



Uplifting Feelings

Peter Poland compares a pair of lift-keelers that are in demand on the second-hand market

There was a time when boat shows were bursting with shoal draught cruisers. Lifting keelers abounded, attracting buyers galore.

But go to a boat show now and you'll have your work cut out to track down any new lifting keel yachts. You might come across the occasional trailer-sailer, but yachts that are big enough to cruise the open sea then snuggle into secluded shallow creeks and dry out on mud or sand have become increasingly rare.

Of course if you sail the non-tidal waters of the Med or cruise up and down the Caribbean islands, this probably won't bother you one jot. However if you want to base your yacht in the UK or northern France and you prefer a cheap drying mooring to a high price marina berth, a lifting keel has much to offer.

The reason for the paucity of lifting keels on today's new boat market place is simple: cost. When I used to build small lift-keelers such as the Hunter Delta 25, I knew we would never be able to compete against fixed keel yachts on price. It takes

longer and costs more to fit keels that move up and down. It was only when our designer David Thomas came up with twin keels that performed as well as many deep fin or lifting keels that we consolidated our position in the shoal draught cruiser market.

A few low-volume specialist builders do still offer new lifting keel cruisers – albeit at the expensive end of the market.

Choosing a lifting keel

There are many types of lifting keels, each with differing merits and varying long-term maintenance issues. The vertically lifting keel (often with extra internal ballast – as found on older boats such as Parkers, Hunters, Evolutions, etc) is an efficient shape but can take up valuable cabin space. The deep and heavy pivoting keels found on some French cruisers (such as smaller Firsts) also work well, but the complex lifting mechanisms can wear and cost a lot to repair or replace. Other French builders, such as Jeanneau, have used a lighter and simpler metal centreplate that retracts inside an external stub ballast keel. Or others have relied on

a combination of fixed internal ballast plus a relatively light centreplate. Then there's the Southerly method with a ballasted pivoting keel that fully retracts through a substantial cast iron grounding plate.

You 'pays your money and takes your choice' – each method has its merits, but whichever you choose be sure to have the system surveyed before buying a second-hand boat. In addition consult the owners' association – if there is one – and study the technical forum on its website.

One of the most influential cruising sailors of recent times has owned two modern lifting keelers and crossed many oceans in them. Both are French-built, have aluminium hulls, extensive internal ballast and deep but relatively light pivoting metal centreplates. These are the Ovi 43 and the Garcia Exploration 45 – and their owner is Jimmy Cornell, the author of *200,000 miles: A Life of Adventure*, and founder of the ARC and other famous voyaging events.

Cornell has covered many leagues in these two centreboarders – the latest boats he has owned. Between them they have circumnavigated the globe, transited the Northwest Passage, cruised down to Antarctica, crossed the Drake Passage (twice – once in winds over 50 knots) and faced storms aplenty. He had full confidence in these boats as ocean



ABOVE When fully lowered, the deep centreboard gives pleasingly sharp performance

LEFT The 36's interior is light and airy – thanks to light woodwork. And the chart table is a proper job – not a token shelf



cruisers. Indeed, some claim a centreboard yacht with internal ballast can run safely in heavy seas whereas a fixed keel yacht can 'trip' on its keel and pitchpole.

For those who like the idea of a centreboard cruiser but don't have the budget for an aluminium-hulled Ovni, Garcia Exploration or the closely-related aluminium Allures range, there were a couple of interesting GRP production yachts that offered similar characteristics and I have sailed them both. These are the Feeling 36 (2001) and 39 (2000).

Feeling history

The Feeling range of family cruisers was originally built by the Kirie yard from the 1980s. It later became part of Kelt Yachts before finally being bought by Alliaura, which went into administration in 2012. During this time, Feeling majored on lifting keels or centreboards and was seen by many as a benchmark for this sector of the market. At the time of the administration the range comprised five models: the 32, 36, 39, 44 and 55.

Sailing the Feeling 36

The Feeling 36's keel configuration features a pivoting GRP centreboard that retracts into a massive cast iron ballast 'shoe', stub keel and internal casing. The 'shoe' comprises all the yacht's ballast and also incorporates two iron 'finlets' that are designed to let the yacht sit upright on a beach and to protect the GRP hull.

The weight of ballast in this cast iron grounding shoe and stub is a substantial 3,084kg – about 1,000kg more than the fixed fin keel alternative and a major percentage of the yacht's all up weight of 7,300kg. So the lifting-keeler still achieves Category A (Ocean) stability certification.

