

A great custom to have

Lightwave has revamped the popular 38 with options suited to the cruising, charter and weekend sailor markets, reports [Roger Priest](#).



The hardest thing about buying a new 38 from Lightwave is the plethora of buyer choices. To make things a little easier for you, Lightwave offers four basic layouts and five nominal levels of fitout, ranging from \$440,000 for the entry level through to \$598,000. If you prefer to make up your own options list plus special requests, then Lightwave is happy to oblige, so it's really a semi-custom offering.

Lightwave 38s have been round a while. However, the boat I tested was the first to benefit from a series of updates. The test boat, Salacia, was spec-built but quickly snapped up by Owen and Diana Day, who didn't see any need to wait for the next off the line.

As a spec-built boat, she had the starboard-hull galley, larger nav station aft in the saloon and a mix of options approximating to one level below the top.

Construction

The boat is of foam sandwich construction with vinylester resin used where critical for osmosis protection and polyester elsewhere. Fixed windows are of toughened 6mm tinted glass glued to the cabin moulding by a survey-approved process. Hatches are by Moonlight. Mini-keels of draught 1.1m are part of the hulls and allow the boat to be beached. The boat had a solid feel to it with no noticeable deflection of the deck.



MAIN PIC Powered-up by the screecher, the boat flies on a broad reach.

ABOVE The saloon is light, airy and comfortable.



LEFT Working in the galley you can still talk with saloon occupants.

BELOW Owner Owen Day at the very ergonomic helm. The seat caters for two and collapses back, providing unimpeded standing room.



For this latest model, the fuel tank has shifted from its earlier bridgedeck location to the port hull and is now 250 litres. But you can specify the 210-litre bridgedeck tank as an optional extra to extend cruising range. The boat now has larger engine hatches, cleverly designed so that when they are lifted the two boarding steps above them lift as well.

Bridgedeck clearance was measured at 65cm aft and 67cm for'ard, with two people on board and an average load. The underside of the bridgedeck is non-skid for that unthinkable capsized.

Down in the hulls

Each hull sports a queen-sized double bunk for'ard. There is a standard opening hatch above the double bunks with insect screens optional. For'ard of the bridgedeck in each hull is a single bunk, with the starboard one optionally convertible to a sit-down head/shower.

Aft of the port-side master cabin is a general-purpose area incorporating the switchboard and Xantrex battery monitor, a desk with optional swing seat, storage cupboards/drawer and a hanging locker. There is no dedicated stowage for paper charts, so these go either in tubes in the hanging locker or under the bunk mattresses.

Aft of the port-side saloon steps is the large well-fitted bathroom, with separate shower and head (optioned to electric in the test boat). The bathroom is a signature feature and makes the boat easy to live aboard.

The port hull is largely standard across the four layouts. Not so the starboard

hull, which is where many of the options occur. The test boat had the well-fitted galley central in the starboard hull, with double stainless sinks, three-burner Smev stove, pantry, a rubbish compartment and front-opening fridge-freezer. Aft of the galley was a double bunk cabin. Stowage under the bunk can be converted to house a washer-drier or the whole cabin to a shower/head, a workshop or an office.

Bridgedeck saloon

The layout chosen for the test boat allows six adults comfortable seating at the saloon table, which slides to allow either more sitting or more standing room. Panoramic views are available through the tinted windows and the natural lighting is excellent. There are two overhead hatches and a vent.

Under the saloon seats are the refrigeration compressor, Vision 100 amp-hour AGM sealed lead-acid batteries (one start and four house (five optional), Balmar smart alternator regulator, and one of the best fitted and accessible electrical panels I have come across. The electrical fitout is standard and one of the best I have seen. It includes a 120-amp solar panel.

Port-side aft in the test boat's saloon was the navigation bench, with standard ICOM VHF radio and Sony stereo, plus your choice of extras, which include a swinging seat. The test boat had the optional chartplotter on a swinging arm so it could be viewed from either the nav bench or from the cockpit helm station via an opening Perspex window.

The saloon features red night lighting. Nice touch. A flush-deck "re-entry" hatch ("escape" to most of us) can be installed in the saloon deck. The test boat didn't have one, and I thought the optional status of this common cat safety feature a little surprising.

A sliding door with upper glass panel closes off the saloon, and a sliding insect screen door comes as an option.

