in isolation but the A40RC certainly seemed to have all the tools in all the right places to do a good job. You could squeeze a high mode for



coming off the start and still make good speed, but so too there is enough hull volume to go bow down to get out of trouble, unlike some narrow waterline IRC leadmine one-offs, which tend to fall over.

Downwind the boat tracked neatly but required a good understanding and communication between the trimmers and helm, especially in the lighter conditions. Our Spanish-English-French interface was not perfect but there was a general realisation that the boat was happy enough VMG running. Coming up a few degrees brought the boat a bit more alive. At 130 degrees AWA we made an effortless (that is to say with very leisurely Basque trimming!) 6.45, 6.5 in 11 knots TWS. On something close to a beam reach in 10knots we were up to 7.8 to 8.2 in 10kts TWS.

Rating-wise, initially the 40RC, with the standard L-shaped keel, has been sailing off 1.098 which has come down to 1.093, while 'Aria' sails off 1.101 with a T-keel.

Down below

The interior is user-friendly, well-finished and perfectly adequate. Those signature semi-teardrop windows brings in plenty of light, and it feels spacious, clean and cool. The joinery work, in moabi mahogany, is excellent and everything is tasteful, functional and well finished for the price. On inclement days or evenings you'd happily spend time below chewing over the day's events, and there is ample comfortable accommodation for crews who will sleep aboard at regattas. In all the boat will sleep 10.

There are big, twin symmetrical double cabins aft, and a large, good double berth forward. The galley is spacious with two burner stove and oven, a 75 litre ice-box, plenty of large, closed lockers and Lewmar hatch overhead. Opposite there is a good, forward facing navigation station with good, accessible space to place instruments, as well as ample stowage.

The main saloon area is spacious with

Left The 7/8ths rig is two-spreader alloy, but the majority of racers will opt for the Formula Spars high modulus carbon rig.

Top The signature teardrop windows bring plenty of light down below, which will sleep 10 crew.

Above The deck layout is excellent and easy to work, with a German A-style mainsheet.

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comfortable linear seating either side of a central drop leaf table. The main heads is forward.

The verdict

What is there not to like about the A40RC? Nothing so far. It is a refined racer-cruiser for a developed, but relatively small market, for those who maybe want to graduate from their Beneteau, Elan, or Jeanneau performance cruisers and go more serious regatta and offshore sailing. As such there is a great deal of interest in this boat.

But it is worth considering what race plans you have. For the money an older Farr 40 or, more especially, a Farr 45 will give you great Solent racing and Cork Week for less money, but don't expect to go winning under IRC. Whether that converts to sizeable sales around the world will be down to how she does on the racecourses much more than marketing hype, or how dual-purpose she is.

All the components are there. As a well priced mid-tech raceboat, off the shelf, there must few equals of the 40RC at the moment and Archambault have worked hard at making sure she delivers. We think she does. ■

Above The stern section is slightly squarer and a little more powerful than the A35, with a modest overhang which reduces drag in the light but adds effective waterline as the boat heels.

ANSWER BACK

from Major Mike Lawrence of the Army Sailing Association

The article highlights many of the reasons that the Army Sailing Association opted for the A40RC. There was a balance to be found between finding a boat that would excite and inspire racers from within the service but not be too daunting that it would prevent us from developing the racing skills of our rising talent. All this had to be backed up with a build quality that would sustain the boat through many seasons of demanding inshore and offshore racing. With the A40RC, we are confident that we have found a boat that ticks all the right boxes.

Within 18 hours of first hoisting a sail on 'British Soldier' the A40RC, we were on the start line of the Warsash Big Boat Series having thrown our hat into the Rolex Commodores' Cup trials looking for a middle boat slot. A technical hitch prevented us from getting any instrument data so we had to sail to the feel of the boat. We were not disappointed with the boatspeed and the performance of the boat relative to our competitors in similarly rated cruiser-racers.

A crew of mixed experience quickly settled into the mechanics of sailing the boat, much assisted by the functionality of the well-designed cockpit. Helm and trimmer found that speed and height was easily found as long as the gears were changed to match the shifting pressure. After a first sail, things are looking good and the boat has much more to give. Carbon rig and rudder were seen as essential for achieving a full racing spec. With an IRC rating of 1.095, there is considerable anticipation within our team as to what can be achieved in the A40RC during a demanding inshore campaign, which will run concurrently with a RORC campaign.

A40 RC specifications

LOA:	11.98m
LWL:	10.54m
BEAM:	3.75m
DRAUGHT:	2.5m
DISPLACEMENT:	6,400kg
BALLAST:	3,100kg
SAIL AREA:	MAIN 51sq m
	JIB 40sq m
	SYMMETRIC 133sq m

PRICE: £156,143

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COMPARISONS... Where does the A40 fit in? Here are some alternatives...



■ **KER 39**
Winning debut at Red Funnel for 'Silk Glove'; few doubts this boat will go on and win and win, but issues with builders did not inspire instant confidence.

LOA:	11.82m
BEAM:	3.59m
DRAUGHT:	2.58m
DISPLACEMENT:	6,050kg
SAIL AREA:	
	Upwind 95sq m
	Symmetric 125sq m
GUIDE PRICE:	£239,360*



■ **KING 40**
Also won on her Red Funnel debut, with an IRC rating of 1.116 – a little quicker than the A40RC, but this Mills design is good-looking and quick.

LOA:	12.15m
BEAM:	3.65m
DRAUGHT:	2.5m
DISPLACEMENT:	6,200kg
SAIL AREA:	
	Upwind 92.7sq m
	Spinnaker 133sq m
GUIDE PRICE:	£254,022*



■ **ELAN 430**
A great value Warsash Spring Series winner, currently selling well through Europe, and a good all-round performer.

LOA:	12.27m
BEAM:	3.9m
DRAUGHT:	2.45m
DISPLACEMENT:	7,600kg
SAIL AREA:	
	Upwind 105.9sq m
	Spinnaker 136.9sq m
GUIDE PRICE:	£150,300*