With the centreboard (which has near neutral buoyancy) lowered, the yacht draws an impressive 7ft 1in (2.16m). But when it's raised, the draught reduces to just 2ft 5in (0.76m). The lifting process is simplicity itself, with up and down-haul lines emerging from a sheave and leading directly back to rope clutches and winches on the aft end of the coachroof. And sensibly the yacht comes with twin rudders – ensuring good control when under sail yet safe grounding when it sits on a beach.



A central panel lifts out of the saloon table to reveal the 36's centreboard box and inspection window



The 36's batteries live on the centreline and low down, putting their weight where it does the most good



LEFT The Feeling 36 offers a spacious and comfortable forecabin

A few years back, brokers Williams and Smithells invited me to try a lifting keel version of the Feeling 36. We set off into a pleasant 12.5 knot breeze that steadily built to around 16 knots and the Volvo 29hp diesel (a 39hp version was available as an extra) pushed us along at just over 6 knots at a peaceful 2,000rpm. With revs raised to 2,800, we accelerated to around 7.2 knots. Manoeuvring was easy enough, despite the lack of prop wash on the offset twin rudders.

Once clear of the harbour, we unfurled the genoa and hoisted the fully battened mainsail from its stack pack boom stowage. Dead to windward, the 36 settled at around 5.7 knots in 12 knots of wind, increasing to around 7 knots as the wind rose to 16 knots. Sadly we did not have a spinnaker or cruising chute to play with, so running and reaching performance was steady rather than spectacular in the relatively flat sea conditions. Thanks to beamy hull sections and substantial ballast in the keel 'shoe', the boat felt extremely steady. The helm felt precise and pleasantly weighted and steering was an enjoyable experience – as I would expect on a yacht from a designer as skilled as Michel Joubert.

With the centreboard fully lowered (drawing 2.16m), the 36 had good upwind 'bite' in these conditions, tacking through around 80° apparent. Of course I had no way of comparing this boat to its fixed fin

keel sister, but I expect this version would be sharper still with its lower centre of gravity. And I had no way of evaluating its performance in heavy conditions. But its Category A Ocean status is reassuring.

The cockpit and deck layout follow the norm for modern 36ft cruisers. The halyards, reef lines, solid kicker control and mainsheet all lead via rope clutches to a couple of self tailing winches at the aft end of the coachroof. Genoa sheets lead to bigger self-tailers planted on plinths at the forward end of the cockpit. The mainsheet track and car are situated forward of the sprayhood, which is a particularly well made example with integral grab rails and an opening forward panel. I prefer a mainsheet that leads to a track aft in the cockpit so that the helmsman can control it, but this does add extra clutter. These days only race boats seem to come with this type of mainsheet system.

The cockpit is comfortable and I liked the attention to detail such as the foot brace on the centreline. The huge locker on the starboard side can also be accessed via a door in the heads compartment below. The port locker (above the stern cabin) is shallower and therefore smaller. Moving around on deck is easy because the shrouds are set inboard, there are stainless steel grab-handles on the aft part of the coachroof and the side decks are wide.

Going below, the first impression is one of light and airiness. The pale wood, forward facing coachroof windows, large pear drop shaped side windows and opening portlights over the galley and chart table all combine to create a pleasant ambience. The other surprise is the way the centreboard box is cleverly incorporated into the accommodation. It doesn't get in the way or dominate proceedings; far from it. The centreboard housing doubles up as the central section of the saloon table, with hinging leaves either side. This centre panel lid can be lifted to access the centreboard inspection 'window' while the pillar that contains the lifting lines doubles up as a robust vertical

grab handle. Substantial timber grab handles also run along each side of the cabin. The settees are comfortable and the upholstery and generous sized backrests make this a pleasant area to relax. It all works well.

The galley area (aft to port) and navigation station (opposite) are also well executed. The galley features a double sink with removable solid timber chopping boards, a 75lt coolbox, the cooker and a reasonably sized work surface. Lockers and drawers provide adequate stowage. The forward facing chart table will take a folded chart and there's space for instruments beside it. There's also stowage inside the chart table, under the navigator's seat and in the large cupboard immediately aft of this.

The spacious and well-finished heads compartment – ventilated by an opening port – is aft of the navigation station and wardrobe. The WC is sited athwartships, which is better than the 'fore and aft' alignment found in most modern yachts because it's more comfortable to use (standing or sitting) when the boat is sailing and heeled. And, equally unusually, there's a door in the aft bulkhead to give access into the cavernous cockpit locker.

Aft and to port there's a conventional stern cabin. The head of the berth is forward of the cockpit sole above, giving a less constricted feeling than found in some stern cabins. Ventilation comes from an opening port.

There's also good hip clearance for turning over in bed. It all works very well. For those who want an extra cabin, an alternative layout offers slightly

smaller twin aft cabins and the heads compartment moves forward, encroaching a bit into the saloon area.