Cockpit

Lightwave deserves special commendation for cockpit ergonomics. To starboard there is a table with seating for four. The table is an option and comes in the three top fitout levels. The seat incorporates stowage for the two 4.5kg gas bottles. Athwartships at the back of the cockpit is a full-width seat, with storage under and the traveller behind.

To port is the raised helm station. A lot of thought has gone into this. When it is fitted with the optional seat and footrest, two people can choose to either sit or stand. Either sitting or standing, you have excellent 360° vision through the raised hard-cover dodger (with zip-up clears). This has become a distinguishing feature of recent Lightwave cats. I think it's a great idea – being entirely functional

and keeping the helmsperson dry in all conditions. Future boats will have a newly styled version with unaltered functionality. The boat comes standard with Raymarine wind and tri-data. Steering is push/pull rack-and-pinion with optional autopilot.

Under the raised helm is a large locker. You can keep this for stowage or specify a removable 60-litre fridge or a 110-litre refrigerated compartment. Either way the option is popular for cockpit drinks and extended cruising.

Close to the outer guardrails on each side, and accessed from the upper boarding steps, is an Anderson 40 two-speed self-tailing sheet winch, with plenty of room for an extra pair of winches for the optional screecher. A single Anderson is provided to port of the traveller for the mainsheet.

Engines

Volvo 29hp D1-30 saildrives nestle in the aft engine compartments and there's plenty of room round each engine to get at regular service points. Like all new-series Volvos, they come standard with 115-amp alternators, so with the Balmar smart regulator, recharging times at anchor will be minimal. The port engine room houses the 67-litre holding tank – up high so that it gravity drains if required. The tank has a single vent but could be readily fitted with a second vent to allow cross-flow air circulation for optimal bacteria breakdown and minimised odour. The rudders are fitted for – but not with – emergency steering,

so that will be one item for owner attention.

On deck

Behind the traveller and right across between the two hulls the test boat had the optional duckboard with a flip-over stowage system for light dinghies. Ask for the articulating A-frame option if you have a heavier dinghy or like to keep your motor on. Davits are a lower-cost option but you would lose that big duckboard. Three steps lead up from the boarding platforms to the cockpit or sidedecks. The dive ladder attachment points are on the starboard boarding platform along with an optional hot/cold shower. Handholds and guardrails (three-wire) are generously fitted.

The twin-spreader 5/6th rig is by Allyacht Spars – with a Selden boom, lazyjacks and zip-up sail cover all coming standard. The mast is stiffened by diamond stays on the spreaders, plus a jumper strut and half-diamond stay on the leading edge of the mast. The diamond stays attach to the base of the mast, not the boat. And that very stiff spar is then held upright by the forestay plus upper and lower shrouds. Two Anderson 28STs are mounted on the mast to take care of halyards and reefing. There is no vang because the wide traveller provides adequate downward force on the boom for all points of sailing. There was no topping lift on the test boat, the boom being supported by lazyjacks. I would be adding one.

The large fully battened main has lots of roach and is the boat's main driving force. It comes with two dual-line slab reefs, which you put in using the mast winches. The standard boat has a smallish (see specs box) self-tacking jib, but the test boat had the optional overlapping genoa and screecher. The jib/genoa and screecher are on Profurl furlers. An asymmetrical spinnaker is optional.

Access to the cabin top is via steps each side of the mast. Lightwave gets full marks for ergonomics all round the boat, probably thinking about growing sales to no longer young baby boomers.

✓ likes

- Owner choice of layout and fitout level
- High-capacity alternators with smart regulator for minimised charging time at anchor
- Cockpit and helmsperson ergonomics
- Hardtop dodger with zip-up clears
- Genuine cruising tankage for water and fuel (when optioned up)
- Comprehensive high-quality electrical fitout – ready to cruise
- Large liveaboard bathroom and provision for optional washer/drier

✗ dislikes

- No dedicated stowage for paper charts
- Re-entry (escape) hatch as option – why not standard?
- Anchor winch choice and configuration (being modified for future boats)
- No topping lift as standard



LEFT Bridgedeck clearance is 65cm and there's that big cockpit.

BELOW The saloon nav table features an opening window and optional swinging chartplotter for helmsperson viewing.





The bathroom is spacious, functional and good-looking.