The forecabin is also well designed, incorporating a wide double berth, full-length storage shelves down each side of the boat, a small seat aft to starboard and a decent sized wardrobe to port. There's also adequate foot space to stand and dress. For a 36ft (10.97m) boat, it's a good size cabin.

All in all, the Feeling 36 is a versatile cruiser. The accommodation is spacious and comfortable. Its overall appearance is sleek and very much in the modern idiom. Michel Joubert is a successful designer with a great track record; and it shows.

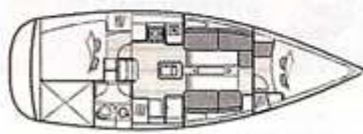
The lifting keel (more correctly described as a large centreboard) combines well with the substantial amount of ballast fixed to the bottom of the hull, which means that the Feeling 36 should be as happy parked on the mud as it is making extended cruises.

It's a shame that this keel system is now so rare. If you fancy a centreboard 36, you may need to look in France. Or perhaps other builders might eventually copy the Feeling format?

The 36s Category A Ocean status is reassuring

TECH SPEC FEELING 36

Year	2001
LDA	11.10m
LWL	10.30m
Beam	3.62m
Draught (lift keel)	0.76-2.16m
Displacement (lift keel)	7,300kg
Ballast (lift keel)	3,084kg
Draught (fin keel)	2.00m
Displacement (fin keel)	6,200kg
Ballast (fin keel)	1,975kg
Sail area (upwind)	68.40m ²





ABOVE Sweet sheer, balanced overhangs and good performance speak for themselves

LEFT A great place to cook, navigate and relax. Windows and light coloured wood create a welcoming ambience

Sailing the Feeling 39

After sailing the Feeling 36, I looked forward to taking a spin on her bigger sister, the Feeling 39. This one was being sold by Whiterock Yachts in Carrickfergus Marina, on Belfast Lough. As Flybe's little plane swooped down over the Irish coast, I could see that the sea was alive with white horses. This promised to be a considerably windier sail than the fair weather affair I'd enjoyed on the 36.

The wind was still boisterous when I arrived at the marina. My first task was to get some photos of the Feeling 39 under sail before the weather got any worse, so I gratefully accepted the offer of a lift out into the lough on a RIB. And there's no doubt that the Feeling 39, like its smaller sister, is a good-looking yacht and very much in the modern idiom (albeit with elegant overhangs as opposed to today's brutal blunt ends). She's from the prolific pen of Philippe Briand – one of France's most successful and versatile designers – and he succeeded in incorporating Feeling's trademark pear drop shaped coachroof windows elegantly into the yacht's graceful lines. Feeling's other distinctive

feature – forward facing windows in the raised aft section of the roof – also blends nicely into the overall look.

Once I transferred to the 39, I had the chance to see how the yacht handled the conditions. Viewed from the RIB, it had looked quick yet easily controlled. And it felt just the same on board. The wind was a steady 25 knots (gusting higher) so we had a few rolls in the in-mast reefing mainsail and the genoa, but later unrolled the genoa to full size. Even with five of us on board, there was plenty of room to move around the spacious cockpit. The crew made light work of tacking the genoa on the powerful cockpit coaming-mounted self-tailing winches.

The mainsail is sheeted via an adjustable traveller on a coachroof-mounted track ahead of the companionway hatch. The sheet itself runs forward, beneath the boom, then down to a block by the base of the mast and back (via one of an array of rope clutches) to a winch on the aft end of the roof. The system works well enough, although the sheet is beyond the helmsman's reach, as is the case on most cruisers on the market these days. ➔



The centreline settee cleverly conceals the centreboard box and inspection window



A Lewmar single wheel controls the twin rudders and folds down to reduce in size when the 39 is in harbour



LEFT Twin stern cabins are comfortable and spacious

The centreboard was fully lowered, increasing the Feeling's draught from 0.7m to a substantial 2.2m. The board itself is not part of the yacht's ballast, so is easily raised and lowered by means of up- and downhaul ropes that lead back to the cockpit winch.

Similar to the 36, the ballast is concentrated in a massive cast iron shoe. This incorporates a central stub keel and two smaller keels on which the yacht can stand and it is recessed into the bottom of the hull. It weighs 3,590kg, which gives the yacht an impressive ballast ratio of just over 45%. And even though this ballast 'shoe' does not place the centre of gravity as low as a deep fin keel would, it gives the yacht plenty of stability. So much so, in fact, that (as with the 36) both the fin keel and centreboard versions of the Feeling 39 are rated Category A Ocean.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the yacht felt steady and stable in the conditions. Thanks to the twin rudders, the steering was precise and predictable, even when the boat was hit by extra heavy gusts. Hard on the wind, it made a relaxed 6 knots and had a pleasing, easy motion.

Even though the wind was sheering all over the place as it bounced off the hills, it was easy to keep the boat in the groove. Directional stability was good.

Then, when I freed off onto a reach, speed increased to 7.3 knots. In the heavier gusts, we hit 8.3 knots. I suspect

that the 39 will surf happily when a cruising chute or spinnaker adds a bit more oomph. It should make a fine passage maker, capable of maintaining good average speeds. And those owners who aspire to club racing and sail in an area where variable draught is not an issue can always go for the fixed fin keel version instead. This draws 2.0m, weighs 675kg less than its centreboard sister and will be a bit sharper hard on the wind.

Under power, the Feeling 39's 40hp Volvo diesel pushed it along at an economical 6 knots at 2,000rpm, increasing to 7.6 knots at 2,800rpm. With twin rudders there's excellent directional stability although, as with the 36, you must remember that there's no prop wash when manoeuvring in tight corners at low speed. This Feeling 39 did have a bow thruster, which made mooring simple even in the strong crosswind that blasted across the marina when we returned.

Accommodation down below is palatial for a 39-footer. There's a choice between a large double berth cabin in the forepeak that stretches right back to the main bulkhead or a slightly smaller forward cabin with an extra heads compartment just aft. Otherwise the standard layout is the same for either version with twin double cabins and a heads compartment aft. There's also a rare option featuring an unorthodox central nav station.

The saloon is bathed in natural light thanks to the forward facing windows and side ports. The overall ambience of spacious airiness is further enhanced by the light coloured joinery – which made a pleasant change from the darker mahogany or teak veneers then found in many production boats. Indeed Feeling was one of the first to offer lighter wood – setting a trend that other builders now follow. This colour scheme also went well with the teak and holly striped cabin sole and restful blue upholstery.

The Feeling 39 is big enough to carry off a saloon layout that features a U-shaped settee (to starboard) faced by a second, straight, settee located on the centreline.

The large saloon table fits between the two. The centreboard box is cleverly concealed under the centreline settee and the lifting tackle can be viewed in a central plinth locker. The lifting ropes reach the deck through a robust steel pillar that doubles up as an excellent grab handle.


The linear galley runs along the port side of the saloon and the central settee's backrest makes a useful support for the chef to lean against when the boat is heeled on port tack. The galley itself is large. The twin-lid cool box with a 12V Frigo system has a capacity of around 45 gallons. There are two chopping boards above the sinks while the work surface is extensive and there are plenty of lockers and cupboards, both overhead and beneath. The cooker has a proper crash bar running across its front. And as a final touch, the chef has a view on to the outside world through a topside window just above the cooker. In short... as good a galley as I'd seen on a 39-footer.

The forward facing chart table is located aft and to port, and there's plenty of space on the switchboard panel for a VHF and instruments. An oilskin cupboard lives behind the navigator's seat while opposite, to starboard, there's the heads compartment, complete with shower and basin. On this boat, this was the only heads, but owners could opt for a two-heads layout if they were happy with a less voluminous forecabin.

The twin stern cabins are predictable and very much the norm on modern yachts of this size. The shelving and cupboards provide adequate stowage and, as elsewhere on the boat, the joinery work and details of finish are crisp and neat. Nice touches show how much thought went into the boat – such as the dedicated battery locker just forward of the engine

compartment. This puts all the weight low down and in the centre of the boat where it does the most good.

Having sailed the 36 and 39, I came away thinking it's a shame that – apart

from Ovnis, Allures and Garcias – this type of centreboard production cruiser with internal ballast or a heavily ballasted external grounding shoe is largely a thing of the past. These Feelings have a lot to offer. Sleek looks, spacious and airy accommodation and the convenience of the centreboard system combine to give good performance and plenty of comfort afloat. I enjoyed them both. A lot. 

I suspect the 39 will surf happily under spinnaker

Used prices

Brokers Williams and Smithells recently sold a 2006 Feeling 36 for £72,000 and a 2008 Feeling 39 for £85,000 and add: "They sell quickly. It's the lift keel that's popular. The boats sail really well, are spacious and the lift keel gives far more cruising options."

TECH SPEC FEELING 39

YEAR	2000
LOA	11.70m
LWL	9.92m
Beam	4.02m
Draught (lift keel)	0.70-2.20m
Displacement (lift keel)	7,825kg
Ballast (lift keel)	3,590kg
Draught (fin keel)	2.00m
Displacement (fin keel)	7,150kg
Ballast (fin keel)	2,825kg
Sail area (upwind)	80.80m ²