The anchor is a 45-pound CQR-style Manson – a good choice. It comes with 50m of 8mm chain and an optional cat bridle. The locker will self-stow up to 70m of 10mm chain. After experiencing the excellent anchor winch on the Lightwave 45, I was disappointed with the winch and fitting configuration on the test boat. I would want one that allows for emergency manual operation, caters for cruising needs by having a warping drum to work lines and that can have its brake applied or released above deck level to prevent back injury. The one fitted didn't meet these needs and had surface rust over its polished steel finish after only a short service life (it's mounted inside a hot, humid, salty locker). Lightwave intends reconfiguring this setup by modifying the hinged deck hatch, fitting a snag protector and a chromed-bronze capstan winch with manual backup. This will result in safer and more seamanlike functionality with freedom from surface corrosion.

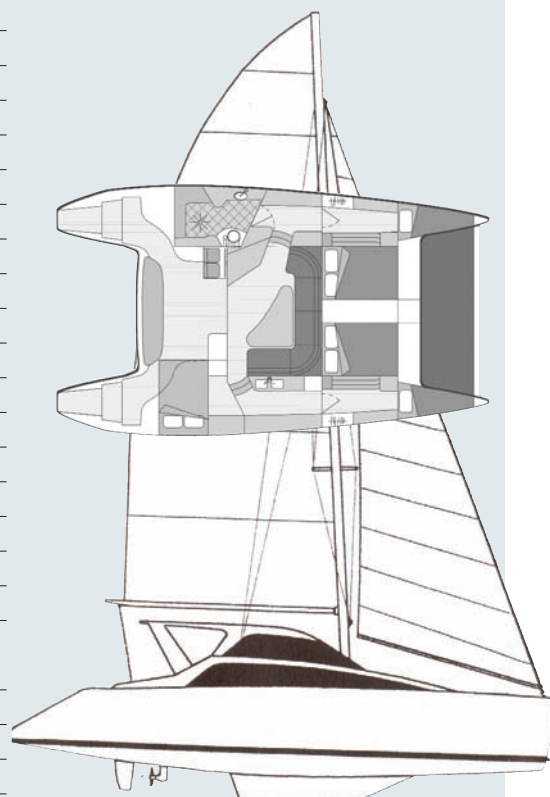
Performance

With the genoa, and pointing at 40°, we made 5.7 knots boat-speed in 13 knots of apparent wind (11 true). The boat pointed to 35° but dropped speed a little. The screecher (which I am sure most owners will specify) works from

SPECIFICATIONS

Lightwave 38s

Length overall	11.3m
Waterline length	11.3m
Beam max	6.7m
Beam at W	5.9m
Beam each hull at WL	0.985m
LWL/beam ratio each hull at WL	11.5:1
LWL/beam ratio at WL	1.92
Headroom throughout	1.9m
Bridgedeck clearance (measured)	65cm
Draught	1.1m
Mast height above DWL	17.6m
Sails by	GM sails (Gold Coast)
Sail area	
Main	50sqm
Self-tacking jib.	19sqm
Genoa (option, replaces jib)	29sqm
Screecher (if supplied)	45sqm
Asymmetrical spinnaker (if supplied)	90sqm
Displacement (lightship)	5000kg
Displacement (DWL)	6500kg
Propulsion	2 x Volvo 29hp saildrives
Alternators	2x 115 amp with Balmar smart reg
Anchor	45 lb CQR-style Manson
Anchor rode	50m x 8mm galv chain
Fuel capacity (standard)	250 L
Optional extra fuel tank	210 L
Fresh water tankage.	500 L (2x 250)
Optional extra water tank	250 L



Holding tank	67 L
Price as tested	approx \$532,000
Price range	\$440,000 to \$598,000
Designer	Tony Grainger
Builder	Lightwave Yachts

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60° round to 120. With it we made seven knots with the wind at 75° in 11 knots apparent (nine true). On a 90° reach we made six knots with the breeze at nine knots. With the sheets eased for apparent wind at 120°, speed dropped to a respectable 5.3 knots. That screecher really works, so “tacking” downwind is a viable option.

The helm was light and responsive (better I thought than the Lightwave 45) and the boat tacked reliably and easily with either headsail – the screecher needing an occasional hand through the gap between forestays.

Under motor we made 6.5 knots at

2000rpm and eight knots at 3000. Future boats will benefit from a stern gear reconfiguration allowing different props and slightly improved speed. Going astern the boat steered well with a light helm.

cruisinghelmsman Roger Priest



Roger Priest is a technical adviser and occasional contributor to *CH*. He has spent many years at sea as a hydrographic surveyor, commercial vessel master and as a seaman officer in the Naval Reserve. His own boat is a much loved Hartley South Seas motor-sailer (see “My Boat”, *CH* Sep 2005).